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### **Practitioners and parents; living in a 'third space'? A study of perceptions of 'British Asian' parental involvement in their children's nursery education**

Nicola Smith

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#### **Abstract**

This research aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the factors impacting on 'British Asian' parent-practitioner interactions in order to improve practice. The research builds on previous studies of parental involvement in the early years and of working with minority ethnic parents (e.g. Brooker, 2002, ; Crozier, 2009; Gregory, 2005; Reay, 1998, 2007; Vincent, 2001; Wheeler and Connor, 2009). Identity, culture and power relationships are examined, with particular reference to the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984). Bhabha's (1994) notion of "third space" is examined in relation to developing effective relationships. Responsibility to the participants, the research profession and to the public are considered (see BERA, 2005). Particular consideration is given to the issues concerning a white researcher working with 'British Asian' participants.

Whilst practitioner participants are well-intentioned in their work with parents, existing structures and power relationships make the construction of meaningful partnerships extremely difficult. The research suggests that practitioners need to move away from existing notions of parental involvement towards a more participatory approach. It considers what a third space might look like in terms of parents and teachers working together.

**Keywords:** parent, involvement, third space, minority ethnic, habitus.

**Practitioners and parents; living in a 'third space'?**  
**A study of perceptions of 'British Asian' parental involvement in their children's Nursery education.**

Nicola Smith

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

**May 2011**

This work or any part thereof has not previously been presented in any form to the University or any other body, whether for the purposes of assessment, publication or for any other purpose (unless otherwise specified). Save for any express acknowledgements, references or bibliographies cited in the work, I confirm that the intellectual content of the work is the result of my own efforts and of no other person.

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## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my lovely Mum, Margaret Simpson. An unending source of inspiration, as an early years practitioner and as a parent.

Thank you to my Director of Studies for the last three years of this research project, Dr Tim Waller, for his advice and encouragement. Thank you to all of the practitioners, parents and children who gave their time and energy to participate in this research. Many, many thanks to Professors Tony Bertram and Christine Pascal for the inspiration, nurturing and support you have given me throughout my PhD studies. To the rest of the team at CREC, thank you for always making me and my children feel so welcome and well looked after. To my colleagues in the CREC Learning Circle, many thanks for your encouragement and support. Thank you to my sisters, Paula and Glenda and to all of the friends who have helped me with childcare when I needed to work on my thesis.

Finally and most importantly, to Elliot, Madeleine and Joel for giving me the support, space and time I needed to carry out my research and write up the thesis, I cannot thank you enough.

## Structure of the thesis

**Chapter one** explains the rationale for conducting this research, including reflections on my roles as a researcher, teacher and parent in relation to this research study. It indicates the aims and objectives of this research study and explains terminology used in the thesis.

**Chapter two** examines theories and concepts which underpin the research and explains their relevance to my work.

**Chapter three** discusses government policy and previous research in relation to parental involvement in early years education, with particular reference to minority ethnic parental involvement. It includes the research questions relating to the study.

**Chapter four** concerns the methodology and methods used in the research study, including ethical considerations.

**Chapter five** consists of the two case studies written up from the data collected in the two Nursery settings.

**Chapter six** examines the data from the case studies in relation to emerging categories illustrating participants' perceptions of parental involvement.

**Chapter seven** analyses the perceptions of parental involvement identified in chapter six using key concepts from chapter two and previous research examined in chapter three.

**Chapter eight** concerns the implications of my research findings for future practice and research. It sets out my model of a 'third space' approach to parental involvement.

The names of all participants and settings in this thesis have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One Introduction to the research and to the researcher</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Fahima.....	4
1.3 The Effective Early Learning project.....	7
1.4 The beginnings of my PhD research .....	10
1.5 The researcher as a parent.....	11
1.6 The researcher as a teacher .....	13
1.7 Aims and objectives of the research.....	15
1.8 Terminology .....	17
1.9 Summary of Chapter One .....	20
<b>Chapter Two Key Concepts</b> .....	<b>21</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	21
2.2 Identity .....	25
2.3 What is identity? How do individuals identify themselves? .....	26
2.4 Identity, habitus and the notion of agency .....	28
2.5 The negotiation of identities .....	34
2.6 'Race', Ethnicity and Identity .....	36
2.7 Identity in relation to the research study: a summary .....	37
2.8 The Influence of Context .....	38
2.9 Power relationships.....	40
2.10 Culture and the notion of "third space" .....	43
2.11 Summary of Chapter Two.....	50
<b>Chapter Three Literature Review</b> .....	<b>51</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	51
3.2 Parental involvement: definitions and perceptions .....	55
3.2.1 <i>Government policy, parental involvement and the Early Years Foundation Stage</i> .....	55
3.2.2 <i>Types of parental involvement</i> .....	60
3.3 Working with parents in the early years. Evidence based practice .....	65
3.4 Parents at the margins of the school space .....	78
3.4.1 <i>The school space and parental involvement</i> .....	79
3.4.2 <i>The home space and parental involvement</i> .....	82
3.4.3. <i>Communication and the use of the English Language</i> .....	85
3.4.4 <i>Communication, sharing information and the notion of 'dialogue'</i> . ..	88
3.4.5 <i>Social and Cultural capital and 'playing the game'</i> .....	94
3.4.6. <i>'Hard to reach' parents?</i> .....	99
3.5 Parents finding their own space .....	102
3.6 A 'third space' for parental involvement? .....	106
3.7 Summary and Research Questions .....	108

<b>Chapter Four Methodology and Methods</b> .....	<b>112</b>
4.1. Introduction .....	112
4.2 The two Nursery settings .....	113
4.3 Influences on the research design .....	113
4.4 Ethical issues .....	115
4.4.1 <i>Responsibility to the participants</i> .....	116
4.4.2 <i>Is my work really effective?</i> .....	117
4.4.3 <i>Might I be doing more harm than good?</i> .....	119
4.4.4 <i>Should I be using better methods and how do I know which ones are better? and Do I have the courage to doubt my own certainties?...</i>	120
4.4.5 <i>Is it fair to worry the children and adults I work with, with these troubling questions?.....</i>	122
4.4.6 <i>Surely being a professional means knowing these answers, not asking these questions?</i> .....	123
4.4.7 <i>Ethical principles</i> .....	124
4.5 My identity as a researcher in relation to the participants.....	124
4.5.1 <i>Myself as a researcher/practitioner</i> .....	125
4.5.2 <i>A white researcher working with 'British Asian' participants</i> .....	128
4.6 Practical considerations .....	133
4.7 Research Design .....	134
4.8 The Social Constructivist perspective.....	134
4.9 The case study approach.....	136
4.10 Ethnography in relation to the case study approach.....	139
4.11 Naturalistic enquiry in relation to the case study approach .....	140
4.11.1 <i>Credibility</i> .....	141
4.11.2 <i>Transferability</i> .....	142
4.11.3 <i>Dependability and Confirmability</i> .....	143
4.12 Grounded theory in relation to the case study approach .....	144
4.13 Methods for Data Collection .....	145
4.13.1 <i>Collecting data: finding the best methods</i> .....	146
4.13.2 <i>Group work and 'codifications'</i> .....	149
4.13.3 <i>Sampling and Recruiting Participants</i> .....	152
4.13.4 <i>Confidentiality</i> .....	153
4.14 Initial field work .....	153
4.15 Teacher Participant Questionnaires and Interviews .....	155
4.16 Parent Group Meetings .....	156
4.17 Book making with children .....	159
4.18 The Pilot Study.....	160
4.19 Organising and Collating the Data .....	162
4.20 Methods for Data Analysis .....	164
4.21 Summary of Methods for Collecting, Organising and Analysing Data.....	166
<b>Chapter Five The Case Studies</b> .....	<b>168</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	168
5.2 Orchard Road Nursery Class .....	171
5.2.1 <i>Orchard Road Nursery Class</i> .....	172
5.2.2 <i>The teacher participants</i> .....	173
5.2.3 <i>The importance of parental involvement</i> .....	175

5.2.4 Opportunities for parental involvement at Orchard Road .....	176
5.2.5 'Walking the walk': teacher expectations of parents and parental involvement at Orchard Road .....	180
5.2.6 'Talking the talk'. English as the language of success. ....	186
5.2.7 Building good relationships .....	190
5.2.8 Parents' changing cultures.....	195
5.3 Parents and children at Orchard Road.....	200
5.3.1 The parent and child participants .....	200
5.3.2 Parents' knowledge of what happens in the settings.....	201
5.3.3 Parent expectations of Nursery.....	202
5.3.4 Children's views on parental involvement .....	204
5.3.5 Transitions .....	205
5.3.6 Speaking English and home languages.....	206
5.3.7 Life at home .....	207
5.3.8 Building Relationships.....	209
5.4 Parental Involvement in the Nursery class at Forest Hill School.....	211
5.4.1 Forest Hill Nursery Class .....	212
5.4.2 The teacher participants .....	213
5.4.3 The importance of parental involvement .....	214
5.4.4 Opportunities for parental involvement.....	215
5.4.5 Struggling to support children with EAL .....	218
5.4.6 Building Relationships.....	220
5.5 Parent and child participants .....	223
5.5.1 Ayesha, Habiba and Imran.....	223
5.5.2 Home life .....	225
5.5.3 Imran at Nursery.....	225
5.5.4 Home language and English.....	227
5.5.5 Ayesha and her children at the margins of school life .....	227
5.6 Summary of chapter five .....	230

**Chapter Six Influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement..... 231**

6.1 Introduction .....	231
6.2 Immersing myself in the data .....	232
6.3 Emergent Coding and Categorising of the Data.....	234
6.4 Experiences.....	248
6.4.1 Participants have different experiences of formal education, with noticeable difference between the groups of parent and teacher participants .....	248
6.4.2 The experiences of speaking English and home language are of particular relevance to participants' perceptions of parental involvement .....	250
6.4.3 Experiences of transition are significant for participants and influence their perceptions of parental involvement .....	251
6.4.4 Some experiences can be seen as 'critical incidents' because of their effect on participants.....	253
6.4.5 Parent participants do not have equality of experience in the Nursery settings and this influences perception of parental involvement .....	254
6.5 Representations .....	256



6.5.1	<i>The notion of a 'good parent' in terms of parental involvement is represented in the settings' documentation and reinforced by the expectations of teacher participants.....</i>	256
6.5.2	<i>Parent participants have clear expectations of teachers in relation to parental involvement. However, they are not given opportunities to discuss this with teacher participants.....</i>	261
6.6	<i>Knowledge.....</i>	264
6.6.1	<i>Teachers know much more about school and early years education in the United Kingdom than parents do.....</i>	265
6.6.2	<i>Teachers know little about children's and parents' lives outside school.....</i>	266
6.6.3	<i>In the absence of knowledge about each other, participants can make incorrect assumptions.....</i>	268
6.6.4	<i>Certain types of knowledge are seen as more valuable than others by the participants in both settings.....</i>	270
6.7	<i>Feelings.....</i>	273
6.7.1	<i>Some teacher participants expressed feelings of empathy with parents which link back to their own experiences in school.....</i>	273
6.7.2	<i>Teacher and parent participants who do not share their ethnicity with or come from the same community as most other participants in the setting expressed feelings of isolation, which influence their perceptions of parental involvement.....</i>	275
6.7.3	<i>Feelings arising from 'critical incidents' can have an enduring influence on teacher-parent relationships.....</i>	276
6.8	<i>Opinions.....</i>	279
6.8.1	<i>Teacher participants expressed opinions on a wider range of issues in comparison with parent participants.....</i>	279
6.8.2	<i>Opinions are often based on incomplete knowledge or lack of experience, rather than on shared understandings.....</i>	280
6.8.3	<i>Parent participants' opinions nearly always relate to their own or their children's experiences.....</i>	282
6.9	<i>Values and beliefs.....</i>	285
6.9.1	<i>It is difficult to discuss values and beliefs with participants.....</i>	285
6.9.2	<i>In the settings and in the research study, most of the dialogue about values and beliefs centres on religious practices and festivals.....</i>	285
6.9.3	<i>Participants in the research seem to have limited knowledge or understanding of each others' values and beliefs.....</i>	286
6.10	<i>Interactions between participants.....</i>	288
6.10.1	<i>Although informal opportunities for interactions are valued by teacher participants, in reality they lead to unequal opportunities for parent participants.....</i>	288
6.10.2	<i>Formal opportunities for interactions between participants can be problematic for parents.....</i>	290
6.10.3	<i>Home visits are a valuable resource in encouraging meaningful interactions between parents, teachers and children.....</i>	291
6.11	<i>The influence of time on parental involvement.....</i>	292
6.11.1	<i>The building of trusting relationships takes time and needs time to be devoted to it.....</i>	292
6.11.2	<i>Teachers and parents feel under pressure because of a perceived lack of time.....</i>	293
6.12	<i>Summary of the influences on perceptions of parental involvement..</i>	294

6.13 Participants' perceptions of parental involvement.....	296
<b>Chapter Seven Analysis of Perceptions of Parental Involvement .....</b>	<b>299</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	299
7.2 Thinking positively.....	301
7.3 'Walking the walk'. What should parental involvement look like? .....	303
7.3.1 <i>Teacher expectations of parental involvement and the potential for challenging these expectations through dialogue.....</i>	<i>303</i>
7.3.2 <i>The need for symmetrical dialogue .....</i>	<i>310</i>
7.3.3 <i>'British Asian' parents in need of support? .....</i>	<i>312</i>
7.4 'Talking the talk'. English as the language of success .....	317
7.4.1 <i>English as the dominant language .....</i>	<i>317</i>
7.4.2 <i>Parents who speak EAL as 'hard to reach'.....</i>	<i>318</i>
7.4.3 <i>The value of home languages.....</i>	<i>321</i>
7.5 Parental involvement in the home space and the school space .....	323
7.5.1 <i>'British Asian' parents' knowledge in relation to parental involvement in the school space.....</i>	<i>323</i>
7.5.2 <i>The significance of home visits .....</i>	<i>324</i>
7.5.3 <i>Parental involvement in children's learning in the home space ....</i>	<i>328</i>
7.5.4 <i>Parental involvement as a participatory democracy? .....</i>	<i>329</i>
7.6 Parental involvement and the negotiation of identities.....	330
7.6.1 <i>Parents negotiating identities.....</i>	<i>330</i>
7.6.2 <i>Religion as an aspect of parent's and children's identities .....</i>	<i>334</i>
7.6.3 <i>Sensitivity in relation to talking about religion.....</i>	<i>336</i>
7.6.4 <i>Support for parents' and children's religious identities in the two settings .....</i>	<i>339</i>
7.7 Moving towards a 'third space'? .....	340
7.8 Summary .....	343
<b>Chapter Eight Implications for future practice and research.....</b>	<b>345</b>
8.1 Introduction.....	345
8.2 The Field, Allen and Tickell Reviews .....	346
8.3 A 'third space' approach to parental involvement.....	347
8.4 My own perceptions of parental involvement .....	354
8.4.1 <i>There is no 'right' way for 'British Asian' parents to be involved in their children's Nursery education.....</i>	<i>354</i>
8.4.2 <i>Parental involvement needs its own space and time if it is to be effective .....</i>	<i>356</i>
8.4.3 <i>Approaches to parental involvement should be transformative in nature rather than reproductive.....</i>	<i>361</i>
8.4.4 <i>Approaches to parental involvement need to be co-constructed, involving parents, teachers and children.....</i>	<i>362</i>
8.4.5 <i>Parental involvement should be empowering for teachers, parents and children.....</i>	<i>365</i>
8.5 Implications for future research .....	366

<b>References .....</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>Appendix One. Data from the two Nursery settings .....</b>	<b>391</b>
Appendix 1.1 Summary of clip log.....	391
<i>Louise: Headteacher interview, Forest Hill.....</i>	<i>391</i>
<i>Abi: Nursery Teacher interview, Forest Hill.....</i>	<i>393</i>
<i>Ayesha and Habiba: Parent interview, Forest Hill .....</i>	<i>398</i>
<i>Chris: Headteacher interview, Orchard Road.....</i>	<i>400</i>
<i>Val: Senior Management Team interview, Orchard Road.....</i>	<i>403</i>
<i>Roma: Nursery Teacher interview, Orchard Road.....</i>	<i>405</i>
<i>Annisa: Teaching Assistant, Orchard Road.....</i>	<i>409</i>
<i>Parent Group Meetings, Orchard Road.....</i>	<i>410</i>
<i>Sabrina: Parent interview, Orchard Road.....</i>	<i>415</i>
Appendix 1.2 Example of data spreadsheet.....	417
Appendix 1.3 Example of field notes transcript.....	418
<b>Appendix Two. Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>419</b>
Appendix 2.1 Example of content analysis.....	419
<b>Appendix Three. Information.....</b>	<b>420</b>
Appendix 3.1 Information sheet given to school staff.....	420
Appendix 3.2 English translation of letter sent to parents.....	421

## **Index of Diagrams**

<b>Fig 2.1 Conceptual Framework .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Fig 3.1 The PEAL Model (Wheeler and Connor, 2006) .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Fig 3.2 Literature Review Framework.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Fig 4.1 The case study design .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Fig 4.2 Example of clip from clip log .....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Fig 4.3 Data collection, collation and analysis.....</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>Fig 6.1 Example of initial coding.....</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>Fig 6.2 Representations of a 'good parent' .....</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>Fig 6.3 Opinions and experiences .....</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>Fig 6.4 Perceptions of Parental Involvement .....</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>Fig 8.1 A model of a 'third space' approach to parental involvement.....</b>	<b>349</b>

## **Index of Tables**

<b>Table 1.1 Aims and objectives of the research study .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Table 3.1 Summary of guidance reports and documents for working with parents.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Table 3.2 Summary of Epstein's typology of parental involvement .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Table 3.3 Working in partnership with parents .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Table 3.4 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>111</b>

<b>Table 4.1 Ethical considerations .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Table 4.2 Ethical Principles .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Table 4.3 Credibility checks.....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Table 4.4 Research methods .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Table 4.5 Meeting Two .....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Table 4.6 Meeting Three.....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Table 4.7 Meeting Four.....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Table 4.8 Meeting Five .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Table 4.9 Meeting Six .....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Table 6.1 Emergent categories of data: Influences on perceptions of parental involvement .....</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>Table 6.2 Experiences .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>Table 6.3 Representations .....</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>Table 6.4 Knowledge .....</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>Table 6.5 Feelings .....</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>Table 6.6 Opinions.....</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>Table 6.7 Values and beliefs .....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>Table 6.8 Interactions.....</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Table 6.9 Time .....</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Table 6.10 Findings in the category of experiences .....</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>Table 6.11 Findings in the category of representations .....</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Table 6.12 Findings in the category of knowledge .....</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>Table 6.13 Findings in the category of feelings .....</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>Table 6.14 Findings in the category of opinions.....</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>Table 6.15 Findings in the category of values and beliefs .....</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Table 6.16 Findings in the category of interactions .....</b>	<b>288</b>
<b>Table 6.17 Findings in the category of time .....</b>	<b>292</b>
<b>Table 6.18 Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement .....</b>	<b>297</b>
<b>Table 6.19 Parents' perceptions of parental involvement .....</b>	<b>297</b>
<b>Table 6.20 Children's perceptions of parental involvement.....</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>Table 7.1 Positive perceptions of parental involvement .....</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>Table 7.2 Walking the walk: perceptions of how should parents be involved in their children's Nursery education .....</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>Table 7.3 Perceptions of parental involvement and the notion of English as the language of success.....</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>Table 7.4 Perceptions of parental involvement in the home space and the school space .....</b>	<b>323</b>
<b>Table 7.5 Perceptions of parental involvement relating to notions of identity .....</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>Table 7.6 Perceptions of parental involvement and a 'third space' approach.....</b>	<b>341</b>
<b>Table 8.1. My own perceptions of parental involvement .....</b>	<b>354</b>

# **Chapter One Introduction to the research and to the researcher**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This research study examines perceptions of parental involvement from the points of view of Nursery practitioners, minority ethnic parents and their children. It was created as a result of my own experiences as an Early Years practitioner and as a parent. In this opening chapter, I will describe how my experience as a practitioner working with a three year old, Fahima, began the thinking process which led to this research study (section 1.2). I will explain how reflecting on my own situation, firstly as a practitioner and later as a mother, influenced the research topic and design (sections 1.3-1.6). I will explain the rationale for conducting this research study. I will outline the aims and objectives of the research study (section 1.7). At the end of the chapter, I will also clarify some of the terminology used in the thesis (section 1.8).

It is important to emphasize early on that this research study is of a personal nature. By this, I mean that it is closely related to my own experiences as a practitioner and parent. Thus, as well as examining the participants' perceptions of parental involvement, the research will also involve examination of and reflection on my own perceptions. This has implications for the research

methodology and for the presentation of the findings of the study. The research study began with my experiences as a developing practitioner and involves my personal journey as a beginning researcher and as a parent, as well as being about the participants in the research. Since it was my role as an early years practitioner which led to me embarking on the research, it is my intention to keep the study firmly linked to early years practice, whilst at the same time endeavouring to meet the necessary standards of academic rigour. By keeping the study closely linked to practice, I will be able to paint a picture of parental involvement as it is for the participants in the study. I will also be able to use the research to consider implications for future practice when working with parents in the early years.

Because of the personal nature of the study, I will need to reflect on my position as a researcher throughout the research process. I will need to consider the potential influence of my own experiences and attitudes on the research design, findings and analysis. These issues are discussed in more detail in section 4.4.1, with reference to Bourdieu's (1992) concept of 'reflexivity'. Although I recognise the need to reflect on my role in the research, I also see value in my personal involvement. Firstly, as a practitioner myself I will be able to approach the analysis of the data and the dissemination of my findings in this study in a way which can make sense to other practitioners. Furthermore, I have worked in the two settings in which I intend to carry out the research so I have built up relationships of trust with practitioners, parents and children in the schools. Since I acknowledge the personal nature of the research and reflect on my own role within the study, this thesis is written in the first person.

My interest in this study is not in determining the importance of parental involvement in Nursery education. Previous research has already pointed to the importance of parental involvement in schools in relation to the educational success of their children (e.g. OECD, 1997: DCSF, 2008: Wheeler and Connor, 2009). Recent research has also indicated that where parents have higher levels of self-confidence and feel involved by practitioners, then this has a positive effect on their children's well-being ( e.g. Wheeler and Connor, 2009: Roberts, 2007). As such, I am starting from an assumption that it is better for children and their parents if parents and teachers work together to build on intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. However, I am interested in how parents and teachers **perceive** parental involvement in their children's learning. Do they have the same ideas about what positive parental involvement should mean? Do they think that parental involvement is effective as it exists presently? If not, how would they change it and what might be the barriers to parental involvement? I am also interested in the benefits to practitioners of parental involvement. How does working effectively with parents support practitioners in their role ? How does it make them feel about themselves as practitioners? The next five sections of this chapter explain how I came to be interested in these questions.

## 1.2 Fahima

The germ of the idea for this research study was a result of my experiences of working with Fahima, a Nursery pupil at Orchard Road School. All of the pupils in the Nursery class at Orchard Road were of Bengali or Pakistani origin and spoke English as an additional language (EAL). The children all spoke either Mirpuri (a dialect of Urdu) or Sylheti (a dialect of Bengali) as their home language. I arrived at the school in September as the new Nursery teacher and Early Years Co-ordinator having previously worked at Forest Hill School for five years. During this time I had only worked with two children who spoke English as an additional language and had worked mostly in a Reception class, with only one year's experience of working with Nursery aged children. I could not speak Mirpuri or Sylheti. It came as something of a shock to experience the first few weeks in the Nursery class at Orchard Road as children 'settled in' to the class. Many of the children found beginning Nursery very difficult and were visibly distressed for much of the time they spent in the class. There seemed to be an acceptance amongst the parents and staff with whom I was to work at the Nursery that the children's crying was inevitable and that the best way to deal with it was for parents to leave their children with the Nursery staff as quickly as possible. The two teaching assistants in the Nursery were of South Asian origin and shared their home language with the Mirpuri speaking children, but for the parents and children who spoke Sylheti there was no-one who could communicate with them in their mother tongue.



Fahima and her mother both spoke Sylheti at home and spoke no English. Fahima was tiny for her age and had spent all of her time before beginning Nursery at home with her mother and extended family. Her family were Muslim and her mother wore traditional Salwar Kameez. Fahima's older brother and cousin were now in the school's Reception class, having attended the Nursery the previous year. Fahima's mother would physically hand Fahima to me each morning and leave immediately. Each day Fahima was in a very distressed state, crying and struggling to run from the Nursery. Fahima's mother would leave, without being able to talk with me about Fahima's feelings or her own.

I found this situation extremely hard to deal with for a number of reasons, beginning with the fact that I could not communicate with Fahima's mother. I was also taken aback by the way in which Fahima was left in such a hurry by her mother. A number of issues troubled me in these first few days in my new job. Firstly, how had it come about that staff and parents in the school accepted the idea that beginning Nursery was an unavoidably traumatic event for children, staff and parents? Secondly, why was there no member of staff in the Nursery who could communicate with Sylheti-speaking families, when such members of staff were deployed elsewhere in the school? Thirdly, what must it feel like to be a child left for the first time with a stranger, who did not speak like anyone in her family or look like anyone in her family, or even dress like anyone in her family, in a new and strange environment? Finally, what must it feel like to be a parent leaving your child in such circumstances, presumably believing that there was no alternative, yet being unable to talk about your child or your feelings with the person entrusted with her care? I felt that the staff and parents in the Nursery had

got so used to the first few weeks of Nursery being a distressing time that they no longer questioned whether this was avoidable. Later on in my research and reading, I saw the situation as an example of a 'dominant discourse' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) operating in the Nursery. Practitioners in the Nursery were understandably concerned with settling the children into Nursery as quickly as possible. The practitioners presented the settling in process to parents as something which inevitably involved tears, with the best way to deal with that being for parents to go home and leave the practitioners to sort it out. The practitioners believed this to be the best way to deal with the situation and the parents accepted their thinking as the 'experts' in the situation.

Thankfully, the situation with Fahima improved: after a few days at the school I was able to organise a chat with her mother through a translator about helping Fahima to settle into the Nursery more happily. We were able to talk through the settling in process with Fahima's mother and the parents of other children who were clearly not yet ready to be left by their parents. We were able to approach the settling in process in a more gradual manner, although this was difficult for members of staff who were used to working in a different way.

This experience set me thinking about my role as the Nursery teacher and about my relationships with parents and children in the Nursery. I became very aware that my ethnic origin, language and style of dressing may be alienating and even worrying for children and for their parents. I was also mindful of the fact that I might be making a lot of assumptions about the children's and parents' feelings and behaviour, since I was unable to communicate effectively with many of them

because of our language differences. I began to reflect on the fact that as the Early Years Co-ordinator I had a lot of power in the Nursery, since I was the one who could ultimately decide how the Nursery was organised and what the expectations of other staff, children and parents were. Unfortunately, at the time I felt that I was the least suitably qualified person to make these decisions, since I had the least experience and understanding of the lives of those who worked in and attended the Nursery, including the parents. I needed to get to know the families and staff using the Nursery, but was unsure about how to go about this. I felt strongly that I needed to find out how parents felt about their children attending the Nursery and how we might improve our provision, particularly around relationships with parents and children and the settling in process. I was also aware that making changes to the provision would be a difficult process for the two teaching assistants, who had been used to existing practices for a number of years. I needed to build good relationships with the teaching assistants at the same time as improving relationships with children and their parents.

### **1.3 The Effective Early Learning project**

A few months later, we were given the opportunity to participate in the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project (Pascal and Bertram, 2008). EEL is a self-evaluation project which allows early years' practitioners to examine practice in their own setting and highlight strengths in their provision. It also supports practitioners to identify areas for improvement in practice and provision. I felt that the EEL project would help me and the teaching assistants to work as a team to understand what

we were doing well and what we might improve. This seemed infinitely preferable to the idea of me trying to impose my own ideas on the setting and expecting the teaching assistants to change practice according to my decisions.

The self-evaluation involved some discussion with the parents and children about our provision and how they thought it should be improved. At the beginning of the project, I was hopeful that it would be a way of encouraging parents to communicate their ideas and opinions to staff, so that we could work in partnership together to improve the Nursery. However, in reality we discovered that when asked, most parents were wary of appearing critical of the Nursery. They were extremely reluctant to volunteer any opinions or ideas for possible improvements to the provision. It was almost impossible to begin any kind of discussion about provision in the Nursery as parents only seemed comfortable if agreeing with staff. Parents were asked about issues such as the physical environment, relationships with teachers, learning experiences, parental involvement and resources. For almost every question, they answered that they were happy with practices and provision.

The only issue on which we found any apparent concern was to do with the physical environment. The nursery did look quite 'run down' physically and in particular the flooring was grubby and the carpet was stained and threadbare. Myself and the teaching assistants had raised the possibility of replacing the flooring with the school Headteacher but there was no money available to fund this. However, during the EEL project the two teaching assistants saw an opportunity to expand their campaign for a new carpet. Thus, one of the

questions which they added when discussing the physical environment with parents was, "We need a new carpet though, don't we?". All of the parents agreed and this was presented to the Headteacher as a result of the self-evaluation: a few weeks later, a new carpet was fitted!

Although the carpet was very welcome and the circumstances in which it arrived were joked about between staff and parents and the Headteacher, this incident highlighted a concern of mine regarding parents. The only criticism we had received as a setting during the EEL project was one which staff had first suggested to parents. For some reason, parents seemed to agree with everything which teachers did and said. As with the settling in process discussed above, parents left all decision making to teachers and seemed to accept that teachers' way of doing things was the right and only way to do them. However, as illustrated by the upset caused to children by the settling in process, the teachers' way of doing things was not always right. Thus, for me one of the most important issues which arose from the EEL project concerned the role of parents in the life of the Nursery. Parents were clearly not used to being involved in decision making in the Nursery, but why was this and how did they feel about it? I knew that I would need to examine these issues if I was to build better relationships with parents and their children.

## **1.4 The beginnings of my PhD research**

I worked at Orchard Road school for two years in total before moving to work at another Nursery class attended by children of South Asian origin. Towards the end of my time at Orchard Road I was given the opportunity to enrol for an MPhil/PhD. Whilst working at the school, I had tried to build up closer relationships with parents and to work as a team with other members of staff. As a team, I felt that we had improved some areas of our practice, most noticeably the transition period when children first began attending the Nursery. We had also begun to invite parents into the Nursery more frequently and to communicate with them in home languages whenever possible. However, there was still a lot of work to be done concerning building better relationships with parents, particularly with regard to involving them in decision making. I was also aware that much of the initiative for involving parents came from us, as practitioners. I wondered what the parents themselves thought about parental involvement and what it should 'look like' from their point of view. I felt that I did not have an understanding of what Nursery life and parental involvement looked like from the parents' perspective. So I decided to ask them and this became a major element in the rationale for this research study.

From the early stages of thinking about this research, I have been concerned about the best way to carry out the study. As well as the need to consider the most effective means of finding the answers to my research questions, I also need to think about my methodology from the points of view of the participants. If

I am beginning the research from a standpoint of concern about the existing relationships between practitioners and parents, I need to consider carefully how my research might influence these relationships. It is not just the outcomes of the research which may influence relationships between parents and teachers, but the process of the research itself. If my research is to be valid in representing the voices of participants, then I need to be able to justify the ways in which I listen to these voices:

*"If we...are to claim validity for our research accounts, in which we aim to make original claims to knowledge: and if we understand epistemology to contain both a theory of knowledge and a theory of knowledge creation: then we need to demonstrate the validity both of the knowledge and also of the processes of coming to know."*

(McNiff, 2007)

Thus, I need to be clear about developing a methodology which respects the voices of participants and considers my own position in relation to those participants and to the research study as a whole. I begin to outline the development of these ideas in the next two sections of this chapter, where I reflect on my positions as a researcher, parent and teacher.

## **1.5 The researcher as a parent**

Although this research began as a response to my thoughts on the experiences of Fahima and her mother and the other parents and children at Orchard Road school, the research is also shaped by my own experiences as a parent. At the beginning of this research study, I was expecting my first child. My experiences as an expectant and new parent have undoubtedly influenced the research as it

has progressed. I soon realised that parenthood is a much debated issue in today's world. There is much lively debate concerning the best way to care for babies and young children in the media and on internet parenting forums: for example, Breastfeeding or bottle feeding, Immunisation or not?, How much television should young children be allowed to watch, if any?, Should mothers stay at home with young children or go to work? and so on (see for example Rumbelow, 2009, BBC News, 2009).

As children grow older, other issues are much debated, such as how many organised activities your child should participate in and when and how much unsupervised play they should be involved in (for example Asthana, 2009, Clark 2007). As Furedi (2008) points out, this constant analysis of what is best in terms of parenting and its effects on the future of children can leave many parents feeling anxious and inadequate. As a parent, it can feel as if even seemingly innocuous decisions can have far reaching consequences for your child. Once I became a parent myself, I had a much better understanding of how parents I worked with might be feeling faced with some of the pressures of parenting. I appreciated that parents often face several demands on their time and attention and that this can often have an impact on involvement in their children's learning. I also began to appreciate that there is no one 'right' way to be a parent and that in the vast majority of cases, we are all trying to parent our children as well as we possibly can according to our changing circumstances.

As a result of my own experiences as a parent and of my reading early on the research, I began to reflect on the ways in which we perceive the role of parent.



As far as schools and practitioners are concerned, is there a 'right' way to be a parent? Who decides what 'parent involvement' should be like? If there is a notion of the 'right' way to be a parent, what are the implications for parents who may not always fit with this notion? These were all questions which I reflected on during my reading for chapters two and three of this thesis and which I still reflect on in the light of my own ongoing journey as a researcher and as a mother.

## **1.6 The researcher as a teacher**

As is clear from my discussion of my time at Orchard Road School, this research study is also shaped by my experiences as a teacher. Once I began reading about work with minority ethnic families at the beginning of my research, I began to reflect on my teaching in other schools, prior to arriving at Orchard Road. In particular, I thought about the two occasions when I had just one child of 'British Asian' origin in my class and how I had supported those children and their parents. I realised that my approach to supporting these children, who I will call Adil and Farhaad, had been very different from the way in which I worked at Orchard Road. Reflecting honestly on my work with Adil and Farhaad, I viewed teaching them as being challenging. This was partly due to my lack of experience of working with children with EAL prior to arriving at Orchard Road and partly due to the fact that Adil and Farhaad both had the experience of being the only child of South Asian origin in a class of white, English-speaking children.

On reflection, at the time of being in my class, I saw Adil and Farhaad as being

'different' from the other children. In one way, Adil and Farhaad needed supporting in a different way from the other children in the class in the sense that they each had EAL and needed home language support. However, on reflection I had to accept that in part I may have treated them differently because of their ethnicity. This is not to say that I behaved negatively towards Adil or Farhaad, but that in my mind they were 'different' from the other children because I did not share so many aspects of my lifestyle and culture with them. I also had a very different relationship with their parents from that which I had with most of the parents of other children in the school. On a day to day level, I was able to chat with the white, English-speaking parents at the beginning and end of the school day. I was not able to do more than smile and say 'hello' and 'goodbye' to Farhaad's mother, since I did not speak her home language and she did not speak mine. I was able to hold a conversation with Adil's mother, but this relied on her limited ability to speak and understand English. It was difficult to communicate with these mothers at all, since there was not a member of staff anywhere in the school who shared their home languages.

Each of these children attended my school for a few terms only, whilst their fathers were working on placement at the local hospital. By the time any home language support could be arranged, they had moved on to a new school. During their time at the school, Adil and Farhaad and their mothers learned as many new English words as they could and we communicated with them as best as we could. Although teachers and other parents adopted a friendly approach towards these families, by any measure their experience at the school must have been unsatisfactory. As practitioners, we failed these families in the sense that we left

them to survive their experience in our school as well as they could, without being able to organise any meaningful support for the children or for the parents.

My reflections on my role in working with these two families led me to include a second setting in my study, where most of the children attending were white and English-speaking. I wondered how parents of South Asian origin perceive parental involvement in a school where they are very much in the minority? How did the teachers in such a school perceive parent involvement with regard to these parents? What are the issues around minority ethnic parent involvement particular to practitioners working mostly with white, English-speaking families? How do the perceptions of these practitioners and parents compare with the perceptions of teachers and parents in a Nursery attended solely by children of Pakistani and Bengali origin? These were all questions which influenced the decision to include two settings in the research: one attended solely by 'British Asian' children and one attended by a majority of white, English-speaking children.

## **1.7 Aims and objectives of the research**

My experiences as a Nursery teacher and as a mother helped to shape the research questions for this study. As I have discussed above, I am concerned with building better relationships with parents. This has to involve giving parents a chance to speak and to influence what happens to their children at Nursery. The implication of this is that I need to consider carefully the existing relationships

between teachers and parents and how power is balanced between individuals and between groups of individuals. As well as considering these relationships in the context of my research questions, I need to think about them in the context of relationships between the participants and myself as a researcher. I also need to consider how an individual's sense of self affects their interactions and relationships in the context of school. In particular, I am interested in how interactions and relationships are affected if parents and teachers do not share the same home language, religion, 'culture' (see chapter two for a discussion of the concept of 'culture') or ethnic origin.

These initial reflections led to the writing of the aims and objectives for the research study. These aims and objectives are outlined in table 1.1, followed by a discussion of terminology used.

**Table 1.1 Aims and objectives of the research study**

**Aim of research**

- to achieve a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural and linguistic factors which impact on 'British Asian' parental-teacher interactions in order to improve practice

**Objectives of research**

- to document and analyse 'British Asian' parents' perceptions of parental involvement in Nursery education in two English primary schools and how they may be affected by cultural and linguistic factors.
- to investigate how far perceptions of parental involvement are congruent between teachers, parents and children within and between two Nursery settings: one attended mostly by children of working class 'British Asian' parents (Orchard Road School) and one attended mostly by children of working class white parents (Forest Hill School).
- to explore the implications for future professional practice in Nursery settings of different perceptions of parental involvement.

## **1.8 Terminology**

When involved in research concerning groups of people such as teachers and parents, one must guard against homogenising and essentialising such groups. Sayer (1997, p.454) defines cultural essentialism as, "*Discourses and practices which label and relate to particular groups of people in ways which suppress difference and homogenise and fix them, not merely stereotyping but pathologising or wrongly idealising them.*" In other words, it cannot be assumed

that parents think and act as a group, or that all parents of Nursery children have the same needs, beliefs and opinions. For the white researcher, it is particularly important to guard against homogenising and essentialising minority ethnic groups, as I discuss further in chapters two and four.

However, in order that the research is presented in a clear, robust fashion, I need to refer to participants in a consistent, clear way. Participants' ethnicity also needs to be described, since this is one of the factors which I am discussing in my research. For this reason, I asked the parents involved in the study how they would like to be described as a group. The term chosen by the parents is 'British Asian'. In the context of this research, this term is taken to refer to parents of Pakistani or Bengali origin who now live in the UK. Whilst I am aware that some may view the use of the term 'British Asian' to be questionable, it is the term which the parents involved in this research thought best described them as a group. Therefore, although I have some personal reservations about the term, I have adopted it throughout the thesis whenever I refer to the parents in the context of them as a group of individuals.

Similarly, the term 'teachers' is used to describe all members of staff in the two schools who are involved in teaching children, i.e. teachers, head teachers, teaching assistants and teaching assistants. I use the term 'teachers' because both of the settings involved in the research were Nursery classes situated in primary schools. Hence, some of the staff participants in the research were teachers of children in year groups other than Nursery. The term 'practitioners' is used in a wider sense when discussing the literature review, since some literature

involves talking about individuals who are employed in settings which are not school based, e.g. children's centres or day nurseries. The term 'parent' refers to a child's mother or father or the person who has primary care of the child. I discuss the issue of the gendered nature of parental involvement in children's education in chapter three.

When talking about parents and teachers and schools, several terms are encountered, e.g. parent participation, parent partnership, home-school relations. However, these terms are inappropriate in relation to my research for the following reasons. Firstly the term 'parent participation' suggests a one way relationship in which parents are expected to participate in activities which the school deem appropriate: there is little implication of responsibility for the parent-school relationship on the part of the school in this term. The phrase 'parent partnership' allows for a two way relationship and suggests a level of equality and democracy. However, researchers such as Vincent (1996) and Crozier (2000) have argued that the types of activities and relationships which have been developed under the heading 'parent partnership' have often operated at a superficial level at best. 'Parent partnership' has therefore become a term which is open to interpretation in the academic field. For me, 'home-school relations' is too abstract a term, since it does not refer to the people involved in the relationships themselves.

I am aware that 'parental involvement' is also a problematic term, since it can be understood as implying that parents should be unilaterally involving themselves in particular ways in their child's education. However, my use of the term indicates a

reciprocal relationship, where schools make efforts to involve parents in all aspects of their child's school life, as well as parents feeling empowered to make choices about their involvement in their child's education. The following definition of parental involvement is useful in this respect: "*The role of parents as supporters of and advocates for their children and as having the knowledge and understanding to ensure the most effective and positive educational experience possible for their children.*" (Crozier and Reay, 2005, p.xi). The notion of parental involvement and how it is defined is discussed in more detail in chapter three of the thesis.

## **1.9 Summary of Chapter One**

In summary, this research study begins from a very personal perspective and so I will need to reflect on my position as a researcher throughout the project. I am interested in investigating 'culture', identity and relationships with regard to parental involvement in children's Nursery education. I am also very aware of the need to consider the different contexts in which identities and relationships are operating. I am motivated by the idea that parents and children are sometimes, albeit unintentionally, denied the opportunity for their voices to be heard. The following two chapters explore the ideas outlined in this first chapter in relation to socio-cultural theory and previous research in the field of parental involvement in education.



## Chapter Two

### Key Concepts

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine concepts and theories from socio-cultural perspectives which are relevant to the aims and objectives of my research. I am approaching my research from a socio-cultural perspective because I am interested in the ways in which the perceptions of individuals and groups of individuals are influenced by their past experiences and by the relationship between these past experiences and the situations and contexts they find themselves in. In chapter one, I discussed the links between parts of my own identity as a teacher and as a parent and my motivation for beginning this particular research study. The main aim of my research is to better understand **perceptions** of parental involvement in the two Nursery settings. If we are to arrive at a better understanding of participants' perceptions, we first need to understand what influences those perceptions. Our perceptions of a particular phenomenon are linked to our general perceptions about the social world or worlds we inhabit. One of the strongest influences on how we view our social worlds comes from how we view ourselves. Hence, my research needs to

examine the concept of identity in relation to individual participants and in relation to groups of participants, as discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this chapter. In section 2.4 , I will demonstrate how Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'(Bourdieu, 1977) can be used to understand how an individual shapes his or her unique identity in relation to past experiences and how this in turn might shape his or her perceptions of parental involvement. In section 2.5, I will also consider how Bhabha's (1994) discussion of the ways in which we negotiate individual and group identities might shape participants' perceptions in this study. In particular, I will show how Bhabha's representation of identity as a fluid concept in a continual state of negotiation is pertinent to participants of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in my study. In section 2.6, I will highlight how 'race' and ethnicity are of particular importance in relation to the identities of participants in my research.

As well as examining the identities of individuals and groups, I need to consider the contexts in which they are operating. Human beings do not develop their particular identities or perceptions in a vacuum: they are influenced by and linked to the context in which they develop. In section 2.8, I will demonstrate how Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of 'field' and 'cultural capital' can be used to examine how individuals may think or behave within the context of parental involvement.

In examining the perceptions of parents and teachers, I will need to consider the relationships which exist between the two groups and between individuals. The status of parents and of teachers within the field of school will unavoidably influence these relationships. In order to fully understand relationships between parents and teachers, I will need to carefully examine the balance of power

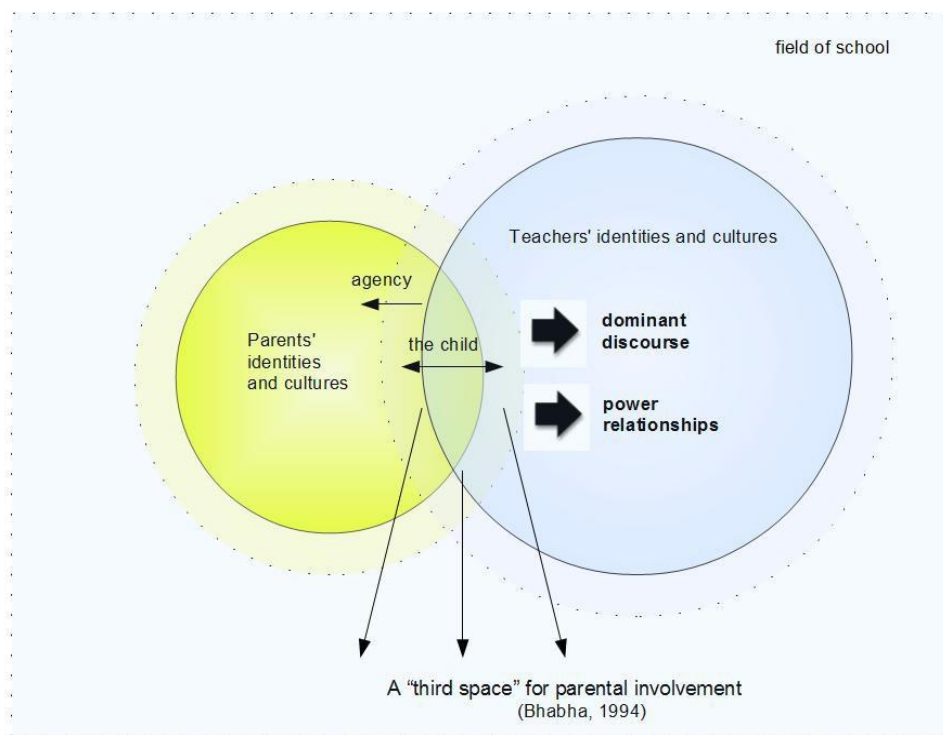
between the two groups. When considering teachers and British Asian parents, there are some indications that teachers operate within the dominant culture. In section 2.9, I will explain how the notions of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977), and 'meconnaissance' (Bourdieu, 1977) can be used to understand how relationships and perceptions are formed within the context of parental involvement.

An important influence on identity, agency and context is that of culture. As Grenfell and James (1998, p.10) point out, "*Culture is a key word as it refers to the world of knowledge, ideas, objects which are the product of human activity.*" At present, the way in which the notion of 'culture' in the UK should or should not develop and change is widely discussed both in academia and in the media, particularly in relation to minority ethnic cultures and more particularly in relation to British Muslims. In order for my research to be relevant in the current climate, the issue of 'culture' needs to be considered carefully. In section 2.10 I will discuss Bourdieu's (1977) notion of culture as a 'structuring structure' in relation to examining ways in which participants in my research might be shaping their own cultures.

As I indicated in chapter one, part of my motivation in conducting this research developed from a desire to develop practice in working with parents. Examining ideas such as identity, context, culture and relationships will help me to understand why participants perceive parental involvement in the ways in which they do at the present time. However, my analysis needs to go further than this and consider how these perceptions might be shaped in the future. Section 2.10

outlines the way in which Bhabha's (1994) notion of a "third space" might be used to transform ways of working with parents and in turn shape new perceptions of parental involvement. I use Freire's (1996) ideas of 'praxis' and 'dialogue' to explore ways in which a "third space" of parental involvement might be constructed.

The diagram below (2.1) illustrates how notions from socio-cultural theory discussed in this chapter relate to my research study:



**Fig 2.1 Conceptual Framework**

The diagram (fig 2.1) illustrates how teachers' identities and cultures are in a process of negotiation with parents' identities and cultures in forming perceptions

of parental involvement. The outer circles acknowledge those parts of identities and cultures which exist at a sub-conscious level. In the diagram, teachers' identities and cultures are depicted in a larger circle than those of parents to indicate the higher status they may be afforded in the field of school. In part, this higher status is maintained by the unconscious acceptance of dominant discourses and by the unequal power relationships between teachers and parents. However, the diagram demonstrates how individual parents and groups of parents may use their individual and collective agency to redistribute the balance of power. The child is shown as moving between the cultures and identities of his/her parents and his/her teachers whilst in the process of shaping his/her own identity. The diagram highlights how a "third space" of parental involvement might emerge from the margins of parents' and teachers' cultures and identities. This conceptual framework will help to shape the methodology for my research study, as discussed in chapter four, as well as informing the analysis of data collected during the research, as discussed in chapters five and six.

## **2.2 Identity**

This discussion of identity begins with a general definition of identity. I then consider how individuals and groups of individuals might identify themselves. This leads to a discussion about how we identify others, including the potential for stereotyping. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977) is used to explore identity as a fluid, rather than fixed, concept. I also consider Bhabha's notion of 'hybridisation' (Bhabha, 1994) and how identities are negotiated. The concept of

agency in relation to identity is linked to the idea of identities being in a constant state of negotiation within particular environments. The notion of identity and the associated concepts are located in the context of my research. I also discuss the limitations of these concepts in the context of my research.

### **2.3 What is identity? How do individuals identify themselves?**

The Oxford English dictionary defines identity as follows: "**identity**.

**noun**(*pl. identities*)**1** *the fact of being who or what a person or thing is .2 the characteristics determining this. 3a close similarity or affinity.*" (Soanes and Stevenson, 2005, p. 245). If we consider that identity is about the very fact of one's being, then it must be considered in any research concerning individuals or relationships between individuals. In this dictionary definition, identity is made up of different characteristics. The research study also needs to consider what these characteristics may be. There are obvious, visible ways of identifying oneself or others, such as by gender, ethnicity or age. There are other visible ways in which individuals or groups of individuals might choose to identify themselves, for example by the way they dress. However, there are many other less immediately visible facets to one's identity, such as religion, sexuality, role in one's family and professional roles.

For different individuals, certain parts of their identity might be more important than others at particular points in time or in particular contexts. As individuals, we may also choose to 'foreground' different aspects of our identities at different

points in time or in different contexts. For example, at work we may present our professional identity to others without revealing much of our identity as a member of our family.

As well as one's own sense of identity, individuals and groups of individuals are subject to being identified in certain ways by other individuals or groups of individuals (Verkuyten, 2005). As well as thinking about how we construct our own identity, we also need to consider the ways in which others identify us. This is particularly pertinent to my research since I am interested in **perceptions** of parental involvement. Integral to how parents and practitioners perceive parental involvement will be how they perceive one another, as individuals and as groups of individuals.

The ways in which we identify others can be related to commonly held beliefs about certain individuals or groups of individuals. For example, if we identify an individual as a police officer, we have certain expectations about how s/he may and should behave. Verkuyten (2005) points out that the social dimension to one's identity can serve to position the individual in the relevant social structure. Identities imposed on us by others can be positive or negative and may involve stereotyping. My research will need to reflect on how our commonly held beliefs about how a teacher or a parent is expected to behave might affect individual's behaviour and perceptions, as well as their relationships with each other.

## 2.4 Identity, habitus and the notion of agency

For Bourdieu, an individual's identity is largely shaped by his/her 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977 ). Habitus is a set of dispositions and attitudes formed by our individual backgrounds and experiences. It is not a fixed entity, although for Bourdieu, our habitus is generated in early childhood when it is determined by our experiences in the family. Although an individual's habitus can evolve, it will always be influenced by its earlier manifestations.

Our past experiences and what we learn from them become internalised and as a result we become predisposed to thinking and behaving in particular ways, without always being conscious that we are doing so (Connolly, 1998). Since we are constantly encountering new experiences, habitus is not a fixed entity, rather it evolves as an individual moves into new situations. Thus, although each individual may have their own particular identities, these identities are shaped by the social world around them: *“I wanted to show that the individual existed not just as an individual but as a social product and that a generative principle was at work.”* (Bourdieu, cited in Harker et al, 1990, p. 35)

Reay (1998, p.369) points out that Bourdieu intended 'habitus' to be used as method, and that the concept can serve to illuminate data in research in previously unconsidered ways:



*“Habitus is a way of looking at data which renders the `taken-for-granted' problematic. It suggests a whole range of questions not necessarily addressed in empirical research: How well adapted is the individual to the context they find themselves in? How does personal history shape their responses to the contemporary setting? What subjective vocations do they bring to the present and how are they manifested? Are structural effects visible within small scale interactions? What is the meaning of non-verbal behaviour as well as individuals' use of language?”*

For me, the notion of 'habitus' is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, in talking to participants it is important to remember that they identify, and have identified, themselves in a number of different ways in different contexts. These identities may all contribute to individual participants' perspectives on parental involvement. I will need to consider how these identities, and the relations between them, interact with the context in which I am conducting my research and influence perceptions. As Reay points out, it will be important to consider how structures and protocols in the institution of school interact with the habitus of individuals and groups of individuals. I will also need to consider how 'at home' participants feel in the context of school, and in the context of the research process. As Bourdieu notes, if individuals move into a field in which structures and practices differ greatly from those of their own habitus, the individual is likely to “*incur negative sanctions*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78). How then might the habitus of individuals and of the participants as a group interact with the structures and protocols of school life? How might the dispositions and attitudes of the participants affect and possibly transform the research process itself? The notion of 'habitus' may provide a lens through which to view participants' identities and the relationships between their identities and the contexts in which I meet them.

The concept of habitus as historical in nature may also be relevant to my research. I will need to consider the question of individuals' personal histories and how these might shape their perceptions of parental involvement. Bourdieu asserts that habitus is "*laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.81). An individual's habitus is formed in the first instance within his family and is then transformed by formal education. For Bourdieu, these early manifestations of habitus influence all of an individual's subsequent experiences. If this is the case, then practitioners working in early years settings have a significant role in the formation of young children's habitus. Parents will certainly have a strong part to play in the formation of their children's habitus. My research will need to consider how practitioners and parents influence the dispositions and attitudes developed by young children. More specifically, in considering parental involvement I will need to consider how children may react to the potential for conflicting dispositions and attitudes evident in the habitus of their teachers and of their parents.

In relation to this point, most of the 'British Asian' participants in the study are first generation immigrants to the UK. Their knowledge of the customs and practices of the UK education system, specifically in relation to early years education, may be limited by their own lack of personal experience of attending a UK early years' setting. Individual dispositions and attitudes which make up an individual's habitus may also have been largely developed in the context of participants' home countries, where cultural and educational practices and customs may differ significantly from those adopted in the UK:

*“In fact it is their present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of social position and hence of the social distance between objective positions”*

(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82)

Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' has been criticised for being too deterministic in nature, with little scope for the individual's or group's sense of agency. Habitus limits the possible courses of action available to an individual or group of individuals in a given field. Because habitus is rooted in one's early social experience, certain behaviours and practices will be considered unthinkable or will not be considered at all:

*“Because the dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions...engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination, as unthinkable, or at the cost of the double negation which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable.”*

(Bourdieu, 1977, p.77)

Moreover, since habitus is ingrained in the subconscious, one is unaware of the restraints being placed on one's actions. If this is the case, and habitus is more reproductive than transformative, then we may need to move our focus to the environments in which individuals find themselves. As a practitioner considering challenging current practices in parental involvement and wishing this research to impact on practice, if we cannot reshape the habitus, then it may be that we need to consider transforming the environment in which individual and group habitus

are engaged. Issues concerning context and environment are discussed further in section 2.6 of this chapter.

However, Bourdieu does concede that habitus can be transformed at times of crisis. For 'British Asian' parents of Nursery children, a big shift may occur in their social world when their child begins attending Nursery. This may well be the first time that parents and children have moved in social circles involving individuals whose family and ethnic origins differ markedly from their own. It is also their first encounter with the world of formal education, which has its own social structures and expectations of the ways in which individuals should behave. Bourdieu (1999) recognised that it is in situations such as these, where individual and collective habitus move into an unfamiliar field, that social change can be effected.

Social change can only be effected in this way if the individuals and groups involved are empowered to bring about that change. We will see in the discussion of agency below how an individual's ability to apply their habitus in different fields affects the level of success they achieve therein. Further consideration of habitus and field in relation to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) will demonstrate the limits on individual and group agency (see section 2.8).

When considering identity, as well as acknowledging conscious self-identity and identity as perceived by others, we must also consider those aspects of identity which are sub-conscious. Giddens (1991) argues that identity operates on a

partly non-conscious level in order to allow us to carry on with daily life. In other words, individuals cannot analyse why they are thinking or acting in a particular way at every point during the thinking or acting process. However, an individual can usually interpret his/her particular thoughts or actions if required to do so. Thus, in research such as mine, participants are able to reflect on their identity and its influence on their thoughts and actions. In a similar way, the researcher and the participants can examine an individual's habitus, which for Bourdieu provides a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious. Although an individual is capable of acting independently, he is influenced by such external factors as the law and belief systems, albeit unconsciously:

*“In practice, it is the habitus, history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such, which accomplishes practically the relating of these two systems of relations, in and through the production of practice. The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of the habitus.”*

(Bourdieu, 1977, pp78-9).

If we are to accept identity as a fluid concept, we must also consider the notion of 'agency'. To what extent do individuals construct their own identities and how capable are they of acting of their own free will in a given situation? Because habitus is a continually evolving concept, individuals are able to control their own actions. For example, previous interactions between an individual parent and his/her child's teacher may alter that parent's attitude towards the teacher. Thus, his/her habitus will also be altered. However, a change in attitude does not have to mean a particular change in behaviour: it is up to the parent as an agent to

decide how he/she will behave in future interactions.

## **2.5 The negotiation of identities**

For Homi K. Bhabha (1994), identity is also a fluid concept, in a state of continual negotiation between self and the other . It is in the space between self and other that a person can find his/her own, truly individual identity. When thinking about 'British Asian' parents of Nursery children, it could be that they are negotiating several identities as they move within and between different environments. Firstly, it is likely that they are involved in a process of negotiation between their own ethnic and racial identities and those of the white majority in the UK. The Parekh report (Parekh, 2000) found that many people in minority ethnic groups were learning to live "*in between*", as Bhabha (1994) would say, or with more than one identity. They may also be negotiating between 'home identity' and their 'school identity'. Most parents have been referred to at some time as 'X's Mum' (or Dad). In the context of family and community, one may have a number of different identities: for example as a mum, a daughter, a friend, a workmate. At the school gate, one is inevitably viewed mainly or wholly as a parent.

Different individuals and different families have different ways of operating at home, but at school there are certain accepted ways of being a 'good parent': for example, supporting the home-school agreement, sharing books which are sent home. In this way, some individuals or groups of individuals are not only negotiating between their own identities and those of others. They are negotiating

between their own identities and those **imposed** on them by others. Modood et al (1997, p.67) describe the way in which individual and group identities are negotiated as an ongoing process, particularly for minority ethnic groups:

*“Minority cultures in Britain are...constantly changing and rewriting themselves through fusing their traditions of origin [which in any case were not monolithic] with elements of the majority culture. The process of mixing and hybridisation will increasingly be the norm where rapid change and globalisation have made all identities potentially unstable.”*

In her research with South Asian communities, Chanda-Gool (2006, p.5) found that individuals experience difficulties when their own sense of identity does not fit with the identities imposed on them by others:

*“Identity also develops from social interaction, as imposed by others. The social and the intra-personal identity interact, and tensions arise when a person struggles to find compatibility with social context and to develop their identity independently of an imposed identity.”*

Blackledge (2004) asserts that the one of these 'imposed identities' can be that of 'British citizen'. The state can wield power over immigrants by deciding whether to award them with the identity of 'British citizen'. He argues that by insisting that British citizens speak English, one's identity as a speaker of another language is rendered less valuable. Since all of the parent and children participants in my study speak additional languages this argument needs to be explored with them.

## 2.6 'Race', Ethnicity and Identity

In my research, 'race' and ethnicity are of particular importance in relation to identities. In the particular context of this research study, all of the parent participants belong to minority ethnic groups, whilst most of the practitioners belong to the majority, white ethnic group. In an ideal world, all ethnic groups would be equal and I would not need to consider 'race' more than any other aspect of identity in this research. However, we still live in a society where whiteness gives advantage (Gaine, 2005) and where members of minority ethnic groups encounter prejudice and racism both from individuals and groups of individuals and within institutions. As Sleeter (2005, p.243) asserts, it would be disingenuous to say that 'race' and ethnicity can be considered in the same way as any other facet of participants' identities:

*“Race matters because teachers bring to the classroom interpretations of students and their communities, and their location within a hierarchical society, that are informed heavily by assumptions about race and ethnicity.”*

Furthermore, in the context of my research, young children are beginning to build their ethnic identities and these can be strongly influenced by those teachers referred to above (see Connolly, 2003).



## **2.7 Identity in relation to the research study: a summary**

So far in this chapter, I have explored how identities are formed and negotiated by individuals and by groups of individuals and how this might be relevant to my research. Parents, teachers and children are constructed by their own self-identity and by the identities imposed on them by others in relation to their roles and to categories such as race, class and religion. Identities can be about more than how we see ourselves or how others see us. They can be about the ways in which others choose to identify us and as such can be used as a social and political tool. Identities can be about our sense of belonging to particular groups, such as religious groups or those with shared ethnicity. However, early years practitioners need to be wary of homogenisation: of treating groups of children or parents who share one facet of their identity as identical in all ways. This is particularly important, since not only do we need to support children in recognising and feeling secure with their own identities, but when working with such young children we are part of the social world which contributes to the shaping of their identities (Siraj-Blatchford, 1996).

Thus it is important that my research enables participants to discuss their perceptions of self and of others. I also need to allow participants the opportunity to discuss identities which they might feel have been imposed on them by others. As the discussion of 'culture' below indicates, without these discussions my research will not achieve the aim of reaching an understanding of participants and their actions in order to improve practice. In enabling these discussions,

parents, teachers and children will be able to influence the environments in which they interact.

## 2.8 The Influence of Context

For Bourdieu, contexts can be defined using the term 'field' (Bourdieu, 1977). Grenfell and James (1998) define Bourdieu's field as “*a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level.*” However, as Webb et al (2002) point out, this is not a fixed structure. Although it is made up of a hierarchy of rules, institutions and practices, the interactions between these elements mean it cannot be static. This is a useful concept for my research, since I am interested in making suggestions for improving practice. If the field of school is viewed as a fixed structure of unalterable rules, customs and protocols, then by definition practice could not be improved. By using the concept of 'field', an individual's ability to influence or change the context in which they operate can be acknowledged. In this way, the field of school has the potential to be co-constructed by teachers, parents and children rather than remaining a fixed structure.

However, context can also *constrain* individuals and groups of individuals. As Foucault (1989a) argued, an individual's knowledge or potential knowledge is limited by the context in which they find themselves. Knowledge can also be limited by the willingness of others to make certain information available and accessible in a given context. Thus my research needs to examine carefully the

extent to which participants' agency is developed or constrained by the contexts of school and community.

Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1977) demonstrates how individuals succeed or otherwise in different contexts, or fields. Cultural capital is a way of describing the value ascribed to certain attributes and skills within a certain field. An agent's ability or inability to 'spend' their capital within a given field will determine the level of success they achieve therein. Reay (1998, p.32) developed the following list of components of cultural capital within the field of home-primary school relationships:

- material resources
- educational qualifications
- available time
- information about the education system
- social confidence
- educational knowledge
- the extent to which entitlement, assertiveness, aggression or timidity characterized mothers' approaches to teaching staff

I would argue that, in the context of my research with British Asian parents, the ability to speak English would be a further component of cultural capital.

Furthermore, without this ability, parents may well be unable to make effective use of other components of their cultural capital. This notion is discussed in more detail in relation to previous research in chapter three.

## 2.9 Power relationships

Teachers maintain a certain status in society and speak English, the dominant language of the UK. As Dahlberg and Moss (2005) point out, Nursery education is shaped by a 'dominant discourse'. Concepts such as 'developmentally appropriate practice' and the importance of play have become 'natural ways of speaking' and are presented as truths about early childhood education. However, as Foucault (1989b) asserted, there is never just one truth, but claims for truth made in a particular time and context. Those who have the most power will be able to present their discourse as the 'truth' most strongly. Said (1995) also acknowledges the way in which the stronger culture, in his argument that of the West, has the power to dominate and even shape other, weaker cultures. Thus in the UK, a dominant, Western discourse of early childhood is presented as 'the truth': "*It [the dominant discourse of early childhood education] offers itself as truth, but it is the product (as is any discourse) of particular power relations that privilege certain perspectives over others.*" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p. 18). Thus teachers are able to present their way of doing things as the right way and may feel justified in expecting parents to agree with them.

In the case of some 'British Asian' parents, they may be in a weaker position than some white parents because of their smaller amount of cultural capital in the field of school. It is by unconsciously accepting this 'way of doing things' that parents become the subject of what Bourdieu refers to as 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977), the means by which one group dominates another in a given field.

Bourdieu (1977, p.192) describes symbolic violence as "*a gentle, invisible form of*

*violence*” which is not immediately recognisable. The structures and protocols which exist in certain fields mean that one social group will have dominance over another, because they conform to the values of the field and expect others to do the same. In terms of schools and parents, teachers have a vested interest in conforming to the values associated with the structure of school, since their role is an integral part of that structure. They are thus in a powerful position with regard to expecting parents to conform to the values of the school, thus exerting symbolic violence.

Bourdieu points out that often symbolic violence is invisible because of its unconscious acceptance by individuals and groups of individuals. Certain practices become so ingrained in the subconscious of groups and of individuals as the 'right' way of doing things that they are no longer called into question. Thus, returning to the notion of the 'good parent' discussed in chapter one we can see how practices such as reading with children and making sure homework is returned have become accepted as part of the role of a 'good parent' and are rarely, if ever debated. Bourdieu refers to the way in which individuals and groups are involved in such practices and thus in the unconscious acceptance of symbolic violence as 'meconnaissance' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.5) a form of misrecognition. We can see how this might relate to the notion of dominant discourses in the context of early years practices. It will be important to explore the nature of relationships between schools, teachers, parents and children in my research study. I will need to explore whether the notions of symbolic violence and meconnaissance are illustrated in the existing power relationships between parents and teachers and how this may affect perceptions of parental

involvement.

However, the imbalance of power revealed by the notion of symbolic violence does not have to remain so. If we have accepted identities and cultures as being evolving entities, then we must also consider the potential for a shift in power. In his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996) Paulo Freire argued that systems of oppression must not be seen as, “...*a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which [the oppressed] can transform*”. Through a process of 'conscientization', or development of a conscious identity and ability to learn, the oppressed can liberate themselves from oppression. They achieve this through 'praxis', a way of reflecting on their own learning and situation and taking appropriate action. In discussing participants' perceptions, my research provides an opportunity to reflect on those perceptions and act accordingly. It will be interesting to explore whether participants in the research are given opportunities to reflect on their roles and identities with relation to parental involvement.

In examining power relationships between teachers and British Asian parents, we must be careful not to overlook the effects of power on the most powerful in the context of school i.e. the teachers. In Freire's terms, it is not just the oppressed who suffer. The oppressors also suffer due to their loss of humanity. I am not trying to suggest here that teachers are in any way inhumane, rather that in analysing perspectives and relationships I need to consider the effects of an imbalance of power on all participants. My research will need to consider how the relationships between teachers and parents and the roles played by teachers in these relationships are influenced by the structures of school within which

teachers are expected to operate.

## **2.10 Culture and the notion of "third space"**

Bourdieu examined the two widely accepted ways of studying culture, and rejected them both. Structuralism defined culture as a way of making meaning of sets of rules and systems which could not be changed. Functionalism saw culture as a means by which the dominant class maintained social order over other groups. Bourdieu brought these ideas together by introducing the notion of a 'structuring structure'. For him, culture was not a fixed concept, but was fluid. As a result of actions by and interactions between groups, individuals and institutions within a structure, that structure can be changed. My research considers both individuals' perceptions of culture and the way in which they are shaping their own culture. In examining perceptions of culture, I need to allow individuals to discuss perceptions of their own culture and that of others.

Further to his ideas on the formation of identities, Bhabha (1994) believes that culture too is a shifting entity. For him, different cultures are at different stages in a process of 'hybridization'. There is no such thing as a 'pure' culture, rather cultures are in an ongoing process of partially blending with each other. Again, Bhabha is interested in looking at the margins of this blending process. Through the process of hybridization, a "third space" emerges which allows new cultural identities to be formed, independent of previous structures. Family literacy projects have been described as a way of achieving the idea of a "third space"

between home and school (Pahl and Kelly, 2005: Cook: 2005.) Pahl and Kelly (2005, p.92) argue that the, “*family literacy classroom can be seen as offering a threshold space*” and that by working with parents on family literacy projects, teachers “*are working at the threshold of home and school*” (p.96) .

However, I think that we have to be very careful about claiming such practices as constituting a "third space". The fact that the word 'classroom' is used suggests that the project is very much a part of school culture and to achieve a 'third space' we need to negotiate where projects will take place as well as what form they will take. There is a fine line between parent partnership, which could be said to be moving towards the notion of a 'third space', and the 'schoolification' of home practices. For me, the idea of "third space" being free from previous structures is very important here. Siting family literacy projects within the school building means that they are in danger of operating chiefly on teachers' terms, especially when the notions of 'symbolic violence' and 'cultural capital' within the 'field' of school are considered.

McClay (2000) considers the challenge facing teachers in their role as educators. She argues that teachers are required to move across cultures in their pedagogical role, “*translating and attempting to help our students feel 'at home' with unfamiliar concepts and cultures*” (McClay, 2000, p. 413). McClay also asserts that teachers need to remain 'others' in relation to their students in order to maintain a professional relationship and avoid difficulties regarding classroom discipline. So teachers need a shift in identities when considering their work with children and their work with parents. They need to negotiate an identity with



which they feel comfortable when working with parents and which also allows parents to be engaged in the negotiation process. I would argue that this cannot be achieved by teachers initiating family workshops, however positive the results might be, since these workshops are not conceived from an equal starting point. We are in danger of describing practices which were formerly known as useful in developing 'parent partnership' and labelling them "third space" practices.

How then, do we ensure that we are building a "third space" when working with parents? How do we begin from a starting point which does not belong to the teachers, but is negotiated between parents and practitioners? How do we, as practitioners, facilitate the negotiation without taking control of it? These are the questions which interest me in relation to my own research. By definition, there cannot be one way of actualising a "third space" of parent partnership. Each negotiated space will be unique and will be negotiated in a new way.

In discussing Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space", Moje et al (2004) identify three ways in which the concept might be viewed, in particular in relation to students' literacy skills development. The first sees "third space" as a bridge between home and school, allowing the voice of groups which might otherwise be marginalized to be heard in the educational field. I have a concern about the notion of a bridge being used in relation to "third space". As practitioners, I think that we have to be wary of viewing parental involvement in terms of a bridge between home and school. Practices such as inviting parents into the setting and sending resources and activities home with children can be described as examples of "third space" as bridge building. For example, Pahl and Kelly (2005,

p.95) describe the "*Backpack project*" where children in a Nursery setting were given a backpack of games and activities to take home. Parents were encouraged to, "*take things home, work on them and bring them back*". To my mind, these kinds of projects are susceptible to domination by us as practitioners, in that we can control what crosses the bridge. In the example of the Backpack project, as practitioners we maintain control of what games and activities are 'sent' home and implicit in the sending is the expectation that parents will use the backpack in a certain way and return it when required to by the setting.

There is also a danger that practitioners may use the 'bridge' as a means by which to impose school practices on to children's and parent's home lives, for example by sending 'homework' tasks. As practitioners, we can deem when, how and what can appropriately be brought from home into the school setting, for example by inviting parents in to the setting to talk on particular themes or demonstrate particular skills. Although there is merit in building bridges between home and school, I do not think that we can claim these practices as creating "third space" in terms of parental involvement. The notion of "third space" as a bridge between home and school could lead us to believe that we have provided opportunities for real 'parental involvement' whilst still maintaining an unequal relationship with children and parents.

Moje et al's (2004, p.44) second conceptualisation of 'third space' is as "a navigational space" which supports individuals to draw on knowledge and discourses from the different contexts in which they are involved. The difficulty with this notion of "third space" in relation to parental involvement is that, as we

have already discussed, practitioners and parents are operating in a field where 'dominant discourses' are prevalent. Thus, although a navigational 'third space' may allow individuals or groups of individuals to draw on knowledge and discourses from their home and community spaces, these may not be seen to be as valid or as important as knowledge and discourses which are already given higher status in the school space.

The final view sees "third space" as a space in which knowledge and discourses from competing spaces are brought into conversation . Existing knowledge and discourses are thus challenged and used as a starting point for the building of new knowledge and discourses. It is this last conceptualisation of the "third space" which interests me most. If we accept that early years practice involves dominant discourses, then we must consider the notion of a "third space" which allows us to question these dominant discourses. In order to question dominant discourses in a meaningful and equitable way we need to allow conversations to take place between parents, practitioners and children. In considering the idea of facilitating conversations between parents, practitioners and children we need to consider how conversations might work between these groups.

In her discussion of children's constructions of texts at home and at school, Cook (2000) uses the notion of "third space" to explore how home and school learning might come together. She asserts the importance of "*unscripted dialogue in which there is equality of participation*" (Cook, 2000 p.88) and I would like to explore this idea in more detail. If a "third space" is to be created which challenges existing discourses, then we will need to encourage 'unscripted

dialogue' about those discourses. If 'unscripted dialogue' is to be encouraged, we first need to consider what kinds of dialogue might already exist in early years settings. If we consider Bourdieu's (1977) notions of *meconnaissance* and of symbolic violence we can understand how teachers may be engaging in what I will call 'scripted dialogue' with parents. In other words, teachers are in danger of maintaining control of the dialogue between themselves and parents, both on a conscious and unconscious level.

As a result of the dominant discourses which exist in early years practice, parents can be made to feel that they need to say the 'right' thing rather than expressing opinions which may be at odds with the accepted way of doing things. In this way, dialogue between teachers and parents can be described as 'scripted' in that there are a limited number of options for what to say which will be acceptable to the early years' practitioner. If we are to actualise a "third space" in which existing knowledge and discourses can be challenged, and new discourses and knowledge may be developed, then we need to consider how we can facilitate 'unscripted dialogue' between practitioners, parents and children as a starting point for this 'third space'.

The idea of "third space" as a space for meaningful, unscripted dialogue between parents and teachers is further supported by the writing of Freire (1996). He emphasises that if dialogue is to happen, an individual or group of individuals cannot speak for another and neither can anyone deny another the right to speak. In contrast to the teacher-as-expert model, Freire (1996, p.70) sees dialogue as an "*act of creation*", which is not about "*depositing*" ideas or imposing one's own

version of the truth onto others. For Freire (1996 p.71), everyone should be given an equal chance to "*name the world*". In Freirian terms then, it is not the task of teachers to decide on appropriate early years practices, but the task of teachers and parents alike. Freire stresses that for this kind of dialogue to take place, praxis and critical thinking must be encouraged. Praxis, by which we reflect on action, is discussed further in relation to parental involvement research in chapter three. If it is not solely the task of teachers to decide on early years practices, then it follows that teachers must be able and willing to reflect on those practices which already exist and are taken for granted as being the right way to do things.

However, we need to acknowledge that it is not easy to reflect critically on those things which we rely on in our every day practice. Reflecting critically on practice means that we have to be prepared to change that practice after reflection and dialogue with parents. If we are to achieve meaningful, unscripted dialogue with parents, then we have to be optimistic about the changes which this might bring about. We also have to have confidence in our relationships with parents and with other practitioners. Returning to Freire's understanding of dialogue, he asserts that in order for dialogue to happen, those involved in the dialogue must have hope and trust (Freire, 1996). My research will need to examine how relationships between parents and teachers are built so that this hope and trust is evident.

When analysing perceptions of parents, teachers, and children, I need to examine the possibility of a "third space" where a new culture of parent partnership can be identified. The research needs to determine if this "third space" already exists in the two settings, and if so how is it co-constructed? If the

notion of a "third space" is not already evident, then I need to consider how parents, teachers and children might begin to actualise this space.

## **2.11 Summary of Chapter Two**

In this chapter, I have considered how individuals and groups of individuals construct and negotiate identities. This includes an examination of the influence of 'race' and ethnicity on identity and the way in which agency is actualised in the negotiation of identities. I have discussed the ways in which individuals and groups of individuals operate in relation to each other and also in relation to the contexts in which they find themselves. In considering parental involvement, I examine Bhabha's notion of 'third space' and how it might relate to the situations of the participants involved in my research. In the next chapter, I consider previous research concerning parental involvement: how this research relates to the ideas discussed in this chapter and what other researchers have highlighted which relates to my own study.

# Chapter Three

## Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine previous research in the field of parental involvement, with particular reference to parental involvement in early years settings and also to minority ethnic parents. It is important at this stage to clarify my literature search terms. I am *not* considering research which examines whether parental involvement has any effect on children's levels of achievement. This is for two reasons. Firstly, as discussed in chapter one, several studies have already summarised the findings of such research and the general consensus is that parental involvement *does* have a positive effect on children's levels of achievement. Secondly, and more importantly, I am not interested in children's levels of achievement per se. Rather, I am interested in individuals' experiences and perceptions of parental involvement. I am also interested in unpicking notions and practices of parental involvement. What does parental involvement look like in early years settings? What does parental involvement mean for the practitioners, parents and children in these settings? In particular, what does parental involvement look like for minority ethnic families?

When conducting the literature review for this research study, I began by searching for previous research on parental involvement in their children's early years education in the UK. I widened this search to include research on parental involvement in UK early years settings in general. However, since there has been little research into minority ethnic parental involvement in the early years, I have also included some studies which involved minority ethnic parents of children in primary and secondary education. I have included studies from beyond the UK if they are particularly relevant to my research in terms of discussing parental involvement from the point of view of minority ethnic parents. Since I am interested in issues of identity and culture I have also looked at the work of researchers who discuss these issues in relation to education and parents.

So, the literature reviewed in this chapter looks at parental involvement practices in early years' settings. It considers the dynamics of relationships which exist between practitioners and parents and how these impact on practices in early years settings. It considers practitioners' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement. Some of the research looks at potential barriers to involving parents. It considers how inequalities in relationships between parents and practitioners may effect the efficacy of parent involvement practices. The literature reviewed concerns both early years settings and schools. This is because the two settings involved in my research study are both Nursery classes in primary schools. Thus, although they are early years settings and follow the relevant statutory frameworks and guidelines, such as those for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008a), they are also part of a wider school community. School policies and protocols are often designed for the school as a whole, rather than always



being approached from the point of view of early years practice.

In the 1980s and 1990s, research into parental involvement found that often parents were viewed as 'problems' by their children's teachers (e.g. Atkin et al, 1988, Hughes et al, 1994). Teachers were viewed as experts, who know how to support children's learning in the 'right' way. On the other hand, parents' approaches to supporting their children were deemed to be the 'wrong' way, with teachers having to work hard to limit the damage done to children's learning and development. Tomlinson (1993) found that this was particularly the case for minority ethnic parents. Although the publication of both the Rampton report (1981) and the Swann report (1985) had highlighted the issue of racism in schools, in the 1990s it seemed that minority ethnic parents were still subject to prejudice and stereotyping in professional and academic discourses.

There has been little research in the area of parental involvement in early years' settings with regard to minority ethnic groups such as British Asian parents. Much of the literature consists of describing settings which have had varied amounts of success in working with minority ethnic parents (see Ahmad et al, 1997: Karran, 1997). Tomlinson (1993, p.131) asserts that minority ethnic parents are often viewed as problems rather than as partners: "*The research literature into the 1990s suggests that educational professionals still regard ethnic minority parents as posing problems for schools, rather than as assets in the educational process.*"

Few studies have involved talking with minority ethnic parents themselves. In this chapter, I will examine previous research and consider what are the perceptions of parental involvement which emerge. How do parents perceive parental involvement? What do practitioners think parental involvement should look like? How might these perceptions be similar to or different from each other? Is there congruence between what teachers and parents think *should* be happening in terms of parental involvement and what actually *is* happening? In examining these questions, I will then be able to consider influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement. This will lead to discussion of the implications for future practice in working in partnership with parents in early years settings, with particular reference to parents from minority ethnic groups in the UK.

In discussing previous research, I will also consider how it might relate to the key concepts underpinning my research, as discussed in chapter two. What does other research tell us about how concepts such as cultural capital might relate to parental involvement? What kinds of structures and relationships are revealed by previous research which might relate to Bourdieu's (1977) ideas of *meconnaissance* and symbolic violence? Is there evidence of parental involvement as a 'third space' according to the definitions discussed in chapter two?

As well as considering previous research in the field of parental involvement, it is also important to consider the educational policy background against which such research was conducted. Hence, in this chapter I will begin by discussing

government policy for parental involvement from 2005 to 2010. It is important to say that I am focusing on government policy relating to the ways in which early years practitioners and school teachers are expected to work with parents. There is a discussion to be had about the ways in which the state should or could support parents and children at home. I am not denying the huge importance of family life, but this is a subject which is for another thesis, if not several.

## **3.2 Parental involvement: definitions and perceptions**

### ***3.2.1 Government policy, parental involvement and the Early Years Foundation Stage***

The importance of involving parents is threaded through the documentation for the Early Years Foundation Stage, or EYFS (DCSF, 2008a). In the practice guidance document, the expectation that parents will be involved in their children's learning is referred to explicitly both in the general guidance and in specific guidelines for children's learning and development. For example, in discussing the principles of the EYFS, there is an emphasis on the understanding that a child's first and most significant relationship will most likely be one with a parent. Given that this is the case, there is an expectation that early years practitioners will need to communicate regularly with parents in order to build a complete picture of a child's learning and development. There is a particular emphasis on the need to share information with parents.

In the EYFS guidance on children's learning and development (DCSF, 2008a), there are many references to parents. For example, practitioners should find out about a baby's routines at home by talking to parents. Parents might be asked to contribute photos for children to make an album about an aspect of learning. The overall feel of the documentation as far as working with parents is concerned is one of encouraging a positive attitude. Practitioners are required to support and 'encourage' parents and to 'tell' them about their child's learning at the setting as well as to 'ask' them about the child's learning and development at home.

It is useful to think about the guidance in the light of the "*ladder of participation*" model (Arnstein, 1969), adapted by Schemming, Lewis and Thoburn (1995) and used by the National Children's Bureau (2006) in training materials for those involved in family support. The ladder illustrates increasing levels of participation for parents: namely manipulated; placated; informed; consulted ;involved; participant partner; helps design service. If we consider the learning and development areas of EYFS guidance (DCSF, 2008a), parent participation is mostly encouraged at the levels of being informed and consulted. For example, in the guidance for communication, language and literacy, practitioners are advised to, "*Use rhymes from a variety of cultures and ask parents to share their favourites from their home languages.*" Here parents are being invited to participate at a consultation level: they provide the resources for an activity which has already been planned. In the guidance on working with parents (DCSF, 2008) it is suggested that practitioners, "*Talk with parents about their children's progress and development, providing appropriate support for those who do not speak or understand English*" which again indicates participation at the level of

being informed and/or consulted. However, there is a recognisable move towards involving parents at higher levels on the 'ladder of participation' model. Although not so prevalent in the guidance as participation at the level of information and consultation, there is acknowledgement that "*In true partnership, parents understand and contribute to the policies in the setting*" in the guidance on working with parents. However, the guidance does not make specific suggestions as to how this "*true partnership*" might be achieved.

My concern with the EYFS (DCSF, 2008a) documentation is that it seems to encourage an approach to parental involvement which is very much practitioner led. There is little emphasis on the need to work together in a truly participatory manner, but rather too much emphasis on passing information back and forth between parents and practitioners. Although the sharing of information has a value in supporting positive relationships between children, parents and practitioners, this is only one part of parental involvement. The language chosen could also be said to reinforce an unequal relationship between parents and practitioners. If parents need encouragement and support does this mean that they are not capable of fulfilling a meaningful role in their child's development without the help of early years practitioners? There may well be times when practitioners need to ask parents about their child, or to tell them about their child in the setting. However, if communication is always initiated by the practitioner, there is a danger that all dialogue with parents will be scripted, as discussed in chapter two. The EYFS (DCSF, 2008a) guidance implies that parents will be asked for their views, for example on how their child communicates at home. However, as discussed in chapter two, the danger in asking these kinds of

questions is that some parents may feel that there is a 'correct' answer. It is possible to follow all of the guidance in the EYFS documentation with regard to working with parents without building any kind of meaningful relationship with an individual parent. Therefore, there is a danger that parent participation remains at the levels of placating, informing and consulting. Until practitioners and parents are working in a way which encourages symmetrical dialogue, it will be difficult to move towards parent participation at the level of helping to design services.

Other guidance for practitioners emphasises the importance of the parent's role in a child's learning and development and the need for practitioners to recognise the parent as the child's first and most important educator. Key points from several reports and guidance documents are summarised in table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Summary of guidance reports and documents for working with parents**

<b>Key point</b>	<b>Related documents</b>
Parents are the child's first and most important educator	<i>Breaking the cycle</i> (DCSF, 2010) <i>The impact of parental involvement</i> (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003) <i>How to help parents</i> (DCSF, 2009)
Families need to be at the heart of early years strategy	<i>Breaking the cycle</i>
It is not who parents are which is important, but what they do, in terms of influencing children's development	<i>Breaking the cycle</i> <i>The impact of parental involvement</i>
Parents need support	<i>Breaking the cycle</i> <i>How to help parents</i>
Practitioners need to model ways of supporting children's learning and development	<i>Breaking the cycle</i>
Practitioners need to create situations where they can have a two way dialogue with parents	<i>Breaking the cycle</i> <i>How to help parents</i>
Sharing information is important	<i>Breaking the cycle</i>
Parents need to be involved in settings at a strategic level	<i>Surestart statutory guidance</i> (DCSF, 2010)
All parents want their children to do well	<i>How to help parents</i> <i>The impact of parental involvement</i>
Family learning is beneficial for parents and children	<i>How to help parents</i> <i>The impact of parental involvement</i>
Fathers have a critical role to play in their children's development	<i>The impact of parental involvement</i>

Thus there is an expectation that practitioners will strive to work effectively with parents. Parents are seen as being aspirational for their children as well as having a vital role to play in their development. Practitioners are encouraged to work with parents in a supportive manner, encouraging the sorts of behaviours which have been seen to aid children's development. The emphasis is firmly on looking at what parents do with their children and not focusing on their social, economic or ethnic background. Having said this, other documentation from the DCSF addresses the existing inequalities in children's progression when looking at minority ethnic groups. For example, statistics quoted in *Breaking the Cycle* (DCSF, 2010) show that only 38% of children of Bangladeshi origin and 39% of children of Pakistani origin achieved a good level of development at the age of five. Only 42% of children who speak English as an additional language achieve a good level of development at the age of five.

### ***3.2.2 Types of parental involvement***

Parental involvement has been defined in a number of different ways and can mean different things to different people. It will be important to bear this in mind when talking to participants in my study about parental involvement, since individuals will make their own meanings of the term depending on different contexts (Lawson, 2003). Since I am looking at ***perceptions*** of parental involvement it is useful to consider the ways in which other researchers have made sense of the term. Some previous researchers have looked at parental involvement in terms of categories or continuums of involvement (see Epstein, 1987; Pugh and De'ath, 1989; Vincent, 1996; Robson, 1996; National Children's



Bureau, 2006).

My difficulty with using frameworks or typologies of parental involvement is that there is a danger of categorising parents in a homogeneous fashion, rather than viewing them as individuals. There is also a risk that parents can be viewed as belonging immovably in one of the types or dimensions of involvement, rather than as agents who may be involved in different ways at different times and according to different circumstances. However, using classifications of different types of parental involvement can be useful if we are considering a starting point for working with parents. In considering the participants in my research, it may be useful to think about 'where they are' in terms of parental involvement, before examining the factors influencing parental involvement in the two settings.

Pugh and De'ath (1989) identified five dimensions to parental involvement, namely non-participation, support, participation, partnership and control. In terms of my research, these five dimensions are interesting as they guide practitioners to look at parental involvement from the point of view of the parents. As I have said, I am interested in how parents *perceive* their involvement in their child's Nursery setting. In terms of Pugh and De'ath's dimensions, do parents feel that they do not participate, and if so is this through a conscious choice or because they feel that they are not invited or required to participate? Do parents feel that they support their Nursery child's learning and development at home, or do they feel involved as participants in their child's learning and development in the setting? Are there parents who feel that they are involved in a working partnership with practitioners and if so, what does this mean in practice? And

finally, are parents involved at the decision making level, having control over what happens in the setting on a day to day basis?

It is important to note that individual parents and groups of parents in the same setting might perceive their levels of involvement differently. Some parents may perceive their level of involvement as fluctuating between the five dimensions according to changes in circumstances. I will need to consider what factors affect parents' ability or inclination to be involved in any of the five dimensions. It is also important to consider how practitioners might perceive parents and their involvement.

Liz Brooker (2002) uses Epstein's (1987) typology of parental involvement as a framework for discussing levels of involvement of the parents of the sixteen Reception children involved in her study of children beginning school. Epstein's framework is summarised in table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Summary of Epstein's typology of parental involvement**

(Epstein, 1987, cited in Brooker, 2002, p.123)

<b>Type 1</b>	Parents' basic obligations in caring for their children in the pre-school and early school years.
<b>Type 2</b>	Basic obligations of schools to communicate with parents about their child.
<b>Type 3</b>	Parental support for children's learning, on school premises and under school direction
<b>Type 4</b>	Parental support for children's learning in the home.
<b>Type 5</b>	Parental involvement in school organizations, leadership or governance.

As Brooker points out, much of the success of home-school work relies on the effectiveness of type two. However, careful consideration needs to be given to the nature of communications between home and school. Firstly, decisions need to be taken as to what information needs to be shared between school and home, as well as the best ways of communicating. My research will need to consider forms of communication with parents used by practitioners, as well as the content of these communications. I will need to look at provision for parents who speak little or no English and may need communications to be translated. I will also need to consider how effective schools are in developing two way channels of communication. It is not simply a matter of looking at how schools transmit information to parents, but also of reflecting on how they encourage parents to

communicate with the school. Furthermore, I will also need to look at how confident parents feel in initiating communication with the school and for what reasons they might need to do this.

Vincent's (1996) classification of parental positions defined four categories with regard to parental involvement : namely detached parents, independent parents, supportive parents or irresponsible parents. I would be concerned that using such a classification might encourage practitioners to label parents according to particular categories. As discussed above, there is a danger in viewing parents in terms of categories. My concern in using Vincent's classification is that it might encourage participants to see themselves and others as belonging to one particular group of parents and behaving accordingly. It is more useful to think in a holistic way about the behaviour and motivations of individual parents and groups of parents. It is worth noting at this point that Vincent did not find any parents in her own research who might belong in the irresponsible parents group, but acknowledged the term as "*a powerful symbol*" (Vincent, 1996, p.107).

Robson (1996) saw home and early years settings as engaged in a continuum of relationships, involving information, contact, involvement, collaboration and partnership. Ideally, Robson advocates that schools move towards the reciprocal end of the continuum, where we find collaboration and true partnership. Her use of a continuum is interesting, as it suggests movement along the continuum and arguably it is less open to interpretation as a set of fixed categories. Similarly, the National Children's Bureau (2006) point out that individual parents might find themselves at different points on their 'ladder of participation' at different times

and in different circumstances.

Because of the concerns outlined above, I will not be using any of the definitions or classifications of parental involvement directly in my discussions with participants. However, as I have said, such classifications may prove very useful in examining the data collected during the research process. Firstly, they may serve to illuminate where individual participants and groups of participants are, both in terms of their involvement and in terms of their own perceptions of that involvement. Secondly, they may help to examine the ways in which participants perceive each other and the motivations behind these perceptions.

### **3.3 Working with parents in the early years. Evidence based practice**

In considering effective parental involvement practices in the early years, I have examined two examples of evidence based practice: namely from Pen Green Children's Centre (Whalley 1997; Whalley et al, 2007; Whalley, 2007a; Whalley, 2007b; Arnold, 2007) and the Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) (Wheeler and Connor, 2009) project. These are both examples of children's centres which have examined the ways in which they work with parents and used the results of this examination to develop more effective ways of involving parents.

The PEAL project (Wheeler and Connor, 2009) was commissioned by the DfES and delivered a training programme for early years practitioners to support parental involvement which was based on examples of successful practice. The

project emphasises the importance of home learning on children's future success:

*“As home and family have such a powerful effect on children's early learning and development, it is not surprising that the most effective early years settings and schools-that is, those that achieve the best social and intellectual outcomes for their children -have been found to work closely with parents.”*

(Wheeler and Connor, 2009, p.15)

The project drew heavily on the results of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education or EPPE study (Sylva et al, 2004), and in particular on the assertion from the study that what parents do is more important than who parents are. The PEAL project encourages working with parents to improve the home learning environment, identified in the EPPE study (Sylva et al, 2004) as an important influence on children's future life chances. The project encourages activities such as parents reading with children, singing songs and rhymes and going to the library. Whilst I would agree that these are worthwhile activities, I think we need to reflect on why we might encourage such activities and indeed why we consider certain social and intellectual outcomes to be the 'best.'

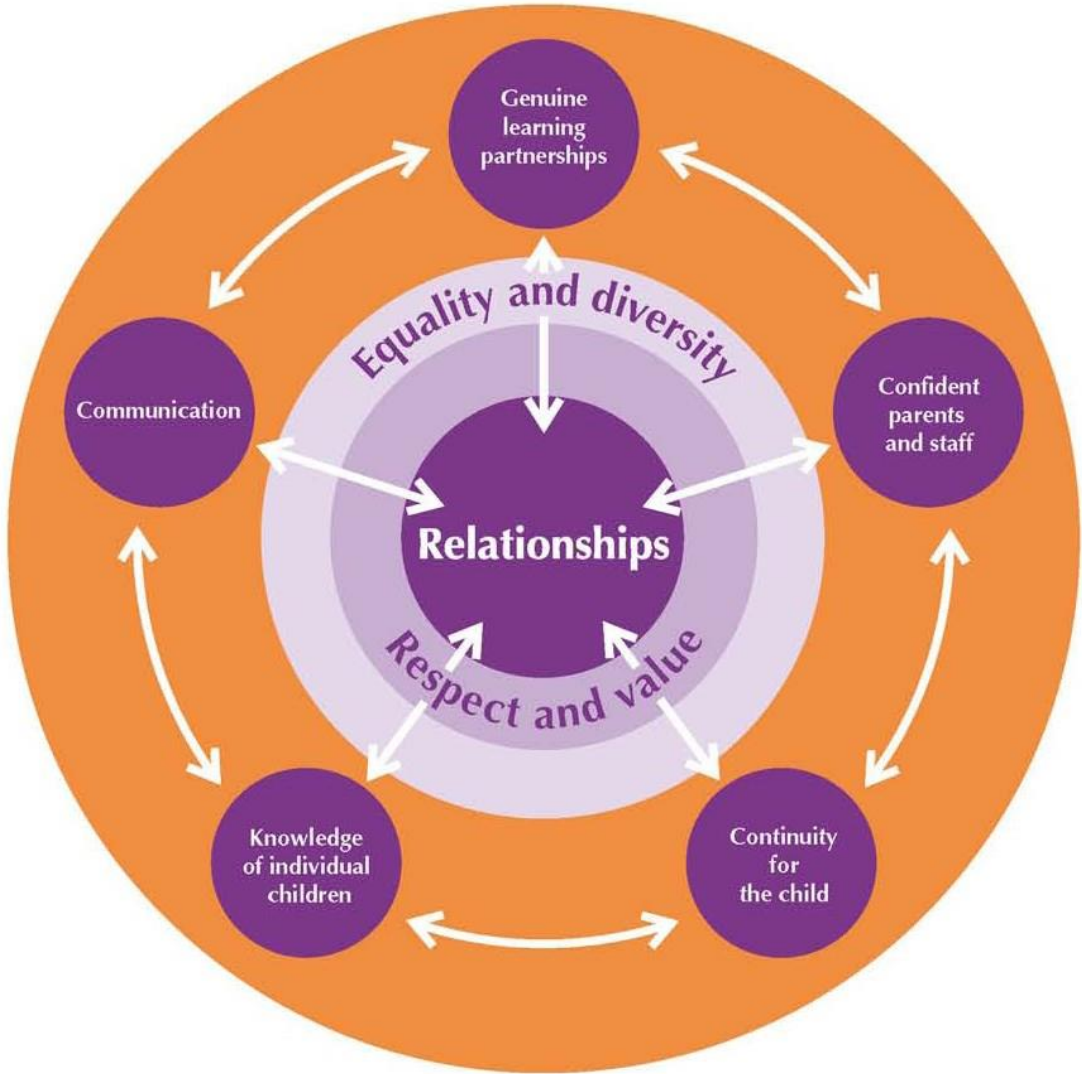
If we consider Bourdieu's notion of habitus, discussed in chapter two, then what parents do is, at least to some extent, conditional on who they are. Parents' cultural and ethnic identity will surely have an influence on their behaviours, which will be based on their previous experiences and their dispositions, or habitus. As practitioners, we need to reflect on the possibility that we wish children to achieve certain social and intellectual outcomes because those outcomes are desirable in society. However, we also need to accept the possibility that those outcomes may not be considered best by the parents with

whom we are working. This is why we need to encourage a dialogue with parents, so that we can be sure of our shared aims and so that we can discuss those on which we might disagree.

Amita Gupta (2003, p.169) highlights the need for practitioners to adopt “a *pedagogy that is relevant to a specific cultural context in which schooling is taking place.*” Practitioners need to consider carefully the cultural context in which they are operating, and this needs to include the wider cultural context, beyond the field of school. This will include the home cultures of the families with whom they work as well as the broader cultural context of UK society. Practitioners need to reflect on what they do and how this relates to who they are and what values they hold dear.

There is no doubt that the conclusion of the EPPE project that what parents do is more important than who parents are is a positive one, to the extent that parents' education level, occupation or income is not the most important influence on their children's development. However, we need to be careful that this key message is not misinterpreted in practice. For many parents, 'who they are' in terms of their individual and cultural identity is of extreme importance and this needs to be recognised by early years' practitioners. It may be that for some parents, their identity informs what they view as the best outcomes for their child. Practitioners need to consider that they are operating within the field of school, which inevitably means that they are heavily influenced by the dominant discourses of Western views on childhood development and pedagogical approaches, as discussed in chapter two.

The PEAL project recognises the need for parents and practitioners to communicate effectively and build strong relationships with each other, as demonstrated in the visual representation of the PEAL model illustrated below:



**Fig 3.1 The PEAL Model (Wheeler and Connor, 2006)**



Respectful relationships are at the heart of this model for working with parents. Wheeler and Connor point out that as well as a key person being required by the EYFS (DCSF, 2008a) to have a respectful, trusting relationship with his/her key children, there is also a need to work towards respectful relationships with each child's parents. The three inner circles of the model need to be in place before the outer elements can develop. For me, this model puts working with parents at the heart of our work as early years practitioners, rather than a desirable 'extra'. If respectful relationships need to be in place before we can develop our knowledge of individual children, then these relationships with parents are central to everything we do in early years settings.

Wheeler and Connor (2009) highlight the need for practitioners to listen to parents, which seems to me to be particularly important if we are concerned with allowing parents to feel that 'who they are' is valued and considered as relevant to their child's care and education. The importance of listening could be inserted into each text box of the PEAL model (Wheeler and Connor, 2006) as being of relevance to each part of the model. The importance of listening and its place in dialogue between parents and practitioners is considered in more detail below, in section 3.4.4.

The PEAL project (Wheeler and Connor, 2009) also emphasises the need for settings to have clear strategies for their work with parents, including having designated staff who are responsible for parental involvement. It emphasises the need to work closely with individual parents and with groups of parents, sharing information and encouraging parents to be active in decision making

about their children's learning. All of these strategies have implications for the way in which practitioners build relationships with parents. Sharing information in an equitable manner and involving parents in real decision making can only happen if practitioners first reflect on the way power is distributed in their relationships with parents. This may mean being prepared to rethink those practices which we take for granted as being the 'right' way to do things.

In the discussion of Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of *meconnaissance* and symbolic violence in chapter two, I considered how these phenomena may exist in parental involvement practices. In order to avoid an imbalance of power between teachers and parents, practitioners need to pay close attention to the recommendation of the PEAL project that settings work pro-actively to remove barriers to collaboration, thus making everyone feel welcome (Wheeler and Connor, 2009, p. 44). Potential barriers to collaboration are discussed below, in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

In reading about the work with parents at the Pen Green centre in Corby (Whalley et al, 2007), it is immediately obvious that the centre's work with parents is based on a clearly defined set of beliefs. These were discussed and agreed on by a local action group, which involved local politicians, local authority officers and staff (Whalley et al, 2007). They included the belief that parents are their child's first educators and that they are committed to their children's education and the belief that workers in early childhood settings need to be concerned with power sharing and community regeneration (Whalley, 2007a, p. 4).

The acknowledgement of parents as their child's first educator is often mentioned in literature concerning parental involvement, for example in the government policy documents discussed above. However, this acknowledgement becomes more meaningful when teamed with a recognition that there is a need for early years practitioners to be prepared to share power with parents. Once we recognise that there needs to be a shift in the unequal power balance between practitioners and parents, we can begin to move away from the phenomenon of *meconnaissance* (Bourdieu, 1977) as discussed in chapter two. If we are prepared to consider a change from working according to ideas and practices which are taken for granted as the 'right' way to think or behave, then we can begin a more open dialogue with parents.

Whalley (2007a, p.7) goes on to discuss what the practice of dialogue looks like in the setting, where parents, staff and children work in an environment where they are able to question, challenge and make choices and where staff felt accountable to parents as well as to other stakeholders. Furthermore, parents are described as advocates for their children, in which role they share understanding of their children's learning at home with the staff at the Nursery.

Throughout the book discussing the research project carried out at Pen Green on working with parents, there is an emphasis on the need to build relationships with parents and individuals, rather than leaning towards homogenisation. There is also much discussion of the importance of adopting a non-judgemental view of parents, particularly in relation to making assumptions about parents' level of commitment based on their involvement in specific projects in the Nursery. This

conviction that all parents are interested in supporting their children's development has been reinforced by a recent review of successful parental involvement practices in schools in the UK: *“The assumption that parents are not interested in their children's education is fundamentally incorrect.”* (Carpentier and Lall, 2005, p. 3)

Furthermore, the Pen Green team make the point that building meaningful relationships with parents takes time, and needs time to be devoted specifically to it. The authors also refuse to approach any work with any parents from the point of view of a 'deficit model', which assumes that parents are ineffective to a greater or lesser extent and need help from the 'experts' who are early years practitioners in order to improve their 'parenting skills'. There is a recognition that some parents' behaviour is affected by their own experiences of education and that this does not necessarily mean that they cannot be effectively involved in their children's Nursery education. In fact, rather than such parents behaviour being judged by the setting, staff should judge their own effectiveness in terms of how well they can reach these parents:

*“We can learn a great deal from listening to these parents. It is easy to sit back and judge parents without knowing very much about their passionate concerns. We can measure the effectiveness of our service by how hard we work to reach the hard to reach parents.”*

(Arnold, C, 2007: p.104)

This approach contrasts with some of the ideas discussed above, where parents are categorised according to their apparent 'level' of involvement. Instead, the

idea of parental involvement is looked at from the point of view of the setting and the practitioners and it is they who are examined in terms of their effectiveness in working with parents. If we who work in the field of early years education want to improve parental involvement, it makes sense to examine our own effectiveness rather than to examine the effectiveness of parents. Firstly, because it is simpler to change one's own behaviour than that of someone else. Secondly, because in examining our own role in parental involvement we are acknowledging that it is the practitioners who are in the most powerful position in the relationship between practitioner and parent.

I have already mentioned research which reinforces the benefits of parental involvement for children. However, the work at Pen Green takes a more holistic approach, considering the benefits for parents and also for practitioners. It is surely important to consider the benefits of parental involvement for practitioners if we are to avoid the 'deficit model' way of working discussed above. If practitioners can see tangible benefits for themselves in working effectively with parents, then they will surely be more motivated to do so? This motivation has to go beyond the rather superficial satisfaction which may be found in reassuring oneself that one is involved in 'good practice' (see discussion in chapter two).

At Pen Green, this involved being prepared to discuss pedagogy and the principles underlying the curriculum at the Nursery with parents. It is important to emphasise that this was not approached in the manner of expert practitioners passing on their knowledge to parents who were assumed to have little or no understanding of the ways in which children learn. Rather, discussions about

curriculum and pedagogy were approached in the manner of a dialogue between parents and practitioners:

*“As professionals, we are sharing our specialised knowledge with parents and trying not to feel threatened by the fact that the parent will often see what is happening more quickly and clearly than we do. The recognitions that the parents' specialised knowledge of their own child can stimulate our thinking is part of our professional development.”*

(Arnold, 2007, p. 52)

Throughout the discussion of work at Pen Green, there is an emphasis on two key ideas: 'praxis' and dialogue. Parental involvement is not viewed simply as a case of the need to adopt certain practices in working with parents. It is approached as part of the work of the Nursery as a whole, which means that practitioners need time to reflect on their practices and to revise them if necessary. There is an expectation that practitioners and parents will all need to engage in critical thinking if parental involvement is to be really effective. The approach of Paulo Freire (1996), discussed in chapter two, is highlighted as supporting the creation of space for dialogue between practitioners and parents. In particular, emphasis is placed on the need to share power with parents. In order to do this, practitioners need to accept that they do not hold all of the knowledge about young children and their learning as a group or as individuals. It is only then that practitioners will be in a position to begin a rich, open dialogue with parents.

However, Whalley (2007b, p.32) also makes the point that practitioners need to have a clearly articulated pedagogical approach. if they are to be able to

communicate ideas effectively to parents and also to maintain their sense of professionalism, sometimes in the face of challenges from parents. I think that a clear distinction needs to be made here between practitioners who have a clearly articulated pedagogical approach and those who may be operating according to dominant discourses without reflecting on their practice using critical thinking. If we wish practitioners to have such a clearly articulated approach, then we need to consider how they might arrive at such an approach: for Whalley (2007b) this is arrived at through allowing staff the time and space to think critically about their practice and revise it accordingly.

It might seem as if there is a contradiction here: on the one hand, practitioners need to have a clearly articulated approach to their work with children, but on the other hand, they need to be prepared to accept that there is not one 'right' way of doing things and they also need to be open to challenges and questions from parents. But if we consider the notion of 'praxis' then this could be seen as the way in which these two ideas can be brought together. By spending time reflecting on practice and revising it accordingly, practitioners can arrive at a clearly articulated approach to pedagogy. By including parents in this process of reflection, they have the opportunity to articulate their ideas to parents, at the same time as listening to parents' ideas and experiences. As a result of this dialogue with parents, it can be hoped that practitioners and parents can arrive at a shared approach to working with children.

In my research, I will need to examine the pedagogical approaches of the practitioners involved and consider how this is shared with parents. I will also

need to consider whether pedagogical approaches have been arrived at through praxis or through an unquestioning acceptance of dominant discourses, or indeed through a combination of these? In unpicking practitioners' and parents' perspectives on pedagogical approaches I will be able to reflect on how these relate to their perspectives on parental involvement.

It is important to note that both the PEAL project and the Pen Green Centre emphasise the need to involve fathers more in their children's early years educational experiences. Although this is undoubtedly an important area of research in relation to parental involvement, it is not the main focus of my study. However, I will need to be aware of the potential issues surrounding the involvement of fathers both when planning my methodology and when analysing data from the research.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I discussed the importance for me of this research stemming from reflections on my own practice and of my conviction of the need for the research to relate strongly to practice. In thinking about how the evidence based practice discussed above might relate to other early years settings, it might be useful to consider what a practitioner who works in real partnership with parents might look like (table 3.3).



**Table 3.3 Working in partnership with parents**

<b>Personal qualities of practitioners who work effectively in partnership with parents</b>	<b>Behaviours of practitioners who work effectively in partnership with parents</b>
Knowledgeable about the ways in which children learn	<p>Supports parents in understanding theories of pedagogy and development</p> <p>Reflects on discourses around learning and working with young children</p>
Open, approachable and reliable	<p>Shares own ideas for developing learning with parent</p> <p>Takes time to listen to parents and children</p>
Non-judgemental and understanding	Works from the assumption that <i>all</i> parents are interested in supporting their children's learning and development
Willing to work in equal partnership with parents	<p>Acknowledges parents as the experts on their own individual children</p> <p>Gets to know individual parents, children and their circumstances</p>

In my own research, I will need to consider whether practitioners are able to work towards the kind of approach outlined in table 3.3. It is important to note at this point that I must be careful not to approach the research from the point of view of identifying 'good' practitioners in terms of working with parents: this would be as unhelpful and prone to bias as the notion of a 'good' parent. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are practices and attitudes, such as those illustrated in table 3.3, which are more likely to facilitate parental involvement in an equitable manner. My research will need to look at practices and attitudes in the two settings, as well as considering the influences underlying the ways in which teachers work with parents.

### **3.4 Parents at the margins of the school space**

In considering the nature of parental involvement, it is useful to consider the spaces in which parental involvement happens, or is expected to happen. In the discussion in chapter two regarding Bourdieu's (1977) notion of field, I considered how individuals, groups and relationships between and amongst individuals and groups are influenced by the context in which people find themselves. In terms of my research, this will mean considering how practitioners and parents operate in the different contexts or spaces in which they find themselves in relation to parental involvement: i.e. home and school.

Back in 1988, Bastiani (1988, p.105) found that parents in general and in particular working class parents were “ *left to operate at the margins of school life*” . Research since his work until the present day shows that this is still the

case in many schools and early years' settings. Barriers to parental involvement exist at the level of policy making as well as at the level of individual settings and schools and at the level of relationships between individuals and/or groups of individuals in a particular setting or school.

In this section, I will look at existing practices of parental involvement in the school space and in the home space. I will also consider if and how these two spaces come together and how individuals from each space , i.e. parents, teachers and children, negotiate their roles in and across the two spaces. I will examine the ways in which research suggests that parents are kept at the margins of the school space. In considering the relationship between the school space and the home space, I will reflect on how existing power relationships influence the ways in which parents, teachers and children construct their roles within and across the two spaces.

### ***3.4.1 The school space and parental involvement***

Much of the advice and guidelines provided for schools, as discussed in 3.2.1, focuses on parental involvement practices sited in the school space. Auerbach (2007) and Bakker et al (2007) argue that practitioners place too much emphasis on the notion of parental involvement as a school based activity. We have seen in the discussion in chapter two that even practices which are based on the notion of creating a 'third space' for parental involvement rely on activities such as parent-child workshops (Cook, 2005, Pahl and Kelly, 2005) which will almost

inevitably take place on school premises. Although researchers such as Cook, Pahl and Kelly have clearly found that these workshop type activities promote better relationships between home and school, other research suggests that they will be limited in their effectiveness for a number of reasons.

Firstly, by emphasising school-based involvement, teachers may perceive non-participation in such events as lack of involvement altogether (Bakker et al, 2007: Auerbach, 2007). This way of looking at parental involvement leads easily to a deficit model of considering parents who do not attend school based events. It overlooks the possibility of other, less overt strategies of involvement, such as those adopted by parents in Auerbach's study of minority ethnic pupils or in Doucet's (2008) study of African American parents. These strategies included parents altering their expectations of their children's participation in household chores to allow time for completing homework, for example. Secondly, it encourages the perception of teachers as the experts on children's learning, with parents needing to be shown how to be involved in the 'right' way (see for example Lightfoot, 2004, Addi-Raccah and Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008, Angelides et al, 2006). This in turn maintains the existing imbalance of power between parents and teachers, with parents in the subordinate role. Thirdly, it again discriminates against those parents who do not possess the required levels of social, cultural and linguistic capital to feel confident in venturing into the school space and interacting with professionals they might encounter there.

There is also the danger that this approach puts the responsibility for parental involvement firmly with the parents. Teachers may think that providing

opportunities for parents to come into school fulfils their responsibilities as far as involvement is concerned. The onus is on the parents to attend or not, as they choose. In reality, it is not a simple choice to attend or not as far as parents are concerned. As I have already said, parents may not feel confident in coming into school. Furthermore, attending events and meetings at school may not fit in with some parents work patterns or with their responsibilities for caring young children or members of their extended family (Crozier and Davies, 2007).

It is all too easy for teachers to assume that parents who do not come into school do not care (Doucet, 2008). Even if parents do attend workshops, parents evenings and the like, this does not mean that they are necessarily involved in their children's education, particularly at the level of decision making. As Crozier and Davies (2007) assert, there is a difference between getting parents into school physically and treating them as equal partners in their children's education. By focusing on parental involvement as something which happens in the school space, there is a danger of involvement remaining on a superficial level, with more importance attached to the number of parents who attend than to the quality of their involvement.

In the case of 'British Asian' parents, school may represent a space where they do not perceive themselves as welcome: *"Many of the schools in our study [of Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents] represent spaces of exclusion, unwelcome spaces where few Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents have a voice."* (Crozier and Davies, 2007, p.311). Some of the reasons why parents may not feel they have a voice and/or are excluded from the school space are examined below, in sections

3.4.3 to 3.4.6.

### **3.4.2 The home space and parental involvement**

Government policy emphasises the vital role of parent partnership in statements such as the following:

*“To this end, parents should be seen as vital partners in a child's education, as not only can they help in making sure homework is in on time and in giving a child vital coaching and advice out of school hours, but they also determine the child's home environment, where children spend much of their waking hours. Engaging and working with parents is one of the most vital parts of providing children with an excellent education.”*

( DFES, 2006)

Since 1994, it has been statutory for schools to include home-school liaison work as part of the school development plan (Ofsted, 1994). Since 1999, home-school agreements have also become a statutory requirement for schools. Sections 110 and 111 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (HMSO, 1998) set out that:

- All maintained schools, city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts adopt a home-school agreement and associated parental declaration
- A home-school agreement is a statement explaining: the school's aims and values: the school's responsibilities towards its pupils who are of compulsory school age: the responsibilities of the pupils' parents: and what the school expects of its pupils

However, as Hood (2001) argues, it is difficult to marry the idea of regulation of parents' responsibilities with the notion of 'partnership', which is presented as the ideal way for schools and parents to work together. As Ribbens-McCarthy and Kirkpatrick (2005) point out, there is a fine line between expecting parents to take some responsibility for their children's learning and regulating what parents do with their children out of school hours. Alongside this is the phenomenon of the 'good parent' who behaves in the way expected of her/him, thus creating the possibility of viewing some parents in a negative way because they appear to fail to live up to expectations imposed upon them. Ribbens-McCarthy and Kirkpatrick (2005) also discuss the way in which government initiatives relating to homework are often based on a deficit model, seeing parents as lacking the skills and knowledge necessary to support their children's work effectively.

Vincent (2000) argues that although the notion of parents as partners is presented as an ideal, in reality it often provides no more than a means by which schools ensure that they have parental support in reaching the aims and objectives of the institution. In policy terms, partnership focuses on the educational benefits to the child at the expense of social benefits. Other researchers (Edwards and Alldred, 2000; Crozier, 2000) describe the way in which schools' efforts to institutionalise home practices, for example through homework, leave parents struggling to meet the expectations of school whilst retaining private space for their families. Edwards and Alldred (2000) also highlight the neglect of consideration of the child, both in policy and in research, as a significant part of the process of parent involvement.

Crozier and Reay (2005) argue that in the twenty-first century, parental involvement has become the centrepiece of Government policy in education. However, they also argue that often parents are viewed as one homogeneous group, or reduced to a simplistic binary between 'the good' and 'the bad'. Their own research shows that the reality is more complicated than this and that influences such as class, ethnicity, economic circumstances and gender may all have a significant part to play in home-school relationships.

Reay's (1998) research into mothers' involvement in their children's primary education found that mothers tended to adopt one of three approaches to supporting their children's learning in the home space: complementing, compensating or modifying. The complementor mothers took the approach of supporting the work of the school, for example by making sure that homework was completed on time. Compensator mothers felt that school was not providing enough for their children and that they needed to provide extra, such as organising home tuition for their children. Modifier mothers did not go as far as this, but adjusted the work provided by school in order to, in their view, improve upon it.

Reay points out that in order to compensate for or to modify their child's education, a mother needs more cultural capital than required simply to be a complementor. This cultural capital is more often possessed by white, middle class mothers, who once again find themselves in a position of advantage compared to their working class or minority ethnic counterparts (Reay, 1998, Levine-Rasky, 2009). Furthermore, these mothers were often able to generate



more social capital for their children outside of school, for example by arranging for them to participate in extra-curricular activities and clubs. A notable exception is in the case of mothers of black students who arrange supplementary schooling: this is discussed further in section 3.5 below.

### **3.4.3. Communication and the use of the English Language**

An important consideration when looking at parental involvement concerning minority ethnic families is the status of the English language in the curriculum. Blackledge (2001, 2004) and Mills (2004) argue that English is widely accepted as the dominant language in the UK education system and that government policy in recent years has been based on the “*common-sense discourse which holds schooling exclusively in English to be the key to success*” (Blackledge, 2001, p.293 ). Mills' (2004) research with mothers of Pakistani heritage found that participants viewed English as the route to academic success. Blackledge (2001; 2004) argues that the power of speaking English is greater than this and that the acceptance of English as the most legitimate language in school, and indeed in UK society, serves to oppress minority ethnic individuals and groups of individuals.

Blackledge (2001) cites the example of a co-ordinator of the National Literacy Strategy expressing concern at the possibility that children from minority ethnic backgrounds may take extended leave from school to visit their home countries. The concern expressed centred on the idea that this extended leave may affect the children's ability to speak English and thus have a detrimental effect on their education overall. The NLS co-ordinator did not take into account research which

has shown that immersion in home language can improve English speaking or the potential social and cognitive benefits of spending time in one's home country. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2004) assert that the idea of English as the dominant, more legitimate language can be used to marginalise individuals and groups of individuals who speak other home languages. Crozier and Davies (2007) also found in their research with British South Asian pupils and parents that with one exception, schools viewed visits to families' home countries negatively and did not ascribe any value to them.

In terms of working with children and parents in the early years, the value attached to speaking English has several implications. Firstly, Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000, p.10) point out that young children pick up on the values and prejudices of those around them. They describe the case of a young child in a Nursery setting who had learnt that “*there are different languages with different scripts, and that these languages are valued by different people*” . Children who are encouraged to use English in preference to their home language are being given the message that school values English more highly and moreover that what school sees as important is of greater value than what matters at home. Furthermore, we need to consider the potential consequences for children if we view speaking English as the key to success in school. In her study of three young bilingual learners in Nursery classes, Drury (2007, p.97) asserts that speaking home language may have a detrimental affect on a child's attainment in school and vice versa:

*“It is highly possible that Maria and Samia will gain educational success at the expense of losing Pahari [a dialect of Punjabi] and that Nazma's strong attachment to Parahi portends poor attainment in school. As practitioners, we need to be aware of the tension these young children might encounter between two possibly irreconcilable pressures: to succeed within the system, and to satisfy the cultural and linguistic expectations of the home.”*

By placing higher value on speaking English than on speaking home language, we are creating a tension for young children between the home space and the school space. It seems to me that this tension is at odds with the notion of 'parent partnership'. We cannot really strive to work in partnership with parents if we are suggesting that their way of speaking belongs at home and our way of speaking belongs at school and is the 'right' way to academic success. As a result of the value placed on speaking English, Siraj-Blatchford (1994, p.46) points out that often in the early years, *“being bilingual is viewed as an aberration, or worse, as something children should grow out of.”*

When working with parents, we need to consider how discourses and policies about language, and in particular the value attached to speaking English, may affect the relationships between parents and school. We need to be careful that the importance placed on speaking English does not serve as a means by which parents who value their home language are marginalised or dominated by practitioners. We may also wish to consider if a system which places children under pressure in this way needs rethinking. It can be argued that the notion that English is the language of success has become accepted as a dominant discourse and that this is something which needs challenging. At the very least, we need to consider that even if speaking English well is desirable and/or

necessary for young children, there should be ways of achieving this without denigrating the cultural, social and intellectual importance of maintaining home languages. At present there is provision for children in early years' settings to play and be assessed using home language. However, this provision does not continue into Key Stage One. Are we therefore giving out the message that home languages are for small children only? If so we need to be aware of the dangers for children of losing their first language, which include a loss of feelings of self-worth and a breakdown of family relationships as well as a loss of opportunities for further cognitive development (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000).

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000, p.35) stress the importance of raising the status of bilingualism so that it is viewed as an asset rather than as a temporary necessity whilst children are learning to speak English:

*“Bilingual programmes should not be seen as early assimilation programmes. That is, they should not be implemented only as a transition programme until the children have learned enough ~English to join in with others. Rather, bilingualism should be seen as an asset and efforts should be made to continue the use of the children's home languages throughout their nursery and schooling.”*

#### **3.4.4 Communication, sharing information and the notion of 'dialogue'**

As Caddell et al (2000) found, parental involvement in Nursery settings often consists of a one-way relationship in which teachers transmit information and expectations to parents. This way of communicating with parents is reminiscent of what Freire (1996) refers to as “*banking*”, which is the antithesis of dialogue. By insisting on a 'right' way of doing things and communicating expectations to

parents, practitioners maintain their more powerful status, albeit unintentionally. Even more worryingly, Crozier and Davies (2006, 2007) found that in the case of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents they interviewed, information was poorly communicated and expectations of parents remained implicit rather than being made clear. The schools in their study seemed to subconsciously regard all parents as one group and as such subscribed to the view that there are accepted ways in which 'good' parents should behave in terms of parental involvement: *"The school's implicit expectations are based on an, albeit subconscious, assumption that all parents are 'like us', 'like us' being white and middle class."* (Crozier and Davies, 2007, p.300).

Thus the teachers in this research study were subject to what Bourdieu (1977) would describe as *meconnaissance*. They did not reflect on their attitudes towards parents, nor consider the ways in which individual parents or groups of parents may wish to involve themselves in different ways in their children's education. Rather, they subconsciously followed the assumption that there are ways in which parents should be expected to behave without any need to discuss or reflect on these behaviours. Any parent who does not behave in this way is viewed as inadequate as a parent or disinterested in their child's education.

Researchers examining opportunities for parents and teachers to communicate with each other have found that teachers often relied on informal encounters at the beginning and end of the school day (Brooker, 2002, Angelides et al, 2006 ). Although this was viewed as a positive part of practice by practitioners, seen as an non-threatening way of presenting an 'open door' approach to parents, in

reality it meant that only some parents had the opportunity, motivation or confidence to talk with practitioners. As Brooker (2002) points out, a parent who had *'anything to say'* required persistence and skill, as well as linguistic, social and cultural capital. As a result, few parents took up the opportunity to speak to the teacher of the class on this informal basis during Brooker's research.

This kind of informal contact means that, as Vincent (1996) also found, home-school relationships exist at the level of individual parents and teachers. Although individual relationships are important, the informal approach discussed above puts the impetus very much on the parents to initiate contact with teachers. This can mean that those parents with greater social, cultural and linguistic capital are far more successful at communicating their needs and concerns to teachers. This can have implications for the children involved. Brooker (2002) cites the example of Troy whose mother Charlotte was confident and assertive in her communications with teaching staff, particularly in relation to writing in Troy's reading diary. As a result of this, more time was devoted to supporting Troy's reading in school, in contrast with Mohammed, whose parents did not write in his reading diary, indeed he had lost his book bag. Brooker (2002, p.126) highlights the way in which an informal, open door approach to parental involvement thus leaves teachers, parents and children helpless in the face of an unfair system:

*"Mrs Goode [the class teacher] certainly does not invite or welcome this demanding activity on Charlotte's part, and is only too aware of the privileges it generates for Troy. But in an informal, demand-led system she is almost powerless to regulate the growing inequality of access and opportunity which Troy, already advantaged at home, is extracting from the scarce resources of the school"*

Many schools in the UK employ bilingual teaching assistants to facilitate communication with children and parents for whom English is an additional language. However, as Brooker (2002) points out, teaching assistants have a lower professional status than teachers and as such do not have the same power to influence the way things happen in school. Thus a parent who approaches a bilingual assistant with a concern is less likely to be able to influence the way their concern is dealt with than a parent who is able to speak directly with the teacher.

Furthermore, Crozier and Davies (2007) found that often teachers use bilingual assistants as an excuse for the lack of direct contact between themselves and parents who speak English as an additional language. In this way, these parents are further marginalised in terms of school life. Thus we have another example of the way in which Blackledge (2001) sees the English language as a means by which individuals and groups are excluded from dialogue and decision making.

However, if the informal approach to communication is not always successful, formal opportunities for parents to talk with teachers do not fare any better in terms of facilitating open dialogue. In their study of Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents in the North East of England, Crozier and Davies (2007) found that most parents did not recognise the importance attached to parents' evenings because the significance of these events and of other aspects of school life was not communicated effectively to them. Furthermore, since the schools in the study tended to treat parents as one homogeneous group, no consideration was given to the fact that many fathers in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities

worked irregular hours in the restaurant or taxi trade. This meant that even if they were aware that parents evenings were taking place and that they were expected to attend, it is likely that they would be unable to be there. Again, schools can be seen to be offering opportunities for parents to be 'involved' whilst parents are viewed as disinterested and inadequate.

Even when parents do attend, it seems that parents' evenings facilitate parental participation only at the most superficial level. Walker and MacClure (2005) examined data from two research projects investigating parents' evenings at secondary schools. They found that parent-teacher consultations followed a pattern reminiscent of a medical consultation. Teachers controlled the direction and content of the discussion and were reluctant to allow parents the time or opportunity to introduce their own points of view: *“At times this dialogue could look like a duel, with the teacher attempting to bring the exchange to a close and the parent trying to keep it open.”* (Walker and MacClure, 2005, p.101)

Although some parents did challenge teachers on issues such as teaching methods or curriculum plans, teacher seemed threatened by these challenges and viewed these parents in a negative light:



*“Parents' evenings stand at the interface between the school and the outside world—a location where the norms and practices of the school are potentially challengeable. So it is hardly surprising that schools wanted to police that boundary, while still needing to subscribe to the rhetoric of parental involvement. Teachers-as-experts were threatened by encounters with adults who could claim to know the children better than they, and who might hold their teaching to account. Parents likewise had their claims to know their children contested, with the status of parent being undermined by the client role constructed during the event.”*

(Walker and MacClure, 2005, p.103)

Although parents and teachers may attempt to communicate effectively and positively with each other, often they find themselves talking past each other rather than engaging in symmetrical dialogue (Reay, 1998). When parents are successful in dialogue with teachers, it is often because they possess sufficient cultural and social capital to be able to 'hold their ground' in discussions, as Reay (1998, p.125) discovered in her research with mothers: *“The middle-class mothers displayed a confidence, self-presentation and self-belief that was often effective in convincing teachers to their point of view”*.

For me, Crozier's and Davies' (2007) and Walker and MacClure's (2005) discussions of parents' evenings illustrate the idea of 'scripted dialogue' between parents and practitioners discussed in chapter two. Teachers hold the balance of power in these encounters as they set the agenda for what should be discussed, for example academic targets for the end of the year. Although lip service might be paid to the idea of parents raising concerns, in reality a ten minute encounter structured in this way does not provide an opportunity for, or indeed an expectation of, a meaningful, 'unscripted dialogue' between teachers and parents. I know from my own experience as a teacher and as a parent that these

encounters invariably involve the teacher talking and the parent listening.

The other form of formal communication commonly available in schools is the school report or in the case of Nursery and Reception age children, the EYFS profile. Brooker (2002) found that for some parents in her study, a school report was meaningless because it was neither translated into their home language nor explained in terms of expectations and the way these were communicated in the report. Similarly, many parents in Crozier's and Davies' (2006; 2007) study were unable to read their children's school reports since they were not translated from English into home languages. These parents had to rely on their children to translate and explain the reports to them. Thus it is highly possible that schools and early years' settings might meet the requirements for contact and communication with parents without approaching anything like establishing a meaningful dialogue with parents:

*“Both parents' and teachers' narratives reflect a constant tension between structure and agency. This tension is manifest in parents' and teacher's struggles to assert their world-views and experiences as legitimate within community and institutional contexts that make them feel marginalised, devalued, alienated and isolated.”*

(Lawson, 2003, p.90)

### **3.4.5 Social and Cultural capital and 'playing the game'**

So far, I have examined expectations of parental involvement and issues regarding communication and dialogue with relation to parents and teachers.

However, there is more to involving parents in their children's education than this. Underlying some of the issues discussed is the notion that some parents know how to 'play the game' of parental involvement better than others. We have already discussed how informal opportunities for communication allowed Troy's mother to secure more teacher attention for her child. In this section, I will examine this phenomenon in more detail, using Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital to unpick some of the reasons why some parents are more successful than others in becoming involved in their children's school life.

Brooker (2002) argues that only some parents are able to be involved in school life in all the five ways classified by Epstein (1987) mainly because most parents are unaware what is expected of them by the school. She argues that parents need to learn 'the rules' regarding how a school parent should behave and that the school in her study did not make these rules explicit to parents. Doucet also found that the African American parents in her research had to work out the "*rules of engagement*" (Doucet, 2008, p.111) for working with school. Thus, those parents who are involved at an influential level in school life are the small minority who possess the following: "*Some personal experience of liberal-progressive schooling: a good face-to-face relationship with the school staff: the confidence to feel at ease on the school premises: and for the favored minority, some training in play provision.*" (Brooker, 2002 pp 132-133).

Similarly, as discussed above, Reay (1998) and Levine-Rasky (2009) both found that middle-class, white mothers were more effective in influencing teachers' points of view. If we are to work towards creating opportunities for symmetrical

dialogue between parents and practitioners, we need to consider that in the field of school, this dialogue is not taking place on a level playing field. Neither are all participants in this dialogue equally well equipped to participate. In chapter two, I have already referred to the elements of cultural capital formulated by Reay (1998, p.32) in her research with parents: namely material resources, educational qualifications, available time, information about the education system, social confidence, educational knowledge and the extent to which entitlement, assertiveness, aggression or timidity characterized mothers' approaches to teaching staff

As discussed in chapter two, in the context of my research the ability to speak English may be a further component of cultural capital. As we have already seen, the ability to speak English is a powerful tool for parents and their children, if they wish them to achieve well academically and to be included in the life of the school. Furthermore, without this ability, parents may well be unable to make effective use of other components of their cultural capital. There are implications here for settings and for individual practitioners. If we are to achieve symmetrical dialogue, then we need to find ways to level the playing field and to equip all of the players equally. We also need to make sure, as Brooker (2002) points out, that all players understand the 'rules' of the game.

In the Asian Parents and the School Experience ( APSSE) study (Crozier and Davies, 2006: 2007), parents were noticeably making use of social capital within the context of family and community support. Siblings were called upon to translate school reports and letters and decisions about which secondary school

to choose were based upon the opinions and experiences of other family members. Where members of the family or community were employed as bilingual teaching assistants, participants in the research study used these contacts to find out more about school and to represent them in the school when needed. Other participants used contacts in universities to support them in university choices and applications.

However, the researchers found that although participants in the study made use of the social capital available to them, this did not result in the generation of further social capital, nor did it add to or enhance participants' cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986, cited in Crozier and Davies, 2006) asserts that social capital is not just generated within social groups but between social groups. For Crozier and Davies (2006), the ethnicity of the participants in their study acted as a 'glass ceiling' on their access to social capital. The families had low volume social capital which could not generate more social capital. This was partly because, like the working class parents in Reay's (1998) study, the parents did not possess enough cultural capital to activate their social capital in school. So for example, knowing a bilingual teaching assistant will only get a parent so far, since the status of teaching assistants is lower than that of teachers and both the parent and the teaching assistant may not be confident enough to assert their point of view strongly.

Another interesting point from the APSSE study regards the different emphasis on social and cultural capital in the field of school compared with the field of home and community for British South Asian participants. The parents in the study were

not found to be motivated by a desire for their children's individual success. They were more interested in activating social capital in school in order to maintain ethnic, religious and community values. Parents were also more inclined to draw on support from the whole family, rather than just relying on their own resources. Family involvement is described as an “*untapped resource*” (Crozier and Davies, 2006, p.693) since schools focus on involving parents.

In my research, I will need to consider what the settings' 'rules' for parental involvement are and how clearly these are communicated to parents. I will also need to analyse how far parents agree with these 'rules' and how far the rules are adhered to as a means of 'playing the game' . It may be that the ways of involving parents established in schools are subject to Bourdieu's (1997) phenomenon of *meconnaissance* discussed in chapter two. Are certain 'rules' and protocols followed because they are genuinely the most effective way to involve parents? Or is it because they have become the accepted 'right' way to do things which is no longer questioned by teachers or parents? Is the established 'right' way of doing things enabling teachers to maintain control and power in their relationships with parents, albeit unintentionally?

In my research, I will need to consider whether it is enough for practitioners to make the 'rules' of parental involvement explicit to parents and for parents to stick to those 'rules'. If we are considering parental involvement at the level of control discussed above, then surely we need to go further than this. If discussing our perceptions of parental involvement with regard to Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' then it may be that we need to rewrite the 'rules' of parental involvement

together with parents. This may mean allowing parents to challenge existing 'rules' and protocols if meaningful dialogue is to be established.

#### **3.4.6. *'Hard to reach' parents?***

In considering the ways in which practitioners work with parents, it is interesting to consider the notion that some parents are 'hard to reach'. Crozier and Davies (2007) quite rightly challenge this view of parents and suggest that in reality, some schools are 'hard to reach' for individual parents and for groups of parents, in particular for British South Asian parents. As well as the ways in which the schools in their study viewed the parent body as one homogeneous group, Crozier and Davies (2007) highlight the ways in which teachers' approaches to parental involvement leave little scope for the parents to have a voice in school. They use Dale's (1996) typology to explain the ways in which teachers in their research were working with parents. Some of the teachers and schools adopted the 'expert' model, considering themselves as the owners of all valuable educational knowledge and thus the decision makers in school life. These schools were a long way from recognising parents' knowledge about their children and their education as valuable, or from promoting any sort of dialogue with parents, let alone in a symmetrical fashion.

Other schools and teachers adopted the 'transplant' model, seeing parents as in need of teachers to transfer their skills and expertise and thus demonstrate how things should be done (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Lawson, 2003; Lightfoot,

2004). There are similarities here with Freire's banking model. In this transplant model, parents are viewed as a resource rather than as potential equal partners in supporting their children's development and education. Teachers tend to view working class parents as more in need of this transfer of skills and expertise than middle class parents (Lightfoot, 2004). Crozier and Davies (2007) saw the children's centre in the area where they conducted their research as following the same sort of model, by providing a toy library and showing parents how children are expected to play within middle class, white norms. Although it is important to remember that this is an opinion which only considers one aspect of the work of one children's centre, it raises again the question of dominant discourses in early years, in particular the importance of play in children's learning and development. As practitioners we may need to reflect on the potential for our own values concerning early years education and the ways in which these values may manifest themselves in early years settings to make those settings 'hard to reach' for some parents and children.

We also need to consider the issue of 'hard to reach' parents or 'hard to reach' schools from the point of view of the practitioners. Crozier and Davies (2007) were aware that teachers in their study were under pressure to meet targets for their own and for the school's performance. We need to consider how the culture of measuring performance in schools might affect teachers' willingness or opportunity to involve parents in a meaningful partnership. If teachers are working in schools which adopt the 'banking' approach to working with parents, then it is likely that relationships with parents exist at a superficial level. We have discussed above that the PEAL model (Wheeler and Connor, 2006) suggests that



respectful relationships are at the heart of successful parental partnership. However, if these relationships do not exist, then it is likely that teachers will be unwilling to consider working in close partnership with parents since they have not established trust in their work with parents, neither have they recognised the valuable contribution which parents could make. Concerns about meeting performance targets might mean that teachers are unwilling to take a perceived risk by removing barriers to involvement and thus relinquishing some of the power they hold at a decision making level. What if the wrong decisions are made and this affects performance negatively? How can parents be expected to know how to do things properly when they are not the 'experts' that teachers are? Thus it is easy to see how relationships between parents and teachers stagnate, parents are kept at the margins of school life and are thus viewed as 'hard to reach' by teachers.

Crozier (2005, p.52) demonstrates that black parents invest a considerable amount of emotional energy in supporting their children, despite often being viewed in a negative light by schools, sometimes to the point of being “*ignored and humiliated*”. Crozier and Reay (2005, p.158) assert that this stems from the way in which Government policy and parental involvement practices in school work in a way which favours white, middle class parents:

*“What we have depicted amounts to a context of high parental anxiety in which Government and many schools operate a model of parental involvement based on white middle class practice. Within this there is miscommunication, parents who do not fit the norm and parents who have neither the confidence, educational knowledge nor time to participate more fully in their children's school or education generally.”*

### 3.5 Parents finding their own space

As well as considering parents' experiences in the home and school spaces, some of the literature examines ways in which parents strive to create their own spaces for involvement in their children's education. Roer-Strier (1998) examined minority families and children in the transition from home to Nursery in Israel, with a particular interest in children's well-being during transition. She identified three categories of parental coping style, which she named kangaroos, cuckoos and chameleons. 'Kangaroo' parents wished to protect their child from outside influences and erected barriers between home and school culture. 'Cuckoo' parents entrusted the socialisation of their children entirely to the Nursery. 'Chameleon' parents encouraged their child to live in harmony with both home and school cultures and to adapt their behaviour accordingly.

Roer-Strier found that it was the children of these 'chameleon' parents who were least at risk of damage to their sense of emotional well-being during the transition period. However, in terms of an individual's identity, it could be that this finding needs further consideration. Although the 'chameleon' skills of socialisation are valuable, there also needs to be space for children and families to construct their own identity independent of the influence of others, as I have discussed in my consideration of Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space".

However, there is an emerging argument in the literature that the way forward is to recognise parents as citizens rather than as consumers or as partners (Vincent, 2000) and to develop the notion of parental involvement as a

'participatory democracy'. In this way, parents can be allowed to create their own space in which they can build dialogue and involvement around issues of importance to themselves and their community. Vincent discusses the idea of parents groups operating as "*counterpublics*" (Vincent, 2000, from Fraser, 1997). Vincent describes counterpublics thus: "*This term describes the meeting places, literature and actions of subordinated social groups who form an alternative public, in the face of dominance by groups who do not recognize their particular interests.*" (Vincent, 2000, p. 17). She goes on to discuss the idea that since the structures of society may serve to reproduce inequalities experienced by such groups, members of these groups require "*their own space and place.*" (Vincent, 2000, p.17)

An example of this notion of counterpublics in relation to parental involvement can be found in Reay and Mirza's (2005) discussion of black supplementary schools in London. The schools involved in their study operated at weekends or after school and had been set up by parents concerned that their children's needs were not being met in mainstream school. The parents involved in the schools saw the mainstream, state schools attended by their children as "*uncaring and racist*" (Reay and Mirza, 2005, p. 139). The researchers found that the parents running these schools were far from the apathetic, feckless and uninformed stereotype of working class parents in the inner city. However, their response to the way in which their children were being treated in mainstream school differed from that of the white, middle-class mothers we have discussed in Reay's (1998) and Brooker's (2002) studies above. Although the black mothers in Reay and Mirza's study were activating agency in trying to change things for their children,

this was not the individual agency which Troy's mother in Brooker's (2002) study for example displayed. The parents involved in running the black supplementary schools were more concerned with a community response to the issues facing their children in mainstream schooling. Thus, they displayed what Reay and Mirza (2005, p.140) describe as a “*collectivised agency*” in acting to improve their children's life chances. However, the schools were doing more than this. They were creating “*spaces of radical blackness*” (p.144) where children could feel comfortable with and confident in their black identity. Reay and Mirza (2005, p.147) assert that this is particularly important given the deficit view of 'blackness' which exists in UK society:

*“The black women educators were all engaged in various ways in rewriting blackness as a positive social identity in its own right. Such reconstructions . While not oppositional in any traditional sense, are written against the grain of the dominant discursive constructions of blackness as a negative reflection of whiteness which still prevail across British society.”*

The women running the schools were also concerned that the ways in which they work with parents should be different from the parents' experiences in mainstream school. They emphasized the need to listen to parents and allow them to make decisions about what should happen in school. At times this meant working in a way which did not fit with their own pedagogical ideology, such as in the example of the child whose parents wished to limit his curriculum to English and Maths learning only. In this case, the principle of working with and listening to parents was considered more important than working according to the teachers' own educational values. This contrasts starkly with the 'teacher as expert' model discussed in much of the literature concerning mainstream schools.

Reay and Mirza suggest that these “*radical spaces of blackness*” as viewed as a threat by the white majority, including the educational establishment. This raises an interesting dilemma with regard to parental involvement. Whilst it is clear from Reay and Mirza's research that there is a need for black parents and their children to create their own spaces for learning, where does this leave practitioners in mainstream education who are striving to work in a more equitable manner with parents? Is it possible for white practitioners to recognise and accept the need for black supplementary schools at the same time as trying to build spaces for equitable parental involvement?

Reay and Mirza (2005, p.148) point out that one of the arguments against the validity of black supplementary schools criticises them as “*segregationalist and isolationist*”. But this view may come from a position of concern about the undermining of white, middle-class educational values. For me the way forward is to acknowledge the need at present for black supplementary schools and the reasons for that need. But at the same time, we can seek to develop dialogic spaces where practitioners and parents can work together in a more equitable manner. Part of doing this may involve looking at the successful ways in which black supplementary schools listen to parents and allow them to make decisions about the educational direction of the schools.

Freeman (2010) examined the ways in which working class parents strove to create their own space for parental involvement by building relationships with their children's schools and teachers. These parents challenged the stereotype of working class parents who are not interested in being involved in their children's

education. Freeman (2010, p. 195) stresses the importance of allowing symmetrical dialogue and reflection: “*Creating spaces for dialog and deliberation around real issues that matter to parents and teachers has the possibility of increasing social and cultural capital, decreasing power inequalities, and developing cross-cultural understanding.*”

### **3.6 A 'third space' for parental involvement?**

One of the participants in Reay and Mirza's (2005, p.149) study sums up where we seem to be in terms of working with parents, particularly minority ethnic parents, and how things need to change:

*“I think schools need to give more space to parents, to listen to their views. I think there needs to be more links between the home and school. Teachers do not know enough about the context of children's lives and about parents' lives. They need to know and then be able to use that. So I think the relationship between parents and teachers isn't a happy one and it hasn't been for years. It needs developing, it needs encouragement, there needs to be the space for it.” (Verna, black supplementary school educator)*

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) argue that the space for this relationship can indeed be the early years setting. They point to the work of the Reggio pre-schools in Italy, where “*the competency of parents as citizens*” (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p. 168) is fully recognised. They highlight the way in which the Reggio philosophy allows true democratic participation of parents through an understanding of the pre-school as “*a social and political place and thus an educational place in the fullest sense.*” (p.168) Dahlberg and Moss see schools as potential sites of

*“minor politics”*, (p.15) where no issue or decision concerning the everyday lives of families and schools goes uncontested. By recognising parents' competency to participate in negotiation around these issues and decisions, a vision of true partnership can be achieved. Bennett (2006) highlights the importance of this concept of true partnership in today's early childhood settings: *“Community involvement in the pre-school is growing in importance, not only in providing expanded services and referrals where necessary, but also as a space for partnership and the democratic participation of parents.”* (OECD, 2006, p.216)

So, although looking at the research to date gives the impression that parental involvement is happening at a largely superficial level, the potential for a new kind of parental involvement is there. My research will need to examine what is actually happening with regards to parental involvement in the two settings and how this viewed by the participants in the research study. However, if my research is to suggest ways forward for future practice, I will also need to consider the potential for the notion of a "third space" of parental involvement developing in either or both of the two settings. I will need to consider whether this 'third space' exists already and if so what it looks like. If it does not exist already, I will need to consider where the starting points might be for building such a space.

### **3.7 Summary and Research Questions**

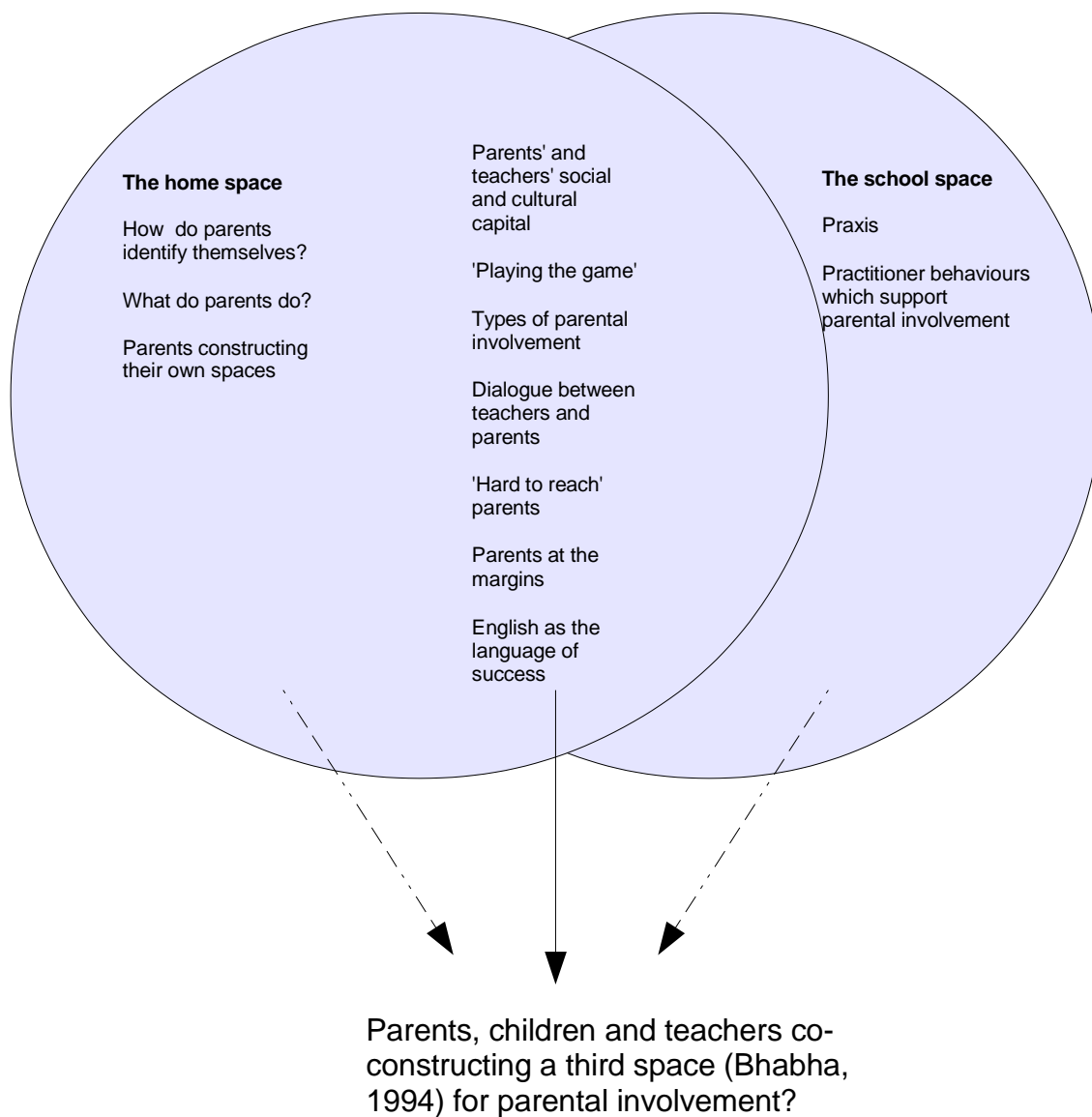
In the first three chapters of this thesis, I have outlined the reasons for beginning this research and what I hoped to achieve when I set out on my PhD journey. I have explained the conceptual framework which underpins my research, drawing on the theories of Bhabha (1994), Bourdieu (1977, 1980, 1986, 1991, 1992 and 1999) and Freire (1996) as well as others. As chapter three demonstrates, much of the research into parental involvement carried out this century suggests that teachers are operating from a well intentioned but misguided standpoint, seeing themselves as experts who need to demonstrate to parents how children should be supported in their learning and development. Parents are viewed largely as a homogeneous group and the responsibility for involvement in their children's education is viewed as being largely their own responsibility, rather than that of teachers. Parents who lack the social, cultural and linguistic capital needed to negotiate successfully with teachers and schools are kept at the margins of their children's schools and education. More often than not, parents from minority ethnic groups such as British Asian parents are amongst this group. In general, the picture of parental involvement seems rather pessimistic.

However, there is an emerging discussion which suggests that if we reflect on our practice and the way we work with parents and children, working in real partnership with parents is possible. In order to do this, practitioners need to be prepared to reflect on their own practices and values and to allow parents to challenge these without feeling threatened. Teachers need to think about ways in



which the collective capital of communities can be activated and about how symmetrical dialogue between parents and teachers can be encouraged.

The diagram below (Fig 3.2) illustrates the key issues I have identified and discussed from previous research into parental involvement as it relates to minority ethnic parents and early years' settings. These are the issues which I will be looking for evidence of in the data from my own research. I will also be examining how the issues relate to one another in my two case studies. For example, how do parents identify themselves and how does this influence what they do? Is there evidence of English being seen as the language of success in school and how might this affect dialogue between parents and practitioners? The diagram is followed by a list of my key research questions (table 3.4). By examining data using the conceptual framework from chapter two and the framework outlined in diagram 3.1 I intend to find answers for the questions listed in table 3.4. My ability to answer these questions effectively depends on the development of a sound methodological approach, as outlined in the next chapter.



**Fig 3.2 Literature Review Framework**

**Table 3.4 Research Questions**

How do 'British Asian' parents and children and their teachers perceive parental involvement?
What influences these perceptions of parental involvement?
How are these perceptions similar and how are they different?
What might be the reasons for similarities in and differences of perception?
Having investigated the first four research questions, what are the implications for future practice?

# **Chapter Four**

## **Methodology and Methods**

### **4.1.Introduction**

This chapter begins with a description of the two settings which will be used in the research study (section 4.2). Before discussing the research design, I will examine the influences on the design (section 4.3). These include ethical issues involving participants and methods (section 4.4.) and reflections on my own identity in relation to the research (section 4.5). In addition I discuss more practical considerations regarding access to the settings and participants and the constraints of a study carried out by one researcher with participants leading busy professional and personal lives (section 4.6).

The next part of this chapter (sections 4.7 to 4.20) examines the methods and approaches which will be used in my research study. It examines the relevance of a social constructivist perspective to my research (section 4.8). It sets out why a case study approach is particularly relevant to this study (section 4.9). It explains the relevance of ethnography, naturalistic enquiry and grounded theory to my research (sections 4.10 to 4.12). I go on to discuss the relevance of particular

methods for data collection (sections 4.13 to 17), during the early stages of the field work and during the main phase of field work. This section includes an explanation of how participants will be recruited for this research study. I highlight the main findings from my pilot study and the implications for the field work in the two settings for the main research study (section 4.18). Finally, I explore the methods which will be used for collating and analysing the data as it is collected and during the final stages of the research (sections 4.19 and 4.20).

## **4.2 The two Nursery settings**

The research will be carried out in two Nursery classes in primary schools, Orchard Road Primary School and Forest Hill First School. All of the children in the Nursery class at Orchard Road are of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin and speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). Most of the children in the Nursery class at Forest Hill First School are of white, British heritage. I was trained as a teacher and subsequently employed at Forest Hill School for five years. I was the Nursery teacher and Early Years co-ordinator at Orchard Road school for two years. A more detailed description of each school can be found in chapter five of this thesis, in sections 5.2.1 and 5.4.1.

## **4.3 Influences on the research design**

The aim of my research is to achieve a deeper understanding of interactions between teachers and British Asian parents with a view to improving practice in Nursery settings. In order to gain a true understanding of these relationships, I

need to spend time developing the trust of participants. I also need to ensure that I can capture as much of the true reality of relationships between teachers and parents as I possibly can. Therefore, the majority of my field work will involve talking: talking with teachers, headteachers, governors, parents and children. More importantly, this time will involve a great deal of listening on my part. It is important that, as far as possible, my own ideas and opinions do not influence what was said by any of the participants. It is also important that the participants are given the opportunity to talk about everything that they feel is of relevance to the research, in order that the research is to be complete. At the same time, I need to ensure that the data collected will answer my own research questions. The research needs to be meticulously planned to ensure that all of these criteria are met. At all times in planning the research, I need to consider the limitations of the methodology, and how I can ensure that the research will produce robust, valid data which will stand up to detailed analysis and discussion.

It is also important to think carefully about the implications of involving young children in the research. Although my research study is focussed on perceptions of parental involvement and therefore examines the relationships between parents and teachers, analysis of these relationships would be meaningless without including the children in the settings. As Pascal and Bertram (2009) point out, it is often the case that children from minority ethnic groups are not really listened to in their Nursery settings. It is the children who are the reason for the settings' existence and who should be at the heart of any research in the field of early childhood. I need to make sure that the approaches I adopt enable the children's voices to be heard in the research project (Nutbrown and Clough,

2009). I need to make sure that I listen carefully to the children so that their views can be truthfully represented in the research. I need to make sure these views come straight from the children and that I am not inferring or interpreting what they may think (Pascal and Bertram, 2009).

Living and working with young children can be hectic and chaotic. Parents of young children face a number of practical and emotional challenges each day. However, when planning and carrying out a research study at this level, one cannot approach the task in a chaotic, haphazard fashion. Research needs to be carefully planned, reflected on and justified if it is to be taken seriously by participants and by the wider research community. I also need to think carefully about confidentiality and how far this can be maintained for participants.

#### **4.4 Ethical issues**

This research will be conducted according to the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA):

*“The British Educational Research Association believes that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research.”*

(BERA, 2004).

This section of the thesis will set out how these guidelines relate to the planning and implementation of my research. I will pay particular attention to my

responsibility to the participants, as highlighted in the guidelines.

#### **4.4.1 Responsibility to the participants**

In addressing my responsibility to the participants, I found it useful to consider questions posed by Alderson (1995, p.57), as in table 4.1:

<b>Table 4.1 Ethical considerations</b>
1. Is my work really effective?
2. Might I be doing more harm than good?
3. Should I use better methods and how do I know which ones are better?
4. Do I have the courage to doubt my own certainties?
5. Is it fair to worry the children and adults I work with, with these troubling questions?
6. Surely being a professional means knowing the answers, not asking these questions?

Alderson is right to suggest that these questions should be carefully considered before embarking on the research study. In order to fully understand the positions of others within a given social space, Bourdieu (1992) asserts that the researcher needs to repeatedly analyse their own position and how it relates to those of others. He calls this concept 'reflexivity'. Using reflexivity within research allows the researcher to bridge the gap between objective, quantifiable findings and a more qualitative research design such as my own. For Bourdieu, although phenomena such as culture can be viewed objectively, we can only make sense of them through practical actions. Thus we are involved in a constant interaction



between objectivity and subjectivity. It is this interaction between objectivity and subjectivity that we need to be aware of in research. If I am to demonstrate the Bourdieuan concept of 'reflexivity' (1992) within my research, I will need to consider my position as a researcher in relation to my research throughout the process. This will mean returning to this list of questions at intervals during the field work, and evaluating my practice as a researcher honestly. I will now discuss my responses to each question in detail.

#### **4.4.2 Is my work really effective?**

If we mean effective in terms of improving practice, that question can only be answered at the end of the research process. I also need to be careful about claiming effectiveness. This is surely a subjective concept: from whose point of view should we measure effectiveness? My own as a researcher? The parents? The teachers? The children? The wider research community? In a sense, my work will only be *really* effective if judged to be so by all of these interested parties. However, my research objective is to better *understand* the perceptions of the participants. Therefore, from a personal point of view, my work will be effective if I gain a deeper understanding of those perceptions. More significantly, my work will be effective from a professional perspective if I can communicate my understanding of participants' perspectives to others in a lucid, truthful manner. As Siraj-Blatchford points out, the validity of research is "*ultimately dependent upon communicative competence.*" (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994, p. 21). A researcher could be rigorous in applying ethical guidelines to the methods of research, but this is to no avail if she then represents participants' contributions

incompletely or inaccurately. I will need to be meticulous in the way I report the ideas and opinions of the participants. My work will be *really* effective if I can move from truthfully reporting and understanding participants' perspectives towards changes in professional practice in the future. A related question which is pertinent to my research in terms of ethics is 'Can I demonstrate *answerability* in my research?' Here I am using Curran and Takata's (2004) definition of the Bakhtin concept of answerability:

*“To listen in good faith to the Other is not necessarily to agree with the Other, but to make a good faith effort to understand how the Other came to his/her validity claim, and to help him/her express that claim effectively to the community, to the benefit of the whole community.”*

An effective demonstration of answerability can partly be achieved through the rigorous application of Guba and Lincoln's (1985) 'criteria for trustworthiness', as discussed later, in section 4.11. By ensuring that my methods meet these criteria, I can say that I will 'listen in good faith' to the participants, and that I will present a true picture of their thoughts and opinions to the research community. However, answerability as I understand it goes further than this in that it permeates more than just the methods of research. Answerability is also about myself as a researcher. I will only be able to claim answerability for my research if I repeatedly reflect on my own motives, thinking and behaviour throughout the research process: *“The researcher is a central part of the research process and her own feelings and experience should be analyzed as an integral part of it.”* (Edwards, 1990, p. 184). I intend to create opportunities for reflecting on my own position in relation to the research by keeping a research diary. I will also be able

to discuss my role in the research with my peers at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood learning circle. The learning circle is a group of researchers and early years practitioners who meet on a monthly basis to share their research progress (see section 4.11.1 for more discussion on the issue of credibility, including my role as a researcher).

#### ***4.4.3. Might I be doing more harm than good?***

This question can be answered if I first consider the potential harm that my research may cause. It is possible that my work may serve to reinforce the imbalance of power between teachers and parents, and I will need to identify ways of guarding against this. Cotterill (1992, p.599) expresses concern over the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee during research field work:

*“During the research process, they [the researcher] may create expectations which encourage some respondents to make disclosures they would only make to close friends...And when a woman then talks about very painful aspects of her life to another who will eventually walk away, there may be potential for real harm.”*

I will need to consider the implications of my research for participants both during the research process and after the research is complete. There are a number of other ways in which my study could cause harm to the participants. Firstly, given that parents often feel under pressure to agree with their child's teachers in matters regarding school life, it would be easy for them to feel pressured into

taking part in the research. Likewise, once the Headteacher's permission has been obtained to carry out the research, staff in the setting could feel obliged to participate. Arguably the most vulnerable participants are the children in the settings: young children like to please members of staff, and are therefore likely to agree to participate if invited to do so. It is also harder to be sure that children have fully understood the implications of participation, and therefore difficult to claim that they have given 'informed consent'. Thus, from an ethical perspective, the way in which the research is initially presented to potential participants is crucial. The aim and objectives of the research will need to be made clear to participants. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality will need to be discussed, as will the potential implications of the finished project i.e. Who might read the final thesis? Where might it be available? How might it be used and by whom? Participants will need to be given a clear option to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants will need to be given time to ask questions about the research before agreeing to participate. The participation of children in the research will need to be considered carefully, with regard to consent and to the methods used when working with the children.

#### ***4.4.4 Should I be using better methods and how do I know which ones are better? and Do I have the courage to doubt my own certainties?***

If a researcher is to adopt a truly 'reflexive' (Bourdieu, 1992) standpoint, it is surely essential to doubt certainties and to question the methods used. It is only by questioning those things which seem certain that we can consider the perspectives of others, which is one of the main objectives of my research. As

Powney and Watts (1987, p.20) point out, “*working with people is problematic and does not produce tidy results.*” Perhaps 'problematic' is not the best choice of words here, since problems tend to be seen as a negative thing. If I am to truly understand the perspectives of participants in the research, I will need to welcome and even look for 'problems', or challenges to my own and others' certainties. Dahlberg and Moss (2005, p.17) warn of the way in which a “*dominant discourse*” concerning early childhood education can serve to reinforce the imbalance of power between some teachers and parents. The theories and concepts on which we base our ideas of 'good practice' in Nursery education satisfy largely Western ideals of how children should think, learn and behave. It follows that we as educators expect parents of children in Nursery to think and behave in a way which supports these ideals. These ideals may well be sound, but if we as early years professionals do not challenge our thinking on how children and their parents should think and behave we could well be guilty of perpetuating social inequalities. Furthermore, the high value put upon 'a good education' in our society means that our status as teachers and researchers further undermines the position of parents. From a Bourdieuan perspective, parents from a non-Western background are even more vulnerable, since, as we have already discussed in chapter two, they possess less social and cultural capital than others in the field of school:

*“The legitimizing authority of school can redouble social inequalities because the least favoured classes, too aware of their future and yet too unaware of the routes by which it happens, contribute in this way to its realization.”*

(Bourdieu, 1964: Translated by Grenfell, M. and James, D. 1998 p.22)

Although as a researcher I would not wish to intentionally reinforce these inequalities, without challenging certainties I could certainly contribute to the phenomenon of '*meconnaissance*', which Bourdieu (1977) describes as the way in which certain processes and practices become seen as the accepted norm, which is by definition not challenged or questioned. Therefore, from an ethical point of view I have a responsibility to the research participants to continually question and challenge certainties. As well as having a responsibility to the research participants as a group, I must also consider each participant as an individual. If parents and teachers are presented as homogeneous groups, the members of which all think and act as one, I am in danger of constructing a generalised view of 'the parent', 'the teacher' and 'the child'. Furthermore, I will be overlooking the fact that each parent, teacher and child operates within their own individual reality. I will need to reflect on the methods used throughout the research process if I am to make sure firstly that I get as accurate a picture of these individual realities as possible and secondly that I represent individual realities honestly.

***4.4.5. Is it fair to worry the children and adults I work with, with these troubling questions?***

As discussed in chapter one, my motivation for beginning this research comes from a conviction that the voices of 'British Asian' children in Nursery classes and those of their parents are not being listened to. In this sense, it is absolutely fair to approach participants with my research questions. For parents and children,

asking the questions acknowledges their voice and can provide a way for these participants to communicate their ideas and opinions which has not existed previously. For practitioners, as well as giving them an opportunity to express their voice in terms of parental involvement, my research might also support them in considering ways in which they can work to acknowledge the voices of children and parents in their settings.

#### ***4.4.6. Surely being a professional means knowing these answers, not asking these questions?***

For me, being an effective professional as a teacher and researcher means realising that we do not know all of the answers. By their very nature, research questions should be those questions to which there is no immediate or obvious answer: “*Research starting with mechanistic linear thinking, closely tied to the known and understood, may be clean and tidy but is unlikely to be of any significance*” (Robson, 2002, p. 55). Hence, from a methodological point of view, Alderson's concerns here are irrelevant. From an ethical point of view, I have already discussed the concern that my research might serve to reinforce dominant discourses and perpetuate 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977). It may be more effective to consider the following questions: ***How can I be sure that the children and adults I work with are truly willing to answer these troubling questions?*** and ***How can I as a professional ensure that they fully understand the nature of the questions and the implications of answering them?*** I will need to select methods and safeguards which ensure that all participants feel fully informed about the research process and understand the

implications of being involved in the research.

#### **4.4.7 Ethical principles**

Ethical issues will permeate every aspect of my research, particularly during the implementation of field work. It is imperative that I adopt a reflexive standpoint whilst carrying out the research. The research design will need to enable me to consider my own actions and views in relation to the research as well as the impact these actions and views may have on the research. The following principles will need to inform the research design and process, and to be reflected on throughout the field work:

<b>Table 4.2 Ethical Principles</b>
All participants will be kept fully informed as to the objectives and nature of the research
All participants will only remain involved with the research if they give continuing consent
All participants will be treated in a fair, considerate and respectful manner

#### **4.5 My identity as a researcher in relation to the participants**

In chapter one, I reflect on my identity in relation to the research project and in relation to other participants in the research. These reflections are crucial in determining the methodology for the research and the methods to be used in collecting, analysing and interpreting data. In this section, I explain how the



research design will be influenced by reflections on my professional and educational status, gender, class, religion and home. Most importantly, I consider how 'race' and ethnicity will influence the design, in particular my role as a white researcher working with 'British Asian' participants. I challenge the argument (Edwards, 1990: Troyna and Carrington, 1993) that a white researcher is not able to reach the 'true' views and opinions of 'British Asian' participants in a research project. Although I am not claiming that I will always be successful in gathering 'real' opinions from participants, I demonstrate why it is important that white researchers, in particular white practitioner/researchers, strive to engage with 'British Asian' participants and to hear their voice.

#### ***4.5.1 Myself as a researcher/practitioner***

Before designing the research, I need to consider my roles as a researcher and as a practitioner. Powney and Watts (1987) assert that the roles of the teacher researching in her own school may well impinge on each other. At different times she is a colleague, teacher, researcher, and/or interviewer. This mixture of roles could easily lead to bias in the research: as Powney and Watts go on to warn, the teacher as researcher should beware the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. All researchers have opinions about their research questions before they begin field work. Care should be taken to avoid a research design and methodology which serve to confirm the researcher's pre-conceived ideas without allowing for alternative perspectives. Robson (2002) advocates the use of Ahern's strategy for identifying potential researcher bias. This involves reflecting on your own position as researcher in relation to the project and its participants throughout the research

process. Similarly, Webb et al (2002) emphasise how researchers working within a Bourdieuan framework must reflect on how social and cultural background, our own position within a particular field and intellectual bias shape our own perceptions. In my own research, my position as a teacher means that I have a 'vested interest' in the research outcomes.

The methods used for collecting data in this study need to be carefully selected to ensure that the voice of each participant is truthfully heard. I am aware of the existing relationships between participants and myself as teacher/researcher, and the effects these relationships may have on participants' willingness to talk about their opinions. Having discussed the Bourdieuan concept of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977) and how it may be exerted on parents and children by teachers, I am concerned that my research methodology itself may reinforce this phenomenon. At the same time, methods used need to produce robust data which can be analysed in a meaningful and coherent way.

In the case of parent participants, we have already discussed the imbalance of power between parents and teachers in the field of school. Parents may well feel under pressure to give what they perceive as the 'right' answers to questions when posed by a teacher/researcher, particularly if they feel that a judgement may be made about their role as a parent as a result of the answers. Similarly, members of staff may be concerned that I will be judging their worth as early years practitioners during the research process. There may also be concern from Nursery staff as to whether their opinions might be presented to the Head teacher

during his/her interview. Children who participate in the research study may also feel that I am looking for a particular, 'right' answer to a question, since, "*They have spent the years since birth coming to grips with parental demands and all their school lives working out what teachers want and how to please them.*" (Bell and Osborne, 1981, p.48). Thus, the research design will need to be carefully thought out, so that methods used will allow participants to feel confident in expressing opinions and sharing ideas. I will also need to ensure that participants are not being led towards certain answers which serve to confirm any pre-conceived ideas I may have.

As well as being a practitioner, my position as a native English speaker should also be considered in relation to the research design. Like my professional status, my home language is something which I do not have in common with many participants in the research study. There are no parents in the study settings who speak English as a first language. I need to be aware of the notion that English is often viewed as the 'language of success' in schools. As an English speaking practitioner researcher, I may be perceived as being in a powerful position by the other participants, which as we have already discussed could influence the conversations which take place. In addition, the use of translators in the research will add another layer to the data which is open to interpretation: I will be considering my own analysis of another person's interpretation of what participants are willing to tell him/her.

For some of the parents and practitioners involved in the research, religion may be an important part of their identity, which again they do not share with me as

the researcher. All of the parents and one of the practitioners involved are Muslims and I do not follow an organised religion. Furthermore, many of my cultural practices differ from those of participants, such as what I eat and the way I dress. This may lead participants to feel wary of sharing parts of their lives and their opinions which are informed by their religious and cultural experiences.

#### **4.5.2 A white researcher working with 'British Asian' participants**

Other researchers have written about the difficulties facing a white researcher working with black participants (e.g. Haw, 1996: Vincent and Warren, 2001).

There is a concern that racial differences can act as a barrier in interviews: *“Black women do not talk about all areas of their lives to white female researchers in the same easy way that white women do, as a result of their structural position and allegiances in society.”* (Edwards, 1990, p.33). Troyna and Carrington (1993, p.107-109) recognise this argument as well as expressing concern about the way a white researcher may decide to interpret data:

*“White researchers cannot elicit meaningful data from black respondents because of status and power differences between them...a second and more significant criticism is based on the way in which the data elicited from black respondents are generally interpreted by white researchers...the third and final element of this critique questions the white researcher's self appointed role as 'ombudsman'.”*

Although I acknowledge the validity of this point of view, there is a danger in accepting that white researchers are unable to elicit meaningful data or interpret it

in a valid way. If we accept this argument as it stands, then white practitioner researchers should not attempt to engage with black participants. If white practitioner researchers are not prepared to attempt to talk with black research participants, then how are they to reflect on and improve their own practice? The reality is that many white practitioners work on a daily basis with black and 'British Asian' children and their parents. These practitioners need to talk to children and parents and to listen to what they say. Part of my research aim is to find a way to talk to 'British Asian' parents which allows them to express their views and opinions openly. As Haw (1996) argues, the intention of such research should not be to interpret the opinions of participants as such, but to “*open up spaces for the 'voices' [of participants] in places where they would not normally be heard.*” (Haw, 1996, p.321)

We should also consider the advantages of interviewing across ethnicities and cultures. A researcher who shares participants' ethnicity and cultural background may find it difficult to separate participants' experiences from their own. As Vincent and Warren (2001, p.44) assert:

*"[It is not] self-evident that a close identification between researcher and respondent is necessarily a "good thing". It may mean that one of the pair will assume what is known and understood between them, which may be counter-productive for the researcher's attempt to understand the respondent's subjectivity."*

This could lead to bias in the collecting of data as well as in the analysis.

Furthermore, participants could be wary of expressing opinions which may differ

from those expected within their own culture.

It may seem from reading the above that I would be unwise to attempt the research I propose. How can I, a white, middle class, English speaking, non Muslim practitioner researcher, hope to gain any insight into the 'true' experiences of participants who are in many ways so different from me? However, it must be remembered that ethnicity and religion are only part of a person's identity. If we allow them to be the only considerations when planning or carrying out research, then we risk treating all white researchers and/or all 'British Asian' participants as two homogeneous groups. As Mirza (1998) discovered, shared ethnicity does not necessarily mean that members of a similar ethnic community will accept you as 'one of them'. In her own research in the North West of England, she found it hard to become accepted by the participants, as despite sharing their ethnic origin she was a newcomer to the geographical area, and so had no wider links with the South Asian community there. Other researchers from a South Asian heritage have also found that it is difficult to build a relationship with white practitioners when conducting research:

*“My sex and ethnicity, that of a Pakistani woman, was a source of open curiosity and suspicion in some cases...one senior teacher, for instance, was convinced that I was checking the school out because my relations and Asian friends were thinking of going there.”*

(Bhatti, 1999, p.16)

As I have already discussed in chapter one, there are things which I hold in common with participants in the research. Firstly, several of the participants are

early years practitioners like myself, who may welcome the chance to discuss their thinking and practice with someone from a similar background. Secondly, since working as a practitioner with the parents and children involved, I have become a mother myself. Like Vincent (Vincent and Warren, 2001) in her research with Bangladeshi mothers, I may find that my new experience of motherhood will act as a 'leveller' between me and the parent participants. Furthermore, since I have already stated that as a white practitioner working with 'British Asian' parents and children I felt a need to engage more closely with families in order to improve practice, I am compelled to carry out this research because of, not despite, the differences which may exist between myself and participants. As Troyna (1993, p.105) articulates, researchers such as myself must seek, "*not only to highlight forms of inequality and injustice, but also view the research act itself as constituting a deliberate challenge to the status quo.*" Thus I do not view the differences between myself and participants as a reason not to carry out the research, but as an important factor in the research design. These differences and my reflections on my position in the research will need to be considered at every stage of the research design. There also needs to be recognition of the notion that no individual has one, fixed identity and that we all allow different parts of our identity to come to the fore in order to help us adapt to different situations. This can be used to an advantage in research, as Mirza (1998, p.172) identified: "*I became aware that in order to cope with all the different people I was required to deal with, I was developing 'shifting identities'.*" As long as I reflect honestly on the way in which my identity and those of the participants is revealed or not revealed during the research, this could be a strength of the project.





## 4.6 Practical considerations

As far as the parent participants are concerned, my request for involvement in the research project will add to the considerable burdens on their time and energy already present in their day to day lives. In planning the research, I need to ensure that my methodology will allow parents to participate fully without taking up an unreasonable amount of their time and energy. I need to be flexible enough to allow parents with varying family commitments to participate in the study. However, I also need to gather sufficient data to answer my research questions as fully as possible. I need to convince parents that the research is worthy of their time and attention, without overwhelming them with information and requests. Most of all, I need to work alongside them in their busy, multi-faceted lives, whilst at the same time ensuring that my research is rigorous and robust.

The teachers involved in the research are also facing increasingly heavy demands on their time and energy, not least at Orchard Road school, where an Ofsted inspection is imminent. I know from my own recent experience as a Nursery teacher that it can be difficult to make time for meetings and discussions with colleagues. Therefore I am prepared for the possibility that it might be difficult to arrange definite times when I can speak at length with staff members. I am also aware that participation in the research may not be a high priority for every member of staff. I will need to make sure that I am clear about the aims of my research in order to convince teacher participants to devote their time to the research. Teacher and parents participants will need to be sure about the amount of time which the field work will take and I will need to keep to the agreed

schedule. I will have to be careful to keep to the times arranged for appointments with participants. This will ensure that most importantly, I am fulfilling my responsibilities to the participants, but also that participants are more likely to wish to remain involved in the research.

## **4.7 Research Design**

As outlined in sections 4.3 to 4.6, the influences on my research design include ethical issues, my own role in the research and more practical considerations. This section of the chapter outlines the research design itself, beginning with a consideration of the perspective from which the design is approached. I outline the design of the case study which will be used in my research and consider how elements from other research methodologies might be brought into the case study.

## **4.8 The Social Constructivist perspective**

The research will be conducted from a social constructivist perspective, as defined by Creswell (2009, p.8):

*“Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to relay as much as possible on the participants' view of the situation being studied.”*

This research study involves analysing perspectives, which by their nature are not quantifiable. Since the research participants are human beings, they will not always react in the same way to a given intervention: I cannot argue that “x causes y” (Bryman, 2001). I cannot separate facts from values in the research: by its very nature it is value-laden. If the participants in the study are to be given a voice by the research, they cannot be treated as objects in a laboratory, having research 'done' to them. Since the focus of the study is on participants **perceptions** of parental involvement, the findings will involve the presentation of multiple realities. The research questions posed are not expected to have a conclusive, 'right' answer. Rather, I am seeking to examine perceptions of individuals and of groups of individuals and how these perceptions relate to, and influence each other. In doing this, I will need to involve the participants in shaping the field work as much as possible. As Griffiths (1998, p.109) indicates, when conducting educational research, “*Reflexivity, openness, collaboration and consultation are all key features.*”

The issues of addressing context and real life using a case study approach are discussed in detail below. In striving to ensure that the stories of participants' perceptions are represented faithfully and realistically, I must give careful consideration to the notion of giving participants a voice, both during the research process and in the way their stories are represented in the final thesis. The importance of giving participants a voice is an influence on many of the choices to be made during the research process: for example, the use of terms discussed in chapter one, the sampling process and selection of methods of data collection and analysis described later in this chapter. The need to reflect the complexities

of participants' everyday lives accurately is an important factor in my decision to conduct the research using a case study approach, as described in the next section of this chapter.

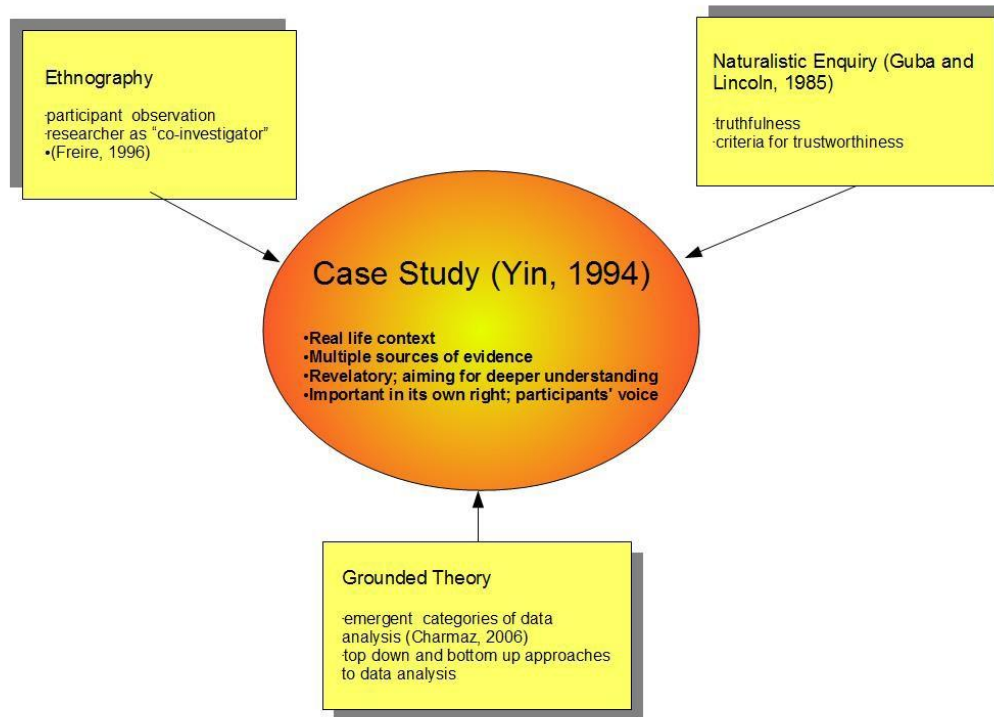
## **4.9 The case study approach**

The research will be carried out as a revelatory case study, according to Yin's (1994, p.9) definition: “*Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.*”

The “*contemporary phenomenon*” being investigated involves relationships between teachers, parents and children in the “*real life context*” of school. The “*multiple sources of evidence*” will include observations, interviews, group work and documentation, as discussed in section 4.13. By using multiple sources of evidence in the research, the findings will be strengthened by triangulation. In other words, by asking similar questions in more than one format, I will be able to support my own findings from more than one source.

The concerns which prompted my research are focused on the real lives of the children and parents with whom I work. My aim is to contribute to the improvement of these real lives in terms of giving a voice to parents, teachers and children. Therefore, my research needs to be grounded in and reflective of these participants' real life experiences. Yin (1994) identifies context of real life as

an essential element in case study research. Guba and Lincoln (1985, p.359) also emphasise that a case study presents, “*A holistic and lifelike description that is like those that the readers normally encounter in their experiencing of the world.*” However, the concepts underpinning the research are part of a wider debate about society and the role that schools, teachers and parents should play in the evolution of society, as discussed in chapter two. Section 4.11 in this chapter sets out how the integration of naturalistic enquiry into the case study will enable me to relate the specific cases I am examining to the issue of future practice in working with parents in the early years. The rigorous application of the case study approach will allow me to reach a better understanding of the relationships between parents and teachers in the contexts of the specific schools studied. Sections 4.10 and 4.12 explain how I intend to use strands of ethnography and grounded theory to deepen my understanding of perceptions of parental involvement in the two settings. Fig 4.1 illustrates how strands of ethnography, naturalistic enquiry and grounded theory can be employed to strengthen the case study.



**Fig 4.1 The case study design**

## 4.10 Ethnography in relation to the case study approach

Ethnography has been defined as follows:

*“A form of social and educational research that emphasises the importance of studying at first hand what people do and say in particular contexts. This usually involves fairly lengthy contact, through participant observation in relevant settings, and/or through relatively open-ended interviews designed to understand people’s perspectives, perhaps complemented by the study of various sorts of document – official, publicly available or personal.”*

(Hammersley, 2006, p.4)

Since I am concerned with understanding the real lives of participants, it makes sense to include methods which allow me to work with participants at first hand, in the environment in which I am interested, in this case the school. The strategy of participant observation will allow me to achieve this, by spending time working alongside parents, teachers and children in the two settings. Firstly, it will allow me to get as close as possible to 'real life' as experienced by the participants. Secondly, it will put me in a position to gather evidence to underpin “*thick descriptions*” (Geertz, 1973) of the settings, participants and relationships between them. For Denzin (1994), a thin description reports simple facts at face value. In contrast, “*A thick description...gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organised the experience, and reveals the experience as a process.*” (Denzin, 1994, p. 505). Thirdly, it will help to increase participants' true involvement in the research. Finally, it will allow me to place myself firmly within the research and to reflect on my own position as researcher. Although the notion of participant observation is often criticised for its lack of objectivity, applying Bourdieu's (1992) concept of reflexivity to the

research, as discussed above in section 4.4.1, addresses this criticism. I have already discussed the idea that I am not claiming that my research is conducted from an objective standpoint and that I do not think this would be possible, given my previous personal involvement as a practitioner in the two settings. However, by reflecting on my role in the research and the methods used throughout the research process, I will be able to take a step back from the research and think in more objective terms about what I am doing.

#### **4.11 Naturalistic enquiry in relation to the case study approach**

The qualitative nature of my research means that it is unlikely to conform to the conventionally accepted criteria for trustworthiness: namely internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. These criterion assume that the research is in search of a concrete 'truth'. This 'truth' must be uncovered in a rigorous fashion which eliminates bias which could arise from influencing factors such as inappropriate selection of participants, unreliable testing or subjectivity on the part of the researcher. I have already discussed the fact that I am not claiming that my research is objective, or that it will arrive at any definitive, 'true' conclusions. However, it is still my intention to conduct the research in a rigorous fashion, so that I remain 'answerable' (Bahktin, 1990) to the participants, as discussed in chapter two, and so that the research might justifiably be used to suggest improvements to early years practice when working with parents.



Although my findings will not be definitive, they need to be valid and robust. It is useful to refer here to Guba and Lincoln's criteria for trustworthiness (1989) and to demonstrate how they apply to my own research. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and each is addressed below, in sections 4.11.1 to 4.11.3.

#### **4.11.1 Credibility**

Credibility is defined by Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.296) as the way in which a researcher ensures that, "*the reconstructions that have been arrived at via the inquiry are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities.*" In other words, the research findings must be judged as a credible representation of reality or realities by all of the participants in the research study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest the following strategies as among those which can ensure credibility in qualitative research:

- prolonged engagement
- persistent observation
- peer debriefing
- member checks

The following table 4.3 illustrates how I plan to use these strategies.

<b>Table 4.3 Credibility checks</b>			
<b>Prolonged engagement</b>	<b>Persistent observation</b>	<b>Peer debriefing</b>	<b>Member checks</b>
Researcher to spend time in each setting prior to beginning interviews, group work etc.	Planned field work to involve engagement in settings on weekly basis for at least half a term	Initial and further data analysis to be shared with peer group of fellow Ph.D. students at CREC learning circle	Researcher to visit Nurseries after field work completed to discuss research with participants
Existing relationships with some of the participants as previously taught at schools	Range of methods used e.g. questionnaires, interviews, group work, documentation, to ensure triangulation of findings	Regular meetings with Director of Studies and other members of supervisory team to discuss findings and methods	Written summary of findings to be provided to participants before submission of thesis
Planned field work to involve engagement in settings on weekly basis for at least half a term		Presentations with discussion at BECERA and EECERA early years conferences, subject to acceptance of papers.	

#### **4.11.2 Transferability**

Although my research is very much concerned with the real lives and experiences of participants, the concepts underpinning the research are part of a wider debate about society and the role that schools, teachers and parents should play in the evolution of society, as discussed in chapter two. Hence I need to ensure that my findings are 'transferable'. Transferability, as opposed to external validity, is

defined as ensuring that the researcher provides, “*the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility.*” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p 316). By ensuring that the report of the case study includes what Geertz (1973) referred to as 'thick descriptions', I am able to demonstrate the transferability of my findings. In other words, once written up, the case studies will need to provide enough information about the settings and the participants to enable other practitioners to make a judgement as to whether the research findings may be relevant to their own practice.

As well as meaning that the data generated by the research must be suitably 'thick', the criteria of transferability also means that it must be carefully and thoroughly analysed. Analysis methods are discussed in detail in section 4.21. The use of a conceptual framework, discussed in chapter two, is an important element in consideration of the 'transferability' of my research. Examination of findings, for example through the lens of Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of 'field' and 'habitus' and Bhabha's (1994) idea of the "third space" will aid practitioners in making a judgement with regards to transferability of the findings.

#### **4.11.3 Dependability and Confirmability**

At the same time as reflecting on my position as a researcher in relation to the research and acknowledging a degree of subjectivity, I also need to ensure that my research findings are dependable and confirmable. In other words, are they as true a reflection of the thoughts and views of participants as possible? Guba

and Lincoln (1989) suggest that dependability can be achieved through the use of an 'audit trail'. Each stage of the research process must be carefully documented so that it can be scrutinised by others both during and at the end of the research study. In my own research, all interviews and group discussions will be tape recorded (with the permission of participants) and transferred onto hard disk and each step of the research process will be recorded in a research diary. The research data will be collated in the form of a clip log (see section 4.19) to enable interviews and group discussions to be searched for particular segments of data. As discussed above in relation to credibility, opportunities for peer review and member checks have been built into the research design.

#### **4.12 Grounded theory in relation to the case study approach**

If the research is to truly reflect participants' perceptions, I must avoid jumping to conclusions, in the sense of relating data to theories before it has been considered from the point of view of the participants (Glaser, 1978). For this reason, when it comes to analysing data from the case study, I intend to adopt some of the methods used in grounded theory. It is important to use this approach to data analysis, where categories emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data, since the research is considering participants' perceptions. As Charmaz (2006, p.46) asserts: "*Careful attention to coding furthers our attempts to understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from our research participants' view.*"

However, if the research is to lead to recommendations for future practice, it needs to be relevant to other early years workers and to other families. Thus as well as taking a 'bottom up' approach to data analysis, a 'top down' approach must also be used. To address this need, I will make use of my conceptual framework (fig 2.1) to analyse the data. Once I am sure that I have developed categories and subcategories which reflect the participants' perceptions, I can relate these perceptions to key concepts and theories. For example, the data can be coded according to the notions of 'field', 'habitus' and "third space" already discussed. Once the data has been coded and categorised, perceptions of the involvement of parents in each setting will be written up as two case studies. Then the two case studies can be compared and contrasted with each other, to see where similarities and differences lie (Patton, 2002). These similarities and differences can then be evaluated in order to draw some conclusions and to make recommendations for future practice.

#### **4.13 methods for Data Collection**

This section of the chapter outlines the methods I have selected for collecting data. I begin by examining the reasoning behind the selection of my methods (sections 4.13.1 and 2), before describing how each method will be used in the research (sections 4.13.3 to 4.13.9).

#### **4.13.1 Collecting data: finding the best methods**

The first method of data collection which I considered was the use of one-to-one interviews. In a small-scale research study such as my own, interviews have several advantages. Firstly, they are easy to manage and confidentiality can be guaranteed. Interviews also lend themselves to relatively straightforward analysis, particularly if they are structured or semi-structured. When working with participants who may speak little or no English, interviews allow for the presence of a translator in a way that questionnaires may not.

Interviewing does present several disadvantages, both in general and in particular relating to my research. Interviews are time consuming. Robson (2002) points out that each interview should take at least half an hour in order to be of value. It is likely that more than one interview would be needed with each participant in order to elicit in-depth ideas and opinions. In my own research, this presents a practical difficulty. If I am to include all parents, including those who speak little or no English, who would be willing to spend the necessary hours acting as translator? Interviewing teachers in the settings could also prove problematic, given the time pressures that they experience.

The question of bias in interviews is difficult to overcome. As Robson (2002) asserts, even when a researcher has carefully worded questions to avoid bias, the way the questions are asked and answers received can influence the interviewee, albeit unwillingly. In my own research, the issue of bias is further complicated by the existing relationships between participants and the researcher.

As Clark and Moss (2001) point out, direct questioning is not an effective approach to gathering data where very young children are concerned. In both settings in which my research is to be conducted, I have been a teacher. This is likely to affect children's response to questions, as they will be anxious to please an adult seen to be in a position of responsibility in the school. Thus, data collected through interviewing is more likely to reflect what children think are the 'right' answers to questions posed, rather than their real opinions and ideas. Clark and Moss (2001) recommend using a mixture of methods when trying to capture children's voices: in their own work, this includes observations, child conferencing, photographs, tours of the physical environment and involving children in making maps.

Working with parents using interviews could present similar difficulties. Brenner (1981, p.44) points out that, "*to some extent, all interviews are seen as threatening by those being interviewed.*" In my own research, issues of class and race could increase this perception. I have already discussed the barriers which racial differences can create between researcher and research participant. In the case of a middle class researcher interviewing working class parents, this

difficulty is compounded. Hoinville and Jowell (1978) found that when an interviewee was aware of 'considerable social distance' between herself and the interviewer, she was unlikely to give full and accurate details of her behaviour and attitudes.

A further issue which needs careful consideration before interviews could take place is the existing relationships between myself as a teacher with parents in both settings. We have already discussed the power relationships which exist between parents and teachers, and the way these relationships are perpetuated in the field of education. It seems likely that parents would be reluctant to talk about anything in interview which they believe could be viewed negatively by the teacher as interviewer. Research has shown that interviewees tend to "*exaggerate where self-esteem is involved, and to be evasive where self-criticism is involved*" (Hoinville and Jowell, 1978, p. 21). I would argue that parents being interviewed by a researcher they have known as a teacher are more likely to do the opposite. Parents in both settings are likely to lack the confidence to openly criticise, or appear to criticise, the school or its staff. They are more likely to give answers which they feel will portray themselves as 'a good parent' in the eyes of the teacher. I need to consider more effective ways of collecting data which will ensure that a truthful picture of parents' and children's perspectives can be portrayed in the case studies.

Interviewing teachers would not involve the same issues of power, race and class, but nevertheless needs to be approached carefully. Simons (1981) suggests interviewing the Head teacher first, before talking to other members of staff. This



avoids causing teachers concern over whether their opinions might be presented to the Head teacher during his/her interview.

#### **4.13.2 Group work and 'codifications'**

The work of Paulo Freire, related in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), describes a way of working with research participants which empowers individuals and groups and ensures that their voice is heard. Freire asserts that investigators and people should work as co-investigators, rather than research being 'carried out' by one person on a group of others. He argues that in the context of education: "*One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people.*" (Freire, 1996, p.76). In the same way, my research methods need to allow the parent participants to initiate the process of articulating and analysing views and ideas. A list of interview questions is unlikely to achieve this, however carefully they are worded and structured. Freire goes on to argue that failure to respect people's view of the world when instigating an educational program constitutes 'cultural invasion, however well intentioned. If my research methods perpetuate cultural invasion, the research will reinforce the imbalance of power between parents and teachers which I am anxious to avoid.

Freire describes the use of 'codifications' in order to elicit meaningful responses from participants which get to the heart of their individual and group concerns. A codification represents a situation familiar to participants, often in the form of a photograph or a drawing. Because a codification is abstract, it allows participants

to reflect on a recognisable situation through dialogue with each other in a non-threatening way. Through dialogue and reflection, participants recognise themselves in this situation and begin to see how they themselves acted in a similar situation. Freire cites the example of a study of aspects of alcoholism in Santiago, in which the researcher made use of codifications. The use of a codification enabled a group of tenement residents to talk freely about their opinions and experiences of alcoholism. As Freire (1996, p.99) points out:

*"He probably would not have elicited the above responses if he had presented the participants with a questionnaire he had elaborated himself...In their comments on the codification of an existential situation they could recognize, and in which they could recognize themselves, they said what they really felt."*

In my own research, the use of photographs with adult and child participants in group discussion presents several advantages. Firstly, it should ensure that my influence on the discussion is minimal, since dialogue will be stimulated by the photographs and not by a list of questions formulated in advance. Discussion could then follow themes elaborated by the participants themselves. Working with parents and children in groups should minimise the threatening nature of speaking freely in the presence of a teacher/researcher. Groups could meet on more than one occasion within the time available for research, and translators could be available within each group. Although bias could not be completely ruled out, it could thus be minimised.

In their research into children's perspectives on the purpose of Nursery education, Evans and Fuller (1998) found that children could consider abstract concepts if embedded in a concrete activity: in this instance, role play. In a similar way,

children in my study could benefit from the use of codifications such as photographs if presented in the activity of book making. Children in both Nurseries have experience of making books with photographs, and enjoy the activity. Discussion about parental involvement would naturally arise if making a book containing photographs of parents and children. If a group of children has ownership of their own book, the issue of giving the 'right' answers could be minimised.

As I have already said, it is important that the research participants' voice is heard truthfully in this research. I do not wish the participants to feel that the research is something which is being done *to* them, rather that it is being shaped *with* them. I have already discussed my concerns about the potential for my research to perpetuate oppression of participants and to encourage symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore my research methods need to be carefully thought through in order to avoid these pitfalls. In consideration of these issues, I have developed a set of principles which my research should adhere to, namely:

the research should be about

- representing the voices of participants as truthfully as possible
- gathering rich, valid, reliable data
- building trust between participants and myself
- encouraging dialogue with participants
- allowing participants to have ownership of the research
- involving participants in shaping the research process

- considering the notion of 'answerability' (Bakhtin,1990)

It is based on these principles that I intend to use the research methods outlined below, in table 4.4:

<b>Table 4.4 Research methods</b>			
<b>Participants</b>	Teachers	Parents	Children
<b>Methods for collecting data</b>	Questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews. See section 4.15	Group work, to include discussion prompted by photographs. See section 4.16	Book making activity using photographs of parents, teachers and children. See section 4.17

#### ***4.13.3 Sampling and Recruiting Participants***

Having discussed the issues around my role as a researcher and power relationships at length, I am wary of perpetuating any kind of imbalance of power through the selection of participants at Orchard Road. I do not want any of the parents to feel that their views are more valued than others. Since all of the families at Orchard Road are of 'British Asian' origin, all of their experiences are valuable to the research. For this reason, all of the parents at the Nursery will be invited to attend the initial meeting. Group meetings can then be arranged according to who wishes to take part, with a maximum of eight parents in a group to allow all to participate in the discussions. At Forest Hill, there is only one child of 'British Asian' origin, whose mother has agreed to take part in the research. At each setting, I intend to interview the Headteacher and all members of Nursery staff.

#### **4.13.4 confidentiality**

In my study, complete confidentiality can not be guaranteed for all participants. Adults participating in focus groups share experiences and views with each other as well as with the researcher. They will need to understand the importance of respecting confidentiality within the group, as well as being assured that individuals will not be named in any reporting of the research. Although it can be argued that children cannot understand the full implications of being involved in research and of confidentiality, they have a right to know what the research involves and that they can choose whether to participate or not. I will need to explain to them who might read the final thesis and how their views will be represented. Children will need to understand that they will not be identified in the research.

#### **4.14 Initial field work**

As an outsider to the settings, I cannot be a fully participant observer, but I can use the concept of participant observation to help me build up trust with participants. Reay (1998) describes how she spent time getting to know her research participants and their lives before beginning her research into mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling. In a similar way, if I am to gain the trust of participants then to begin with I will need to spend time in each Nursery setting, getting to know teachers, parents and children. I will need to talk to them about my research and about myself. I will need to ensure that participants are used to seeing me helping out in the Nursery, to make my

presence less threatening. I will also need to spend time working alongside teachers in the Nursery to give staff time to talk to me and to get to know me. Thus, before beginning any formal data collection, I will spend up to four weeks in each of the settings, getting to know staff, parents and children. This will be a time to talk informally with parents, play with the children and help teachers in the setting. Participants need to feel that they can trust me, firstly before they are willing to take part in the research and secondly to feel able to be honest in their contributions to discussions. I am also aware that I am relying on the support of staff members to be able to carry out my research in the settings. It is important that they feel that I am trustworthy and that I can be supportive of their work in the Nurseries before they will be willing to give up valuable time for the research interviews. Once the interviews and group work begins, I will continue to spend working in the settings, to allow me to observe the involvement of parents during the day-to-day running of the Nurseries.

## 4.15 Teacher Participant Questionnaires and Interviews

The following questionnaire will form a basis for the practitioner interviews:

1. Where did you go to school?
2. What are your main memories of being at school?
3. Are you from a working class, middle class or upper class background?
4. What is your ethnic origin?
5. Do you believe parents should be involved in Nursery education? why? why not?
6. What kinds of parental involvement exist in the Nursery at the moment?
7. When and how do you let parents know what is happening in the Nursery?
8. When and how do parents let you know what is happening to their child at home?
9. What are the advantages of parents being involved in their children's Nursery education?
10. What are the disadvantages?
11. What things do you find difficult when working with parents?
12. What things do you find easier ?
13. Whose job is it to make sure that parents and teachers get along well?
14. What impression do you try to give to parents about yourself and about the Nursery?
15. What do parents at this school think about parental involvement?
16. What makes "a good parent" as far as school is concerned?
17. When and how do you discuss parental involvement in the Nursery?
18. How do you think parental involvement will change in the future?

## 4.16 Parent Group Meetings

I have planned the parent groups using a mixture of approaches to collecting data. On reflection, this is partly an explicit decision with relation to the methodology, but partly because I feel more comfortable with a mixture of activities. Having worked as a teacher of children and then adults for over ten years, I think that maybe part of me is approaching the planning for the group meetings in a similar way to which I approached planning lessons for children and adults I taught. Methodologically speaking, I am aware that I do not want parents to feel under pressure in any way, so particularly in the early meetings I plan to use activities to stimulate discussion and to give parents something practical to engage with, rather than needing to contribute to discussion all the way through each meeting.

The activities I will use are loosely based on ideas from an Open University (1997) study pack designed for parents, *Confident Parents, Confident Children*, which was suggested to me as a starting point by one of my supervisors. As I have already discussed, I wish to allow the parents to lead the discussion in the group sessions as much as possible. For this reason, I have planned questions and activities intended to stimulate discussion rather than a formal interview schedule for each meeting.

All parents whose children attended the Nursery will be invited to the first meeting. Translators in Mirpuri and Bengali will be present. The main areas of



discussion at the meeting will be:

- my professional background
- the aims of the research project
- confidentiality
- the right of participants to withdraw from the research at any time
- the locations, dates and times of future meetings

The planned schedule for each subsequent meeting is outlined below, in tables 4.5 to 4.9

<b>Table 4.5 Meeting Two</b>		
<b>What do I want to find out at this meeting?</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Questions</b>
What do parents know about day to day life in the Nursery?	Make a list of all the things your children do at Nursery	
How do parents find out what their children have been doing at Nursery?		How do you know what your children do at Nursery?
What was parents' own experience of Nursery as a child?		Did you go to a Nursery class or similar as a child?  Where did you live when you were three and four?

<b>Table 4.6 Meeting Three</b>		
<b>What do I want to find out at this meeting?</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Which adults play a part in the children's lives?	Who lives with your child? Who are the important adults in your family for your child? Smiley faces activity	
Are these adults involved in Nursery life?		Have these adults been to Nursery? What do these adults know about Nursery?

<b>Table 4.7 Meeting Four</b>		
<b>What do I want to find out at this meeting?</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Questions</b>
What do the parents and children do when they are not in the Nursery?		What do your children like to do at home? What kinds of activities do you like to do with your children?
The role which religion plays in the lives of the parents and their children.		What influence does religion have on family life?
Does religion impact on parental involvement? How?		How does religion affect your child's schooling?

<b>Table 4.8 Meeting Five</b>		
<b>What do I want to find out at this meeting?</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Questions</b>
What do parents think should happen at Nursery?	Cards to fill in: things the children have learned since being in Nursery.	
What are parents' expectations for their child's learning in Nursery?		Does what the children have learned match your expectations for their learning?

<b>Table 4.9 Meeting Six</b>		
<b>What do I want to find out at this meeting?</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Questions</b>
What do parents think makes a 'good teacher'?	Make a job advert for a new teacher at your child's Nursery. What would make a 'good teacher' for your child?	
How do parents support their children's learning?		What things do you do to support your children's Nursery education?
What do parents think about parent involvement in Nursery?		Use of photographs to stimulate discussion on parental involvement. Photographs used will show parents, teachers and children in different scenarios in school e.g. sharing books, craft workshops, Eid parties.

#### **4.17 Book making with children**

The children will be given a choice of paper and other book making materials such as stapler, sellotape, etc. I will also provide a range of photographs for them to use in their books, depicting parents, teachers and children in different scenarios in school, as for the final parents' meeting. The children will be encouraged to talk about the photographs and what they think of the activities shown.

## 4.18 The Pilot Study

The pilot study has been conducted at a large primary school in Birmingham. 90% of the children attending the school speak English as an additional language. Of these children, the vast majority are of Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian origin. The aims of the pilot study are as follows:

- to test and refine the interview schedule for staff and parents
- to test and refine the group work plan for parents
- to test and refine the book making activity with children
- to identify any practical difficulties in carrying out the research
- to highlight any potential gaps in the data that may result from my planned research methods

During the pilot study, I have interviewed all members of staff in the Nursery using the teacher interview schedule. I met with a group of 8 parents on five occasions, using the meeting plans outlined above. Their children all took part in the book making activity.

The main findings of the pilot study were as follows:

- parent groups needed to meet for at least three sessions before becoming confident enough to give opinions, particularly concerning issues which they are concerned about.
- as well as the parent groups, there is value in talking to parents about their experiences individually.
- one interview with each member of staff is not enough: they seem to go away on reflect on what they have said, then want to add to it.
- two interviews with each member of staff is difficult to organise: giving a questionnaire to fill in before the interview is more effective.
- some children need to work in their home language if the book making activity is to be successful.
- parents need to be invited to participate in the research verbally, as well as being given a letter with translation.
- participants want to know quite a lot of detail about the research at the initial meeting.
- it is helpful to give Nursery staff a 'crib sheet' about the research, as parents will question them about it on the days when I am not in the Nursery.
- parents appreciate a reminder about the group meetings one day in advance.

These findings mean that I will be providing the teachers at Orchard Road and Forest Hill with a copy of the interview schedule in the form of a written

questionnaire before conducting the interview based on discussing their answers in more depth. I will also be asking parents for permission to use data from one-to-one conversations which may happen during my time in the two Nurseries. I will need to provide translators for the activities with children as well as for parent meetings. I will also be using an information sheet for the staff in both settings to refer to should they be questioned by parents in my absence.

#### **4.19 Organising and Collating the Data**

I am expecting to generate a considerable amount of data through the use of interviews, questionnaires and group work. In addition, I will need to collect documentation which relates to parental involvement in each setting in order to write up each case study. I need to ensure that I can keep track of all the data as I collect it and organise it in such a way that it will be accessible for analysis in a rigorous fashion. To achieve this, I intend to use a clip log approach to organising the data, as suggested by one of my supervisors. This will involve tape recording each interview and group work session using a hand held recorder, with the permission of participants. These recordings will then be transferred to my computer hard disk. I will listen to each recording and divide it into small sections of time.

Each section will be logged and coded according to 1) the participant who is speaking on the clip, 2) the time counter for the beginning and end of the clip and 3) the subject under discussion, as in the example shown in fig 4.2:



cli0:30/0:45  
Description:  
lived in UK all life  
  
**Recorded on:** 2006-  
03-18

**Fig 4.2 Example of clip from clip log**

This clip log will be recorded using Quotations Manager software (Smith, 2006), which will enable me to add further codes to each clip once I am at the stage of data analysis (see chapter six).

In addition, I will record field notes and reflections in my research diary, in a series of paper notebooks which I have used to record my thoughts since beginning the reading for this research project. These notes will include my observations of the two settings and, with permission from participants, they may also include informal conversations with individuals. I will also use my research diary to reflect on my role in the research and the methods used.

## 4.20 methods for Data Analysis

The concerns which prompted my research are focused on the real lives of the children and parents with whom I worked. My aim is to contribute to the improvement of these real lives in terms of giving a voice to parents, teachers and children. Therefore, my research needs to be grounded in and reflective of these participants' real life experiences.

As discussed above in section 4.12, it is important to use an approach to data analysis which allows categories to emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data. But in addition to this, I also need to ensure that my findings meet Guba and Lincoln's criterion of 'transferability' as discussed in section 4.11.2.

There are pitfalls to avoid when analysing data for this research. Firstly, it would be easy to make assumptions about events and conversations without considering the subjective nature of research. This issue is partly addressed by adopting a reflexive approach, as already discussed. It also requires a careful consideration of the use of language by the researcher and by participants: "*No researcher is neutral because language confers form and meaning on observed realities.*" (Charmaz, 2006, p.46). As well as addressing this issue when planning research and considering terms to be used in the field work and written report (see discussion of terminology in chapter one), the use of language needs to be carefully considered when analysing data. The use of "*in vivo*" codes (Glaser, 1978) can enable the researcher to reflect the view of participants through



reflecting on their use of language. 'In vivo' codes use words adopted by participants to describe events or phenomena, which may reveal hidden assumptions or accepted meanings. In using 'in vivo' codes, the researcher can stay close to the meaning of the participants themselves, rather than risking imposing their own meaning onto participants' words.

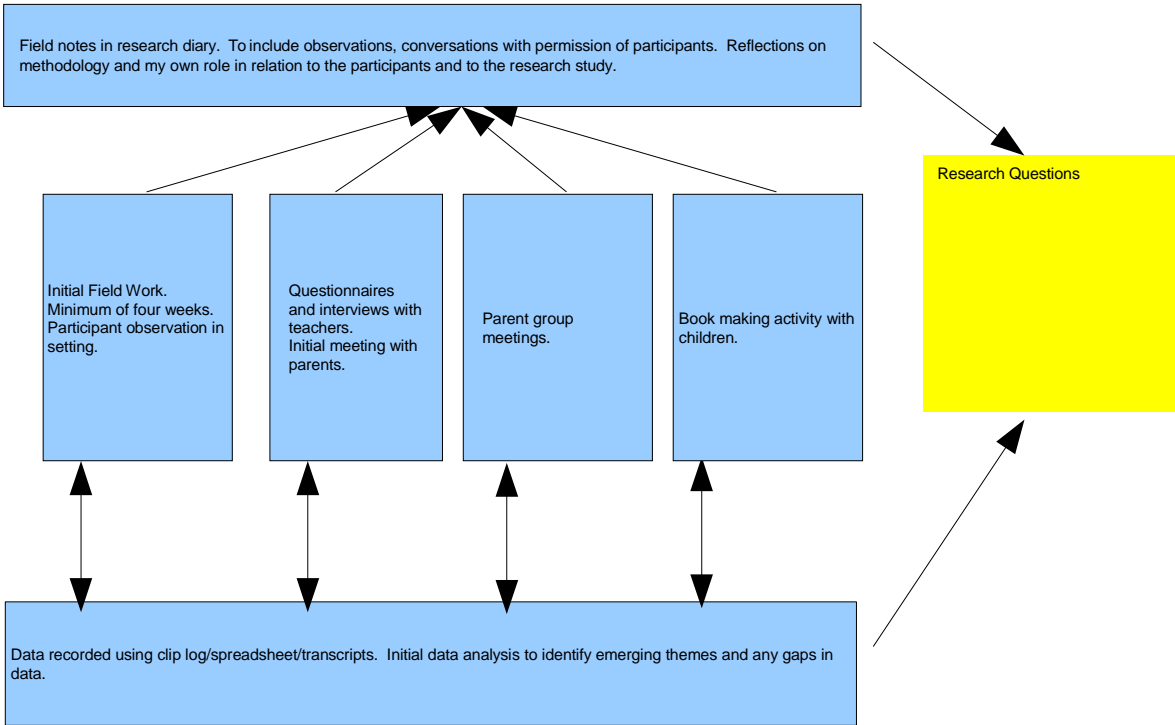
Another potential difficulty in conducting data analysis concerns the possibility of overlooking data which does not fit emerging patterns or themes. It is important to consider this data carefully, since data which does not fit a pattern or theme can actually serve to strengthen our understanding of that pattern or theme (Patton, 2002). This data, sometimes referred to as the 'negative case', may change or broaden a pattern or it may cast doubt on an emerging pattern. However, if the findings of the research are to be robust, negative cases must be looked for and carefully considered.

Finally, difficulties can arise when coding and categorising data using a 'bottom up' approach. A criticism of this method is that it can lead to data being fragmented and decontextualised (Bryman, 2001). In part, this difficulty can be addressed in my research by the use of a conceptual framework to bring ideas and patterns together in a structured way. It is also addressed by the adoption of the Bourdieuan concept of reflexivity in research, which has already been discussed. The use of Guba and Lincoln's criteria for trustworthiness (1989), which are discussed above in relation to data collection and analysis, are a further safeguard against fragmentation and decontextualisation.

## 4.21 Summary of Methods for Collecting, Organising and Analysing Data

The following diagram, fig 4.3 illustrates how I intend to collect, organise and analyse the data in this research study.

**Fig 4.3 Data collection, collation and analysis**



Thus my research diary will serve as a way of organising field notes and of reflecting on the research journey. Data will be organised into the clip log, spreadsheets and transcripts as it is collected. This will enable me to avoid being overwhelmed by the amount of data at the end of the field work. More importantly, it should help me to identify any gaps in the data as the field work progresses, so that I can return to the participants to discuss these gaps if necessary. The following chapter presents the results of the data collection and the early stages of analysis in the form of the two case studies.

## Chapter Five

### The Case Studies

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the case studies of parental involvement in the Orchard Road (sections 5.2 and 5.3) and Forest Hill (section 5.4 and 5.5) Nursery classes. In organising the data from the two settings and writing up the case studies, I need to consider my decisions carefully in relation to answerability to the participants. One of my main concerns with regard to answerability concerns the need to enable individual participants to "*name their worlds*" (Freire, 1996: see discussion in chapter two). This concern has led me to consider writing up each participant's contributions to interviews or group discussions individually. However, I have rejected this idea for three reasons. Firstly, as the parent and child participants at Orchard Road are involved in group discussions rather than individual interviews, the sense of these discussions will be fragmented if each individual's contribution is presented separately. Secondly, as part of my research is to examine the role played by structures, in relation to concepts such as field (Bourdieu, 1977), I need the case studies to paint a picture of the ethos of each

setting as a whole in regard to parental involvement, as well as examining individual attitudes and relationships within it. Therefore it makes sense to present the data from all of the teacher participants' interviews and questionnaires together. The third reason concerns the experience of the readers of this thesis. Having tried to write up the data provided by each individual separately, I realise that the reader is then required to hold a lot of information in mind in order to understand the similarities and differences between individuals' perceptions of parental involvement as revealed in the case studies. So, for each case study, firstly I present the data from the teacher participants and then the data from the parent and child participants. The data from participants is written up in this order so that I can demonstrate how the schools try to approach parental involvement before discussing how parents and children perceive these approaches. A summary of the clip log from each interview and group discussion can be found in appendix one.

In each case study, italicised references to the clip log are provided in brackets, for example (*cri0:00/0:25*). Written answers to the teacher questionnaires are referenced using the number of the question, for example (*question 9*).

Contributions from the children are referenced using the child's pseudonym, for example (*Raheema*). Although I had planned to use a clip log to collate data from the book making activity, in reality there was a lot of talking between myself and the children about matters such as where to stick the pictures and how to join pages together, which were not directly useful as data. This meant that organising the data using a clip log did not prove to be helpful. Instead, I used a spreadsheet to record data which made relevant comments more easy to find (Messenger,

2011). An example of a data spreadsheet can be found in appendix one.

References to field notes made in my research diary include the initials *fn* between a code for the participant or setting name and the number of the note, for example (*orfn01*) is from the first page of field notes made about Orchard Road Nursery class. A sample of field notes is also included in appendix one.

The two case studies are organised into subsections as a result of the first stage in my data analysis. In order to present each case study in a coherent manner I use subsections which relate to what the participants talk about in their questionnaires, interviews and group discussions. Although inevitably influenced by the questions I ask participants, the titles of these subsections also reflect the emerging concerns of the participants. As such, as well as providing a way in which to organise the data into an understandable narrative, they also constitute an early stage in data analysis.

## **5.2 Orchard Road Nursery Class**

The case study of parental involvement in the Nursery at Orchard Road is organised as follows. Firstly, I provide a description of the school and where it is situated (section 5.2.1) Then in section 5.2.2 I introduce the teacher participants in the study. The data from their interviews and questionnaires is presented in the following sections:

***5.2.3 The importance of parental involvement***

***5.2.4 Opportunities for parental involvement***

***5.2.5 'Walking the walk': Teacher expectations of parental involvement***

***5.2.6 'Talking the talk': English as the language of success***

***5.2.7 Building relationships***

***5.2.8 Parents' changing cultures***

Next I present the data from the parent and child participants, which is organised into the following sections:

***5.3.2 What parents know about Nursery***

***5.3.3 Parent expectations of Nursery***

***5.3.4 Children's views on parental involvement***

***5.3.5 Transitions***

***5.3.6 Speaking English and home languages***

***5.3.7 Life at home***

***5.3.8 Relationships***

***5.2.1. Orchard Road Nursery Class***

Orchard Road is a large primary school close to a city centre in the West Midlands. At the time of the field work for this study, there are 428 children on role, including 55 who attend the Nursery class. Of these 55 children, 23 are in the Nursery class on a full time basis and 32 of the children attend for either five morning or five afternoon sessions. The proportion of children attending Orchard Road who are entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. The vast majority of children attending the school are of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, with Mirpuri and Sylheti being the main languages spoken. All of the children who attend the Nursery are from Muslim families of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin.



Orchard Road school is housed in a large Victorian building at the end of a street of Victorian terraced houses. According to the Office for National Statistics, the neighbourhood in which the school is situated is one of the most economically deprived in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Most of the children who attend the school live in the streets immediately surrounding it. There are no pupils attending the school from outside the local area. The nursery class is situated at one end of the building, with its own entrance for parents and children. The outdoor area in the nursery is shared with the two Reception classes. The nursery consists of one large room which is divided into areas according to use, such as a painting area, role play area and so on. A smaller adjoining room is known as the 'quiet room' and is used for stories and small group activities. At other times it is available for the children to access freely and play with construction toys or listen to stories at the 'listening station'.

### ***5.2.2 The teacher participants***

#### **Chris, Headteacher**

Chris is the headteacher at Orchard Road School. He has been in post at Orchard Road School for five years, having previously been the headteacher of a junior school in the same city. Chris has also worked as a deputy head in a school which he says is “*similar to Orchard Road in terms of size and ethnicity of pupils.*” (*cri1:47/2:05*) He describes himself as being white, middle class and British and he has lived in the UK all his life (*cri0:23/0:45*) .

### **Val, member of the Senior Management Team**

Val has worked at Orchard Road school for more than twenty years and is well known by many of the families in the local area. She is a member of the school senior management team and has curriculum responsibility for Literacy. Val teaches groups of children throughout the school as well as having some non-contact time to spend on her management duties. Although Val was not originally invited to participate in the research, I interviewed her on the suggestion of the headteachers. The suggestion was made since Val has worked with local families for a considerable amount of time and her perceptions of parental involvement are valued by the headteacher.

### **Roma, Nursery teacher and Early Years Co-ordinator**

Roma is the Nursery teacher and Early Years Co-ordinator at Orchard Road, so she is also responsible for overseeing the work of the two Reception classes. Roma had been working at the school for just over a year at the time of the field work. She describes herself as of Indian origin and from a working to middle class background (*questions 2 and 3*). Roma was born and grew up in the West Midlands (*question 1*). Roma speaks English as her first language.

### **Annisa, teaching assistant/Teaching Assistant**

Annisa has worked at Orchard Road school for just over twelve years. She has worked as a teaching assistant throughout the school, but has been based in the Nursery for the past six years, working with four different teachers during this time. Annisa was born and educated in Bombay, India and still has contact with

friends and family members living there (*question 1*). Annisa came to live in the UK more than twenty years ago. I know from my own time at Orchard Road school that Annisa is a well known and trusted member of the school community. Annisa speaks Mirpuri and can understand and speak some Sylheti and she is often parent's main point of contact with the school. Annisa dresses in traditional Salwar Kameez, like all of the mothers seen in the Nursery. At the beginning of each Nursery session, Annisa often has a group of parents around her in conversation with her and with each other (*orfn15*). In her interview, Roma talks about her dependence on Annisa for translating and communicating with parents. Annisa also shares her religious background with the parents: she is a Sunni Muslim.

### ***5.2.3 The importance of parental involvement***

A copy of the school prospectus, written in English, is given to all parents when their children join the Nursery at Orchard Road. The prospectus stresses the value placed on partnership with parents and the community: for example,

*“I [the headteacher] value the partnership that exists between the community and the school. This strong and active partnership is vital if we are to maintain and develop a rich learning environment which inspires each child to develop their individual talents skills and abilities.”*

(Orchard Road school prospectus).

In keeping with the school vision presented in the prospectus, all of the teacher participants acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in the life of

the school. In his interview, Chris was keen to stress his commitment to involving parents as “*a good idea in theory and in practice*” (cri2:30/2:41). He is aware of the arguments in favour of involving parents in their children's education: he acknowledges that “*parents are the child's primary teacher*” (cri9:45/9:55). Chris feels that school should try to follow on from the child's learning at home and, in his words, “*be joined up, not separate.*” (cri10:08/10:43). Roma believes that parental involvement is important as it helps parents to understand and value the place of play in their children's learning (question 9). Annisa also thinks that parents should be involved and take an active part in their children's Nursery education (question 5). She believes that involving parents helps them to understand how their children learn through play and allows them to teach their children at home (question 9). Val does not refer to the importance of parental involvement specifically, but her emphasis on what “*makes the difference*” (val15:20/15:25) throughout her interview points to an assumption that parental involvement is important.

#### **5.2.4 Opportunities for parental involvement at Orchard Road**

During my time at Orchard Road, I hear about a number of opportunities for parental involvement provided by the school. Many of these opportunities are advertised on the noticeboard for Nursery parents, situated in the corridor between the external and internal Nursery entrances. In the week when my research interviews with staff are carried out, the noticeboard contains a wealth of written information for parents (orfn01). It has a poster advertising the Eid Celebration evening for staff and families which was recently held in school. A

second poster advertises the upcoming meeting for parents with the Ofsted inspection team. There is a notice thanking parents for their support for a recent charity appeal in school and another thanking parents for the high levels of attendance at recent parents' evenings. There are adverts for community education courses in driving theory and Asian beauty, to be held in the schools' community room. There is also an invitation to a glass painting workshop open to all parents of children in the school. A list of important dates is provided, including dates for class assemblies to which parents are invited.

As headteacher, Chris sees himself as responsible for overseeing strategies for parental involvement, but stresses that he is reliant on the staff team as a whole to support the implementation of such strategies. He cites Nursery home visits and the stay and play group as examples of how staff at the school involves parents early on in their relationship with school, although he admits that only a few children attend the stay and play group. Chris has had “*one or two*” (cri3:55/4:00) requests from parents to work as volunteers in school, but he sees this as an area he would like to develop. He sees the issue of organising volunteer help in school as “*a challenge*” (cri4:05/4:16), partly because of the bureaucracy involved in organising Criminal Records Bureau checks. At present, there are more requests for placements in school as a requirement for courses such as NVQ3 in Early Years than Chris can accommodate. As he points out, most students asking for a placement need to work with children in the foundation stage or key stage one and he “*doesn't want to overload the lower years with help*” (cri4:51/5:07). In his interview, Chris names several ways in which parents are offered the opportunity to come into school: reading with children at the

beginning of the day in Key Stage One, workshops on parenting matters and curriculum areas, twice yearly parents evenings and other information evenings for parents on subjects such as SATs testing.

Roma lists several ways in which parents are involved in the life of the Nursery: parent induction days, home visits, Nursery open days, informal daily chats, parents staying for the first ten to fifteen minutes of the Nursery session, school newsletters, the Nursery noticeboard, messages via other adults or older siblings and telephone calls (*questions 7 and 8*). Annisa sees the success of parental involvement as being a kind of 'domino effect': once some parents are involved, other parents will see the children of those parents making good progress and want to become involved themselves (*question 18*).

It is noticeable that most of these opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's learning take place in the school space, with parents expected to be physically present in school to take part. Moreover, all of the opportunities for parental involvement discussed are initiated by the teachers. Only Val even considers the possibility of parents initiating ideas for themselves. When asked what she would like to be able to do as far as parental involvement is concerned, Val answers that she would like parents to "*take the leading role*" (*val9:13/9:15*), which she has never seen any parent do. She sees parents as being very good at coming along to events such as the summer fayre, but as yet she has not seen parents organising their own events or being involved in decision making of any sort. During her time at the school, the only parents Val has known to help out in the classroom have been parents who are studying for a relevant course and

need the classroom experience. Val emphasises the lack of parental involvement in teaching and learning throughout her interview. Later, she tells me that parents do not come into school for the planned open days to watch parents teach.

Val reflects on the difficulty of finding out parents' opinions about teaching and learning in school:

*“Well that's always very hard isn't it, because sometimes you think if you ask them directly they'll say nice things back to you, because that would be what you'd want to hear. I don't think I know what they **truly** think....they'll say 'it's fine, yeah, it's great'. Except if they've got a problem, if they've got a problem they'll come out and tell you, they're not backward in coming to you if there's a difficulty, but difficulties tend to be to do with things like their child being hit by somebody, or hurt by somebody, or something like, some, their property. It doesn't, it's not, not down to teaching and learning, it wouldn't be someone who came in and said, 'I don't think my child's getting a good deal in that class, or, it's more to do with, more sort of, behaviour.’”*

*(val12:45/13:32 )*

She does not think parents would come to talk to teachers about their concerns around behaviour issues to do with their own child, unless, “they were sent for, they would ask [for help].” (*val8:45/8:48*). Val thinks that individuals might have different opinions about school depending on their circumstances at a particular time: “*If they'd had a run in with someone that week, that would totally colour how their whole view of the school is ,but then it would change back again the next week*” (*val14:03/14:09*).

Val, Roma and Annisa all express the opinion that parents needed to be asked for their views on parental involvement. In relation to community classes, Val believes that, *“It’s trying to find what parents want, not what you think they want”* (val3:47/3:53). Roma perceives a need for a designated member of staff to work with parents, with part of their role being, *“Picking up on what they expect. Because we don’t know until we ask”* (rom8:32/8:54). Annisa also feels that there is a need to find out what parents need or want in terms of involvement: *“we need to ask parents about their view on this matter”* (question 15). However, there is no evidence that these points of view have been translated into action in the form of actually involving parents in decision-making.

### ***5.2.5 'Walking the walk': teacher expectations of parents and parental involvement at Orchard Road***

All of the teacher participants express opinions about levels of parental support at Orchard Road, as well as about their own vision for parental involvement. Annisa sees parents' responsibilities as far as Nursery is concerned being to *“teach their children good manners and have positive concern about their children's education”* (question 16). Val has definite ideas about what is the most effective type of parental involvement. She is not a great believer in home work, she does not think that it is homework which *“makes the difference”* (val15:20/15:25). Val prefers more collaborative activities, such as families making costumes for book week. However, she does not think that parents value these activities in the same way and cites examples of parents who bought costumes and were disappointed not to win the competition (val15:20/16:20). Val preferred the home-made



costumes which had obviously been made by family members: *“Cause it shows then that the family are taking, you know they're all working together with the child”* (val16:00/16:04). Similarly, she laughs about teachers sending home a cuddly toy in a rucksack with books to encourage reading together at home, but the children preferring times tables to learn:

*“I mean, they missed the point completely, because it was all about reading, but no, it's times tables and all sort of schooly type things, colouring sheets and, and things they could sit down and do on their own. Yeah, and the whole point of it was that they did it with their families”*

(val16:20/16:52)

Val names other examples of activities which she thinks are valuable for parents to do at home with their children: taking them to places, joining the library with them and reading them stories at night (val16:04/16:12).

In her interview, Roma perceives parents as being supportive of the school, particularly in comparison to groups of parents she has worked with previously (rom0:36/0:45). She sees parents as having high aspirations for their children: *“They want their children to learn, they want them to build the right attitudes to learning”* (rom0:52/0:56). Roma sees parents' high aspirations for their children's learning as being linked to their family values: *“Do you know what I mean? They do expect children to learn, because that's just having family values and they're the old fashioned, you know, their children are special to them.”* (rom8:55/9:00). She thinks that parents value the English education system and want children to be successful within it (rom19:48/19:57). Roma also sees parents as being willing

to take on suggestions (*rom1:07/1:09*) and viewing school success as important, “*because they don't want their children to be a problem*” (*rom3:52/3:54*). She thinks that some parents support the idea of homework for children in the Nursery, although others do not think that children in Nursery need homework (*rom 4:49/5:15*). Roma has tried sending activities home for children and parents to complete together, such as a book made by the children to teach the names of colours in English. However, she says that parents are “*not bothered*” about such activities (*rom1fn06*). Roma feels that the children do not benefit from rich learning experiences at home, which means that providing such experiences is an important part of her role in Nursery (*rom1fn06*). Despite seeing parents as wanting their children to succeed, Roma feels that they struggle to support their children's learning. Roma attributes this partly to what she sees as parents' own lack of formal education (*rom0:57/1:03 and rom 3:55/4:06*). Another perceived barrier to involvement is the difference between the UK education system and those of the parents' home countries. Roma cites the example of the home-school agreement:

*“They don't understand that we have a contract between the parents, the children and the staff at the school. They don't understand the whole value of the home-school agreement. You know, those are the sorts of things they don't understand.”*

*(rom1:43/2:01)*

Roma feels that parents who were not born and brought up in the UK have a fundamentally different approach to school, based on what she thinks their own experience of education might have been (*rom2:18/2:31*). For Roma, these parents have a view of school as being separate from home: “*Most parents think home is home and school is school*” (*rom19:45/19:48*). Chris expresses a similar opinion: “*Many parents here feel that teachers should deal with school. 'Home is home and I will deal with home, and you deal with school'*”. (*cri13:35/13:46*).

Chris sees this as something he would like to change, feeling that there is a need to work on the “*overlap*” between home and school. However, Roma reinforces the idea that teachers should deal with school with her comment about the transition from home to school at the beginning of the school year: “*I can't afford to have them [parents] in, I just take over*” (*rom1 fn05*).

Roma also sees lack of information for parents as a barrier to involvement, particularly with regard to possible extra-curricular activities (*rom2:10/2:18*).

Roma sees other factors contributing to parents' seeming inability to translate their aspirations for children into active support for their learning. One of these is a lack of support for parents from the school itself. Roma feels that parents need the support of a designated teacher:

*“They can't however, support their children. They'd like to but they don't know how to, that's the impression I get. They're very willing to take on suggestions, but I don't think there's enough support in the school, with people, um, working with parents to do that, to give that support, professional support, I must add, rather than just anybody doing it. I think a teacher should be assigned to work with parents.”*

*(rom0:57/1:26)*

The idea of parents needing professional support is one which Roma emphasises in her questionnaire responses and at several points in her interview. In her questionnaire, Roma says:

*“It would be advantageous if the Government could spend money on educating parents and making them take more responsibility of their children when in school. Parenting skills ought to be taught to parents as soon as a baby arrives (from birth) and trained professionals ought to be employed for this purpose and monitor parents/families who require help. Even if parents wish to return to work as soon as they have their baby, a scheme should be in place so that the welfare of the child is being considered.”*

(questions 18 and 19)

In her interview, Roma expresses concern that parents are unsure of how to support very young children's development. She feels that parents need support with caring appropriately for babies and under threes, since they may not sterilise bottles or provide appropriate toys for their youngest children. Again, Roma is talking here about parents who were not born and brought up in the UK. Although she recognises that the parents may have a different approach to raising young children, she does not see this approach as appropriate for life in the UK:

*“[They need] more parenting skills. Because they don't know what's available, they come over, they still put their babies in a wrap because they don't know that Mothercare have strong, proper baby carriers.....All the practical things, because they're good parents, they just don't know how to be good parents in this community, because there are things on offer that they wouldn't even think about at home. They'd go for, do the basics at home, just boil the water, but here we'd sterilise things to make things fresh.”*

(rom9:59/10:34)

Roma thinks that sometimes parents do not get involved in their children's education because they are preoccupied with other concerns (*rom2:44/2:55*). Although at present there are no children from asylum-seeking families in the Nursery, Roma talks about her recent experience of working with parents seeking asylum in the UK as an example of this (*rom2:31/2:44*). With these parents and children, Roma feels that she did not have time to build a relationship with them before they moved on to a different area (*rom3:03/3:17*).

Only Chris demonstrates awareness that the attitude of teachers might contribute to a lack of parental involvement: he also feels that involving parents creates potential for conflict. Chris attributes this partly to his belief that teachers see themselves as experts and this means that they are not as flexible, or as willing to listen to parents, as they could be. He describes teachers as “*not always receptive to parents' knowledge of their own child*” (*cri11:43/11:52*), despite his opinion that “*the evidence*” (*cri11:33/11:35*) suggests that parents know what their children need better than teachers do. The other teachers see barriers to parental involvement as created by the parents' situations or other external factors over which they have little control, such as Roma's feelings about the lack of time she has to fulfil her role as Early Years Co-ordinator.

### **5.2.6 'Talking the talk'. English as the language of success.**

Not only are parents expected to 'walk the walk' of parental involvement, they also need to 'talk the talk' in school. All of the teachers refer to the ability, or lack of ability, of the parents to speak English. At one point in her interview, Roma refers to "*the language*" (rom7:37/7:48). The supremacy of English is assumed to the extent that she does not feel the need to name it here. All of the information provided in the school welcome pack is written in English, with no written translations available. Similarly, all of the information on the Nursery noticeboard is available in English only (orfn01). Chris is unsure about the benefits of formal, written communication with parents. He produces a school newsletter, but this is on what he describes as an "*ad hoc basis*." (cri7:52/8:02) Making the newsletter a regular communication is "*part of his plan*" (cri8:10/8:15) but he finds this hard to manage. Chris has begun to make use of a local translation service so that some communications can be provided for parents in home language: he cites the governors' report as an example. However, he is unsure of the benefits of translating letters for parents and describes the idea as "*more of a courtesy, really*" (cri8:55/9:05). Chris' new idea is to produce written communications on paper printed with a letterhead in the parents' home languages, asking them to come into school if they would like the letter to be translated verbally. Chris feels that there is not much value in translating all written communications since:

*"As I understand it..we put a letter out in Urdu..not many parents could access the Urdu because their language is actually Mirpuri...and, um, Urdu, written down, is not the same. Likewise, if we put a letter out in Bengali... the main dialect spoken...is Sylheti."* (cri9:27/9:34)

Chris becomes quite hesitant at this point in the interview, giving the impression that he is unsure of the exact relationship between the spoken and written forms of home language used by families attending the school. However, despite his reservations, the newsletter is still provided in English, as are all other written communications. No-one seems to have considered the idea that, if parents are unlikely to be able to access a letter written in Urdu, they may be even more unlikely to access the same letter written in English. Val does express reservations about the use of letters: *"Letters are a little bit of a waste of time"* (val4:54/5:02). The reasons which Val gives for letters being a waste of time are not to do with parents' ability to read in English or home language, but are more to do with real life practicalities: letters tend to get lost, forgotten or left in book bags. There seems to be a lack of willingness on the part of the teachers to consider the implications of communicating in English with all parents. From the interview with Chris, the main reason for this lack of willingness may be to do with the amount of time, effort and money which has to be spent on using the translation service.

The emphasis on using English does not just affect the flow of information between school and home. It also has an impact on relationships between parents and teachers at a much deeper level. Roma expresses a feeling of isolation with regard to the parents whose children attend Nursery and those whose children use the stay and play group: *"I feel very isolated. The parents don't know me"* (rom14:37/14:44). This feeling relates partly to the fact that she feels reliant on the teaching assistants to translate for her in conversations with

many of the parents (*rom10:52/11:14*). This is particularly true of her relationships with parents of Bangladeshi origin in the Nursery:

*“I think it's a shame really, because I don't have any contact with them and I don't approach them, they don't approach me and they know it's a language thing and I know it's a language thing. They very rarely come to me, they go straight to Annisa.”*

*(rom11:49/12:12)*

Roma feels that the parents of Bangladeshi origin in the Nursery see her as a teacher as being “*outside their culture*” (*rom12:19/12:25*). She perceives these parents as being more comfortable talking with the teaching assistants and teaching assistants in school (*rom12:04/12:12*). Although Roma can speak a little of the home languages of parents in the Nursery, this is only enough for her to understand their conversations with other members of staff (*rom12:59/13:12*). Roma does not feel confident enough with the spoken languages of Sylheti and Mirpuri to join in with conversations herself.

Annisa believes that some children use home languages more at home because they may have members of their extended families who do not speak any English (*ann6:53/7:09*). Another reason for families “*keeping their own language*” might be if one parents comes to live in the UK from abroad (*ann7:09/7:20*). In this way, speaking home languages is seen as appropriate only when it is the sole means of communication. If individuals **can** speak English, it is assumed that they will. Annisa notices that several of the children's mothers only speak Mirpuri or Sylheti. She does not think that this is due to a lack of opportunities to learn



English but more a choice relating to there being no perceived need to speak English: *“They don't need to learn English, they've got their own community, they don't need to go out, they've got all the community they need”* (ann7:33/7:42). Annisa is the only participant who considers the notion that parents might want to keep their own language. In general, home languages are viewed as creating barriers between home and school: translation needs to be provided, parents who do not speak English are excluded from conversations with the Nursery teacher and it is parents who do speak English who are more confident in their interactions with teachers. The opposing argument, that presenting English as the language of success marginalises families who want to 'keep their own language' and leads to inequitable access to information and relationships, is not considered. Val hints at this when she talks about how she managed to ensure a good attendance at the school Eid celebrations:

*“When we got Sameera out at the gate and people who could explain in their own language, talk to them about it, explain what it was and why we were charging money, etcetera etcetera, that was successful.”*

(val4:44/4:55.)

By speaking to parents in their home language, Sameera was able to explain what was going to happen in detail and encourage more parents to participate in the celebrations. Even in this case, though, Sameera would presumably only have spoken to those parents who share her home language of Mirpuri. So again, the parents and children of Bangladeshi parents are subject to inequitable treatment.

### **5.2.7 Building good relationships**

A considerable amount of talk in the staff interviews concerned the importance of building relationships with individual parents and families. Chris talks positively about the informal contacts which happen between teachers and parents. He stresses the “open door” (*cri7:43/7:46*) policy of the school and says that “many families are open to staff” (*cri6:55/7:00*). He reminds me that it is not unusual for teachers to be invited to the children's homes for tea after school. Chris goes on to tell me that one family had invited all of the teachers in school to their home for lunch to celebrate Eid (*cri7:00/7:21*). Chris sees these relationships as beneficial for parents: “Teachers give informal support to families they know well.” (*cri6:46/6:55*). In his experience, some teachers and parents maintain informal contact even when the parents' child is no longer in the teacher's class (*cri7:21/7:43*). However, Chris himself has little contact with individual parents from the Nursery, explaining that they tend to approach Nursery staff with concerns rather than come to him (*cri13:54/14:11*).

Val also stresses the importance of the daily contact which teachers have with parents: at the school gate at the beginning and end of the day and daily morning reading in the foundation stage and key stage one classes. Although she acknowledges that these opportunities for daily contact diminish as the children grow older and progress through key stage two, Val still believes that individual, personal contact with parents is most effective: “That personal contact, especially if it's in the language they speak, is much better, letters are a little bit of a waste of time.” (*val4:54/5:02*). Val goes for tea with families she knows well

on a regular basis and thinks this helps build relationships:

*“I think that does make, if you know what I mean, a big difference to the children, because they have this idea that you know what they do at home and they know, it's like a very close contact and you tend to get, well I think you have better relationships with children that you've seen at home.”*

*(val 17:19/17:32)*

Val also tells me about the ten or twelve members of staff who went to a child's house for tea at Eid, although she missed this event as she was in a meeting (val17:12/17:17). Val has a clear vision of how she would like relationships to work between herself and parents:

*“I'd like it to be a two way thing. That I could feel that they could say what they felt and I could say what I felt and neither would, we would respect each other's opinion. I mean I would like parents, some parents, to be more critical of things sometimes, and to ask more.”*

*(val14:36/15:54)*

Roma also refers to the importance of building relationships with parents and allowing them to build trust in the Nursery staff (*question 9*). Of all the staff, Roma seems to be least confident in her relationships with parents, expressing a sense of isolation discussed above. However, she does say that parents who speak English are beginning to approach her more often, now that they are getting to know her. She cites the example of one parent who had a new baby, which gave her something to initiate a conversation about (*rom14:14/14:20*). Roma feels that she is beginning to build good relationships with some individual parents, although her time to talk to them each day is limited. When Roma does have the

time and opportunity to build relationships with parents, she has a clear idea of how this should be done. She talks about “starting from where parents are” (*rom1:26/1:34*) and the importance of listening to parents. Roma comes back to her idea that the school needs someone whose role is to work with parents:

*“Picking up on what they expect. Because we don't know until we ask. Because so many parents have so many different views, because they come from so many different parts of the Indian subcontinent and with that, and from one culture to the next is so different, one place to the next the culture is so different, the customs are so different. Some parents have very high expectations, some have not.”*

*(rom8:32/8:54)*

Like all of the other teacher participants at Orchard Road, Annisa stresses the value of informal, everyday contact with parents: *“Parents bring their children in the morning. They change the children's book if they want to.” “We talk to the parents nearly every day, when they bring or take their children home from school” (questions 6 and 7)*. Annisa also refers to the 'open door' policy of the school: *“They are welcome any time of the day” (question 6)* and to the more formal contact opportunity at parents' evenings (*question 17*).

The teachers clearly all value informal contact with parents and support the 'open door' policy of the school. During the time I was in the Nursery conducting field work it was clear that teachers tried to present themselves to parents in a welcoming and friendly manner. However, it is questionable how effective the emphasis on informality and an open door approach is in building meaningful relationships with **all** parents. Although parents are *“welcome at any time of day”*,

as Annisa tells me, in practice during my time in the Nursery I only saw parents at the beginning and end of planned sessions (*orfn22*).

A noticeable exception to the 'open door' policy occurs at the beginning of the school year, when children are beginning their Nursery experience. The headteacher, Chris feels that it is important to involve parents with the “*settling in process*” at Nursery and acknowledges that for some children this process can take weeks (*cri3:42/3:46*). However, the practice in the Nursery is to encourage parents to leave their children with Nursery staff as soon as possible, even if the children are distressed (see discussion in section 5.3.5. for the parents' perceptions of transitions from home to Nursery). As seen above, Roma feels that her role is easier during the transition time if she is left to deal with the children on her own.

The teacher participants do express some concern over aspects of their relationships with parents. As discussed above, Roma does not feel that she has built meaningful relationships with the parents of Bangladeshi origin in the Nursery. At his previous school, Chris felt that parents were more confident in approaching him as Headteacher, but he has little contact with parents at Orchard Road “*over educational matters*” (cri12:23/12:44). Throughout his interview, Chris gives the impression that he operates at a distance from parents. For example, he concentrates on written communication rather than talking with parents. He seems to see his role as one of planning strategies for parental involvement, without really becoming personally involved in them himself. Again, this may be to do with what he perceives as the “*challenging*” nature of organising volunteers in school and providing translation services, for example.

As I have said, it is clear during my time in the Nursery that Annisa is a valued point of contact for parents. However, there are parts of her role which Annisa finds difficult. For some parents, Annisa is the only person who can communicate with them and so she is often in the position of having to let parents know about concerns about their child in the Nursery. Annisa finds it hard to explain to parents that their children “*were misbehaving in school*” or “*are slow for their age*” (question 11), as this information can be hard for parents to accept. However, she enjoys telling parents about “*good work and good behaviour at school*” (question 12).

### **5.2.8 Parents' changing cultures**

In her interview, Val talks about changes in the community in general which she has witnessed during her time at Orchard Road and about how this has impacted on parental involvement in school. More parents speak English now, unlike the first generation immigrant parents she worked with twenty years ago. Val feels that parents are more confident in their interactions with teachers now, citing the example of parents' evening, where parents are more likely to ask questions than they used to be. *"A lot of second generation, third generation, know exactly what to ask, what level's my child at, you know, how are they doing, um, I'm not saying all but there's a fair proportion"* (val6:28/6:41). Val thinks the change is partly to do with the fact that now in most families there is one parent who can speak English, but also to do with a change in the families' place in society:

*"Plus I think there's a different attitude...It was a bit like, sort of, um, it's sort of how society's gone in general really, , it's like you're lucky to be here, keep your head down and behave yourself, do as the teachers say...Any new section of society behave like that, don't they at first, because they haven't really got a stake in society?"*

(val7:05/7:22.)

As a result of this perceived attitude, in her early years of teaching at the school, Val had the sense that teachers *"could do no wrong."* (val7:26/7:30). This was not something which Val felt comfortable with: *"I thought that was wrong, you know, that you weren't questioned about what you did, but I think that's changing, quite rightly so"* (val7:30/7:40). Interestingly, although Val perceives parents as being more confident in questioning teachers, she only sees this happening with regard

to the progress of their own children. She does not think that parents would question the way in which their children are being taught.

Val welcomes the change in staffing since she began working at the school, when all but two members of staff were white. Now, she is pleased to see teaching assistants who can speak the home languages of the children. Val is especially glad that she is beginning to see past pupils from the school returning to work as teaching assistants and sees this as a positive sign that pupils are aiming for higher levels of education than previously. Val has also seen a change in the school intake as regards ethnicity. When she first came to the school, there was a mix of white, black and Asian pupils but gradually she has seen the intake become almost completely made up of South Asian, Muslim pupils. When asked why this is the case, Val answers:

*“There's still probably quite a lot of white and black families [living in the local area] but they don't choose to send their children here, they go to different schools....It's 'where they should go'. It used to be, someone used to call round and say, you know if you're white or black you don't go to that school, that's a Muslim school...I mean, I'm only saying, that's what I've heard people do.....it's like social engineering, ethnic engineering, I don't know.”*

*(val12:05/12:37)*



Interestingly, Val uses “we” when talking about the community, rather than, “they”:

*“We've got more problems now with things like split homes, that sort of thing, drugs, those sorts of things that would not have been the case. I think there's a lot more, um, children not doing as their parents say as they get into teenagers and not being able to control them, not having the same things to use as threats, you know, not having the same respect for their parents' authority, you know, this sort of thing, um, has changed”.*

*(val8:06/8:32.)*

Val sees more differences between parents and their children as far as their values and aspirations are concerned: teenagers may not want arranged marriages or to go to mosque and they may be more interested in further education than their parents were. (2val0:13/1:03) Val sees the Asian community around the school as feeling “*under threat*” (2val2:13/2:14) and she thinks that community members are reacting to this by becoming “*more Islamic*”, particularly with regard to the way in which girls are expected to behave. Val notices more girls and women wearing veils and thinks that parents “*clamp down on girls because they can't clamp down on the boys*” (2val2:46/2:50). Throughout her interview, Val reflects of the challenge of understanding parents from an outsider perspective. Despite her willingness to talk about her views of the community around the school, Val is aware that she does not live as part of that community, so is only seeing things as an outsider (2val2:56/3:02).

Annisa also reflects on the parents' life in the community, especially with regard to their religion. Although Annisa lives in the same geographical community as the parents, she does not go to the same mosque as any of them. Annisa explains to me that although she and all of the parents in the Nursery are Sunni Muslims, *“You know, we are all very different, like Bengali Muslim, the culture is very different from Pakistani Muslims”* (ann0:56/1:00). Annisa provides several insights into the religious beliefs and customs of the parents in the Nursery: she knows which local mosques they attend and which of their beliefs and customs they have in common as well as where there are differences (ann1:01/3:29). However, Annisa says that parents do not discuss religion with her, maybe because they think she may not share their views (ann4:55/5:10). Parents do discuss religion insofar as it is relevant to their children's experiences in Nursery: Annisa gives the example of a child who was told to eat the same foods as Annisa, since they would be Halal (ann5:14/6:02). Annisa thinks that as far as being Muslim in the Nursery is concerned, ensuring that food is Halal is parents' only real issue (ann5:10/5:14).

Roma thinks that practitioners need to understand what she refers to as the 'culture' of parents and children. Although she has concerns about her relationships with some parents, in particular the parents of Bangladeshi origin, Roma feels that as she is of Indian origin herself, she can understand the parents better than a white practitioner might: *“Because I'm Asian myself and can understand the culture, I think I've got a fairly good start because I understand the culture and I think, okay, I'll accept that”* (rom11:18/11:31). Again, Roma stresses the importance of the time it takes to get to know parents and their

cultures, which is why a practitioner who did not share their ethnic origin might have difficulties (*rom11:24/11:42*)

One aspect of the children's cultures which Roma has clear views on is their religion: *"I don't think religion should affect anyone's education, really...it's very personal"* (*rom20:00/20:05*). Roma views teaching about religion as being a part of the Early Years curriculum and so her role is to teach children respect for *"other religions and cultures"* (*rom20:22/20:25*). For Roma, this involves celebrating Christian festivals in the Nursery, such as Christmas and Easter and other festivals such as Diwali and Chinese New Year (*rom20:30/21:20* and *rom22:26/22:13*). Roma has not had any objections to these celebrations from parents and so assumes that they *"do not mind"*. (*rom22:07/22:06*) Roma also had an Eid party in the Nursery as part of the whole school celebrations (*rom21:20/22:07*). Apart from the need to make sure that any food eaten in Nursery is Halal, the teacher participants do not consider the need to acknowledge the families' religions in school. All of the mothers and most of the fathers I see during the field work dress in clothes appropriate to the Muslim tradition and several of the girls in Nursery wear head scarves covering their hair. For this reason, the religion of the families using the Nursery is always visible. However, it is never explicitly referred to whilst I am in the Nursery.

## **5.3 Parents and children at Orchard Road**

This part of the case study from Orchard Road is organised into the following sections:

### ***5.3.1 The parent and child participants***

### ***5.3.2 Parents' knowledge of what happens in the settings***

### ***5.3.3 Parent expectations of Nursery***

### ***5.3.4 Children's views on parental involvement***

### ***5.3.5 Transitions***

### ***5.3.6 Speaking English and home languages***

### ***5.3.7 Life at home***

### ***5.3.8 Building Relationships***

Some of the references in this part of the case study are to field notes rather than to recorded clips. This is because tapes at two of the parent meetings were damaged in the process of transferring the recordings to the hard disk of the computer. So, for parts of the tapes which were inaudible I used my field notes made during the group meetings.

### ***5.3.1 The parent and child participants***

Ten mothers have participated in the research group meetings at Orchard Road. Indra, Anjali, Jhuma, Dali, Ranjita and Charu are all of Bangladeshi origin and

Speak Sylheti as their first language. Indra acts as a translator for this group of mothers in the meetings. Abida, Sabrina, Majeda, Aliya and Hina are all of Pakistani origin and speak Mirpuri as their first language. Abida acts as a translator for this group of mothers. At the third and fourth meeting, we are joined by Tahmid, Abdul and Azad, three fathers whose children attend the Nursery. They are all of Bangladeshi origin. Ten children take part in the bookmaking activity. Aqib, Shaquil, Jabraan, Maaria and Samuel are of Bangladeshi origin and speak Sylheti as their first language. Umayr, Awais, Raheema, Noreen, and Aisha are of Pakistani origin and speak Mirpuri as their first language. They use English to communicate with me and home languages to talk about their books with Annisa.

### **5.3.2 Parents' knowledge of what happens in the settings**

Parents knew “a little bit” (*orp9:33*) about the Nursery before their children began attending regularly. None of the parents think that they know much about the day to day routine in Nursery, other than what their children tell them (*orp1:53/2:22*). The daily routine and planning sheets are displayed on a noticeboard inside the Nursery, written in English (*orfn01*). Parents do know about children's learning in the Nursery. Parents list learning colours, numbers and shapes as being things which their children learn about at Nursery, as well as bringing books home to support early reading (*orp0:28/1:31*). Indra welcomes the fact that children can begin Nursery at the age of three: “*They learn more and better, it's good*” (*orp11:24/11:38*). Learning is cited as the main reason children come to Nursery: at the beginning of the first meeting, when I ask the parents what they think their

children do at Nursery, Majeda answers, “*They learn things.*” (orp0:12/0:14)

It is not just the children's parents who are interested in what happens in Nursery. It seems that members of the children's extended family know something about what goes on in the Nursery and see it in a positive light. Majeda says that her extended family think that Nursery is good (2orp8:56/8:58). Tahmid says that his children talk about Nursery and school at home with members of the family (2orp9:09/9:12). Indra thinks that it is important for all of the family to know what is happening at school (2orp9:21/9:24) All of the children's uncles and aunties named have children also at the school and some share the job of dropping off and picking up children (2orp9:36/9:40). All of the parents say that grandparents are interested in what goes on at Nursery (2orp9:53/9:55).

All of the parents welcome their children being at Nursery (orp11:54/12:02) and Indra feels that her daughter is learning things more quickly now than when she spent all of her time at home (orp11:37/11:54). All of the parents in the group came to the parents' evening held earlier in the academic year, but they are reluctant to express an opinion on parents' evenings (orp2:22/2:49). Similarly, they do not name anything which they would like to change about what children are learning at Nursery (orp4:20/4:42).

### **5.3.3 Parent expectations of Nursery**

At the fourth parents' meeting, we discuss what the parents' expectations are for their children's learning in Nursery. They list academic skills such as reading,

writing, speaking English, shapes, colours and counting. They also think that Nursery teaches children how to make friends and to share. The parents think that there is a big difference between the Nursery and Reception classes: Nursery is more about play, Reception more about work. Children find the change hard, but parents think that it is good for Reception to focus less on playing and more on working.

The parents think that a Nursery teacher needs to be caring, friendly, and good at dealing with children's behaviour. They would also expect a good teacher to “*provide a good education*” (orpf1). The discussion continues in relation to the need for a Nursery teacher to be caring. The parents feel that children are not just at Nursery to study, “*they need affection to feel secure*”, as Hina says (orpf5). During the activity using the photographs, Abida says that she thinks that teachers need to tell parents what to do with their children at home to support their learning (orpf7). However, the other parents have their own ideas about how to support their children's learning. They mention the colours book, which Roma told me none of the parents had used with their children (orfn10). Sabrina says that it is “*no good*” as it is a boring activity and children do not learn from it as they are not interested enough. She thinks that children learn better by, “*playing games and singing songs*” (orpf8). Similarly, Anjali and Jhuma do not think that sending books home with the children is a useful activity: “*The children don't know how to speak or read English, but are just given books. What are we supposed to do with them?*” (orpf9). The parents go on to name activities they consider useful for supporting children's learning: using the computer, talking and activities whilst out shopping such as counting and using money (orpf10).

In general, the parents do not feel involved in Nursery life, as Majeda says: “*We are not involved in what is going on in Nursery*” (orpf11). The group of parents would like to have some kind of weekly report on what children have been doing in the Nursery (orpf12). They would also welcome the chance to participate in parent workshops, supporting them in areas such as using the books in the book bags (orpf13). All of the parents in the group agree that parents' evening can be difficult as it starts before children are settled in bed. Majeda suggests that mornings are better for meetings than evenings (orpf15).

#### **5.3.4 Children's views on parental involvement**

The children all identify the adults in the photographs as either Mums or Dads, with the exception of Aqib. He thinks that one of the people in the photos was a grandmother. The children all think that the pictures relate to activities in the Nursery and talk about the adults in the photographs playing, helping, smiling, painting and having a party. The children talk about their own parents in the Nursery. Aqib sees the role of his father as being one of bringing him to school: “*My Dad brings me to Nursery and then goes to work*” (Aqib). Umayr and Shaquil say that their Mums do not come in to Nursery but the other children give examples of occasions when their mothers do come in: talking with Mrs \*\*\*\* (Noreen), talking with Mrs \*\*\*\* about the baby (Raheema), joining in with parties (Jabraan and Awais) and reading books (Awais). Only Samuel suggests that fathers might also come into Nursery: he remembers his Dad helping him with some sticking (Samuel). Umayr does not know why, but he does not think that Mums come to play with toys in the Nursery. Noreen thinks that it would be nice if



this did happen: she thinks her Mum would like making books. Aisha and Maaria both link the book making activity to their home experiences. Aisha tells me that she has things for sticking at home and Maaria says she is going to tell her Mum about the book.

The parents all feel that their children enjoy Nursery: they want to come to Nursery every day (*orp13:23/13:37*) and ask if they can come at weekends (*orp12:59/13:10*). Aliya's daughter asks if friends can come home from Nursery to play with her (*orp12:44/12:59*) and she enjoys bringing books home to share with family members (*orp12:35/12:44*).

### **5.3.5 Transitions**

Parents in the group like the idea of home visits and all say that their children were very pleased to see the teachers in their own houses (*orp7:42/8:27*).

However, Abida says that at first her child hid from the teacher (*orp8:37/8:46*).

Indra likes the idea of home visits, because "*you have like a one-to-one with the teacher, you talk like in more depth about the situation and what's going on, you find out more as well*" (*orp9:0909:17*).

The parents all say that it is better to leave children when they are upset than to stay with them (*orp7:24/7:30*). The mothers in the group talk freely about their experiences of their children's transitions from home to Nursery at the beginning of the school year. All of the children cried (*orp4:42/5:02*) when first left at the Nursery. The parents found this hard (*orp7:30/7:42*), but see it as a normal part of

life: Charu's older children went to school in Bangladesh and cried there when they were first left (*orp5:15/5:32*). When her children came over to the UK, they cried when left at school for the first time: Charu thinks this is because they could not speak English (*orp5:49/6:05*). When I ask what could be done to make the transition from home to Nursery less upsetting for the children, Majeda says “*I think it's just part of life, anyway*” (*orp6:05/6:25*).

### **5.3.6 Speaking English and home languages**

The parents all seem pleased that their children are learning English (*orp3:29/3:33*). Hina says, “*In this country, it is good to know English*” (*orp4:03/4:08*). When I ask if they want their children to speak home languages at Nursery as well, all of the parents say they do, except Ranjita who says, “*We don't mind*” (*orp3:50*). All of the parents use home language at least some of the time at home, especially when talking with older relatives who do not speak any English (*2orp13:11/13:24*). Majeda thinks that although her children are growing up in the United Kingdom, it is important to keep “*our own culture*”, part of which is the home language. She says:

*“We do try and teach them at home, you know when they're walking or eating, we tell them things in their language as well....My Mum doesn't like me to speak English at home....My second daughter speaks English constantly, we can't get her to use her own language at all....She does go to mosque, she behaves really well, she's starting to read but at home, well. My Mum doesn't like it, but I do try and speak to her in her own language”*

*(2orp12:15/12:53)*

Sabrina also talked with me about her Mum's concerns that home language was not being used enough by Sabrina, her brothers and sisters and their children:

*"I don't mind, although my Mum says, you know, 'There's plenty of time for the kids to pick up English. We find, when speaking in their own language they [the children] stumble a bit, but we're like that, mind you, cause we've been speaking, you know once we get up to school, er, you know and we started, with our brothers and sisters we never used our own language. Even now, we speak to each other in English."*

*(sab4:43/5:04)*

Sabrina says her Mum gets worried because she and her brothers and sisters cannot always translate from English into their home language. On several occasions, Sabrina refers to "*our own language*", which for her family is Mirpuri.

### **5.3.7 Life at home**

At the second meeting, parents talk about who is important to their child. All of the parents name Mum, Dad and siblings as important to their child. Six parents name one or more grandparents. Four parents name uncles, aunties and cousins as important in their child's life. No-one included non-family members in their drawing and all of the parents agree that family is more important than friends (2orp07:25/7:27). The parents only include family who live with them in their drawings. Majeda says, "*The ones we've got here are just family in our own houses. If you include the others (laughs) it would be too many!*" (2orp07:34/7:44).

The parents also talk about what their children like to do when they are not at Nursery. When Tahmid's children are at home they like to watch cartoons on television, which are in English: "*What else would they watch? Cartoons!*" (2orp10:17/10:19). Majeda says "*We have our own TV channels, but they don't like it!*" (2orp11:03/11:08) and the other parents laugh and agree with her. Tahmid says he watches the Bengali television channels if they are free of charge, but his children will only watch cartoons (orp11:46/11:50). The parents all say that if they go out with the children, it tends to be a trip to visit family rather than a visit to an attraction or facility.

None of the parents in the group take their Nursery aged children to mosque school. They all think that the children are too young but once they are five or six then they will go to mosque school (2orp11:55/12:15). The parents seem reticent to talk about the role of religion in their children's life and in the life of the Nursery. Indra thinks that it is important for the school to support the children's religion by talking about Eid and other religious occasions (2orp15:15/15:21). In the parent meeting, Sabrina does not think that the school could do more than it already does to support the children's religion (2orp15:42/15:47). In a later conversation with me, she says that school celebrates festivals and that there is plenty of time for children to learn more: in any case, they learn about religion at home (sab1:43/2:08) . However, later on in the conversation, she expresses concern about the way she sees her generation changing the way they live their lives: "*My age group, I think they are mostly leaning to the British way. I think they are drifting away from their own culture and religion*" (sab8:13/8:19).

Sabrina does not want this for her own children:

*"I'm worried that this generation, because it's already half and half, you know this generation is going to be more further on with that. But I'm gonna keep my family, well I'm gonna try, as much as possible, you know, for them to know where they come from and their own religion. Obviously because we're living here we have to do some things which are, you know, British, but I think it's right to know your own language and your own religion."*

(sab7:05/7:34)

Sabrina thinks that maybe the school could do more to support the children in keeping their own language and religion, but then reflects on the difficulty of doing so: *"Oh , I suppose, how would, at school because there's loads of religions, like Bengalis and Hindus and Jews, they can't exactly teach them all, could they?"* (sab7:47/8:00). However, Sabrina repeats several times that she wants her children to know what she refers to as *"their own"* culture and religion: *"I want them to always know where they come from"* (sab6:37/6:39).

### **5.3.8 Building Relationships**

Once the children are attending Nursery regularly, Indra feels that teachers always try to find time to listen to parents (orp13:53/14:06). However, the parents who do not speak English confidently say that it can be difficult to talk to teachers, although the teachers will always try to find someone to interpret the conversation (orp14:26/15:07). None of the teachers have been to speak to the Headteacher, since they have not felt a need to do so (orp14:14/15:38).

At this point in the meeting, the parents become much more animated in their discussion and it is clear that they feel strongly about the issue of children needing affection. They recognise that children are physically well cared for in the Nursery, for example if a child bumps his/her head s/he is given a cold compress and the incident is recorded in the accident book (*orpf3*). However, the parents have been given the impression that teachers are not allowed to touch the children and that this includes not cuddling a child who is upset. Majeda recounts an incident which she feels was not handled appropriately by the Nursery teachers. She tells me that her son Nabeel soiled himself at Nursery and a member of staff telephoned her to request that she bring in a change of clothes for him. Majeda was out shopping when she took the call, so it was more than half an hour before she arrived at the Nursery. On arrival at the Nursery, she found Nabeel still in his soiled clothes in the toilet area. Majeda becomes visibly upset at this point in her account: "*He had just been left like that!*" (*orpf6*). The other mothers agree with her that children in the Nursery are not always shown enough emotional support, especially when they are crying. Majeda explains that she complained to the headteacher about the incident she describes but feels that this affected her relationship with Roma: "*I went to Mr \*\*\*\*\* [Chris] to complain and after I'm sure Mrs \*\*\*\*\* didn't want to speak to me. They probably don't like us when we complain.*" (*orpf18*) Despite this, Majeda and all of the other mothers say that they have always felt confident to raise concerns when they have needed to (*orpf19*).

## **5.4 Parental Involvement in the Nursery class at Forest Hill School**

In this section, I present the case study of parental involvement in the Nursery class at Forest Hill School. I begin by describing Forest Hill School and the Nursery class and Foundation Stage unit (section 5.4.1). Then I introduce the teacher participants (section 5.4.2). As with the case study of Orchard Road Nursery class, I present the data from the teacher interviews and questionnaires first. This data is organised into the following sections, to reflect the emerging concerns of the teacher participants:

### ***5.4.3 The importance of parental involvement***

### ***5.4.4 Opportunities for parental involvement***

### ***5.4.5 Struggling to support pupils with EAL***

### ***5.4.6 Building relationships***

The next section introduces the parent and child participants (section 5.5.1). The data from the parent interviews is presented in the following sections:

### ***5.5.2 Transitions***

### ***5.5.3 Home life***

### ***5.5.4 Home language and English***

### ***5.5.5 Ayesha and her children at the margins of school life***

### **5.4.1 Forest Hill Nursery Class**

Forest Hill School is a First School in a new town in the Midlands. The school has 229 pupils on role, of which 32 attend the Nursery on a mornings only or afternoon only basis. The school is situated in the middle of a housing estate and most of the children attending Forest Hill live on the estate. According to an Ofsted inspection report the school serves "*an area of considerable economic hardship.*" (Ofsted, 2006) . All but a few of the pupils are of white, British heritage.

Forest Hill School was built in the 1960s in school grounds which include two playgrounds, a garden quad and playing fields. The Nursery class is situated along one side of the school building, along with the two Reception classes, in the Foundation Stage unit of the school. The Nursery teacher plans the curriculum and activities together with the two Reception teachers. The Nursery children spend some of their time playing together in the Nursery space, which has its own outdoor area. At other times of the day, the gate between the Nursery and Reception sections of the Foundation Stage unit is open and the children are free to move around both sections, indoors and out. There is one child of South Asian origin attending the Nursery: Imran, whose mother is Ayesha. The Nursery also has one other Muslim pupil of Somalian origin and three pupils of Polish origin. The rest of the children are of white, British origin.



### **5.4.2 The teacher participants**

#### **Louise, headteacher**

Louise is the acting headteacher at Forest Hill School. She has worked at the school for more than ten years, as a class teacher and more recently as the deputy headteacher. Louise was a colleague of mine when I worked at Forest Hill. She was born and educated in England and describes her self as white and middle class (*questions 1 and 2*).

#### **Abi, Nursery teacher**

Abi is in her second year of teaching and is responsible for the children in the Nursery at Forest Hill. She was born in Wales, where she went to primary and secondary school (*question 1*). Abi describes herself as white and middle class (*question 2*).

### **5.4.3 The importance of parental involvement**

The foundation stage policy at Forest Hill school sets out the teachers' philosophy concerning working with parents. *"We realise the children entering school have had many and varied experiences. Parents are valued as their child's first educators and their involvement in school and their child's education is encouraged from the start."* (Foundation Stage policy, Forest Hill School). The importance of working with parents is highlighted as an influence on the progress made by their children: *"We aim to work with parents for the good of the children and their education."* (Foundation Stage policy, Forest Hill School). In her interview, Abi expresses her belief about involving parents fully in the life of the Nursery: *"It's their child, they should be involved in everything we do"* (abi3:40/3:47). Louise lists several advantages to involving parents in their children's Nursery education: it gives parents a better understanding of school life, it supports parents in managing behaviour at home, it provides parents with ideas for activities to do at home, it leads parents to have higher expectations of their children with regard to learning and to independence (loufn10). She also acknowledges that involving parents can have disadvantages, such as creating extra pressure for teachers. Louise also thinks that it can lead to parents questioning what the school does. However, Louise sees this questioning as being a result of a lack of understanding and parents are usually *"happy"* once something has been explained to them (loufn10). Louise has experienced difficulties when discussing children's behaviour with their parents. She feels that parents do not always understand the school's rules on behaviour and that parents confuse bullying with children *"falling out"* (loufn11). Abi says that it is

"never nice" to have to inform parents that a child has misbehaved or had an accident (*abi10:06/10:24*) but she has never had a parent who is "difficult" with her over such incidences (*abi10:40/10:50*).

#### **5.4.4 Opportunities for parental involvement**

The Foundation Stage policy at Forest Hill sets out how the school will endeavour to involve parents with their child's learning. Before their child starts school, they will be provided with information about the school and how it is organised.

Children will be invited to visit the foundation stage unit with their parents. The Nursery teacher will visit children at home to meet them and their parents and answer any questions they might have:

*"I think we start, at least we try, to start that relationship off really well with the home visit. You know, we try and put them at ease, they get to know us, obviously we get, um, quite a bit of information from them as well, but, you know, it's all done really informally so hopefully they don't feel, you know, any pressure. We try and put them at ease as much as we can."*

*(abi3:47/4:12)*

Abi clearly thinks that the family days, when children visit Nursery with their parents, are an important way for parents to find out about Nursery:

*"We do encourage all the parents to come, and kind of say, you know, for their sake, you know, come and be nosy, come and have a look at what we do. You know, then if they do have any more questions after the event, you know after the home visit, they think of more questions then. They probably do want to know what we've been doing, what we've been up to."*

*(abi5:38/5:58)*

Once children are attending Nursery, essential information is communicated via written whole school newsletters, sent out on a weekly basis. In addition, Abi produces a termly Nursery newsletter informing parents of the theme for the children's learning. According to the Foundation Stage policy, parents will be kept "continually informed about their child's progress on a daily, informal basis" and there will be a whole school open evening organised each term. Information about children's learning will also be communicated through wall displays, letters, photographs and work that is sent home. All written communications are sent to parents in written English. Other opportunities will be provided for parents to come into school, such as Harvest Festival, Sports Day and the school tea days, which are held once a term (*Forest Hill Foundation Stage policy*).

Both Louise and Abi stress the importance of informal, daily contact with parents. Louise says that it is important to be "*welcoming and approachable*" (*lou13:06/13:10*) to parents and to adopt an "*open door*" policy which is part of the whole school ethos (*lou12:36/12:47*). Abi says that she tries to make sure she is available to talk with parents as they drop off and collect their children at the

beginning and end of Nursery sessions:

*"If they just want to speak to us, through the year, either when they drop their child off or when they pick them up...I know we do try, especially for new families coming in, we do try and make ourselves available and you know, I try to chat when I'm taking in dinner money and fruit money and stuff like that. I'm at the door, you know welcoming them in, and then I'll try to position myself somewhere, I try to make it so that I say hello to most people. Then if I needed to speak to them or they needed to speak to me, hopefully they will just find me and we can have a chat."*

(lou08:17/8:53)

Imran's parents have only taken advantage of this opportunity to have a chat with Abi on one occasion, as far as Abi can remember. Imran's father came to talk to Abi as he was concerned that Imran had been eating soap in Nursery (abi24:24/24:32). Abi says that if there is something which Imran's parents need to let her know about, then *"it is normally Dad who will come in and say it"* (abi24:14/24:24).

Louise stresses that her weekly newsletter to parents is *"informal"* (loufn8) and similarly, Abi says that the Nursery newsletter, *"Just lets them know what we are doing"* (abi9:12/9:30). Abi is wary of making parents feel under pressure, as she says in her discussion of home visits (abi3:47/4:15). Louise perceives more formal occasions such as parents evening as being less popular with parents (loufn7).

Aside from written communications and daily, informal contact, the school relies on parental involvement strategies which involve parents coming into school to

participate in events. These include curriculum days, such as Art days (*loufn7*) and whole school tea days, where parents are served tea and cakes by the children and taken to look at a certain aspect of the children's work. The school also "*targets parents who we think need it*" (*loufn8*) with family literacy workshops. Louise says that the teacher responsible for these events "*is very good at persuading parents to join in*" (*loufn8*).

#### **5.4.5 Struggling to support children with EAL**

The teachers at Forest Hill only have a few children who speak English as an additional language to support, but they find this difficult. Louise tells me that in order to access formal support, including access to workers from the local authority who speak the children's home languages, a school needs to have a certain number of pupils who require that support (*lou04:57/5:13*). Louise is aware that the school is not able to work with pupils and their parents with EAL in the way she would like to because of this lack of support from outside agencies. She tells me about her recent experience of trying to work with a mother who spoke very little English: "*It was very much taking her to show her things, rather than being able to tell her what was going on. And just hoping that she understood*" (*lou07:25/7:44*). There are three pupils in the school whose home language is Polish and Louise has tried to access home language support for them but with no success (*lou05:13/6:00*). There is a supply teacher who visits the school occasionally who speaks Polish, but this is what Louise describes as "a lucky coincidence" (*lou07:44/8:01*). There are no members of the school staff

who can speak Imran's home language, Punjabi. Louise tells me about the "Nursery Talk" speech and language programme which is being implemented in the Nursery with children who have speech difficulties. She thinks that this can be used to support children with EAL, as although it is not aimed specifically at children with EAL, it uses "*the same principles*" (lou 04:35/4:57).

Abi expresses concern about her ability to support children with EAL: "*I always say that I don't really know how to help children with English as an additional language*" (abi25:50/25:59). She tells me that she has not received any training for working with children with EAL (25:59/26:13). Abi has found it particularly difficult to support Imran appropriately because he has a speech difficulty as well as speaking EAL. At first, it was difficult for her to recognise that he had a speech difficulty: "*He didn't really talk that much, which meant it was hard for me to tell whether he was speaking in English, or if he just wasn't bothered, or if he, you know, what his actual need was*" (abi18:42/18:53). Once Abi was able to organise for a speech and language therapist to visit Imran in school, she was able to gain a more clear picture of his needs (abi18:53/19:05). As a result, Abi has implemented the "Nursery Talk" programme with Imran, which she feels has improved his speech, as well as leading to him talking more in the Nursery (abi20:05/20:22).

#### **5.4.6 Building Relationships**

As well as finding it difficult to support Imran's needs, Abi has struggled to get to know his mother, Ayesha. Abi was not aware that Imran's mother, Ayesha, does not speak English until she arrived for his home visit. Fortunately, Ayesha's sister-in-law was there and able to translate for Abi (*abi12:48/13:07*). Abi finds it difficult to communicate with Ayesha and is not sure how much she understands. On one occasion, Abi had to talk to Ayesha about Imran being bitten by another child at Nursery and she struggled to make herself understood (*abi12:24/12:28*). Abi says she told Ayesha about the Nursery talk programme, but she is unsure whether Ayesha understood what the programme entails. There was some written information available, which Abi assumes Ayesha has shown to her husband, who speaks good English (*abi20:26/20:43*). Abi thinks that Ayesha lacks confidence in her abilities to speak and understand English, particularly where "teachery" things are concerned (*abi13:46/14:02*). Ayesha relies on her sister-in-law, Habiba, to translate conversations with Abi, which Abi also finds difficult at times. Abi wants to talk to Ayesha and addresses her directly, being careful to make eye contact, but at times Habiba still answers for her (*abi14:12/14:52*). Abi has experienced similar challenges in communicating with the mother of a Polish child who attends the Nursery: she has had to rely on family members to translate and is unable to hold a conversation with the mother (*abi 15:13/17:41*).

Abi is concerned that parents feel confident in leaving their children with her when they first start at Nursery. Abi reflects on her own experience of starting school, which was not a very happy one. Abi cried and used to cling onto her Mum when



she arrived at school. Abi says she has talked about this with her Mum and as a result, she says that she feels sympathy for parents when their children are upset (*abi1:43/2:02*). Abi is also wary of putting parents under pressure. She stresses that her termly newsletter is to let parents know what is happening in Nursery, in case they want to do anything at home. However, she does not want to communicate any expectations that certain things will be done at home.

Similarly, when the Nursery talk programme was implemented for Imran, Abi told his Mum that it was a way of the teacher being trained to support children, rather than a programme to address Imran's difficulties: "*Basically, the way you, you know, talk about it to the parents is saying, this is like training for us and we need a partner child to work with, but we think that he would benefit if it was him*" (*abi21:25/21:40*).

Louise has more definite expectations of parents as far as school life is concerned. She lists several attributes of 'a good parent' in terms of supporting the work of the school: one who brings children to school on time, does not allow unnecessary absences, helps the child with reading and homework, encourages involvement in after school activities, who wants their child to be involved in school life, gives him/her opportunities and takes good physical care of him/her.

Louise talks about the need to build relationships to encourage parental involvement. Louise feels that the biggest influence on levels of parental involvement is that of parents' own school experiences (*lou14:15/14:31*). Louise's own experience of primary school was a happy one, although she enjoyed secondary school less as she did not go to her local school and so was unable to

see her friends after school (*lou00:10/1:24*). Louise thinks that some of the parents at Forest Hill have not had good experiences of school as children, which means that they do not want to be involved in their children's life at school (*lou13:28/13:51*). Other parents have had better experiences and want to be involved more (*lou13:51/14:03*). The difficulty for Louise is working out "*which parents are which*" in order to encourage involvement in different ways (*lou14:03/14:15*). Louise thinks that teachers and parents should strive to build equitable relationships with each other: "*Both parties have got to do their best to get on with each other. It's a fifty fifty thing*" (*lou12:30/12:36*). Louise believes that teachers need to take parents' views into consideration: "*It isn't all about what we want, it's a partnership*" (*lou13:24/13:28*).

Abi does not think that there are any difficulties in her relationship with Ayesha as far as cultural and religious aspects of Imran's life in school are concerned. Imran does not normally eat in school, but when he did stay for Christmas dinner, he wore a vegetarian badge so that he was given appropriate food. Abi thinks that Ayesha was quite happy for Imran to join in with Christmas celebrations. Abi is not aware that Imran goes to mosque school until I tell her during our conversation in the interview.

## **5.5 Parent and child participants**

### **5.5.1 *Ayesha, Habiba and Imran***

Ayesha is the mother of Imran, the only child of South Asian origin attending Forest Hill Nursery class. Ayesha met with me for interviews on two occasions, along with her sister-in-law, Habiba, who acted as translator. Ayesha has lived in the UK for eight years, when she moved here with her family from Pakistan.

Ayesha is married to Habiba's brother. Habiba was born in the UK (*aye0:00/0:40*) and her Mum and sister also live on the Forest Hill estate (*aye 03:09/3:21*). She has another sister who lives in a different area of the same town (*aye 03:21/3:27*).

Habiba's daughter will be beginning at Forest Hill Nursery in the next academic year. Ayesha has an older daughter, Fareeda, who is a pupil at Forest Hill.

Ayesha chose Forest Hill Nursery class for Imran because it is close to home and part of the school which all the children in her immediate family have attended, including her younger brother (*aye3:27/4:19*).

Imran is the only child of South Asian origin attending Forest Hill Nursery class. Imran's mother Ayesha was keen to take part in the research study, as were Abi and Louise, the teacher participants at Forest Hill. Ayesha was happy for Imran to talk to me and to take part in the book making activity. However, on the day planned for me to talk to Imran, he decided that he did not want to take part in the activity. This presented me with an ethical and methodological dilemma. Firstly, I was concerned that Imran should not feel under pressure to take part in the

activity, and I was aware that he did not know me very well, although I had spent some time in the Nursery. I considered asking Ayesha to take the book making activity home and carry it out there, reporting back to me on the conversation. However, Imran was not enthusiastic about this idea either. At this point, I decided that it was unfair to ask Imran any more to take part in the book making activity, as this might result in him feeling that he had to participate.

Having made this decision, I have to consider whether the case study at Forest Hill should be included in my research, since it is arguable incomplete. However, I include the case study because it still gives voice to the parent and teacher participants involved. At the point when Imran decided not to take part in making the book, the teacher and parent participants had already given up a considerable amount of time to the research. It also gives voice to Imran, since deciding not to take part in the activity is a valid choice which he is entitled to make. Imran has said that he is happy to be talked about in the thesis, but he did not want to make a book. Imran's decision to say no to participating in the book making activity is also something I need to reflect on in terms of my methodology. It may be that by presenting a range of activities for children to participate in, I would have gathered more rich data: this would be something to consider in future projects.

### **5.5.2 Home life**

At home, Imran enjoys watching TV, playing on the computer and singing along to music on his Mum's mobile phone. Habiba tells me that he also plays a game where he sets out all his toys on the carpet in a certain arrangement and then will not let anyone else touch them (*aye 01:14/2:56*). Ayesha and Habiba take Imran "up town" or to visit his grandmother or to the soft play centre if they go out anywhere (*aye 02:56/3:09*). Imran also goes to mosque school for two hours every week day. Unlike the older children, who moan about having to go, Imran really enjoys mosque school (*aye 21:07/21:47*). Ayesha says that the teachers at Forest Hill school do not know that her children go to mosque school (*aye 21:47/22:00*). Habiba thinks that it is important for parents to spend time at home with their children reading books and drawing, teaching them colours and numbers and helping older children with spellings and homework (*aye 24:35/25:30*).

### **5.5.3 Imran at Nursery**

Ayesha says that when Imran first came to Nursery, he used to cry (*aye4:19/4:39*). Habiba says that Imran "*can be hard work*" when he is crying (*aye4:39/4:48*). At first I think that Ayesha means that Imran used to cry in the Nursery, but Habiba explains that he would cry about Nursery when he got home (*aye5:33/6:03*). However, he always wanted to come back again the next day (*aye6:03/6:17*). Imran has only stopped crying like this since he started talking at Nursery. When Imran first started Nursery, he was not talking at home or at

school (aye4:48/5:19). Ayesha says that Imran enjoys coming to the Nursery now. He likes reading and painting and playing at being on a train. Imran also enjoys playing outdoors and building things. These are the activities which he talks to Ayesha about when he gets home (aye1:14/2:01). Ayesha also likes the Nursery, as "*The teachers are nice, it's close to home and Imran is learning all the time, he's improved a lot*" (aye7:40/7:58).

However, Ayesha and Habiba express concerns about the way in which Imran's speech difficulty is being addressed. Before coming to Nursery, Imran had access to a speech therapist through the family's health visitor. However, this support did not continue once Imran joined the Nursery. Ayesha says that she let the Nursery teacher know about Imran's speech difficulty at parents' evening (aye9:41/10:16). However, Habiba and Ayesha feel that it took too long for Imran's speech difficulty to be addressed. Habiba feels that Imran needs extra support which he is not given: "*If there's one child who need more attention then that child should get it, I think...It took him this long to start talking and he's been here since September*" (aye8:38/8:52). She sees Imran as being, "*left to play on his own*" during a crucial phase in his learning and development: "*They should be learning something every day, I think. This is their time to learn, isn't it, they're clever at this time, aren't they?*" (aye9:10/9:19). Ayesha says that Imran has been given some extra help with his speech, but only because the teacher needed training (aye2fn3). Ayesha feels that Imran still needs support, as he has only just begun to speak and still stammers at times: "*He's only just started talking and he's four tomorrow, that's not right is it, for a four year old?*" (aye12:15/12:20)

#### **5.5.4 Home language and English**

Ayesha also says that Imran is not receiving any extra support with learning to speak English (aye11:30/11:51). Ayesha and Habiba both see learning English as being important if Imran is to get on well in school: "*It's English he's going to learn all his subjects in, and pass his exams in, one day*" (aye14:08/14:28). For this reason, Ayesha would rather that Imran speaks English at Nursery and Punjabi at home. Ayesha and Habiba are not aware that some schools provide bilingual support for children with EAL. Habiba thinks that this is more likely to happen in the nearby city, as "*there are more Asians*" (aye13:11/14:08). However, Ayesha would not want this type of support for Imran, since she wants him to work on his English at school and she can speak Punjabi with him at home. I ask her if she thinks speaking English is important to help him do well at school and she replies: "*It is in this country, it is in this country, yes*" (aye14:28/14:38).

#### **5.5.5 Ayesha and her children at the margins of school life**

Ayesha talks about her own experiences and those of her children as outsiders to the mainstream culture in the school. She says that she does not often talk to the teachers. This is not because the opportunity is not here, but because Ayesha does not feel confident enough in her ability to hold a conversation with the teachers (aye6:32/6:59). When Ayesha comes to parents' evening, she brings Habiba to translate for her (aye6:59/7:10).

When Ayesha talks about Imran's and Fareeda's experiences with school dinners, she refers to the food provided as being mostly, "*their food*", as opposed to Halal food (aye15:10/15:13). Habiba tells me about an incident when Fareeda was given chicken to eat by the dinner supervisors. Fareeda ate the chicken, not realising that she should not as chicken is not Halal, and when her family discovered this they came to talk to the class teacher. They were assured that it would not happen again, but on a second occasion Fareeda was given non Halal meat. Fareeda took her meal back to the dinner supervisors, but was told to just eat the peas on her plate. It was also suggested that it might be better for her to bring her own packed lunch, instead of eating school dinners (aye15:13/18:14). Habiba clearly still feels cross about this incident:

*"Ayesha was very angry, because her daughter had to stay on peas for the rest of the day and she's paying for a full lunch. They could have, why didn't they give her a sandwich or fish, or, they could have given her something else but, they only seen it as her having a whole meal even though she couldn't eat it. She's a six year old, you can't just feed her peas and leave her hungry until three o'clock."*

(aye17:07/17:26)

Fareeda has experienced difficulties in making friends with the other children in her class and at playtimes has felt excluded by the white children: "*She used to be left out. All the white kids would play together, and she used to be stood on her own*" (aye19:54/20:00). Habiba is surprised by this, as she does not think that Fareeda really looks very different from the other children as she is light skinned: "*She doesn't even look that different, she's really, really, white, blue eyes, she does look like a white child, but I don't know how they notice it but she was actually left out for a long time*" (aye20:13/20:24). Ayesha has talked to the class



teacher about Fareeda's isolation on the playground, but "*nothing was done about it*" (aye20:02/20:03). Ayesha sees her sister-in-law's children as more confident, because they go to a school with lots of other children of Asian origin. Ayesha feels that Fareeda has become more confident since going to mosque school and mixing with other children of Asian origin: "*Sometimes it feels like, sending them to an all English school is putting them behind, really*" (aye19:37/19:43).

Ayesha has also experienced being treated as an outsider by other mothers on the playground. Habiba tells me that Ayesha had told her about other mothers "*sniggering*" at her. When I ask Ayesha about this, she says that she does not always understand what the other mothers are saying, but that she did hear a comment about an outfit she was wearing one day: "*Well, I suppose that is the fashion for them*" (aye22:40/22:53). Ayesha and Habiba are surprised at this reaction, as they see themselves as part of the community on the Forest Hill estate: "*These parents on Forest Hill shouldn't be like this because we live in Forest Hill. I'm sure they've seen us walking around*" (aye24:12/24:16). Habiba says "*that wouldn't happen where my sisters kids go, because its all Asian women*" (aye23:53/24:07).

## **5.6 Summary of chapter five**

In this chapter, I have presented the case studies of parental involvement in the Nurseries at Orchard Road School and Forest Hill School. In doing so, I have tried to allow the participants voices to be heard by organising the writing of the case studies into themes emerging from the data. In the next chapter, I will outline the next stage in the data analysis, where I examine influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses my first two research questions in relation to themes which emerge from the data: How do 'British Asian' parents and children and their teachers perceive parental involvement? and, What influences these perceptions of parental involvement? The process of organising the data according to participants' ideas began with the writing up of the case studies in chapter five. In this chapter, I will explain how I have analysed the data from the two case studies further. As I have said in chapter four (see sections 4.19 and 4.20) when discussing methodology, my concern when collating and analysing the data is that I do not want to impose my own agenda onto what the participants said. My intention in analysing the data is to take a 'bottom up' approach, examining themes which emerge from participants' words first, before thinking about how these themes relate to elements of my conceptual framework (fig 2.1) and literature review framework (Fig 3.2). Thus, in this chapter I explain how I categorised the data according to what the participants talked about (section 6.2). I list the categories and subcategories which I used to code the data (section 6.3).

I highlight key findings in relation to each category and discuss each of these findings (sections 6.4 to 6.11). I demonstrate the ways in which these categories relate to each other and how each one influences participants' perceptions of parental involvement (section 6.12). At the end of this chapter, I highlight key findings in relation to participants' perceptions of parental involvement, identified from my analysis of the data in this chapter and in chapter five (section 6.13). In the next chapter (chapter seven), I use the conceptual framework and literature review framework to address the third and fourth research questions: How are perceptions of parental involvement similar and how are they different? and, What might be the reasons for similarities in and differences of perception? In the final chapter of the thesis (chapter eight) I examine the implications of my research findings for future practice.

## **6.2 Immersing myself in the data**

Before I could begin any detailed analysis of the data, I needed to know in depth what had been said in each interview, on each questionnaire, in each piece of documentation and in each group session. I had to find a way of immersing myself in the data so that I could navigate my way around it and analyse what participants said in a rigorous manner. I needed to ensure that my analysis is grounded in what parents, teachers and children were telling me. Returning to Bakhtin's (1990) notion of 'answerability' I can only be answerable to the participants in the research if I know the data thoroughly. I needed to ensure that I had not overlooked anything which an individual participant had said. By

undertaking content analysis in this way (Robson, 2002), I would be able to unpick the influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement in the two settings. I was also able to make decisions regarding the richness of data, in terms of how valuable each clip was in terms of building 'thick' descriptions in each case study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Thus those clips which seemed particularly 'thick' at this stage of the data analysis were coded with an asterisk \* at the end of the tag.

So, my first step in the analysis of the case studies was to make a list of everything which parents, teachers and children talked about in each setting. I made a list of topics of discussion using speech bubbles, as in the example in appendix 2. The process of going through each clip log, document or set of field notes and listing topics of discussion in this manner allowed me to spend more time familiarising myself with the data. I chose to make a list using a speech bubble graphic rather than a table, for example, for two reasons. Firstly, I needed a way of listing the topics which had a strong visual impact for me, to support my memory of the interviews and group work sessions, etc. Secondly, it meant that I was able to print out the list and physically cut out the speech bubbles. I was able to do this away from the computer. Another suggestion from my supervisor, this enabled me look at the topics of conversation all together in a way which is difficult on screen. It also meant that I could physically handle the data, which again supported me in remembering in detail what participants had talked about. By recording topics of conversation in this way, I was able to physically move them around, sorting them and seeing where topics of conversation might belong together, in considering themes emerging from the data. It also meant that I could

make more than one copy of some of the speech bubbles, since some topics of conversation belonged with a range of others.

### 6.3 Emergent Coding and Categorising of the Data

As a result of the process described above in section 6.2, I was able to identify the following categories of influences on perceptions of parental involvement, shown in table 6.1:

**Table 6.1 Emergent categories of data: Influences on perceptions of parental involvement**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1. Experiences	Participants talking about their own experiences or about their perceptions of others' experiences
2. Representations	The ways in which participants identify others e.g. a 'good' parent or teacher
3. Knowledge	Participants talking about their own knowledge or their perceptions of the knowledge of others
4. Feelings	Participants talking about their own feelings or their perceptions of others' feelings
5. Opinions	Participants talking about their opinions
6. Values and beliefs	Participants talking about what they 'hold dear'
7. Interactions	Participants talking about their interactions with each other
8. Time	Participants talking about the time available to them or about the passage of time

Thus, these categories represent the themes discussed by parent, child and

teacher participants in the two settings. As I have said at the beginning of chapter five (see section 5.1), in part these categories of data are influenced by the questions I decided to ask participants. However, the questions I asked were designed to stimulate discussion about parental involvement, in order to reveal participant's perceptions of parental involvement in the two Nurseries. Thus, by analysing the discussions around parental involvement, I am able to see what the influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement are. The data in the clip log was then tagged according to the relevant categories from the list in table 6.1. An example of these tags is shown below, in fig 6.1:

**Fig 6.1 Example of initial coding**

ann7:33/7:42
<b>Description:</b> they don't need to learn, they've got their own community, they don't need to go out "They've got all the community that they need."
<b>Categories:</b> opinions, values-and-beliefs

Each category was then analysed further and split into subcategories, which were also used to code the data. These subcategories and their codes are illustrated in the tables 6.2 to 6.9 below. Each table shows the abbreviated code used to tag data in the clip log, the full code, a and definition of each full code. An example of a clip of data relating to each code is provided to illustrate the definition.

Examples taken from direct speech are preceded by an initial to indicate whether a teacher (**T**), parent (**P**) or child (**C**) is talking. Each category has a subcategory coded "other". There are two reasons for including this subcategory. Firstly, it avoids the temptation to fit each clip of data neatly into categories without considering those clips of data which may be examples of the negative case

(Patton, 2002). Secondly, it enables me to acknowledge that participants in the research did not tell me everything. This has been described by Bahktin as the "non-dit" (Morris, 1994). At times, participants may choose, consciously or unconsciously, to withhold ideas and thoughts. Acknowledging this notion serves to remind me that my research involves the interpretation of those thoughts on parental involvement which participants are prepared to share with me.



**Table 6.2 Experiences**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
exed	Formal education experiences	Experience of going to Nursery, school or further education in UK or abroad	<b>T</b> “ <i>Primary school education was all in Coventry...Secondary education my first few years were in Coventry, it was a comprehensive school, a boys' comprehensive school, and then my family moved to Lewes in East Sussex...and, er, I then, um went to the boys' grammar school.</i> ” cri0:46/1:11
exfam	Family/community experiences	Issues and events which involve or affect families or communities	<b>T</b> “ <i>Because of extended family, because of auntie, the grandmother...they [families] still use the home language at home.</i> ” ann6:53/7:08
extrans	Transition experiences	Changes in circumstances	<b>P</b> “ <i>Very hard...very difficult...crying every morning.</i> ” orp4:49/4:55 [when children started Nursery]
exlang	Language experiences	Home language and other languages spoken or learned	<b>T</b> “ <i>I think it's a shame really because I don't have a lot of contact with them [Sylheti parents], they don't approach me, I don't approach them. it's very difficult, and they know it's a language thing and I know it's a language thing.</i> ” rom11.55/12:03
excrit	Critical incidents	Incidents which cause significant interest or concern	Parents discussing incident when child soiled himself and was left alone. orp4fn6

**Table 6.2 continued**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
extea	Teaching experiences	Teachers' experience of working in schools	<b>T</b> “ <i>One factor I think also there was a greater confidence in terms of, of interacting with the school at senior level, that's not something some of our parents have.</i> ” cri13:27/13:36 [talking about working with parents at previous school]
exhmc	Home country experiences	Experience of living in or visiting country of birth or of family's origin	<b>P</b> “ <i>When she was five...in Bangladesh...she went at about five, six as well.</i> ” orp11:08/11:16 translator; when did participants go to school for first time?
excurr	Curriculum experiences	Foundation curriculum as taught in Nurseries or other experiences of school curriculum	<b>T</b> “ <i>I did Diwali, I did Chinese New Year...Easter I didn't, Pancake Day I didn't, which I'd have liked to.</i> ” rom22:28/22:44
exoth	Other		

**Table 6.3 Representations**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
reppar	representations of parents	Written or spoken representations of expected parent behaviours	<i>Parents are valued as their child's first educators and their involvement in school and their child's education is encouraged from the start.</i> (Foundation Stage policy, Forest Hill School)
repteach	representations of teachers	Written or spoken of expected teacher behaviours	<i>Teachers will ensure that your child has equal access to all aspects of school life.</i> (Home-school agreement, Orchard Road School)
repoth	other	Other representations	

**Table 6.4 Knowledge**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
knowcurr	Curriculum	Knowledge about what children learn in school	<b>P</b> <i>"They [the children] tell us what they have been doing in school."</i> (orp2:09/2:22)
knowsch	Daily life in school	Knowledge about daily routine and events in school	<b>P</b> <i>"My daughter hasn't been at the Nursery that long anyway , so I'm not really aware, I'm not really aware what happens here."</i> (orp1:53/2:09)
knowedpol	Education policy	Knowledge about local and national education policy	<b>T</b> <i>"In other schools, parents tend to know about the school system."</i> (rom7:01/7:04)
knowlan	Language	Ability to speak English or community language	<b>T</b> <i>"It's slow but it's a big change...many more people can speak English."</i> (val6:43/6:59)
knowpin	Parent involvement	Knowledge about how parents are expected to be involved in Nursery education	<b>T</b> <i>"They don't understand the fact that, um ...the home-school agreement says that we have that contract between our children, the parents and, respect for the school."</i> (rom1:41/1:57)
knowqual	Qualifications/formal education	Knowledge gained by qualifications or formal access	<b>T</b> <i>"The majority of parents are not educated or professional people"</i> (rom6:06/4:15)

**Table 6.4 continued**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
knowcare	Childcare	Knowledge about caring for young children	<b>T</b> <i>“I was saying to Annisa, tell her Mum he's at that stage, he needs, he's looking, you know, the baby's actually flailing, looking around, playing with his fingers, he's thinking about, he needs a rattle.”</i> (rom17:12/17:23)
knowrecu	Religion and culture	Knowledge of different religious and cultural beliefs and practices	<b>T</b> <i>“They don't all go to that mosque. Some [parents] go to Saddam Hussein mosque, their belief is a little bit different.”</i> (ann1:55/2:00)

**Table 6.5 Feelings**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
feeltran	Transitions	Feelings resulting from changes in circumstances, either during the change or on reflection on the change	<b>P</b> <i>“Because it's new to them [children starting Nursery], isn't it, they have to leave their parents and stay at school behind. They know they can't go home whenever, when they want.” orp5:08/5:17</i>
feellang	Language	Feelings invoked by the ability to speak English or community languages	<b>P</b> <i>“Because they [children] didn't know how to speak English, that's why they were crying, after they came back from Bangladesh, because they was grown up... you know, like crying because they couldn't speak the language.” orp5:44/6:00</i>
feelrel	Relationships	Feelings about other people	<b>P</b> <i>“They [teachers] probably don't like us when we complain. I went to Mr ** to complain and after I'm sure Mrs ** didn't want to talk to me.” orp4fn16,18</i>
feelcrin	Critical Incidents	Feelings invoked by critical incidents, or by reflecting on critical incidents	<b>P</b> <i>Mother talking about incident when son soiled himself at Nursery “He had just been left like that...I was so angry.” orpfn6</i>
feelchn	Children's feelings	Children's feelings and emotional well-being	<b>T</b> <i>“It's hard to leave children crying.” (orp7:30/7:42)</i>
feeloth	Other		

**Table 6.6 Opinions**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
opicom	Communication	Opinions about communication between school and home, teachers and parents	<b>T</b> “ <i>And another thing that I think's important to say is that personal contact is the most effective, you can get one or two but if you speak to parents...</i> ” val4:06/4:27
opibac	'British Asian' Community	Opinions about the local 'British Asian' community and the wider 'British Asian' community	<b>T</b> “ <i>In the home language [home country], more than likely, I send my child to school and that's it, I don't have to be involved, whereas here [the UK] the attitude is completely different, you are involved, you do encourage them to go to after school clubs, etc.</i> ” rom2:07/2:15
opisoc	Social	Attitudes relating to social and cultural issues	<b>T</b> “ <i>Plus I think there's a different attitude, I'm not, I don't know quite how to put it, it's a bit like, sort of um, it, it's how society's gone generally really, it's like you're lucky to be here, keep your head down, behave yourself, do as the teachers say..you know any, any new, um, section of people that arrive behave like that, don't they, at first, because they're not, they haven't really got a stake in society.</i> ” val7:00/7:25

**Table 6.6 continued**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
opied	Education	Opinions about what education is for and how it should be provided	<b>T</b> <i>“The child will learn, um, all of it's preschool experiences from parents and other members of the family. Um, the advantage [of having Nursery] is to take that on into a more formal way.” cri 9.57/10.16</i>
opipin	Parent involvement	Opinions about the idea of parental involvement	<b>P</b> <i>“Kids come to school, and then when they actually come home, they do tell you more things and then you learn from them as well, the new things that they do, cos when they come home they want to do the same things as well, they want you to join with them.” orp12:12/12:22</i>
opilan	Language	Opinions about the use of English and the use of community languages	<b>T</b> <i>“I think it's more of a courtesy, in terms of demonstrating, um, an acknowledgement of other languages. Because as I understand it, or, you know we put a letter out in Urdu, not many people, parents would access the Urdu because their language is actually Mirpuri and,um, Urdu, written down, is not the same.” cri9:05/9:27</i>
opichn	Children	Opinions about how children behave and what children need	<b>T</b> <i>“They [parents] don't ask for help, but, I mean when they come up to talk about it [behaviour], if they're sent for they would ask and I think, I</i>



Code	Full code	Definition	Example
			<i>think probably that would be their biggest worry that they couldn't cope with...more so than education" val8:41/8:52</i>
opitea	Teachers	Parents opinions about teachers	<b>T</b> <i>" Teachers say they are not allowed to touch children, that is cruel, they need a cuddle if they have hurt themselves"orp4fn4</i>
opirel	Religion	Opinions regarding religion and its place in school	<b>T</b> <i>"Religion is a very personal thing, you can be a Christian but you don't have to deliver that in your everyday lifestyle, or work, working lifestyle, do you? Um, you know you keep your religion separate because it's personal to you."</i> <i>rom20:06/20:17</i>
opioth	Other		

**Table 6.7 Values and beliefs**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
belirel	Religion	Values and beliefs with a grounding in a particular religion	<i><b>T</b> "We do, like, you know, five times a day pray, we all do the same, we give, you know two and a half percent of our[..]money and we do go to Hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca." (ann02:37/02:49)</i>
belifood	Food	Values and beliefs relating to how and what to eat	<i><b>P</b> "They told her 'All you have to do is just eat the peas, not the other stuff in there and it's better if you bring your own meals.'" (aye16:45/16:52)</i>
belihom	Home country	Values and beliefs which relate to a participant's home country	<i><b>P</b> "Obviously because we're living here we have to do some things which are, you know, British, but I think it's right to know your own language and your own religion." (sab7:05/7:34)</i>
belioth	Other		

**Table 6.8 Interactions**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
interfor	Formal interactions	Interactions which take place within formal, i.e. pre-arranged, contexts	<b>P</b> All parents in the group came to parents' evening ( <i>orp2:22/2:49</i> )
interin	Informal interactions	Interactions which take place within informal, i.e. not pre-arranged, contexts	<b>T</b> " <i>Personal contact is the most effective.</i> " ( <i>val 4:10/4:20</i> )
interoth	Other		

**Table 6.9 Time**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Full code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
time	Time	The time available to participants	<b>P</b> " <i>Teachers will always make time to listen to parents.</i> " ( <i>orp13:53/14:06</i> )
mep	Passage of time	The passage of time	<b>T</b> Val talking about changes at OR school over her time there ( <i>2ros 0:13/2:56</i> )
timeoth	Other		

Once I had coded the data using the categories above, the examples provided in the tables were shared with my peers at the CREC learning circle. In this way I was able to test the initial stage of my data as partial fulfillment of Guba and Lincoln's criteria for trustworthiness (see section 4.11). In sections 6.4 to 6.11 I highlight and examine the key findings from each main category and explore how each category influences perceptions of parental involvement.

## 6.4 Experiences

<b>Table 6.10 Findings in the category of experiences</b>
1. Participants have different experiences of formal education, with noticeable difference between the groups of parent and teacher participants.
2. The experiences of speaking English and home language are of particular relevance to participants' perceptions of parental involvement.
3. Experiences of transition are significant for participants and influence their perceptions of parental involvement.
4. Some experiences can be seen as 'critical incidents' because of their effect on participants.
5. Parent participants do not have equality of experience in the Nursery settings and this influences perception of parental involvement

### ***6.4.1 Participants have different experiences of formal education, with noticeable difference between the groups of parent and teacher participants***

All but one of the teacher participants in the research had experienced going to school in the United Kingdom. Only Annisa had any experience of schooling in another country, in her case India. In contrast, of the parent participants only Sabrina experienced her primary education in the United Kingdom. All of the teacher participants also have some years' experience of working in primary schools and early years settings in the United Kingdom. The parents' experiences of Nursery and primary education are limited to any previous experiences they may have had involving older children in their families attending early years

settings. Here again, Sabrina has more experience than the other parents: she went to school in the United Kingdom herself and at the time of the research, four of her five children have attended the Nursery at Orchard Road.

Thus, the educational experiences of parents and teachers involved in the study have been markedly different from an early age. With the exception of Annisa, the teachers' understanding of the way the education system in the United Kingdom operates is rooted in their own early experiences as young children. Furthermore, all of the teacher participants in the study have undergone some form of vocational education or training in order to qualify as teaching assistants, teaching assistants and primary teachers. In contrast, the vast majority of parents are developing an understanding of the education system in the UK as their children experience it. This finding is important because of its relation to the category of knowledge, discussed in section 6.6. Parents come to the Nursery settings with little knowledge of how early years education works in the UK, because of their lack of experience in this country. Thus, from the beginning of their relationship with their children's teachers, parents are at a disadvantage and teachers hold the balance of power in terms of knowledge of what happens in Nursery.

This finding is also one example of the lack of shared experiences between teacher and parent participants. Teachers do not experience living in the same community or speaking the same home language as parents (although Annisa is able to communicate with Mirpuri and Sylheti parents, her own home language is Punjabi). Their educational experiences differ markedly from those of the parents.

We will see in the discussion of participants' knowledge, feelings and opinions (in sections 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8), how the lack of shared experiences between teacher and parent participants interact with other influences on perceptions of parental involvement and the effects this has on relationships in the two settings.

#### ***6.4.2 The experiences of speaking English and home language are of particular relevance to participants' perceptions of parental involvement***

Experiences involving speaking home language and speaking English are discussed by all participants in the study. In both settings, of the teacher participants only Annisa shares the parent participants' experience of speaking her home language as well as English. For Roma, Val, Chris, Louise and Abi, their home language is English. These teacher participants all speak of their experiences of difficulty in communicating with parents who do not speak English. Similarly, they all speak of their experiences of using translators to enable communication with parents in their home languages. These experiences are noticeably spontaneous and haphazard in nature. At Orchard Road, Annisa is able to translate for parents who speak Mirpuri and can attempt some communication with Sylheti-speaking parents. The Sylheti-speaking parent participants describe experiences where a translator has to be found elsewhere in school before they can hold a conversation with Roma. Chris translates some written communications but not others and Val describes asking Sameera to stand at the gate and talk to parents about the Eid celebrations only once it was established that few tickets had been sold. At Forest Hill, the teachers struggle to communicate with parents who speak EAL using their own resources and are

reliant on family members or a sometimes present supply teacher to translate for them. In section 6.6.4 I discuss how this haphazard provision for communicating with parents relates to the value placed on speaking English by teacher participants and thus influences perceptions of parental involvement.

### ***6.4.3 Experiences of transition are significant for participants and influence their perceptions of parental involvement***

Another noticeable shared experience discussed by participants in both settings was that of settling children into Nursery. All of the participants talked about this experience of transition as being a significant experience. The parent participants in both settings all talked at length about their children's experiences of beginning Nursery. For all of the parent participants' children, settling into Nursery involved some crying and distress: either in the Orchard Road Nursery when the children were left by their parents, or in Imran's case at home on his return from Forest Hill Nursery. Although these experiences were not wholly happy ones, the parents seemed to accept this as inevitable: as Majeda said, "*It's just part of life, really.*" For all of the parent participants except Sabrina, making the move from Pakistan or Bangladesh to living in the UK has been another experience of transition, so in that sense Majeda makes a pertinent point.

Although the parent participants seemed accepting of the distress caused to their children by settling into Nursery, this is another experience right at the beginning of their relationship with teachers which influences perceptions of parental involvement. For parents of upset children in Abi's Nursery class, the influence

may be a positive one, since it allows her to feel empathy with those parents in relation to her own early experiences (see discussion in section 6.7). However, for the parents at Orchard Road, the experience of settling their children into Nursery begins a noticeable pattern in their relationship with the teachers. Roma finds the settling in period difficult and tries to improve this by excluding the parents from Nursery at this time. To me, this communicates a message to parents that they are no longer needed and that it is best to leave their children in the care of the 'experts'. This message is accepted by the parents, who say it is better to leave an upset child than to stay with him/her. In section 6.6.4 I discuss how this message is reinforced by the opinion of some teacher participants that 'British Asian' parents need 'expert' support.

As well as talking about the transitions experienced by children beginning Nursery, the participants at Orchard Road also talked about the transitions experienced by the local community. Val acknowledges that she is seeing the changes in the local 'British Asian' community as an outsider, but she perceives a change in the way parents behave in school. Val thinks that as families become more established in the local area, parents become more confident in their communications with school: asking more questions at parents' evenings, for example. The parents talk about the changes in their community as there are more second and third generation immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh in their families. For Majeda and Sabrina, the biggest change involves spoken language. They both talk about their mothers' concern over younger family members speaking English at the expense of learning home language. Tahmid



speaks about his children preferring English language television programmes to those on Bengali channels.

These parents articulate their experiences of negotiating language and identity with relation to their families and with relation to the transition from home to school. Whilst they all value the experience of speaking English and see the ability to do so as necessary for academic success, they acknowledge a need to maintain home language. Sabrina discusses her experience of trying to instil in her children an awareness of "*where they come from*". Majeda, Sabrina and Tahmid all seem to be articulating a concern around their experiences of negotiating identities for themselves and their families in a changing community, issues discussed further in chapter seven.

#### ***6.4.4 Some experiences can be seen as 'critical incidents' because of their effect on participants***

The experiences which were discussed at most length during the parent group meetings at Orchard Road and the parent interviews at Forest Hill are two experiences which I have categorised as 'critical incidents', using the code *excrit*. These experiences involved Majeda's son Nabeel soiling himself at Orchard Road and Ayesha's daughter Fareeda being given non-Halal food at Forest Hill. I have highlighted these experiences as critical incidents for two reasons. Firstly, they are the experiences, along with those of settling into Nursery and language experiences, which stimulated the most discussion amongst parent participants. Thus, it can reasonably be assumed that these incidents are of significance to the parent participants and should be recognised as such in the analysis of the data.

Secondly, they are both experiences which have clearly had an enduring emotional effect on the parents involved. Majeda was visibly upset and fighting back tears when recounting the episode when Nabeel soiled himself and was left alone. Similarly, Habiba's tone of voice and body language demonstrated that she was clearly still angry about the occasions when Fareeda had been given non-Halal food and subsequently left feeling hungry. These experiences appear to have affected the relationships between the teachers and parents concerned: Majeda even thinks that Roma avoided speaking to her for a while after she discussed the soiling incident with Chris. In the discussion of participants' feelings and opinions, I highlight how critical incidents effect feelings and opinions and thus influence perceptions of parental involvement.

#### ***6.4.5 Parent participants do not have equality of experience in the Nursery settings and this influences perception of parental involvement***

It is noticeable in both settings that not all parents have the same opportunities to experience parental involvement in their child's education. At Orchard Road, parents of Bangladeshi origin are unable to experience direct conversations with the Nursery teacher and do not have a translator readily available. In contrast, parents of Pakistani origin can communicate directly with Annisa and she is available every day to translate conversations with Roma. Although communication with Annisa gives these parents easier access to knowledge about what is happening in Nursery and an opportunity to share their own views, there is still a concern around equality for these parents. It is clear that several parents have a good relationship with Annisa and feel able to talk to her on a day-to-day basis. However, as a teaching assistant, in the current management

structure at Orchard Road, Annisa does not have the power to make decisions concerning curriculum or organisation in the Nursery. It is Roma who has the responsibility for deciding how the Nursery should be run, albeit in consultation with Annisa and any other support staff. As things stand at the moment, there is no reliable channel of communication between Roma and the parents, through which opportunities for dialogue between staff and parents can be established.

Furthermore, this situation can put Annisa under unwanted pressure. Annisa is often responsible for talking with parents about difficulties experienced in the Nursery concerning children's behaviour, which she says she does not like doing. At Forest Hill, as a teacher Abi says that talking with parents about challenging behaviour is a difficult area of her work. At Orchard Road, this responsibility rests almost always with Annisa, since she is the only person who can communicate directly with parents.

There is further inequity of experience amongst parents at Orchard Road caused by the informal visits to some families' homes by teachers. Both Val and Chris say that this supports close relationships between the families and teachers involved and in this way the contact is a positive thing. However, it does mean that these parents can access opportunities to talk with teachers which other parents do not.

At Forest Hill, Ayesha does not have the same opportunity of experience as the other parents as she cannot communicate directly with Abi unless she takes a family member with her. Unlike parents who speak English, she cannot take

advantage of the opportunity for informal communication that Abi tries to create by making herself available at the beginning and end of each session.

In both settings then, some parents are able to access opportunities for parental involvement much more readily than others. As will be demonstrated in the discussion in section 6.8.2, this inequality of experience has an influence on participants' opinions concerning issues of parental involvement and thus on their perceptions of parental involvement.

## 6.5 Representations

<b>Table 6.11 Findings in the category of representations</b>
1. The notion of a 'good parent' in terms of parental involvement is represented in the settings' documentation and reinforced by the expectations of teacher participants.
2. Parent participants have clear expectations of how the role of teachers should be represented. However, they are not given opportunities to articulate these expectations.

### ***6.5.1 The notion of a 'good parent' in terms of parental involvement is represented in the settings' documentation and reinforced by the expectations of teacher participants.***

Data for this category is firstly found in the documentation analysed in each

setting. From documents including the school handbook at Orchard Road, the Foundation Stage policy at Forest Hill and the home-school agreements from both settings, the following representations of the 'good parent' in terms of parental involvement in Nursery education can be drawn, shown in fig 6.2:

**Fig 6.2 Representations of a 'good parent'**

***A good parent:***

1. ensures that his/her child attends school regularly and punctually
2. ensures that his/her child is appropriately dressed for school
3. ensures that his/her child is 'ready to learn' each day at school
4. spends time reading with his/her child and joins the local library
5. encourages hobbies and visits to places of interest
6. encourages appropriate behaviour in his/her child
7. attends events in school when invited to do so
8. encourages his/her child to complete homework
9. signs and returns letters to school as requested

This representation of the 'good parent' is reinforced by teacher participants in their interviews and questionnaires. For example, at Forest Hill Louise describes her expectations of parents in the school. These include bringing children to school on time, not allowing unnecessary absences from school, helping with reading and homework and wanting to be involved in school life. At Orchard Road, Val talks about the importance of parents taking children to the library and reading with them at home.

At Forest Hill, Ayesha supports the teachers' expectations of parents. For her, the parent's role is to spend time with the child, teaching numbers and colours, drawing, reading books and helping older children with spellings and homework. The participants at Orchard Road are more challenging about the expectations of teachers with regard to learning activities at home. They are more likely to visit family than to take their children to places of interest, for example. Rather than wanting to use the soft toy rucksack in the manner expected by the teachers (to stimulate writing and discussion), parents ask Val for times tables sheets to be included in the rucksack. At the last parent group meeting, the participants expressed their dislike of book bag activities and the colours book sent home from Nursery and listed activities which they felt were more useful.

Although the parents do challenge representations of 'good parenting' in this way, there are few opportunities for them to engage in dialogue with teachers around what 'good parenting' means for them. The challenge to homework activities at the last parent group meeting is only raised explicitly in the context of this research, when parents are given the opportunity to debate representations of appropriate parental behaviours. In the context of school, the challenge is implicit: the parents do not take part in the prescribed activities with their children. This leads Roma to represent the parents to me as disinterested and/or in need of support.

However, although the parent participants disagree with some of the methods by which they are expected to support learning at home, they do express support for the idea of being involved in learning. The parents also acknowledge the

importance of reading with their children, saying that they would appreciate workshops to give them support in using the book bag activities. By imposing representations of 'good parenting' on the parents the school marginalises them in terms of supporting children's learning. As there is no opportunity for dialogue with parents, representations are not shared between teachers and parents. This leaves teachers with an inaccurate picture of parents' intentions, which leads teachers to position 'British Asian' parents as being in need of support. Thus the teachers maintain their position as 'experts' whose role is to impose their notions of good practice on parents and the cycle is repeated.

Thus, in both settings the the teachers are responsible for deciding how parents should be expected to behave, without encouraging dialogue with the parents about their own expectations. This is a particularly important point in relation to 'British Asian' parents since they may well have different cultural and educational expectations of their children and of their own role in supporting their children. The parents at Orchard Road articulate this in their discussion of the unsuitability of some activities sent home. Roma hints at an understanding of differing expectations when she says of the parents at Orchard Road: "*They know how to be good parents, they just don't know how to be good parents in this community.*" Roma also says that parents "*do realise that some things have to be done because they are living here.*" However, she does not go as far as questioning the school's representation of a 'good parent' or her own views about the way to be a 'good parent'.



**6.5.2 Parent participants have clear expectations of teachers in relation to parental involvement. However, they are not given opportunities to discuss this with teacher participants.**

Parent participants at Orchard Road articulated their ideas about what makes a good Nursery teacher at the final group meeting. Teachers should be caring, friendly and good at managing children's behaviour and providing a good education for children. The parents were particularly concerned about the role teachers play in supporting children's emotional well-being. Hina thinks that children in Nursery need affection to feel secure. Discussion of the parents' concerns centred on the parents' worry about the 'no touch' policy in school. Hina is under the impression that the teachers in the Nursery are not allowed to cuddle children who are upset.

Clearly, the 'no touch' policy was developed with safeguarding of children in mind and in fact the policy does not say that teachers should not have physical contact with children, but that such contact should be in response to initiation from the child (*orfn21*). It is not my intention in this thesis to debate the appropriateness of such a policy, but to consider the effect on parental involvement of such a policy being in place without the opportunity for parents and teachers to develop a shared understanding of its implications. It seems that the teachers in the Nursery may have a particular interpretation of the policy which is at odds with the representations of appropriate teacher behaviour outlined in the written policy. In addition, the teachers' interpretation does not match parents' expectations of how their children should be cared for. By developing policies without opportunities for dialogue, the school allows parents and teachers to develop conflicting

understandings of such policies. It is my assertion that, had parents and teachers engaged in dialogue around such policies at the time of their development, a shared understanding could have developed. This would then minimise the opportunities for critical incidents such as the one involving Majeda's son to occur.

This example discussed above is another instance where the research process provides an opportunity for parents to articulate their views which is not provided in school. In both settings, the school is responsible for presenting their own representations of how teachers should behave, as well as how parents should behave in the documentation setting out how parents and teachers should work together. For example, the home-school agreement at Orchard Road says that teachers will "*provide a variety of teaching and learning experiences, work towards raising your child's standards in all curriculum areas...[and] ensure that your child has equal access to all aspects of school life.*" Similarly, the Foundation Stage policy at Forest Hill says that teachers "*aim to provide equal right of access to the curriculum and learning so that all children can reach their full potential. We work as a team to provide a pleasurable and valuable learning environment for our pupils and staff.*" I have already discussed the inequalities of opportunity with regard to parental involvement which exist in both settings (see section 6.4.5) so in this sense the teachers are not meeting their own expectations. Furthermore, again here the school positions teachers as the 'experts' who will decide on how they should fulfil their role without reference to parents' expectations.

As well as serving to marginalise parents, this approach to policy-making creates difficulties for teachers. If they are represented as the 'experts' in school policy, this can lead to dis-empowerment when a teacher encounters a situation with which they are unfamiliar. This can be seen in Abi's assertion that she "*does not know what to do*" with parents with EAL. Positioning teachers as 'experts' in the structures of school encourages Abi to feel that there are certain areas of 'expertise' which she lacks. A more dialogic approach (Freire, 1996) where parents and teachers could reach a shared understanding of the needs of parents with EAL, would relieve this pressure for Abi. As it is, positioning teachers as 'experts' encourages a deficit view of parents with EAL. In this way, it is because the parents do not speak English that Abi does not know what to do with them. This puts a distance between Abi as the 'expert' and parents with EAL as 'hard to reach'.

A further example of the schools' control of representations of appropriate teacher behaviours can be seen in the home-school agreement at Orchard Road. This document does not talk about teachers supporting children's emotional well-being, which parents raised as a concern when talking about what makes a 'good teacher'. Instead it concentrates on teacher behaviours in terms of providing good quality teaching and learning experiences for the children. This again positions the teacher as 'expert' in relation to the parent: parents should make sure that their child comes to school on time every day and teachers will take over from there, with responsibility for children's learning. Thus, as well as being in control of expectations of parent behaviours, the teachers also have the upper hand when it comes to deciding what should be expected of their own role. Parents do

not seem to have a recognised voice in the settings in terms of policy and decision-making.

At Orchard Road, Val, Roma and Annisa articulate the opinion that parents should be asked for their views about Nursery. Val in particular thinks that parental involvement should be "*more of a two way thing*". At Forest Hill, Louise expresses the opinion that parental involvement is "*a fifty:fifty thing*" and Abi says, "*It's their child. They should be involved in everything we do.*" However, there is no evidence in the data that parents are being involved in making decisions concerning parental involvement.

### 6.6 Knowledge

<b>Table 6.12 Findings in the category of knowledge</b>
1. Teachers know much more about school and early years education in the United Kingdom than parents do.
2. Teachers know little about children's and parents' lives outside school.
3. In the absence of knowledge about each other, participants can make incorrect assumptions.
4. Certain types of knowledge are seen as more valuable than others by the participants in both settings.

### **6.6.1 Teachers know much more about school and early years education in the United Kingdom than parents do**

The teachers, parents and children in the research study differed greatly in their knowledge of the UK education system in general and specifically in their knowledge of what happens in Nursery. As discussed in section 6.4.1, teachers' knowledge of the UK education system is developed from an early age if they attend school in the UK themselves. Furthermore, their education and training means that they have a range of knowledge about how children learn, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DSCF, 2008) curriculum and what is accepted as 'good practice' in Nursery education. Since they are directly involved in day-to-day planning in the two settings, the teacher participants have detailed knowledge about what children do and what children are expected to do, during their time in Nursery.

In contrast, the parent participants' knowledge of the UK education system and of what happens in Nursery is slim. As Abida says at Orchard Road, she knew "*a little bit*" about what happens in Nursery when their children began attending the class. Since then, parents' knowledge has been built up in a small way, partly through what their children choose to tell them. In this sense, the parents' children have a greater knowledge about Nursery and what happens there than do the parents themselves. The parents' lack of knowledge about what happens in Nursery is not helped by the fact that most of the information provided for them is written in English and therefore not equally accessible to all parents. Thus, opportunities for these 'British Asian' parents to be involved in their children's

Nursery education are limited, firstly by their lack of knowledge about what that education entails. For some parents, these opportunities are further limited by their inability to access information made available by the school to those parents with knowledge of spoken and written English. We can see how this limited knowledge serves to reinforce the positioning of teachers as 'experts' discussed in section 6.5. Parents do not know about their children's education and so this is best left to the 'experts'. As Roma says, "*I just take over.*" In '*taking over*', Roma excludes parents from the opportunity to improve their knowledge of what happens in Nursery, thus reinforcing the status of teachers as 'experts'.

At Forest Hill, Abi tries to share her knowledge of the early years curriculum with parents, through her invitation to family days ("*come and see what we do*") and in the newsletter which she sends home with information about the Nursery curriculum each half term. However, for Ayesha there is limited access to this knowledge because she cannot read the newsletter in English. Here is another example of Ayesha having inequality of access, this time to valuable knowledge of the curriculum.

### ***6.6.2 Teachers know little about children's and parents' lives outside school***

Teacher participants' knowledge about the parents' and children's lives is similarly limited. For example, at Forest Hill, Abi is not aware that Imran goes to mosque school and she did not realise that Ayesha spoke little English until her home visit. At Orchard Road, Chris struggles with his knowledge of the relationship between parents' spoken home languages and written Arabic when he talks

about his use of translation. Annisa's knowledge of the families' home lives is greater: she talks to me about the different mosques attended by parents, for example. It is clear that Val also knows the parents well, but she is still aware of the idea that her position as an outsider to the local 'British Asian' community means that she may be seeing parents' lives from a different point of view from their own. It is clear from my time at Orchard Road that Annisa and Val have built up strong relationships with some parents and are readily approached by those parents on a daily basis.

However, the general lack of shared knowledge affects communication between parents and teachers: Annisa and Val both identify issues which parents are reluctant to discuss with teachers, namely religion and teaching and learning methods. Teachers' lack of knowledge about parents and children's home lives means that it is hard for them to find 'common ground' on which to build relationships of trust with parents. Roma recognises this when she talks about her budding relationship with the parent with a new baby: she feels that the new baby has given her a 'way in' to build trust with this particular parent. Here Roma is touching on something significant. The mother with the small baby is clearly an 'expert' in terms of her knowledge of her child, as all mothers are. However, since Roma is encouraged to see her role in the Nursery as that of 'expert', she is not able to recognise the mother's knowledge of her own child. Roma asks Annisa to tell the mother that her baby needs a rattle: Roma can see this by the way the baby is behaving, waving his arms around.

Thus, at the beginning of their relationships, Roma is established as the 'expert' whose role is to impose her knowledge and opinions on the parent, who is in need of support. Consider how this relationship might be different if the structures in school encouraged dialogue between teachers and parents. If an approach was taken which encouraged the sharing of knowledge, rather than the imposition of knowledge by one dominant group on to another, a different relationship might emerge. By sharing the mother's 'expert' knowledge of her own child and Roma's 'expert' knowledge of child development, a shared knowledge could emerge, concerning how babies learn and how to support that development in the best way for the child and family concerned. As it is, the mother concerned is told her baby needs a rattle. If she provides a rattle as recommended, she confirms her status as in need of support. If she does not, then she risks being positioned as uninterested in supporting her child's learning, since she is not given the opportunity to articulate the reasons behind this decision. A further example of this phenomenon is discussed below, in section 6.6.3.

### ***6.6.3 In the absence of knowledge about each other, participants can make incorrect assumptions***

It seems that in the absence of any detailed knowledge of what parents do or think, in some instances the teachers make assumptions about what is happening which are incorrect. In the same way, because parent participants only know a little about what happens in Nursery, on occasion they make assumptions about the teachers' intentions. An example of this is demonstrated by Roma's discussion of the colour book sent home with children at Orchard Road. When it



is not returned, Roma does not know why but she assumes that it is because the parents do not see the importance of supporting their children's learning of colour names.

In reality, the parents reluctance to complete this activity relates to their view of it as "*boring*", as articulated by Sabrina, and therefore unsuitable as a way of supporting the learning of colours. Arguably, their view of the colours book as boring stems from a lack of opportunity for Roma to explain to parents why she was sending the book home or how it should be used. For me, this incident highlights the danger of a lack of knowledge about school on the part of parents and of a lack of knowledge about parents on the part of school. It is further evidence of the need for parents and teachers to be given space to develop a shared knowledge of children's learning and of the parent's role in supporting that learning.

A similar misunderstanding can be seen at Forest Hill, concerning Abi and Ayesha's different levels of knowledge about the Nursery Talk programme. Abi does not know that Ayesha is very concerned about Imran's speech and would welcome his involvement in a structured program of support. From Ayesha's point of view, she does not know that Abi is worried about putting parents under pressure and is therefore not presenting a complete picture of the Nursery Talk program to her. Ayesha and Habiba then assume that Abi is not concerned with meeting Imran's individual needs. Thus, the opportunity for creating shared knowledge about Imran's needs and the best ways of meeting them is lost.

In both of the examples above, the teachers were well-intentioned in their actions: Roma wants to involve the parents in supporting their children's learning of colours and Abi does not want to create anxiety for Ayesha about Imran's speech. However, their lack of knowledge of the feelings and opinions of the parents involved mean that their good intentions are lost. The misunderstanding about the colours book has resulted in a lack of motivation to provide homework activities on the part of Roma and to carry them out on the part of the parents. The misunderstanding about the Nursery talk program means that Ayesha feels more anxious about Imran's speech, as she does not feel that he is being given enough help.

#### ***6.6.4 Certain types of knowledge are seen as more valuable than others by the participants in both settings***

It is clear from the data that certain types of knowledge are valued more than others in the field of school. The most striking example of this involves knowledge of the English language. All of the parent participants recognise that knowledge of English is essential for their children if they are to succeed academically. Furthermore, knowledge of English gives those parents who speak it greater access to discussions with teachers. Parents who know how to speak and read English can easily access information displayed on the noticeboards in both Nurseries. Parents who use English are able to read letters sent home without relying on family members who may or may not be able to translate. These parents can talk directly to the teachers, without having to communicate through translators who may speak for them as well as interpreting their own words.

At Orchard Road, Roma acknowledges that most parents do not know about the home-school agreement or understand the school's expectations of parents with regard to the agreement. This may be partly a result of the school's decision to provide copies of the home-school agreement in English only. It may also relate to the lack of opportunities for parents to contribute to writing the home-school agreement, discussed above in section 6.5.2. In any case, the lack of knowledge about the home-school agreement undermines parental involvement in two ways. Firstly, it influences teachers' perceptions of parental involvement insofar as reinforcing the opinion that some parents are not interested in being involved in their children's Nursery education. Secondly, it excludes some parents from being involved since they are not aware of what the opportunities or expectations for parental involvement are.

In the context of the research project, Sabrina uses her knowledge of English to communicate her opinions about parental involvement to me in a way which is not available to all of the other parent participants at Orchard Road. There was potential here for my research to reinforce the inequalities of access which I have discussed in section 6.4.5. My concerns around this are discussed in the next chapter.

The class teachers at both settings also seem to perceive a valuable body of knowledge which they do not have, concerning how best to work with minority ethnic parents or parents who speak EAL. Roma speaks on several occasions about 'British Asian' parents' need for 'specialist help'. Furthermore, Roma views the parents' knowledge of caring for young children, using slings for example, as

inferior to her own knowledge of the range of alternative products available. Abi also expresses concern that she has not been given any training for working with parents with EAL and that she does not know "*what to do*" with them or their children.

The notion that they are working with parents who require specialist support which they are unable to provide influences the teacher participants' perceptions of parental involvement. Although well-intentioned in their desire to support parents, the teacher participants are thus perceiving parental involvement from a deficit standpoint. They see parents as being in need of help and unable to support their children since this help is unavailable. Abi and Roma also see themselves as teachers as lacking in the knowledge required to support parents in the way they would like to. As we have seen in the discussion of school policy in section 6.5.2, the consideration of some types of knowledge as being 'expert' knowledge serves to reinforce the position of parents as being in need of support which teachers are expected to provide. This phenomenon undermines parental involvement as it establishes teachers as a dominant group who are responsible for imposing their valuable knowledge on to parents.

## 6.7 Feelings

<b>Table 6.13 Findings in the category of feelings</b>
1. Some teacher participants expressed feelings of empathy with parents which link back to their own experiences in school
2. Teacher and parent participants who do not share their ethnicity with or come from the same community as most other participants in the setting expressed feelings of isolation, which influence their perceptions of parental involvement
3. Feelings arising from 'critical incidents' can have an enduring influence on teacher-parent relationships

### ***6.7.1 Some teacher participants expressed feelings of empathy with parents which link back to their own experiences in school***

At Forest Hill, it was noticeable that both Louise's and Abi's own feelings of empathy with parents may affect their own perceptions of parental involvement. Louise's feelings about her difficult experiences at secondary school may well have influenced her view that parents' own experiences of education are the biggest influencing factor on parental involvement. Abi explicitly says that her own practice with regard to settling children into Nursery is grounded in her own feelings about being left at school by her Mum. This feeling of empathy seems to have a generally positive influence on perceptions of parental involvement. Abi is clearly sensitive to the needs of parents and children during the settling in period at Nursery, and this might be one of the reasons why there were only three

children who were upset about beginning Nursery at Forest Hill in the previous September. Louise is motivated to provide positive experiences for the children in her school and also to support those parents whose own school experiences may not have been so positive. Thus, both Abi's and Louise's sense of empathy for parents leads to them thinking carefully about how to build trusting relationships with the parents at Forest Hill.

In experiencing this feeling of empathy with parents, teachers are able to move towards creating that shared experience and knowledge which we have seen to be lacking in the two settings at times. We have seen in the discussion in section 6.4.1 that the teachers and 'British Asian' parents in this study do not share their experiences of early education and in sections 6.5 and 6.6 I have demonstrated how this contributes to an uneven distribution of knowledge of education and school practices. However, an example of a shared experience, such as Abi's own recollection of starting school which she identifies with the experiences of the children at Forest Hill, is the beginning of a shared approach to knowledge and parental involvement practices.

Abi's experience of starting school, which she has discussed with her own mother, leads her to encourage parents to spend time in the Nursery with their children during their transition from home to school. This transition then becomes an experience which is shared between parent, child and teacher. Whilst the children and their parents are in the Nursery, the opportunity is there to create a shared knowledge: "*They get to know us, we get information from them.*"

(abi3:56/4:04). This might contribute to a perception of parental involvement as a

shared endeavour, rather than, as we have seen in other examples in sections 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6, as a matter of teachers and schools imposing practices on parents.

***6.7.2 Teacher and parent participants who do not share their ethnicity with or come from the same community as most other participants in the setting expressed feelings of isolation, which influence their perceptions of parental involvement***

At Orchard Road, although Roma feels that being of Indian origin means that she understands parents in the setting, she also expressed a sense of feeling, "*outside their culture*", particularly in relation to the parents of Bangladeshi origin. This leads Roma to feeling isolated and influences her perceptions of parental involvement in relation to these parents. As she says, the Sylheti-speaking parents do not approach her and she does not really have a relationship with them because of her inability to communicate with them in home language. Roma feels unable to involve these parents in a meaningful way, since she is not even able to begin conversations with them.

Roma is aware of her isolation and tries to build relationships, for example with the mother of the new baby, but she is reliant on Annisa to act as translator in order to do so. Roma is struggling to create shared experiences and knowledge with the Sylheti-speaking parents in the setting, because the structures in place serve to position her as an outsider to this group of parents.

At Forest Hill, it is Ayesha and Habiba who experience isolation from other parents and teachers in the setting. Ayesha says that she does not often talk with Abi and she describes her own and her daughter Fareeda's experiences of being isolated by other children and parents on the playground. Fareeda has experienced "*being left out*" by other children at play times and Ayesha has been subject to bullying by other parents over her style of dress and ethnicity. Habiba feels that this would not happen to her own sister at her niece's school: "*That wouldn't happen where my sister's kids go, because it's all Asian women.*" These feelings have influenced Ayesha's perceptions of her involvement in her children's education: she worries that she is "*putting them behind*" by choosing to send them to an "*all white school.*"

### ***6.7.3 Feelings arising from 'critical incidents' can have an enduring influence on teacher-parent relationships***

Majeda was clearly distressed in recounting the critical incident when Nabeel soiled himself and Ayesha felt "*very angry*" about the incident involving Fareeda's school dinners. It is clear that these feelings at the times of the critical incidents have had an enduring influence on the parents' perceptions of parental involvement. Majeda is convinced that Roma has avoided speaking with her since she complained to Chris about the way her son was treated. Fareeda's experience contributes to Habiba's perception that it might disadvantage 'British Asian' children to send them to a majority white school. Whilst it is arguably impossible to avoid 'critical incidents' of any kind occurring, however good the relationships between parents and teachers, this is an area for reflection in the



context of the research and of early years practice in general.

At Orchard Road, we have already seen how parents and teachers have little knowledge of each others day-to-day lives. It seems that the incident involving Majeda's son is the almost inevitable result of a lack of opportunities for dialogue between teachers and parents. If parents had been made aware of the school's policy relating to incidents when children soil themselves and dialogue encouraged arriving in a consensus about how they should be handled, then it is unlikely that Nabeel would have been left alone until Majeda arrived. Similarly, if the catering staff at Forest Hill had been involved in dialogue between the Nursery and Imran's family around what food should be served to the children, the incidents where Fareeda was given the wrong food could have been avoided.

It is important that I also acknowledge my own feelings in relation to these incidents, since they have an impact on the data analysis and the way in which the incidents are discussed in this thesis. During the field work, I found the occasions when parents raised these incidents in discussion very difficult to manage. Firstly, it was clear that in conducting the research, I was responsible for causing Majeda, Ayesha and Habiba to revisit difficult emotions with regard to the incidents. This brought my responsibility to the participants into sharp focus. Not only am I responsible for reporting the parent's feelings accurately in this thesis, but at the time of the field work I had to acknowledge that the research itself was influencing these parent's perceptions of parental involvement. By encouraging the parents to recall 'critical incidents' I was reminding them of negative feelings about parental involvement which they were still in the process of working

through. Secondly, I have a responsibility to the teachers involved in these 'critical incidents'. My responsibility to the teachers and parents involved in these incidents is particularly important in relation to ethical considerations.

For this reason, I have returned to listen to the recordings of the discussions of these incidents more often than I have to other recordings. This has meant that I can listen carefully to what was said to ensure that participants' voice is truthfully represented in my thesis. It has also meant that I am able to discuss the incidents with critical friends, such as my supervisors and my peers at the CREC learning circle. In this way, I can uphold my particular responsibility to the participants involved with regard to answerability, reliability and credibility.

It would be easy to perceive the Nursery staff at Orchard Road and the catering staff at Forest Hill in a negative light in relation to these incidents. However, it is clear from the discussion of school policy in section 6.5 that they are constrained by the structures of the settings in which they work. Furthermore, in section 6.9 I discuss how on occasions inappropriate practice can be seen to be a result of pressures on practitioners, rather than of the motivations of any individual.

## 6.8 Opinions

<b>Table 6.14 Findings in the category of opinions</b>
1. Teacher participants expressed opinions on a wider range of issues in comparison with parent participants
2. Opinions are often based on incomplete knowledge or lack of experience, rather than on shared understandings
3. Parent participants' opinions nearly always relate to their own or their children's experiences
4. Children's opinions were almost always positive

### ***6.8.1 Teacher participants expressed opinions on a wider range of issues in comparison with parent participants***

The category which has the most clip log entries for teacher participants in the study is that of opinions. Although the clip log was not constructed in a manner intended for quantitative analysis, there are a noticeable number of opinions expressed by teachers on matters ranging from how to care for young children to how parents discipline their teenagers in the local community. To list a few examples, Val is of the opinion that homework is not the most important element of home-school relationships: Chris thinks that stay and play groups are effective in meeting more families: Annisa thinks that some parents do not see a need to speak English: Roma holds the opinion that parents are supportive of their children's learning: Louise thinks that parents are influenced by their own school experiences in terms of parental involvement and Abi thinks that it is important

not to make parents feel under pressure. It is clear then, that teachers in this study have developed their own thinking with regard to parental involvement practices.

However, as demonstrated in the discussion in sections 6.5 to 6.7, these opinions have been developed in contexts which position teachers as 'experts' who have access to valuable knowledge which they have a responsibility to transmit to parents and children. In this way, the opinions of teachers are given more value than those of parents and are not open to debate. This can be seen in an examples such as the parents who asked for times tables and were positioned as lacking in understanding. In this instance, the teacher's opinion, that talking and writing were more valuable activities, was afforded higher value by Val, the teacher in question. In section 6.8.2, I illustrate how affording value to teacher opinions without opening them up to debate can result in the translation of teacher opinion into practice without a consideration of the appropriateness of such practice.

### ***6.8.2 Opinions are often based on incomplete knowledge or lack of experience, rather than on shared understandings***

All of the teacher participants express the opinion that an 'open door' policy is best when working with parents and that informal contact is most effective in building relationships with parents. However, in reality this policy cannot be said to be effective in either setting from the point of view of the parent participants. During my time at Orchard Road and at Forest Hill I did not see any parents coming into Nursery except at pick up and drop off times, suggesting that parents

do not make extensive use of the 'open door' facility. Furthermore, the inequalities in provision for talking with parents who do not speak English means that such a policy is reliant on translators being found somewhere in the school building if and when they are required. Roma herself admits that the Sylheti-speaking parents do not approach her at all as a result of the language barrier. At Forest Hill, Ayesha says she does not talk to the Nursery staff: she cannot, unless she has her husband or sister-in-law with her.

In this instance, it seems that the teacher participants may be basing their opinions on accepted 'good practice' rather than on the needs and experiences of the parents they are working with at the time. However, since practices are not open to discussion with parents, then the 'open door' policy is continued.

As discussed above in section 6.6 limited knowledge can lead to participants making assumptions about each other, which in turn influences their opinions about what is happening in the two settings. At Orchard Road, Roma assumes the parents are not interested in the colour book activity because she does not know that they thought it boring and unsuitable. This assumption may inform her opinion of parents in general, not just in relation to this activity. Roma's opinion of the parents is that they want their children to do well but that either they do not know how to support their learning or they are not interested in doing so, seeing this as the role of school.

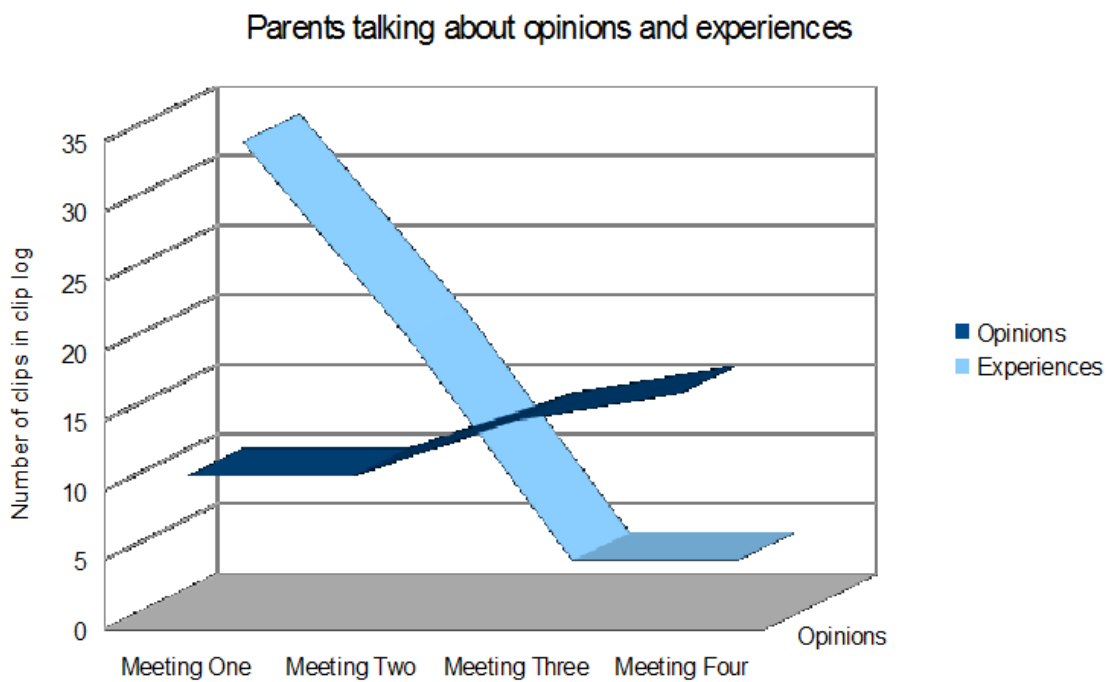
Discussions at the parent group meetings indicate that she is misguided in this opinion: parents list a number of activities which they engage in to support their children's learning. It is not that they lack knowledge or motivation but rather that they have a different way of doing things. Similarly, Roma is of the opinion that parents do not know how to care for young children and need professional support with this. However, this opinion is based on Roma's acceptance of cultural behaviours in the UK as the only way of doing things, as she herself makes clear: "*They know how to be good parents, they just don't know how to be good parents in this community.*" Here, Roma is hinting at the notion that certain practices and ways of doing things are valued more highly than others. Thus, her opinion of parenting skills demonstrated by parents using the Nursery is based on an unconscious acceptance of the notion that parenting practices of 'British Asian' parents need to be modified to suit the representations of 'good parenting' imposed on them by the white majority population in the UK.

### ***6.8.3 Parent participants' opinions nearly always relate to their own or their children's experiences***

As discussed in chapter four, the methods used in collecting data were designed to encourage parents to give voice to their concerns and opinions. The graph in figure 6.3 illustrates the parents' increasing confidence in voicing their opinions as the group meetings progressed. This indicates that, as in the pilot study, the research methodology supports parents in developing a relationship with me as a researcher at the same time as providing a space for parent participants to articulate their concerns. It should be noted that it is not my intention to quantify

numbers of opinions expressed, since the clip log is not designed in this way. Rather, the graph illustrates the number of clips which are related to the categories of opinions and experiences. In this way, the data is not intended to present a scientific representation of opinions and experiences, but to indicate the patterns of discussion as the meetings progressed.

**Fig 6.3 Opinions and experiences**



At the early meetings, parents were more comfortable in relating their own experiences and those of their children. However, by the final meeting, parents were more confident in expressing their opinions around issues such as the attributes of a good teacher and appropriate learning experiences for their children. It is noticeable that the majority of opinions expressed related directly either to the participant's own experience or to those of their children. This could be a reflection of the notion that the 'British Asian' parents involved were more

comfortable in talking about experiences and thus by relating opinions to experiences they were able to anchor the discussion in a place where they felt secure. Or it could be an indication that it is in reflecting on experiences that these parents developed their opinions. In either case, the relationship between experience and opinion is clear.

Thus, as practitioners we should be mindful that in providing opportunities for shared experiences we open up the possibility of arriving at a shared consensus of what parental involvement should look like. We can only do this if the structures of school encourage this shared approach by providing opportunities for dialogue. If not, we risk leading parents to reflect our own opinions back at us, as Val points out: *“Well that's always very hard isn't it, because sometimes you think if you ask them directly they'll say nice things back to you, because that would be what you'd want to hear. I don't think I know what they **truly** think....they'll say 'it's fine, yeah, it's great'.”*



## 6.9 Values and beliefs

<b>Table 6.15 Findings in the category of values and beliefs</b>
1. It is difficult to discuss values and beliefs with participants
2. In the settings and in the research study, most of the dialogue about values and beliefs centres on religious practices and festivals
3. Participants in the research seem to have limited knowledge or understanding of each others' values and beliefs

### ***6.9.1 It is difficult to discuss values and beliefs with participants***

This category highlights one area where I feel my methodology was only partly successful. Although the research gave participants the opportunity to discuss some hitherto hidden issues of concern, there was little dialogue around values and beliefs, particularly in relation to religion. This is an area of discussion which I suggest takes more time to develop than was available to me in my research study. Although I was able to build up trusting relationships with the participants, as demonstrated for example in their willingness to discuss 'critical incidents' with me, issues of religion were difficult to talk about with participants. The reluctance of participants to talk about such issues may also be linked to the findings in this category discussed below, in sections 6.9.2 and 6.9.3.

### ***6.9.2 In the settings and in the research study, most of the dialogue about values and beliefs centres on religious practices and festivals***

Most of the discussion in relation to religious values and beliefs related to customs and festivals rather than to the beliefs themselves. For example, all of the parent participants and Annisa talked to me about the importance of Halal

food. All of the parent participants and Nursery staff involved in the study talked about the celebration of festivals, such as Eid. All of the participants talked about mosque attendance, either by adults or children in the families attending the Nurseries. This focus on customs and festivals can be seen as a way in which the participants are striving to create shared knowledge and experiences between parents, teachers and children. I have seen in the research methodology that talking about experiences is a good starting point in interviews and group meetings. Sharing the experience of celebrating a festival or eating together can also be seen as starting points for practitioners, parents and children. However, the participants in this research study seem to be struggling to move on from these shared experiences to a deeper understanding of each other's values and beliefs, as discussed in 6.9.3 below.

### ***6.9.3 Participants in the research seem to have limited knowledge or understanding of each others' values and beliefs***

There is little sense in the data of participants having anything other than a superficial knowledge of other participants' values and beliefs, as opposed to their religious practices. Even Annisa, who shares some religious beliefs with the parents in her setting, kept her discussion focussed on practices and customs rather than on values. In part this may be because of the very personal nature of one's religious and/or moral values and beliefs. Since by their nature they are firmly held and unlikely to change, it is difficult to discuss such values and beliefs with someone with whom we do not have a very close relationship. As I discuss in section 6.9.1, it may be that despite my efforts I did not build up enough trust with

participants to enable them to talk freely with me about such issues.

As well as considering my own relationships with participants as a factor in their reluctance to talk about values and beliefs in any detail, I need to consider the relationships between participants. As we have seen, teachers and parents have little knowledge about what goes on in each others' lives. Right from the beginning of their relationship, when children are settling into Nursery, parents and teachers experience difficulties in getting to know and support one another. The 'critical incidents' which the parents relate to me involve negative experiences, which are thus unlikely to contribute to establishing trust between parents and teachers.

Furthermore, I have indicated that school policy and structure encourages teachers to impose their ways of doing things on parents. It may be that in the case of religion, which is fundamental to the identities of these Muslim parents, parents resist the imposition of teachers' values. However, indicated in more pragmatic terms in the parents decision not to complete the colours book homework, the imbalance of power in teacher-parent relationships means that any such resistance is operated in silence. In other words, parents do not want to compromise their religious values and beliefs whilst at the same time feeling unable to articulate this. The alternative then, is to keep quiet. Thus, religious values and beliefs cannot be a subject for discussion between parents, children and teachers until a climate is created which encourages trusting relationships and opportunities for dialogue.

## 6.10 Interactions between participants

<b>Table 6.16 Findings in the category of interactions</b>
1. Although informal opportunities for interactions are valued by teacher participants, in reality they lead to unequal opportunities for parent participants
2. Formal opportunities for interactions between participants can be problematic for parents
3. Home visits are a valuable resource in encouraging meaningful interactions between parents, teachers and children

### ***6.10.1 Although informal opportunities for interactions are valued by teacher participants, in reality they lead to unequal opportunities for parent participants***

I have already discussed the difficulties inherent in leaving interactions between parents and teachers to chance by emphasising the informal nature of schools' open door policies (see section 6.8.2). In both settings, teachers expressed concern about their ability to interact directly with parents. At Orchard Road, Chris said that parents do not approach him and Val feels that parents are more likely to talk to her if "sent for". Issues of translation directly affect teachers' ability to interact with parents. For example, at Orchard Road Roma's interactions are limited to those parents who can speak English. At Forest Hill, Louise has experienced being reduced to rudimentary sign language with a parent with EAL and Abi and Ayesha rarely talk to each other. Opportunities for informal interactions at both settings are clearly unsatisfactory for all participants, then.

Parents do not have equality of access to interactions with parents and teachers are aware of difficulties in facilitating such interactions.

However, as discussed in section 6.8.2, there is clearly a sense amongst the teachers that an informal approach is best when working with parents. This is reflected in the words of the parents and children. For example, Ayesha and Imran like the Nursery at Forest Hill because the teachers are "*nice, friendly*". At Orchard Road, Abida thinks a 'good' teacher should be "*caring and friendly*". This is a matter which has troubled me as a researcher for a while. As a practitioner, I have always considered it important to approach parents in a friendly, informal manner. How is it that an approach which is valued by myself and a researcher as well as by parent, teacher and child participants in theory, does not work in practice?

Furthermore, in sharing some of my research findings at the BECERA inaugural conference in 2011, a delegate questioned my assertion that informal approaches to parental involvement should be challenged. Although recognising the potential for inequitable access, the delegate expressed her own concerns around formalising interactions with parents: "*We already have too many meetings,*" she said, as well as acknowledging that she too values the day-to-day conversations she has with parents. Before troubling this discussion further in section 6.10.3, I will consider formal opportunities for interactions in both settings, by way of examining their potential as more effective practices.

### ***6.10.2 Formal opportunities for interactions between participants can be problematic for parents***

Formal opportunities for interactions between parents and teachers exist in the form of parents' evenings and meetings, for example. However, the parents in the study do not find these events easy: Ayesha has to take someone with her to provide translation and does not feel that she was listened to when she expressed concern about Imran's speech. At Orchard Road, Majeda and Anjali find it difficult to arrange care for their children so that they can attend appointments in the evening. These evenings are also difficult because of the relationships between parents and teachers and their levels of confidence. Val thinks that parents are becoming more likely to ask questions about their child's learning, but that they still see the teachers as experts on how to support that learning in school, in terms of teaching methods and curriculum. This notion is reinforced in the parents group meetings, where parents express opinions about what their children should learn at Nursery, but not about how they should be taught.

However, there is clearly a place for formal opportunities for parental involvement. The parents at Orchard Road would welcome workshops to support them in their use of the book bags, for example. Furthermore, without formal opportunities for interactions between parents and teachers, parents would have to rely on the informal opportunities which, as discussed in section 6.11.2, do not promote equality of opportunity in terms of parental involvement.

### **6.10.3 Home visits are a valuable resource in encouraging meaningful interactions between parents, teachers and children**

The opportunity for interactions between parents, teachers and children which is universally acknowledged as successful in this research study is that provided by home visits. All of the participants expressed positive reactions to home visits: teacher participants think they are valuable in building relationships, parent participants welcome the opportunity to meet and talk with the teachers and children enjoy the visits. Closer considerations of the notion of home visits points to several potential reasons for their success. Firstly, home visits take place outside of the school space. In this sense, teachers are free from the structures which position them as 'experts'. The emphasis is on getting to know children and their parents and putting them at ease. In the home environment, the child and the parent are the 'experts'. Furthermore, although there are issues of translation to be considered, since home visits are pre-arranged, interpreters can be provided. All the parents in the research study were visited, so from this point of view there are not issues of inequality of access.

I would argue that the success of home visits in the two settings lies in their position as a formal opportunity for interactions, in the sense that they form part of a planned transition process, but one which is approached in an informal manner. During the home visit then, there is greater scope for parents, teachers and children to come together on an equal footing and thus begin a shared dialogue around the child and his/her time in Nursery.

## 6.11 The influence of time on parental involvement

**Table 6.17 Findings in the category of time**

1. The building of trusting relationships takes time and needs time to be devoted to it
2. Teachers and parents feel under pressure because of a perceived lack of time

### ***6.11.1 The building of trusting relationships takes time and needs time to be devoted to it***

At Orchard Road, Val and Roma both allude to the time which is needed to build relationships with parents with regard to parental involvement. Val talks about the changes she has seen in 'British Asian' parents' levels of confidence in their interactions with teachers during her twenty years at Orchard Road. She also reflects on her perceptions of change in the local 'British Asian' community as it has developed over two or more generations. Indeed, the time Val has spent working with the local 'British Asian' community was my reason for interviewing her for this research (see section 5.2). The passage of time has afforded Val several advantages over other members of staff. She knows families well and is often invited into their homes. Val does not experience the sense of isolation which Roma feels as a relative newcomer to the community. Annisa has also had time to build relationships with parents over the years she has worked at Orchard Road.



During the initial stages of data analysis, I reflected on the possibility that in categorising time as an influence on parental involvement, I might be reflecting on my own preoccupation with time, rather than a concern of the participants in the research. As a part-time researcher who is also in part-time paid employment and the mother of two young children, I often find myself preoccupied with making enough time for people and work which is of importance to me. By way of example, even as I write this section of the chapter, I am aware that I am devoting time to my thesis which the rest of my family are spending as 'quality time' together at the local country park. Therefore, this was an aspect of the data analysis which was checked with the participants in the research and with my peers at the CREC learning circle, to validate this finding.

### ***6.11.2 Teachers and parents feel under pressure because of a perceived lack of time***

It was clear to me during the field work that all participants were devoting considerable amounts of time to the research project. It was also clear that participants feel under pressure owing to a lack of time in their day to day lives. For example, Roma says she does not have enough time to devote to her role as Early Years Co-ordinator and Sabrina says that she does not have much time to support her children's homework. In striving to link my research to implications for future practice, I need to be wary of implying that teachers and parents should be spending more time on parental involvement activities. However, I would argue that participants might find more effective ways to spend the time available for working together and that how time will be spent should be part of the dialogue

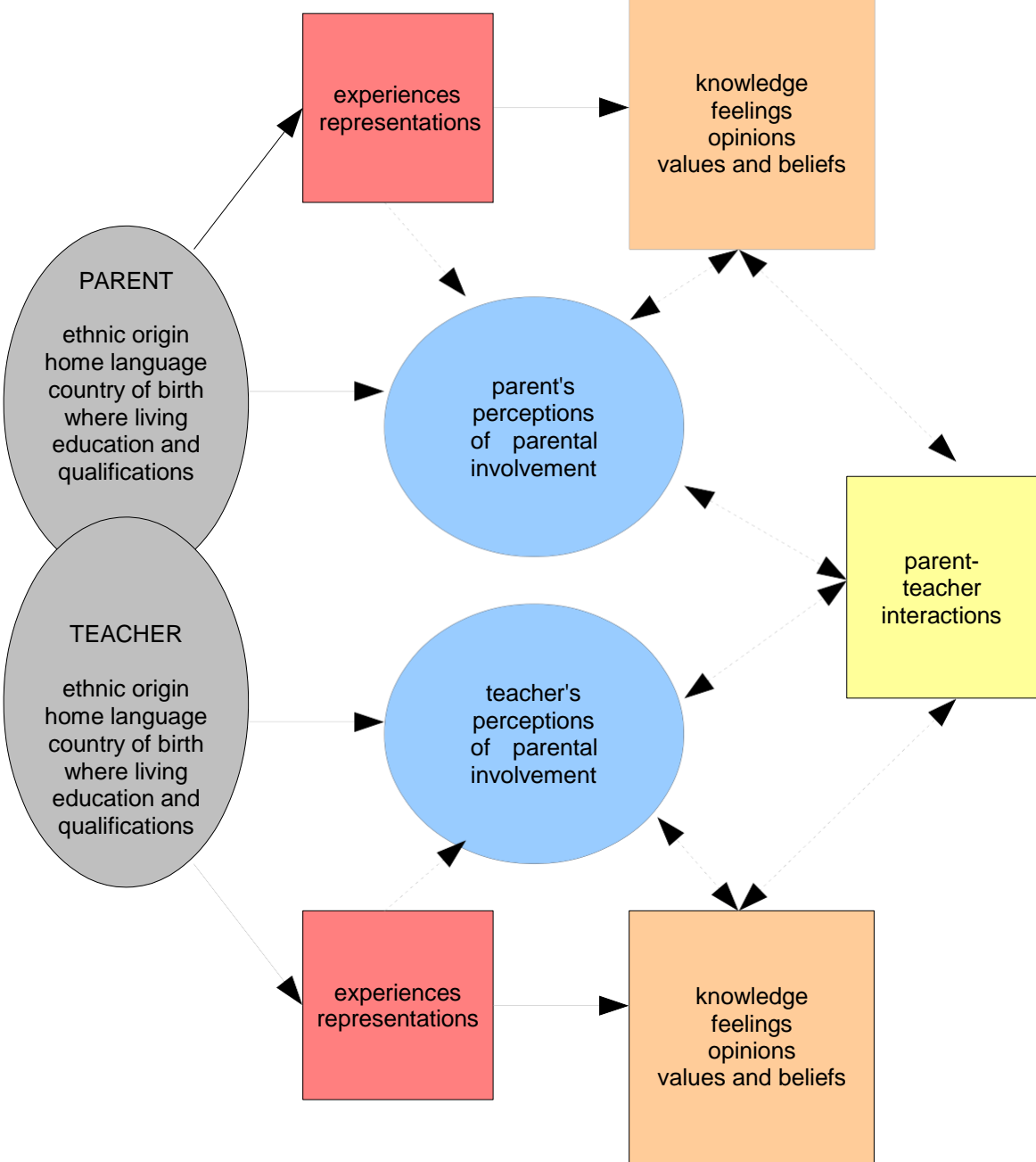
between parents, teachers and children in the settings.

## **6.12 Summary of the influences on perceptions of parental involvement**

The diagram in fig 6.4 illustrates how the categories emerging from the data interact with each other to influence parent and teacher participants' perceptions of parental involvement in the two settings. Parents and teachers come to the two settings with different life experiences, including those of education, training, home language and country of birth. Their experiences at home and in Nursery, together with notions of how teachers and parents should behave, contribute to the development of their knowledge, feelings, opinions, values and beliefs.

Parents and teachers bring their knowledge, feelings, opinions, values and beliefs with them when they interact with each other. These interactions feed back into participants' knowledge, feelings, opinions, values and beliefs. Furthermore, they also contribute to the participants' perceptions of parental involvement.

**Fig 6.4 Perceptions of Parental Involvement**



### **6.13 Participants' perceptions of parental involvement**

Having considered each case study and the categories generated from the data, I then returned to my first research question: How do 'British Asian' parents and children and their teachers perceive parental involvement? The discussion of each category and the ways in which they interact with each other informs my findings in relation to this research question. These findings are outlined below in tables 6.18 to 6.20. It is important to note that the perceptions highlighted in my findings are those perceptions which emerged mostly strongly from the data, in terms of being discussed most extensively by participants or in terms of being discussed by several participants on different occasions. It is not my intention to attribute any perception to an entire group of teacher, child or parent participants. In this chapter, I have discussed the influences on these perceptions with regard to the participants and their Nursery settings. In the next chapter, I use my conceptual framework (fig 2.1) and literature review framework (Fig 3.2) to examine these perceptions in relation to the wider contexts of research and socio-cultural theory.

<b>Table 6.18 Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement</b>
<i>It is important for the parents we work with to be involved in their children's education</i>
<i>Parental involvement is most effective if approached informally</i>
<i>The 'British Asian' parents we work with need to take part in activities which we consider to be 'good practice' in order to be effectively involved</i>
<i>The parents we work with need support to be involved with their children's education</i>
<i>We find it difficult to work effectively with 'British Asian' parents who do not speak English</i>
<i>We should be asking parents for their views on parental involvement</i>
<i>There are some aspects of parents' and children's lives which are not relevant to the children's Nursery education</i>

<b>Table 6.19 Parents' perceptions of parental involvement</b>
<i>We want to be involved in our children's Nursery education</i>
<i>We do not know much about what happens in Nursery</i>
<i>It is important that we and our children speak English if they are to be successful in school</i>
<i>We know how we want to be involved in our children's Nursery education</i>
<i>We understand how to support our children's learning at home</i>
<i>Parent involvement means us coming to Nursery or engaging in learning activities at home</i>
<i>We are negotiating our identities between home and school and supporting our children to do the same</i>

<b>Table 6.20 Children's perceptions of parental involvement</b>
<i>Parents can come to Nursery to play or have parties</i>
<i>Our parents are interested in what we do at Nursery</i>
<i>Our parents like to be involved in the things we do at Nursery</i>
<i>Parent involvement is about our parents being in the Nursery</i>

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Analysis of Perceptions of Parental Involvement**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the influences on participants' perceptions of involvement and highlighted key findings in relation to each influence. Examining the influences on participants' perceptions of parental involvement allowed me to identify perceptions of parental involvement which emerged from the data in the two case studies. In this chapter, I will analyse these perceptions in relation to the conceptual framework (fig 2.1) and literature review framework (Fig 3.2) outlined in chapters two and three of this thesis. This will enable me to demonstrate how my findings relate to perceptions of parental involvement beyond the contexts of the two settings. Then in chapter eight, I will discuss the implications of my findings for future practice in early years settings.

In section 7.2 of this chapter, I highlight positive perceptions of parental involvement in the two settings. In section 7.3, I examine participants' perceptions of what parental involvement should look like in practice. In section 7.4, I analyse those perceptions of parental involvement which relate to the notion of English as

the language of success. In section 7.5 I explore perceptions of parental involvement in the home space and in the school space. In section 7.6 I consider perceptions of parental involvement which relate to issues of identity. Finally, in section 7.7 I look for evidence of participants moving towards a "third space" approach to parental involvement. At the beginning of each section, I highlight the relevant perceptions of parental involvement identified in the previous chapter. For each perception of parental involvement, I indicate which participant/s it is attributed to: parent, child or teacher.



## 7.2 Thinking positively

<b>Table 7.1 Positive perceptions of parental involvement</b>
It is important for the parents we work with to be involved in their children's education ( <i>teachers</i> )
We want to be involved in our children's Nursery education ( <i>parents</i> )
Our parents are interested in what we do at Nursery ( <i>children</i> )
Our parents like to be involved in the things we do at Nursery ( <i>children</i> )
Our parents can come to Nursery to play or have parties ( <i>children</i> )

It is important to begin this final part of the data analysis with the positive perceptions of parental involvement shown in table 7.1. As discussed in chapter six, one of my ongoing concerns throughout the research is to represent the voices of participants truthfully and respectfully whilst not being afraid to challenge some of the ideas which they express in my analysis of the data. In this chapter, I challenge several of the opinions and assumptions held to be truthful by teacher and parent participants involved in the research. However, before doing so, I feel it is important to recognise and highlight the positive aspects of participants' perceptions of parental involvement.

Although there were occasions during the interviews and group work when I felt very uncomfortable with the views being expressed by participants, my overwhelming impression was of participants who were all in one sense working towards a common goal. Parents in the study were motivated to be involved in

their children's Nursery education and had clear ideas of how they are involved and of how they might be involved more. Teachers in the study all valued the importance of involving parents in their children's education and were approaching their strategies for involving parents with good intentions. As I pointed out in chapter six, the children in the study were wholly positive in their standpoint on parental involvement.

It is noticeable that in table 7.1, half of the positive perceptions of parental involvement come from the children involved in this study. For the children, their parents are involved, should be involved and enjoy being involved in their Nursery education. It is this positive, 'can do' approach to parental involvement which should frame the discussion and analysis which follows in the rest of this chapter.

### 7.3 'Walking the walk'. What should parental involvement look like?

<b>Table 7.2 Walking the walk: perceptions of how should parents be involved in their children's Nursery education</b>
<i>The 'British Asian' parents we work with need to take part in activities which we consider to be 'good practice' in order to be effectively involved (teachers)</i>
<i>The parents we work with need support to be involved with their children's education (teachers)</i>
<i>We know how we want to be involved in our children's Nursery education (parents)</i>

#### **7.3.1 Teacher expectations of parental involvement and the potential for challenging these expectations through dialogue**

As highlighted in section 6.4 of the previous chapter, the teacher participants in the study have clear ideas about how parental involvement should happen and of the ways in which teachers and parents should behave. This could be seen as a strength of the practice in the two settings, since teachers have clearly thought about issues around parental involvement. In both settings, teachers list ways in which they provide opportunities for parental involvement: for example, home visits, family days, parents' evenings, book bags, homework and so on. However, these opportunities for parental involvement are transmitted to parents in ways which are reminiscent of the 'expert' and 'transplant' methods outlined in Dale's

typology (Dale, 1996: see section 3.4.6).

Often, strategies for working with parents are based on teachers own notions of the 'best' ways of involving parents. One example can be found in Val's discussion of the rucksack sent home with children at Orchard Road, which the teachers intended to be a stimulus for discussion and creative writing. However, for the parents involved the rucksack would be more useful if it contained activities such as times tables practice sheets. My concern here is not in evaluating the relative merits of discussion and creative writing with those of times tables practice, but with Val's assertion that parents had "*missed the point*" on this occasion. It is my argument that the parents had not *missed* the point, but rather that they had a *different* point. In this instance, Val is operating according to the 'transplant' model of involvement, believing that the parents need to be shown how to use the rucksack appropriately. In the case of Abi's discussion of the Nursery Talk programme at Forest Hill, the 'expert' approach to working with parents can be seen. Abi holds the valuable knowledge concerning how the programme operates and decides not to share all of this knowledge with Ayesha. In both settings, 'British Asian' parents are expected to 'play the game' of parental involvement, but as I outline in the following discussion, they are playing the game on an uneven playing field.

It seems that parental involvement practices in both settings have not evolved through a process of dialogue between parents, children and teachers. Rather they are a result of decisions made by teachers, as indicated in documents including the school prospectus and home-school agreement at Orchard Road

and the Early Years policy at Forest Hill. These documents can be seen to represent the schools' claims for truth (Foucault 1989a and b) which the school is able to impose on parents and children because teachers hold a more powerful position in the context of an educational setting. In Foucault's terms, the context of school limits the parents' knowledge and thus the power of their own claims for truth.

It is not just the context of school which affords most of the teachers more power to assert their knowledge as truth, but the context of being born, educated and/or trained as practitioners in the UK. As well as the parents' early life experiences meaning that they do not possess knowledge of the UK education system, for Said (1995), as individuals originating from Pakistan and Bangladesh they are also subject to domination by the more powerful culture of the West. This domination of Western practices can be seen in teachers' acceptance of certain parenting practices as being more beneficial than others: taking children to the library and buying baby carriers instead of slings, for example.

The lack of dialogue around appropriate parenting behaviours in the two settings can be attributed to a number of factors. Partly, dialogue between parents and teachers is not encouraged because of practical issues concerning translation (see discussion in section 6.2 on the perceived need for parents to speak English) and a perceived lack of time (see discussion in section 6.11). However, I would argue that a more important factor contributing to the lack of dialogue can be seen in the existing power relationships between teachers and 'British Asian' parents. For a number of reasons, in the present climate in the two settings it

would be very challenging for teacher participants to allow or facilitate dialogue around issues of parental involvement.

The first reason relates to how practitioners feel at present about their relationships with parents. In examining feelings, knowledge, experiences and interactions in chapter seven, we have seen that teachers are not always confident in their relationships with 'British Asian' parents. They are wary of creating anxieties for parents, they feel isolated in relation to some parents and they feel lacking in the knowledge and resources necessary to support 'British Asian' parents, particularly if those parents speak little or no English. I would argue that teachers' feelings about 'British Asian' parents are a result of their own subconscious imposition of the identity onto parents of being 'hard to reach' (Crozier and Davies, 2006). Returning to Verkuyten's (2005) discussion of identity (see section 2.3), once we impose an identity onto an individual or group of individuals, it follows that we have certain expectations of the behaviour of that individual or group of individuals. Hence the positioning of 'British Asian' parents as 'hard to reach' becomes a reproductive phenomenon. Teachers perceive difficulties in working with 'British Asian' parents, they respond by imposing knowledge and practices upon them, which reproduces the imbalance of power existing in their relationships. The imposition of knowledge and practices limits the value placed on parents' own knowledge and practices, as well as suppressing the dialogue necessary for parents to arrive at an understanding of school based knowledge and practices.

Thus we arrive in a situation at Orchard Road where parents have "*missed the point*" and continue to be positioned as in need of support and 'hard to reach' (Crozier and Davies, 2007). At Forest Hill, Abi decides that Ayesha will not appreciate the benefits of the Nursery Talk programme for Imran and thus withholds knowledge about the programme. In this way, Abi is limiting Ayesha's understanding of the Nursery Talk programme and the benefits of participation for Imran. Abi's decision has two further consequences here. Firstly, it reinforces her status as a teacher who holds more valuable knowledge than Ayesha as a parent. Furthermore, Abi will now be trained to support children who need extra help with speaking, thus further confirming her 'expert' status. Secondly, in deciding to withhold information from Ayesha, Abi removes the necessity for further dialogue about the programme: it is for her own training, which Ayesha by implication does not need to know any more about.

Thus it is made difficult for Ayesha to challenge the lack of dialogue about the programme because it does not, to her knowledge, directly affect her. In this way, Abi is unaware that Ayesha would welcome the intervention which the programme would provide in terms of Imran's speech difficulties and which is in fact being provided, but without Ayesha's full knowledge. As a result, as far as Abi is aware, Imran's parents only concern is that he may have been eating soap. Thus, since they have no apparent concerns about his speech, this is not a matter for discussion. Imran's speech difficulty becomes a matter for the 'experts' and is not a subject of dialogue with his parents.

So, in deciding how, where and when parents should be involved in their children's education and documenting these decisions in school policy, teachers present themselves as the 'experts' in terms of parental involvement. This leaves the parents with the choice of conforming with teacher expectations, not conforming with these expectations, or challenging the expectations. In Bourdieuan terms, as individuals and as a group of individuals the teachers in this study hold more cultural and social capital than the parents. As discussed in sections 6.3 and 6.4 of the previous chapter, the teachers in the study have greater knowledge about the UK education system and about life in the Nursery and they enjoy the status of qualified teacher in the field of school. In this way, their cultural capital is of higher value in three of Reay's (1998) components of cultural capital: educational knowledge, information about the education system and qualifications (see section 7.4 for a discussion of home language/English in relation to cultural capital). The parents' lack of cultural capital means that challenging or not conforming with teacher expectations is difficult. Indeed, in the case of parents who do not speak English, conforming with teacher expectations is not always a valid option (see section 7.4). Parents who cannot conform or choose not to conform with teacher expectations risk being labelled as disinterested or as not understanding the expectations, thus confirming the status of teachers as 'experts'.

In the case of the Nursery parents at Orchard Road rejecting the colours book and book bag activities, although the parents did not feel that the activities sent home were appropriate, they did not possess the cultural capital needed to challenge the activities in an explicit manner. Thus they challenged the activities



by not participating in them. This invisible challenge can thus be seen as a result of the lack of dialogue in the settings and as an endorsement of the research methods used in facilitating dialogue with the parents and in opening up a space in which their voices could be heard.

In the teachers' behaviour and thinking in relation to 'good practice' in terms of parental involvement, we can see the workings of Bourdieu's (1977) notions of *meconnaissance* and symbolic violence . Certain practices are accepted by teachers as being the 'best' ways of working with parents. These include practices discussed in section 3.2.1 of this thesis, which are widely accepted as 'good practice' in government policy and are recognised as such in previous research: practices such as encouraging parents to read and talk with their children, to spend time supporting homework and to join their local library. These practices are enshrined in written policies at Orchard Road and Forest Hill and as such are no longer open for debate. Teacher participants list such practices as being important for effective parental involvement. I am not interested in questioning the validity of these practices as such, but in questioning the notion that they are no longer subject to discussion. In accepting these practices as the 'right' way to involve parents, without reflecting on their suitability for the particular parents concerned, teacher participants are engaging in *meconnaissance*, or in the unconscious acceptance of such practices as the 'right' way to do things. As a consequence, the parents are subjected to symbolic violence in that their lower levels of social and cultural capital in the field of school make it difficult to challenge the ways in which they are expected to be involved in their children's Nursery education. The lack of dialogue around these practices both maintains

their status as the 'right way to do things' and reproduces the imbalanced nature of power relationships between teachers and parents, which in itself perpetuates the lack of symmetrical dialogue.

In the example of the rucksack activity at Orchard Road, the 'right' way to use the rucksack is as a stimulus for discussion and writing. By adopting this kind of 'banking' (Freire, 1996: see discussion in 3.4.4) approach to working with parents, the teachers involved do not allow a dialogue to open up which could result in a shared understanding of how to use the rucksack. Although a dialogue is begun by asking the parents what else they might like to be included in the rucksack, the dialogue here is asymmetrical. The parents do not suggest the 'right' sort of activities and so the dialogue does not continue. There is no attempt to create a dialogue around the possibility of changing the focus of the rucksack activity since its suitability is not in question: it represents 'best' practice and this is not open to discussion.

### ***7.3.2 The need for symmetrical dialogue***

For me, a move towards more symmetrical dialogue could be a means of breaking the reproductive nature of practices and relationships in the two settings discussed in section 7.3.1 above. The transformative potential of dialogue is hinted at in the research process itself in this study. The interviews and parent groups were intended to provide spaces where parents could give voice to their concerns. In terms of challenging accepted parental involvement practices, to a

small degree this can be seen to have happened. Although the parents were not able to effectively challenge the practices discussed in the field of school, in the context of the research parents were able to articulate these challenges. In the case study at Orchard Road, parents voiced their challenges in relation to activities sent home and in relation to the 'critical incident' involving Majeda and her son. In the case study at Forest Hill, Ayesha and Habiba questioned the school's practices with regard to the provision of Halal food and with regard to support for Imran's particular needs. These challenges represent only a small step towards symmetrical dialogue between parents and teachers, since they did not constitute part of a dialogue involving parents and teachers but one involving parents and myself as researcher. However, I would argue that if spaces for such dialogue were to be created in the field of school, the effect could be transformative both in terms of relationships between parents and teachers and in terms of effective practices in parental involvement.

In terms of transforming relationships between parents and teachers, such dialogue could have an effect on the existing power relationships between the two groups. The opportunities for dialogue created during the research process reveal an important perception of parental involvement from the point of view of the parents: namely, that parents know how they want to be involved in their children's Nursery education. The parents at Orchard Road name ways in which they already support their children's learning at home, for example when out shopping. They also identify practices which they would like to see established in the Nursery, including workshops to support them in the use of book bags and a weekly report on what is happening in Nursery. Similarly, at Forest Hill Ayesha

and Habiba have clear ideas about how to support children's learning: by reading books and helping with spellings, for example. The benefit of a symmetrical dialogue between parents and teachers would not depend on such a dialogue resulting in changes to parental involvement practices. For example, dialogue at Orchard Road may not necessarily result in the setting up of workshops to support book bag activities. Just as teachers' accepted practices for involving parents should be open to debate, so should the suggestions of parents.

For me, the benefits of such an approach would be seen as emerging from the establishment of spaces for dialogue . In creating spaces for dialogue, teachers would be sending out a powerful message about the value of the parents' knowledge. In other words, in asking parents how they wish to be involved in their children's Nursery education, teachers would be recognising that parents know how they want to be involved and that this knowledge is valuable. The teachers in the study all recognise the value in asking parents for their opinions, but until this becomes something which *does* happen, rather than something which *should* happen, parents' knowledge is unrecognised. In the recognition of the value of parents' knowledge, parents are able to accrue more social and cultural capital and thus the dialogue which emerges is more likely to be of a symmetrical nature.

### ***7.3.3 'British Asian' parents in need of support?***

Since these opportunities for symmetrical dialogue do not exist at present in the two settings, teacher participants remain largely unaware of the parents'

knowledge, feeling and opinions with regard to parental involvement, as discussed in chapter six. In both settings, teachers perceive 'British Asian' parents as being in need of support. However, the reasoning behind this perception differs in the two settings.

At Orchard Road, where all of the parents are of 'British Asian' origin, parents as a group are seen as lacking the confidence to question teachers or to offer their opinions. This lack of confidence is largely attributed to the parents' status as immigrants to the United Kingdom, either as first or later generation immigrants. Aside from the dangers inherent in viewing 'British Asian' parents as a homogeneous group and defining them only in terms of their immigrant identity, the teacher participants are only seeing part of the picture here. It is true that there is little evidence in the data from this research study of parents questioning school practices or offering opinions. However, this cannot necessarily be attributed solely to a lack of confidence on the part of parents. Neither can this lack of confidence be attributed to the fact that all of the parent participants but Sabrina were born in Pakistan or Bangladesh and later moved to the UK as immigrants.

Rather, the lack of questioning of teaching practices or offering of opinions can be seen to be related to the structures of the field of school in relation to Orchard Road. Parents are offered few opportunities to question teaching practices or offer opinions, and these opportunities are often framed within the 'scripted dialogue' of formal events such as parents evenings or meetings. We have seen in the discussion in 7.3.2 how it is difficult for parents to effectively challenge

school practices in these scenarios, because of the interplay of cultural capital and power relationships. Thus, in this sense the field of school is a 'structuring structure' in Bourdieuan terms, where existing policies and protocols serve to reproduce the positioning of parents as lacking in confidence and unwilling to contribute to parental involvement practices. This in turn encourages teachers to view 'British Asian' parents as being in need of support, which contributes in turn to the reproductive cycle whereby teachers are the 'experts' controlling the knowledge and involvement of parents.

At Forest Hill, the representation of 'British Asian' parents as being in need of particular support stems more from a lack of confidence and resources on the part of the teacher participants. Abi says that she '*does not know what to do*' with children and parents who speak English as an additional language and Louise is reduced to '*taking her [a parents with EAL] to show her things and ..... hoping that she understood*'. Working with 'British Asian' parents is moving these teachers into previously uncharted territory. They are used to working with white, working class parents who "*may not have had a positive experience of school themselves*" but, as in my own experience as a practitioner at Forest Hill, they do not have the same experience of working with 'British Asian' parents. This should not be a difficulty for the teachers given the principle of equal opportunity for all advocated in the Early Years policy at Forest Hill. Such a principle demands that each parent and child should be approached as an individual with his/her own needs, regardless of sex, race, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation (HMSO, 2010).

However, in reality the existing structures in the school and in the local authority mean that an equal opportunities approach is not possible for the teachers at Forest Hill. The small number of children who speak EAL in the school means that teachers at Forest Hill cannot access home language support for children and parents with EAL. The existing provision for parents who speak English as an additional language means that parents and teachers rely on family members and the sometime supply teacher to facilitate communication. This marks parents with EAL as 'different' and 'in need of support', but again this is not because the parents do not speak English per se, but rather because the existing structures do not support bilingualism or the speaking of languages other than English. These structures thus position 'British Asian' parents as being in need of support, thus serving to perpetuate the kind of oppression associated by Blackledge and Pavlenko (2004) with the acceptance of English as the superior language. As well as oppressing 'British Asian' parents, teachers are dis-empowered by the way in which such structures suggest that they are lacking in the skills and resources necessary to support parents with EAL. The consequences of accepting English as the language for success are considered further in section 7.4 below.

Ayesha and Habiba are already isolated by the other parents' attitudes to their country of birth and the way they dress. They are further marginalised by the structures in school which serve to keep them firmly at the margins of school life. They are under pressure to 'walk the walk' both in terms of teacher expectations and in terms of the expectations of other parents. In this sense, the 'British Asian' parents at Forest Hill lack the collective agency available to the parents at Orchard Road. Although Habiba and Ayesha join together to criticise practice in

the school in relation to meeting the needs of Fareeda and Imran, they do not question parental involvement practices in the same way as the parents at Orchard Road. At Orchard Road, at the parent group meetings parents express opinions about general parental involvement practices such as homework activities and the timing of parent evenings as well as issues relating to their own, individual children.

Similarly, although Habiba expresses surprise at the attitude of other parents, along with a belief that such attitudes would not exist in majority 'British Asian' communities, neither Habiba nor Ayesha possess enough cultural and social capital to begin to challenge these attitudes. It is only within the confines of the research study that Ayesha's experiences on the playground with other parents are revealed. This raises the question of how to provide opportunities for 'British Asian' parents' voices to be heard when they are part of a majority white community and school.



## 7.4 'Talking the talk'. English as the language of success

<b>Table 7.3 Perceptions of parental involvement and the notion of English as the language of success</b>
<i>It is important that we and our children speak English if they are to be successful in school (parents)</i>
<i>We find it difficult to work effectively with 'British Asian' parents who do not speak English (teachers)</i>

### 7.4.1 English as the dominant language

The need for parents to speak English is not questioned by any of the participants in the research study. As such, the notion that parents should speak English can be seen as a dominant discourse. Again, at this stage I am not interested in questioning the need for parents to speak English, but rather challenging the idea as a dominant discourse which is not open for discussion. It is clear throughout the case studies that the insistence on the need for parents to speak English acts as a means by which those parents who speak little or no English are marginalised in terms of parental involvement. These parents have little or no means of communication with the school and those means available are often only available at limited and unpredictable times. I recognise that the need for parents to speak English rests partly on pragmatic ground: at Forest Hill, there is no member of staff who can translate and at Orchard Road the provision for English-Sylheti translation is patchy. However, this patchy or non-existent

provision is both a cause and effect of the need for parents to speak English in school.

By establishing the need for parents to speak English as a dominant discourse, the need to provide consistent opportunities for translation is removed. Since consistent opportunities for translation are not available, there is an immediate need for parents to speak English if they are to be involved in their children's Nursery education. Thus, those parents who do not speak English are not involved. This lack of involvement can then be seen as part of a decision on the part of parents to see that "*home is home and school is school*", to exempt themselves from involvement in their children's education and to "*keep their own language*". Once again, a reproductive principle is at work here. As in the lack of dialogue around parental involvement practices discussed in section 7.3.1, parents are not able to challenge this representation of themselves as seemingly lacking in interest in school life, since they do not speak the language necessary for their voice to be heard.

#### ***7.4.2 Parents who speak EAL as 'hard to reach'***

Accepting the need for parents to speak English means that not only are some parents marginalised in terms of opportunities for parental involvement, they are also viewed as 'hard to reach' and thus difficult to work with. We have seen in section 7.3.1 that representing parents as 'hard to reach' relates to a deficit model of parental involvement. Thus, the acceptance of speaking English as a pre-

requirement for effective parental involvement contributes to the reproductive nature of teacher-parent relationships and of parental involvement practices discussed in section 7.3.1. Parents who do not speak English are marginalised in terms of parental involvement practices and in terms of relationships with teachers. As I argued in section 2.8, in my study the ability to speak English can be seen as an important component of cultural capital. Parents who do not speak English do not have access to the same knowledge and information as those parents who speak English. Thus they have fewer opportunities to accrue cultural capital in the form of knowledge of the education system and the day-to-day life of the Nursery. Moreover, any knowledge they do glean they are unable to articulate, since they do not speak the language required for the articulation of such knowledge. In this sense, speaking English is both a component of cultural capital and a means by which other components of cultural capital can be activated in the field of school. Thus the English-speaking staff and parents are able to maintain their higher status and the supremacy of "*the language*."

In maintaining the status of English as the language for success, participants in the study are also accepting the marginalisation of part of the identities of those participants who speak home languages other than English. This is articulated in the discussion by Sabrina and Majeda about their own concerns and those of their own mothers:

*"We do try and teach them at home, you know when they're walking or eating, we tell them things in their language as well....My Mum doesn't like me to speak English at home....My second daughter speaks English constantly, we can't get her to use her own language at all....She does go to mosque, she behaves really well, she's starting to read but at home, well. My Mum doesn't like it, but I do try and speak to her in her own language"*

*(Majeda)*

*"I don't mind, although my Mum says, you know, 'There's plenty of time for the kids to pick up English. We find, when speaking in their own language they [the children] stumble a bit, but we're like that, mind you, cause we've been speaking, you know once we get up to school, er, you know and we started, with our brothers and sisters we never used our own language. Even now, we speak to each other in English."*

*(Sabrina)*

This struggle on the part of the parents to negotiate their own identities and to support their children's negotiation of identities is discussed further in section 7.6.

We have seen how early years practitioners play an important role in supporting children in shaping their own identity (Drury, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000: see section 3.4.3). What message are the 'British Asian' children at Orchard Road and Forest Hill being given with regards to their own identity in terms of the value placed upon their home languages? In insisting on the

supremacy of English, teacher participants are perpetuating the scenario which they themselves wish to avoid, namely that "*home is home and school is school*". The message given to parents is that home languages are indeed for home and English is for school. Thus, children are encouraged to "*the language*" as quickly as possible in school and to keep "*their own language*" for home.

#### **7.4.3 The value of home languages**

As in Freire's (1996) assertion that the oppressors are often themselves oppressed, although as a group teachers can be seen to be dominant with regard to speaking English, as individuals this can bring disadvantage. In Roma's case, she is the only participant at Orchard Road who speaks English *only*, and does not share her home language with the other participants. Although this puts her in a more powerful position than those parents who speak home languages but no English, Roma feels isolated as a result. She expresses this isolation in terms of her own inability to speak Mirpuri or Sylheti, rather than attributing it solely to the parent's inability to speak English. Although this is not an explicit challenge to the supremacy of English, Roma does implicitly consider that in her situation, sharing home languages with the parents might increase her opportunities to build relationships with them. In contrast with the teachers in Crozier and Davies (2007) study, who used bilingual assistants as an excuse not to engage with parents, Roma acknowledges her dependence on Annisa to facilitate relationships with all of the parents, Mirpuri and Sylheti-speaking.

In terms of day-to-day life in the Nursery, it is Annisa's ability to translate for Roma and the parents which is most highly valued. Without her, arguably there would be no verbal communication at all between teachers and parents in the Nursery. Hence, in the Nursery Annisa's cultural capital could be seen to be of more value than that of Roma and most of the parents. However, in the context of the whole school, the value placed on the ability to translate for parents and teachers decreases as the children grow older. Bilingual staff are mostly employed to work in Nursery, Reception and Key Stage One at Orchard Road. Annisa's ability to translate is valued in the whole school context in terms of her support for the children in the Nursery. Her use as a translator for parents in the Nursery is a 'side product' of her work with children. Annisa's role as translator is valued by Roma but at the same time it is seen as a 'second best' scenario. As Annisa is a member of support staff, Roma perceives that parents approach her at first because of her bilingual abilities, but would rather talk to Roma since she has the higher status as class teacher. In this sense, as in Brooker's (2002) study, the status of English as the language of success is again reinforced: teachers speak English and support staff speak home languages.

Support for bilingual children is concentrated in the Early Years of school and gradually withdrawn as the children learn English. Thus, although in the context of the Nursery Annisa's multilingual abilities are valued, in the context of the whole school they serve to reinforce the view that home languages are for home and English is for school. Speaking Mirpuri or Sylheti is acceptable in the early years as children are beginning to learn English, but it should be replaced as quickly as possible by the use of English as the dominant, if not only, language

used in school.

## **7.5 Parental involvement in the home space and the school space.**

<b>Table 7.4 Perceptions of parental involvement in the home space and the school space</b>
We do not know much about what happens in Nursery (parents)
We understand how to support our children's learning at home (parents)
Parent involvement means us coming to Nursery or engaging in learning activities at home (parents)
Parental involvement is most effective if approached informally (teachers)

### ***7.5.1 'British Asian' parents' knowledge in relation to parental involvement in the school space***

In section 7.3, I have considered how parents' knowledge is not always recognised in the field of school. In table 7.4, we can see that parents perceive a lack in their own knowledge concerning what happens in the school space. In part this lack of knowledge is related to the use of English to provide information to parents, discussed above in section 7.4. However, there is more to this perception of parental involvement than a consideration of the parents' ability, or lack of ability, to speak English. Parents' lack of knowledge about what happens

in Nursery is partly a result of the approaches to parent involvement in the two settings, as we have seen in the discussion in section 7.3.

### **7.5.2 The significance of home visits**

As discussed in chapter six, teachers in both settings emphasised the importance of an informal approach to parental involvement although in practice this could not be seen to be successful. As with the teachers in Vincent's (1996) and Brooker's (2002) studies, by emphasising informal opportunities for day-to-day contact with parents, the teachers at Orchard Road and Forest Hill unintentionally create inequality of opportunity for parental involvement. However, formal opportunities for parental involvement cannot be said to be any more effective: for example, Ayesha expressed her concerns about Imran's speech at the parents' evening at Forest Hill but does not feel they were acted upon and the parents at Orchard Road find it difficult to attend parents' evenings for practical reasons.

On first analysis, the picture here is a depressing one: neither informal nor formal approaches are effective in involving parents in terms of increasing their knowledge of what happens in Nursery. However, on further examination it may not be the *approaches* which are ineffective, but the *practices* used to facilitate these approaches. If we take the example of the home visit as a parental involvement practice used in both settings, this can be seen as a formal *practice* in the sense that such visits are an established part of the transition from home to school and they are instigated by teachers rather than parents. In this sense, they



do not differ greatly from parents evenings: both are opportunities for dialogue between parent and teacher concerning knowledge of the child and take place at regular times in the school calendar.

However, the *approach* taken by teachers on home visits differs markedly during home visits from that taken during parents evenings. At both schools in this study, parents' evenings followed the established format of a ten minute conversation between teacher and parent sitting on either side of a school desk. On these occasions, the agenda for the discussion was set by the teachers and usually involved discussing the child's progress in relation to pre-determined academic targets. On the other hand, home visits were approached in a much more informal manner. This was in part due to the location: home visits, by definition, take place in the home space and not in the school space. Moreover, they are seen as a means of parents, teachers and children to get to know each other.

Importantly, home visits provide an opportunity for teachers to interact with parents in the home space, outside of the structures of school. In the discussions about home visits in Abi's interview and with the parents at Orchard Road and Forest Hill, we can see that teachers use their individual agency to approach home visits in a way with which they feel comfortable. Home visits are approached in a positive way by teachers: they want the children to feel at ease and be confident about spending time in the Nursery with their teacher. The parents in the study all welcomed home visits and saw them as a positive start to the children's Nursery experience. Unlike the opportunities for day-to-day contact, equality of opportunity could be provided by arranging for translators to be

present. All parents could be visited and thus be given equal opportunities for involvement. Although home visits are not without difficulties (for example, it was only by chance that Habiba was available to translate for Abi at Ayesha's home visit), they do provide an example of an effective informal *approach* to a formalised *practice*. In this sense, home visits move beyond the kind of inequalities perpetuated by a the reliance on a demand-led informal approach to parental involvement identified by Brooker (2002) in her study of a reception class. Home visits can be seen to represent an opportunity to open up a space for dialogue between parents and teachers and begin to address the imbalances of power which exist between them.

Thus for participants in this study, home visits are an effective parental involvement practice which has the potential for beginning a more equitable relationship between parents, children and teachers. We can see Abi endeavouring to use a similar approach to family days at Forest Hill. She couches her invitation to parents in informal terms ("*Come and be noseey, come and see what we do.*") and encourages parents to join in with the children's play and chat to teachers at the family days. This kind of approach to parental involvement is discussed further in chapter seven.

For me, the recognition of the success of home visits is an important finding in this study, both from the point of view of the research outcomes and in relation to the research process itself. As discussed in chapter four, from an ethical and methodological standpoint I am answerable to the participants in the research. In terms of the teacher participants, I have wrestled with a dilemma throughout the

study. Firstly, I am a teacher and I understand some of the difficulties and pressures experienced by teachers in the current educational climate. Secondly, I have worked in both of the settings discussed and I know from my own experience that engaging with parents is not easy: indeed, this was a major motivation in the rationale for conducting this study as discussed in chapter one. Thirdly, in conducting this research I have been dependent on the support of practitioners in both settings and on their willingness to give their valuable time and energy to the research. So, in relation to my answerability to teacher participants, it is difficult for me as a researcher to highlight areas of the data which could be seen to portray these practitioners in a negative light. On the other hand, I am also answerable to the parent and child participants in this study. As such, I have a responsibility to highlight practices which might contribute to the marginalisation of these participants in terms of parental involvement.

The success of home visits as a parental involvement practice reassures me as a researcher and in part solves my dilemma. The effectiveness of home visits as a parental involvement practice which takes place outside of the school space highlights the way in which the structures of school and of the education system in general constrain teachers in terms of parental involvement. We have seen in sections 7.3 and 7.4 how these structures encourage the reproduction of parental involvement practices which marginalise 'British Asian' parents. Once practitioners are able to engage with 'British Asian' parents outside of the school space, they can move towards more a transformative approach to parental involvement.

Thus, it is not individual practitioners who are responsible for reproducing existing power relationships between themselves as teachers and 'British Asian' parents. Rather, it is the constraining nature of the structures of school and the education system which limit the parental involvement practices of these teachers.

### ***7.5.3 Parental involvement in children's learning in the home space***

As discussed in chapter five, it is noticeable that the vast majority of the opportunities for parental involvement discussed by participants involved parents coming into school or carrying out school initiated activities in the home space. Although the parents discussed opportunities for involvement which they initiate at home, such as playing on the computer and going shopping, these are not acknowledged by the teacher participants. We have already seen how parents have limited cultural and social capital in the field of school and the effect this has on their ability to be involved in their children's education. It seems that the lack of recognition of the home space as a valid space for the initiation of parental involvement activities, rather than just as an environment for carrying out school initiated activities, means that teachers and parents are missing out on the potential for valuable parental involvement opportunities. Parents at both settings seemed confident in their abilities to support their children's learning at home, although as discussed above in section 7.3 and 7.4 this confidence is not always recognised by their children's teachers. Furthermore, lack of dialogue around activities which are sent home can lead to non-participation on the part of parents which is wrongly perceived as lack of involvement (Auerbach, 2007: Bakker et al,

2007). By keeping parents at the margins of the school space, teachers are overlooking valuable opportunities to work with parents.

#### ***7.5.4 Parental involvement as a participatory democracy?***

The scope of opportunities for involvement in their children's education is limited at both settings to supporting children's learning and development. Parents and teachers all talk about parental involvement in terms of helping children to make academic progress, whether this happens in the school or the home space. Only Val hints at the possibility of the school space as a potential site for participatory democracy (Vincent, 2000), when she talks about the parents' suggestion box and her wish that parents would "*take the lead*". However, given that the data suggests a reproductive approach to parental involvement, it is not surprising that parents are not involved at the level of decision making.

The reproductive nature of parental involvement practices in the settings does not allow for the notion of parental involvement as a participatory democracy for a number of reasons. Firstly, the structures inherent in the field of school in both settings do not give teachers the space needed to engage in praxis and reflect on their practice in relation to parental involvement. The phenomenon of *meconnaissance*, discussed in section 7.3.1 works to remove the incentive for teachers to reflect on practices, or on the thinking behind practices, with regard to involving parents. Secondly, as we have seen in sections 7.4 and 7.3, most 'British Asian' parents in the study do not possess sufficient levels of social and

cultural capital to be able to challenge either the structures or practices of the settings. In this way, the parents' individual and collective agency is limited. Furthermore, this situation both perpetuates and is perpetuated by a lack of opportunities for the parents' voices to be heard. The opportunities for symmetrical dialogue in both settings are severely limited by the structures of school and by the practices which operate within these structures. Thus, participants in both settings are a long way from working together to make decisions about parental involvement or other practices in school.

## 7.6 Parental involvement and the negotiation of identities

<b>Table 7.5 Perceptions of parental involvement relating to notions of identity</b>
<i>We are negotiating our identities between home and school and supporting our children to do the same (parents)</i>
<i>There are some aspects of parents' and children's lives which are not relevant to the children's Nursery education (teachers)</i>

### 7.6.1 Parents negotiating identities

So far the discussion of the data in this chapter has focused on the structures of the field of school and how individuals and groups of individuals operate within those structures. I have also discussed the ways in which the different contexts of

the home space and school space influence parental involvement practices and the interactions of parents and teachers within those practices. In this section, I consider how, in moving between the home and school space, parents and children are involved in processes of negotiating identities, as discussed with relation to the conceptual framework in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this thesis.

All of the parents in the study talked at some point about the ways in which, as 'British Asian' parents whose children attend UK schools, they are engaged in a process of negotiating their own identities (Bhabha, 1996). The parents at Orchard Road also talked about the ways in which they endeavour to support their children in negotiating identities, and the effects this has on themselves and members of their extended families.

At Orchard Road, the parents first touch on the subject of the negotiation of identities in their discussion of what their children do at home. Tahmid and Majeda both talk about their own preference for home language television channels, whilst their children want to watch cartoons on English-speaking channels. Interestingly, Majeda refers to home language channels as "*our own channels*." This choice of language is reiterated in conversations with parents and teachers on other occasions: Habiba refers to the food available at Forest Hill as "*their own food*" meaning food which is culturally appropriate for the majority, white population of the school. Annisa refers to parents "*keeping their own language*" in her discussion about speaking English and home language. Sabrina refers to her family's "*own culture and religion*". The participants are expressing a strong sense of parent's cultural identity as relating to their South Asian heritage

and to their religious values and beliefs in the choice of words here. Sabrina articulates the need to hold onto this sense of identity and to encourage its continuation in the lives of her children: "*I want them to always know where they come from.*" In this way, Majeda and Tahmid are articulating the way in which their sense of identity is rooted in their early experiences of living in their home countries. Sabrina and Habiba are reflecting on their family habitus, rooted also in South Asian cultures.

However, as well as having a strong sense of identity relating to their cultural and ethnic origins, the parent participants are engaged in the negotiation between these identities and their identities as 'British' Asians. Both Roma and Sabrina express this negotiation of identities in terms of deciding what has to be done to fit in with life in the UK and to what extent parents are willing to conform with these expectations: "*Obviously because we're living here we have to do some things which are, you know, British.*" (Sabrina) ;"*Parents do realise that some things need to be done because they are living here*" (Roma) . Annisa also perceives parents as engaging in the negotiating of identities only when the context in which parents find themselves makes such negotiation necessary: "*They don't need to learn English, they've got their own community, they don't need to go out, they've got all the community they need.*" Here we can see participants articulating the way in which Bourdieu views an individual's habitus as being shaped by the social world in which they find themselves, whilst remaining influenced by its earlier manifestations (see discussion in section 2.4).

Once children begin attending the school Nurseries, the habitus of individual



participants enters into what Bourdieu sees as a time of crisis . Now parents are negotiating identities between their own values, which Roma perceives as being "*based on their home countries*" and the expectations upon them as UK citizens whose children attend UK schools. Sabrina and Majeda both articulate the difficulties inherent in this negotiation of identities with regard to their relationships with their children and their mothers (see section 7.4.2 above).

We have seen evidence of the ways in which parents incur negative sanctions during this time if their habitus is not closely aligned with the structures and practices of school: for example, in the rejection of parents' ideas about caring for babies and young children at Orchard Road. Ayesha's suffering is two-fold in this respect, since her individual and family habitus is not closely aligned with the structures of school, nor does she share many components of her habitus with the majority of the other, white parents at Forest Hill. Furthermore, although habitus is seen by Bourdieu as being ingrained in one's subconscious, in Ayesha it is partly made conscious in her choice of dress, which leaves her open to bullying by other parents on the playground. In chapter eight, I will set out my notion of a 'third' space approach to parental involvement which would allow parents and teachers to reflect on their dispositions and attitudes and move towards a shared understanding of their own and each others' individual habitus.

### ***7.6.2 Religion as an aspect of parent's and children's identities***

In their discussions relating to the negotiation of identities, the parent participants talk about the role of religion in their own lives and in the lives of their children. At Forest Hill, Imran goes to mosque school regularly and the parent participants at Orchard Road will send their children to mosque school when they are older. For Imran then, mosque school is an important part of his daily life. He spends two hours there each weekday and he enjoys going to mosque. However, this is not a part of his identity which is acknowledged in the field of school, since Abi does not know that Imran attends mosque school. Thus, in this sense, Imran's home and school identities are not in a process of negotiation or hybridization (Bhabha, 1994), but are kept separate. When his sister Fareeda has engaged in negotiating the religious aspect of her own identity with her school identity, she encountered a similar phenomenon. Since the food provided at school is not Halal, it is suggested to Fareeda that she eats part of a meal only or brings her own lunch. This sends a clear message to Fareeda and Imran that the religious aspects of their identity are not open to negotiation in school: they belong at home.

Abi tries to support the religious aspect of Imran's identity by giving him a vegetarian badge to wear when he eats at school, as the dinner supervisors do not always remember that he cannot eat certain foods. This is another example of how the structures of school work to marginalise 'British Asian' children and parents despite the best efforts of their teachers, this time in terms of their

religious identity. The school dinners service does not provide Halal food for Imran and Fareeda, since they are in a very small minority of children at Forest Hill who require such food. This means that in the context of school meal provision, their sense of identity as Muslims is not supported. Abi tries to support this aspect of Imran's identity with the vegetarian badge, since this is the only option open to her. However, Imran and his family do not identify him as a vegetarian but as a Muslim. Abi is put in a position where she has to impose the identity of vegetarian on Imran since this is an acceptable identity within the structures of school. Within the white majority population, 'vegetarian' is a recognised identity, whereas 'Muslim' is not.

When first examining this issue in the data from this study, I wondered if I was in danger on placing too much emphasis on a relatively small aspect of life in school, i.e. school dinners. Moreover, it could be argued that for Imran, there is no issue: he has a badge which ensures that he is only given appropriate food. On reflection, if Imran's and his parents religious identity was recognised in other ways in school, I might agree with this argument. However, the context in which Imran is given a vegetarian badge is one in which his religious identity is not supported and neither is that of his mother, Ayesha. Indeed, the clothes which Ayesha wears as an expression of her religious identity are openly "*sniggered at*" by other parents. Furthermore, Imran's teachers do not have knowledge of his religious life outside of school and he is the only Muslim child in the Nursery. We have already seen how the structures of school limit opportunities for dialogue between Abi and Ayesha and this makes it hard for Abi to recognise the religious aspect of Imran's identity or to support this identity in school.

The lack of opportunities for dialogue around religion and religious identities can also be seen in the data from Orchard Road. Even Annisa, who shares her identity as a Muslim with the parents, says that she does not discuss religion with the parents. Annisa thinks that this is because parents are concerned that they may have a difference of opinion. In expressing this opinion, Annisa is recognising that although she shares her identity as a Muslim with parents, it does not necessarily follow that she and the parents as individuals identify themselves as Muslims in the same way: *“You know, we are all very different, like Bengali Muslim, the culture is very different from Pakistani Muslims.”* However, the lack of dialogue around religion means that Annisa and the Muslim parents do not have the opportunity to articulate their differences or to find shared experiences from which they might begin to build more equitable relationships with each other.

### ***7.6.3 Sensitivity in relation to talking about religion***

Annisa also recognises the sensitivities involved in dialogue around the subject of religion. During the fieldwork, there were only two occasions when I was able to move the dialogue around religion beyond a discussion of the celebration of festivals and the significance of Halal food. These two occasions were when I talked with Annisa in her interview and when I had a one-to-one conversation with Sabrina. When talking with parents in the group meetings, there was a definite sense of discomfort when the subject of religion was raised in relation to parental involvement. Parents were happy to talk about mosque school and about other

aspects of their religious life in relation to their home identities. However, as soon as I tried to move the discussion on to talk about the role of religion in their children's education, the conversation came to a halt (orcfn25). It seemed that, in terms of dialogue about religion and identity, my methodology was unsuccessful in allowing parent's voices to be heard.

I had the impression that Sabrina had more that she wanted to say, but that she was inhibited in the group situation. For this reason, I arranged to interview Sabrina as an individual. This was a methodological decision which required some reflection. Sabrina was the only parent participant at Orchard Road who was born and brought up in the UK. She speaks English fluently and did not need a translator during the group meetings. Sabrina has more knowledge of what happens in Nursery than the other parents, since she has had four children who have attended the Nursery at Orchard Road. Thus, in the field of school and in the context of the research project, Sabrina possesses greater amounts of cultural and social capital than do the other parent participants. In interviewing Sabrina separately, I was in danger of reproducing the imbalance of power in the relationship between myself and the parent participants which I had worked so hard to address in the formulation of my research methods.

My justification for interviewing Sabrina is that the interview opened up a space for her voice to be heard in terms of talking about the negotiation of her identities as a 'British Asian' parent. In terms of moving towards a 'third space' approach to parental involvement, Sabrina may be further along in her journey than other parents. She is at a point where she can articulate her struggles in negotiating

identities. She is able to do this partly because she is fluent in the dominant language and partly because she possesses the social and cultural capital to feel confident in her articulation of this struggle. In terms of my research methods, interviewing Sabrina was the right thing to do in that it allowed a space for the articulation of this struggle to be heard.

In relation to the other parent participants, I also feel that interviewing Sabrina was the right thing to do. Having decided to request an interview with Sabrina, I offered all of the other parent participants the opportunity for a one-to-one interview. Majeda was interested in being interviewed, although in the event was unable to meet with me because of her commitment to caring for her ill mother and accompanying her to several hospital appointments. None of the other parents wished to be interviewed on their own. Although in this respect, I could be seen to be giving voice to Sabrina in a way which is unfair to other parent participants, in interviewing Sabrina I am able to reflect on how symmetrical dialogue can be reached with other parent participants. Sabrina's enhanced social and cultural capital and her ability to activate this capital in gaining access to me as a researcher sheds light on the discussion which runs through this thesis about finding ways to give 'British Asian' parents a voice. Sabrina avoids marginalisation to some extent because of the 'British' aspects of her identity, namely speaking English and knowing about the UK education system. In accessing the opportunity to articulate her opinions and ideas, Sabrina confirms my assertion that the structures of school serve to reproduce the marginalisation of 'British Asian' parents in terms of their knowledge of school life and in terms of opportunities for symmetrical dialogue.

#### ***7.6.4 Support for parents' and children's religious identities in the two settings***

I have already highlighted how Abi was constrained in her efforts to support Imran's identity as a Muslim in relation to eating in school. At Orchard Road, the experiences of the teacher participants can be seen to be reflective of my own experiences as a researcher in the setting. Dialogue around the subject of religion is difficult, as I discovered. In the context of the research, I am able to reflect on this and highlight it as an area for further research with regard to listening to the voice of 'British Asian' parents. Teacher participants also recognise the sensitivities involved in discussing religion, but there is a difference in their relationship with the parent participants. As a researcher, once my research is complete, I am no longer directly involved in the life of the setting, although I still maintain a responsibility to the research participants. Teachers, on the other hand, are engaged in sustaining day-to-day relationships with parents and their children. In the light of this need to maintain working relationships with parents, it is not surprising that teachers' response to the sensitivities around discussing religion may be to limit that discussion.

Both Abi and Roma talk about religion in their interview in terms of Halal food and the celebration of festivals. They are on 'safe' ground here, since food and festivals are a long-established element of the early years curriculum, the appropriateness of which is not the subject of this thesis. As far as they are

concerned, the parents in their settings are happy for their children to engage with curriculum activities relating to religious festivals and food. However, we have already seen how opportunities for parents to challenge practice in the settings are limited. It seems unlikely that 'British Asian' parents with limited social and cultural capital would have the necessary resources to begin a dialogue around issues of particular sensitivity such as religion. Even in the parent groups, which were designed to facilitate a more symmetrical dialogue, parents were reluctant to discuss their religion.

Abi's and Roma's approach to religious identity is understandable, but not justifiable in terms of giving parents a voice in the settings. Roma's assertion that "*Religion is nothing to do with education, it is a personal thing and you keep it separate*" is one which I would challenge in the light of my research. In the experiences of the parents at Orchard Road and at Forest Hill, we can see that religion is an important facet of individual's identities. In insisting that religion is kept separate from education, Roma is negating this aspect of parent's identities in the field of school. This in turn serves to reproduce the notion that, "*home is home and school is school.*"

## **7.7 Moving towards a 'third space'?**

Although the notions of parental involvement as a participatory democracy, praxis and symmetrical dialogue are not explicitly recognised in either of the settings,



there are hints in the data of a move towards a recognition of these notions. This is reflected in the perceptions of parental involvement listed in table 7.6.

<b>Table 7.6 Perceptions of parental involvement and a 'third space' approach</b>
<i>We should be asking parents for their views on parental involvement (teachers)</i>
<i>We know how we want to be involved in our children's Nursery education (parents)</i>

On several occasions, teacher participants talked about the need to ask parents for their views on parental involvement. Val articulated the view that parental involvement is not about what teachers think that parents need, but what parents are interested in themselves. Chris, Roma and Annisa at Orchard Road and Abi and Louise all talked about the importance of listening to parents: to increase parent's knowledge about their children's education, to reach agreement on the kinds of parental involvement experiences which parents value and to establish trusting relationships between teachers and parents. However, it seems that teacher participants have not been able to make the leap between thinking about giving voice to parents and actually opening up a space where these voices can be heard.

Moving towards a 'third space' approach to parental involvement is not just a case of teachers asking parents what they think. As my research methods demonstrate, time needs to be spent on building relationships with parents before they will be willing to tell us what they really think. I feel sure that my research has uncovered but the 'tip of the iceberg' in relation to participants' perceptions of parental involvement and there is certainly scope for further research here.

Similarly, teachers need time to build trusting relationships with parents and they need the structures and policies of school to support such relationships. Teacher participants expressed frustration at the lack of support for their work with parents: for Roma, this was a perceived lack of support within school and for Abi and Louise a perceived lack of support from the local authority.

A 'third space' approach is not just reliant on trust between parents and teachers. It needs teachers to be able to trust themselves and their own practices. In part, this comes from the time and space for teachers to realise a clearly articulated pedagogical approach (Whalley, 2001b). I have no doubt that the teacher participants in this study had clear views on how children should learn and be taught and on how parents should be involved in these processes. However, we have seen that there is little evidence of the opportunity for teachers to reflect on these views, thus articulating them clearly to themselves, or to articulate them clearly to parents. Once again, this is an issue for the schools at a structural level as well as being a concern for individual practitioners.

## 7.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have examined the data from my research study using the lens of the conceptual framework and literature review framework outlined in chapters two and three. I have argued that the existing parental involvement practices in the two Nursery settings encourage the reproduction of perceptions of parental involvement and thus of the structure of the field of school. The acceptance of certain parental involvement practices as being the 'right' way to do things sustains an environment where parents' and children's voices cannot be heard and where symmetrical dialogue does not flourish.

In challenging the acceptance of certain parental involvement practices, I am not arguing for or against these practices themselves, but against the notion that they are not subject to debate. In reproducing certain parental involvement practices, the structures in the two settings do not allow for praxis on the part of teachers or for a co-construction of parental involvement between teachers, parents and children. Although 'British Asian' parents in both settings are liable to marginalisation in terms of parental involvement, this is a result of the reproduction of existing structures and practices, rather than as a result of any individual parent's ethnic origin, home language or immigrant status.

Whilst it is my assertion that there is no 'right' way for teachers to work in partnership with any individual parent or group of parents, this research study has highlighted issues which may be of particular relevance to 'British Asian' parents,

their children and their children's teachers. It has been my intention throughout this research to keep the study firmly rooted in a discussion of practice. In the final chapter, I will set out my vision for transforming ways in which teachers and parents can work together using a 'third space' approach. I will also consider how the influences on perceptions of parental involvement identified in chapter six need to be considered in moving towards a 'third space' approach.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Implications for future practice and research**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In this thesis, I have examined the perceptions of parental involvement of a group of 'British Asian' parents, their children and their children's teachers. I have analysed the influences on these perceptions of parental involvement and considered how these influences relate to the identities of participants and the social structures within which participants operate. I have demonstrated how existing discourses and practices of parental involvement can serve to marginalise 'British Asian' parents and their children and to dis-empower teachers. In this final chapter of the thesis, I will relate my analysis to the wider field of research and practice, beyond the two settings involved in this study. I will do this by considering my own perceptions of parental involvement, developed during the course of this PhD research. I will relate these perceptions to my model for a 'third space' approach to parental involvement, illustrated in fig 8.1 below. I will consider how the influences on perceptions of parental involvement identified in chapter six can be addressed in order to move towards a 'third space' approach to working with parents. I will also discuss these perceptions in the light

of discourses of parental involvement as articulated in three recent reviews commissioned by the government: Frank Field's review of children living in poverty and their life chances (Field, 2010), Graham Allen's report on early intervention (Allen, 2011) and Dame Tickell's (2011) review of the EYFS.

## **8.2 The Field, Allen and Tickell Reviews**

In recent months, whilst I have been involved in writing up this research study, three reviews have been published which are of relevance to the findings and analysis in this thesis. A discussion of the Field, Allen and Tickell reviews did not form part of the literature review framework in Fig 3.2, since they were not commissioned until after the completion of the data collection and analysis for this study. However, in order to maintain the transferability of my research findings, it is appropriate to consider the recommendations of each review in this chapter, in relation to the implications of my research findings and analysis for future practice.

The Field Review (2010) is of relevance to my research since it is concerned with making recommendations for enhancing the life chances of children living in poverty in the UK. Statistics indicate that children in families of Bengali and Pakistani origin are amongst those children most likely to live in poverty: 58% and 54% of children in these ethnic groups live in poverty in the UK (DWP, 2009). The review asserts that it is not money which will improve the life chances of these children, but that, "*it is family background, parental education, good parenting*

*and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years [the first five years of life] that together matter more to children than money." (p.5).*

The Allen Review (2011) sets out ways in which the author argues that early intervention strategies can serve to improve outcomes for young children and break cycles of deprivation in families and communities. Allen argues that appropriate parenting practices play an important part in breaking these cycles of deprivation: "*What parents do is more important than who they are. Especially in a child's earliest years, the right kind of parenting is a bigger influence on their future than wealth, class, education or any other common social factor*" (Allen, 2011, p. xiv).

The concerns of these reviews with parental education, family background and the discourse surrounding 'good parenting' are of direct relevance to my research study, as the discussion of the review in sections 8.4.2, 8.4.4 and 8.4.5 indicate. In addition, the emphasis throughout the Tickell (2011) review on working in partnership with parents in early years settings is a timely one in terms of the approach I advocate in this chapter (see section 8.4.2).

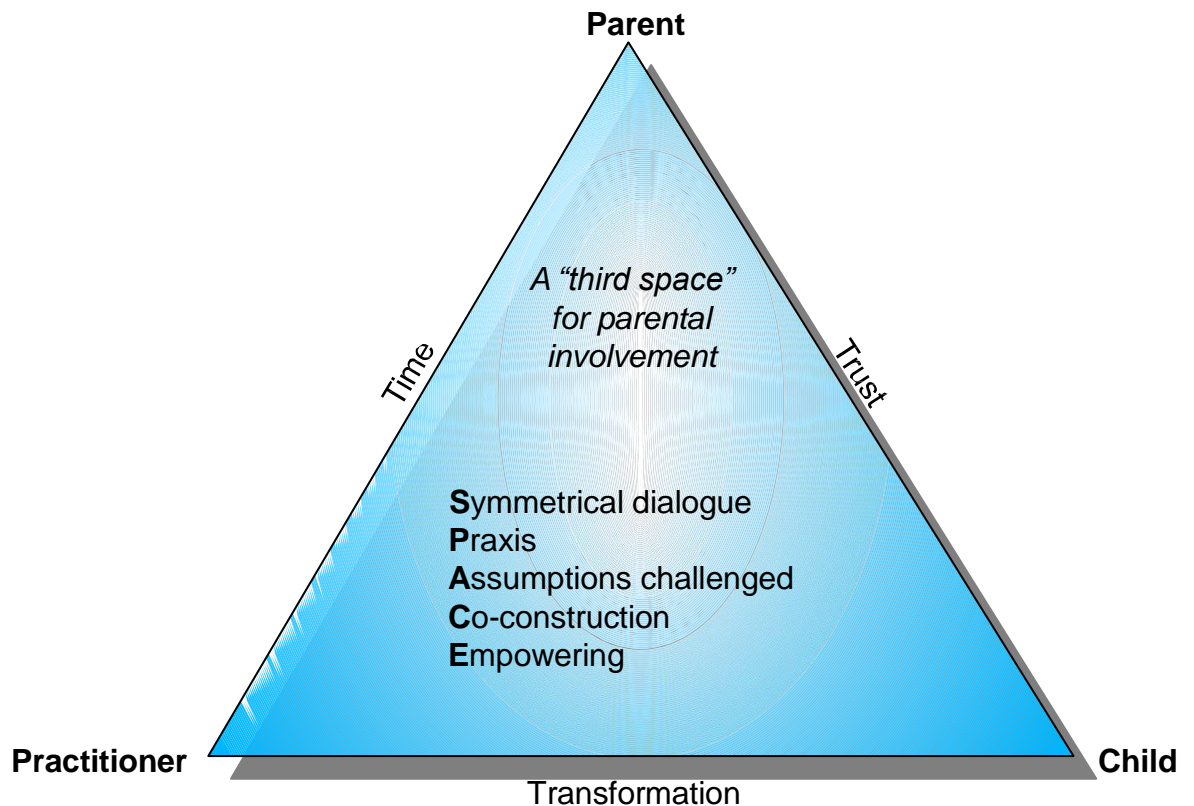
### **8.3 A 'third space' approach to parental involvement**

In chapter six, I examined the influences on perceptions of parental involvement in children's education and in chapter seven I went on to highlight the perceptions themselves, as they emerged from my analysis of the data. The discussion of

these perceptions makes clear that in my research study, although well-intentioned, practitioners were not working in partnership with parents in an equitable manner. At the beginning of the thesis, I set out my intention to keep my research closely aligned with practice in early years settings. In this section, I will explain how I see the potential to transform the ways in which practitioners, parents and children work together using a 'third space' approach. I also examine the ways in which the influences on perceptions of parental involvement identified in chapter six need to be considered in order for my notion of a 'third space' approach to be actualised in practice.



**Fig 8.1 A model of a 'third space' approach to parental involvement**



The diagram in fig 8.1 illustrates how I see a 'third space' approach to parental involvement in practice. An effective approach to parental involvement should open up a space where the elements listed can be found: namely **S**ymmetrical dialogue, **P**raxis, the challenging of **A**ssumptions and a **C**o-constructive approach which is **E**mpowering for parents, children and teachers. A 'third space' approach to parental involvement needs time to be devoted to it, as well as needing the passage of time to evolve. This is because a 'third space' approach can only be implemented on a basis of trusting relationships between parents, children and teachers. Finally, by definition a 'third space' approach should be transformative rather than reproductive in nature. In advocating this approach, I acknowledge

that there is not one 'right' way of involving parents effectively in their children's Nursery education. Rather, I argue that a 'third space' approach allows practitioners, parents and children to negotiate their own parental involvement practices as appropriate for individuals and for groups of individuals at a particular time.

In considering a 'third space' approach to working with parents, we need to think carefully about the influences on perceptions of parental involvement identified in my research: namely experiences, representations, knowledge, feelings, opinions, values and beliefs, interactions and time. In particular, as practitioners working with parents from minority ethnic groups, we need to consider the possibility that some parents' experiences of their own education may be markedly different from our own. We need to create space for parents and practitioners to share their experiences and for these experiences to be recognised in the ways in which parents and practitioners are represented in the policies and structures of settings. I would argue that this space needs to be created before children begin to attend settings. My research indicates that home visits can provide an ideal opportunity for the beginnings of symmetrical dialogue. Rather than using such visits to transmit information and expected behaviours to parents, practitioners should use home visits as the foundation for a co-construction of shared knowledge and experience.

As practitioners, we need the time and space to reflect on our own feelings, opinions and values in order to engage with parents in a way which promotes dialogue. In other words, we need to be sure about what we 'hold dear' in terms

of practice and pedagogy with regard to young children and be prepared to share this with parents. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that some parents, particularly those who do not share our own educational and cultural experiences, may hold different values or opinions. We need to be prepared to negotiate ways of working with these parents and their children which allow individuals to 'keep their own culture', as Sabrina expressed it in my study, whilst building a shared knowledge about their children and how to support their learning, development and well-being. Remembering the influence of time on perceptions of parental involvement, we need to consider that at particular times in particular circumstances, different approaches might be appropriate.

To use an example from my own reflections on practice during this research study, I relate a conversation which took place between myself and a parent involved in the pilot study. The mother concerned was discussing our emphasis in the Nursery on children developing independence, for example by hanging up their own coats and selecting their own resources. She could not understand why I thought this was important; "*Why do they need to be independent? They are three years old, that's what Mums and Dads are for!*" At this point in the research study, I reflected in my research diary that we had not done enough as practitioners in the setting to explain the importance of independence for children's development. However, at this later stage in my journey as a practitioner and research, I see that this is only part of the story. In adopting a 'third space' approach, I need to reflect on why I believe it is important for children to learn independence. I should consider how this belief is rooted in my experiences as a child and adult in the UK and as an early years practitioner who

was trained in the UK. I may not change my mind about the importance of independence, but as well as articulating this belief to the mother, I would need to allow her to reflect on her own beliefs around independence and to share them with me. In this way, we could be working together in a way which encouraged interactions of a more symmetrical manner. It might then be appropriate to consider that for this child, in this particular family and community, at this particular time, learning to be independent may not be the most important concern.

So, in proposing the notion of a 'third space' approach to parental involvement in relation to the findings of my research, there are several elements which I would highlight as being fundamental to such an approach. Firstly, a 'third space' approach must allow teachers and parents and children to open up spaces where they can engage in symmetrical dialogue with each other. Since at present teachers occupy a more powerful position in the field of school the impetus for opening up such spaces should come from them. Secondly, a 'third space' approach should enable parents and teachers to reflect on their dispositions and attitudes and to share those parts of them which remain valued elements of their 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977), such as their religious values or their attitude towards pedagogical approaches, for example. In this process of conscientization and praxis (Freire, 1996: see section 2.9) teachers, children and parents can arrive at a shared understanding of pedagogy and of parental involvement, which can form the basis for a shared knowledge and shared experiences. At the same time, teachers parents and children can maintain those parts of their identity which are important to them and support each other in the negotiation of new identities.

Lastly, I argue that a 'third space' approach cannot be seen as a set of definitive practices which can be arrived at through a process of negotiation. Rather, I would assert that a 'third space' approach to parental involvement is an ideal which parents, children and teachers should strive to work towards and which will mean different things to different individuals and groups of individuals at different times. My recommendations for future practice are not based on a list of desirable practices but on an approach to working with parents which should be co-constructed between particular practitioners with the parents and children with whom they are working at a given time.

## 8.4 My own perceptions of parental involvement

Table 8.1 articulates my own perceptions of parental involvement, drawn from the analysis and discussion in chapters six and seven of this thesis:

<b>Table 8.1. My own perceptions of parental involvement</b>
<b>1. There is no 'right' way for 'British Asian' parents to be involved in their children's Nursery education</b>
<b>2. Parental involvement needs its own space and time if it is to be effective</b>
<b>3. Approaches to parental involvement should be transformative in nature rather than reproductive</b>
<b>4. Approaches to parental involvement need to be co-constructed, involving parents, teachers and children</b>
<b>5. Parental involvement should be empowering for teachers, parents and children</b>

Each of these perceptions is explained and discussed with regard to implications for future practice in sections 8.4.1 to 8.4.7 of this chapter.

### ***8.4.1 There is no 'right' way for 'British Asian' parents to be involved in their children's Nursery education***

As a result of my reflection on the research carried out in this study, it is my assertion that there is no 'right' way for 'British Asian' parents to be involved in their children's Nursery education. As practitioners, we need to recognise that in the negotiation of their identities between home and school, parents need to be

allowed to find their own approaches to supporting their children's learning and to involving themselves in the life of the Nursery. This does not mean that practitioners do not have a role to play in creating spaces for parental involvement, but that their role should exist alongside that of the roles of the parents and of the children, in the co-construction of practices discussed below, in section 8.4.6.

Although my research has highlighted areas of which are of particular concern in relation to 'British Asian' parents, it does not follow that there is one way of addressing these concerns in terms of adopting particular practices. To take an example from the research, an issue of concern for the parents and teachers at Forest Hill Nursery was the need for bilingual support. Clearly, the best way to address this concern would be to provide bilingual support for parents in the form of members of staff who speak home languages. However, from a practical point of view this is not always going to be possible. In suggesting a notion of 'good practice' in the form of a recommendation to provide bilingual support, I would be enabling the existing structures in similar settings to continue to dis-empower teachers and thus marginalise parents who speak EAL. What I am suggesting is that teachers, parents and children engage in dialogue to co-construct the 'right' parental involvement practices for the parents, children and practitioners in a particular setting at a particular point in time.

Furthermore, although my research has highlighted particular areas of concern for practitioners working with 'British Asian' parents, it does not follow that practitioners should approach all 'British Asian' parents in the same way. As the

experiences of the parents in my study demonstrates, different parents are at different stages in the negotiation of their identities as 'British Asians', as parents in their community and as 'school parents'. Thus as well as considering issues which may be of relevance to particular groups of parents, particularly if those groups do not belong to the majority white, English-speaking population of the UK, we need to remember the need to build a relationship with each parent as an individual.

#### ***8.4.2 Parental involvement needs its own space and time if it is to be effective***

The emphasis of the Field (Field, 2010) and Allen (Allen, 2011) reviews on the importance of engaging and working with parents is a welcome one in relation to my own perceptions of parental involvement. The discourse in these reviews can be seen as a welcome step towards opening up space and time for parental involvement as a recognised part of the role of early years practitioners. However, my research demonstrates that a 'third space' approach is something which takes time to work towards. Before parents, teachers and children can work together in a 'third space' of parental involvement, they need time to build trust in their own values and opinions and in their relationships with each others. Rather than creating time and space to build relationships of trust with parents, the emphasis in the Allen report is on "*providing parents with the information and support they need*" (Allen, 2011, p.xiv) to help their children and to avoid "*the wrong type of parenting*" (Allen, 2011, p.xiii). A key recommendation of the report is that a National Parenting Campaign is set up as the "*Crown Jewel of the Big Society*



*project, pursued with enough passion and vitality to make it irresistible even to the most jaundiced."* (Allen, 2011 p.xix).

The emphasis throughout the report is a positive one, founded on the desire to provide support for parents. However, the findings of my research suggest that this cannot be effectively achieved by mounting a campaign with the aim of showing parents how to support their children in ways deemed appropriate by the authors of the Big Society project. The message behind the rhetoric here could be interpreted as one of a desire to impose a certain way of parenting on those parents who are deemed in need of support and intervention. My research shows that imposing practices on 'British Asian' parents will not transform the way in which they are involved in their children's learning and development, but may serve to marginalise them further in society, thus achieving an effect opposite to that proposed by the recommendations of the Allen report. I would not argue with the aim of the Allen review to improve outcomes for children, by working to improve parental understanding of children's development in the early years and effective means of support for that development. However, if we wish to support parent's understanding of early years development, first we need to build relationships of trust with those parents.

Following on from the discussion in section 8.4.1 it is clear that if practitioners are to build relationships with individual parents in order to negotiate practices of parental involvement, then this is a process which will take time. As fig 8.1 illustrates, a 'third space' approach to parental involvement needs time to be given to it. In the case of 'British Asian' parents, it might be that the time taken to

build trusting relationships is considerable. In chapter seven, I demonstrate how the habitus of 'British Asian' parents makes it difficult for them to align their identities with the structures and policies of school. This may mean that it will take practitioners longer to work with parents and support them in feeling 'at home' in school. However, there is no 'quick fix' approach to parental involvement. If we are not prepared to spend time on building trusting relationships with parents, then we risk reproducing the imbalances of power which already exist in the structures of school.

As early years practitioners, we have a particular responsibility to parents here since we meet them at the beginning of their relationship with their children's teachers. It is in our power to lay the foundations for trusting relationships built over the course of interactions between home and school from the early years on. We are also at a position of advantage since spending time on building relationships is legitimized for early years practitioners in a way which it might not be for those working with older children (DCSF, 2008a). It is vital that as early years practitioners we take the opportunity that we alone among practitioners are given, namely to develop spaces for symmetrical dialogue at the time when the cultures of home and school first come together. By opening up these spaces, we will be able to create shared experiences and knowledge with parents, which my study has shown to influence perceptions of parental involvement.

In this way, the findings of my research demonstrate how we are able to move on from the situation depicted in previous research with minority ethnic parents, which is mostly concerned with families with children in primary and secondary

school. It is up to practitioners in the early years field to make sure that parents begin their relationship with school in a positive and equitable manner. In adopting a 'third space' approach to working with parents, we can ensure that schools are not the 'unwelcome spaces' perceived by the 'British Asian' parents in the APSSE study (Crozier and Davies, 2007). It is imperative that we adopt a 'third space' approach if we are to avoid the phenomenon of parents needing to act as compensators, complementors or modifiers of their children's learning by the time their children arrive at junior and secondary school (Reay, 1998).

We also need to create a space for the co-construction of parental involvement practices which exists outside of the structures of school. If we do not do this, again we risk reproducing the existing relationships between teachers, children and parents. Again, this is not a case of decreeing that parent involvement practices should be sited in a particular physical space, be that inside or outside the school building. Rather, that practitioners need to create spaces where parents can 'name their worlds' and engage in symmetrical dialogue. To do this, we need to be able to look at the dominant discourses surrounding parental involvement and open these discourses up to debate with parents. I argue that this can be more effectively achieved by opening up a space where parents and teachers can develop a shared knowledge, rather than in the separate spaces highlighted in the research of Vincent (2000) and Reay and Mirza (2005), discussed in chapter two.

At the same time, practitioners need the space to be able to 'name their worlds' (Freire, 1996) and reflect on what is important to them in terms of values and

practices in relation to parental involvement. This space can be activated by allowing and encouraging practitioners to reflect on and develop a 'clearly articulated pedagogy' which can be shared and discussed with parents. Thus, although I see a 'third space' approach as being one where parents and teachers negotiate practices of parental involvement, it is not a case of 'throwing the baby out with bath water'. Establishing spaces for symmetrical dialogue with parents allows practitioners to articulate their own values and ideas in a way which does not impose these values and ideas on parents, but allows for meaningful debate. In this way opinions and assumptions which may operate as dominant discourses in early years settings can be challenged. At the same time, practitioners are given the opportunity to share their knowledge of how young children learn and of the UK education system with parents.

The Tickell Review (2011) recommends that parents are given a clearly written explanation of the EYFS framework on their child's entry to an early years setting. Although I welcome this recommendation, my research demonstrates that this sharing of knowledge does not go far enough, particularly for practitioners who are working with parents who were not born and educated in the UK. This explanation should be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between teachers, parents and children which brings parents to a better understanding of the pedagogy of the EYFS and allows teachers to benefit from parents' knowledge of their own child. I would argue that as well as making sure that parents understand the 'rules' of school culture, as advocated by Brooker (2002), we open up spaces where those rules can be challenged.

Thus, although I have argued against the notion of teachers as 'experts', a 'third space' approach allows practitioners to maintain their integrity as early years professionals. In the same way, it allows parents to establish those elements of their identity which they wish to maintain whilst negotiating between home and school. For 'British Asian' parents, this may include those parts of their identity which are rooted in their 'race', ethnic origin and religion. The Tickell Review (2011) also recommends that parents are fully involved in assessments of their child's learning and development. I welcome this move, if this involvement includes parental involvement in the development of a shared pedagogy. In other words, we should not only be involving parents in assessing their children's learning and development, but in identifying an individual child's needs and the best ways of supporting those needs.

#### ***8.4.3 Approaches to parental involvement should be transformative in nature rather than reproductive***

In facilitating praxis and symmetrical dialogue, a 'third space' approach allows for transformative parental involvement practices, rather than encouraging the reproduction of existing structures and imbalances of power. In this way, parental involvement can be seen as being a fluid process, in a continual state of 'hybridisation'. What is appropriate for one individual parent or practitioner may not be appropriate for another. In suggesting that parental involvement is fluid, I am not suggesting that practitioners must add parental involvement practices to the ever-growing list of changes they are expected to accommodate in today's educational climate. If adopting a 'third space' model of parental involvement, the

**approach** of practitioners does not need to be in a continual state of change.

Rather, the process of praxis should lead practitioners to ask questions of themselves regarding their position in relation to parental involvement.

Opportunities for symmetrical dialogue will allow practitioners to articulate their position to parents, and will also allow parents, practitioners and children to challenge assumptions. Parents, practitioners and children will then be in a position where discourses and practices of parental involvement can be co-constructed, as discussed in section 8.4.4.

#### ***8.4.4 Approaches to parental involvement need to be co-constructed, involving parents, teachers and children***

In considering approaches to parental involvement, my research study demonstrates that by imposing parental involvement practices on parents and children, teachers risk reinforcing the existing imbalances of power between home and school, parents and teachers. Imposing certain practices on parents does not allow parents to share the knowledge of their children with teachers, or for teachers to share their knowledge of the education system and of how children learn with parents. In creating spaces for dialogue with parents, we can create opportunities for this knowledge to be shared. In this sense, we can recognise parent's cultural capital in relation to their knowledge of their own child, and allow them to activate that capital in the field of parental involvement. We can also support 'British Asian' parents to accrue cultural capital in terms of their knowledge of the UK education system and of children's learning in the early years. In this way, we can redress the imbalances of power which exist in

relationships between teachers and 'British Asian' parents. Practitioners, parents and children can then be in a position where they can negotiate their identities as teachers, parents and pupils in school. In turn, this allows practitioners, parents and children to co-construct parental involvement discourses and practices.

The need for parents, practitioners and children to work closely together to co-construct parental involvement practices should be carefully considered in relation to the recommendations of the Field and Allen reviews. The Field (2010) review recommends the dissemination of 'best' practice in terms of parenting which it asserts is "*rooted in the collective wisdom of the community.*" (p. 20) If we view this recommendation in the light of a 'third space' approach to parental involvement, we can interpret it as an endorsement of the notion of a co-construction of 'best' practice in terms of parenting. However, elsewhere in the report, a recommendation is made that young people should be taught how to be '*good parents*'. The assumption here is that every individual and group of individuals in the UK should accept the definition of a 'good parent' promoted in the review. Thus, my worry here is that the discourse of this review is referring to 'the community' in the same way as 'the language' was referred to in my case study at Orchard Road, i.e. the community of the dominant, white, English-speaking majority.

We need to be careful that this recommendation does not lead to members of the dominant white, middle classes in society imposing their view of 'good parenting' on minority ethnic and working class parents. In doing so, as a society we would be in danger of reproducing the very relationship between poverty and life

chances which the recommendations of the Field review seek to transform and thus we waste a valuable opportunity to effect change. This danger is illustrated in the recommendation of the review that children's home learning environments are measured as a means of evaluating Life Chance Indicators. The review cites the findings of the EPPE project (Sylva et al, 2004) in relation to home learning practices which are shown to make a difference to children's life chances. These include parents talking and reading with children, singing songs and nursery rhymes, engaging in learning activities and playing with children.

Although I do not question the benefits of such activities, I would sound a note of caution with regard to how these benefits are communicated to parents. The difficulty in evaluating home learning environments at the same time as promoting the teaching of 'good parenting' is that we risk trying to impose 'best practice' on parents in terms of the home learning environment. My research has shown that imposing our ideas of 'best practice' on parents does not move us forward in terms of our relationships with parents or in terms of developing those parent involvement practices which make a difference to children and their families. I would argue that before we begin to teach 'best parenting' practices and evaluate home learning environments we need to open up a dialogue with parents from a range of social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. Within this dialogue the practices highlighted in the EPPE project (Sylva et al, 2004) can be clearly articulated to parents and thus open to debate. The debate about these practices can then form the basis of a co-construction of 'best parenting' practices. Practitioners can have the opportunity to share their knowledge of approaches to supporting learning in the UK and parents can be given voice in terms of



articulating their individual and community approaches to raising their children. In this way, best parenting practice can indeed be 'rooted in the collective wisdom' of the communities (plural, not singular) in which we are seeking to engage parents.

#### ***8.4.5 Parental involvement should be empowering for teachers, parents and children***

In co-constructing discourses and practices in relation to parental involvement, parents, teachers and children are involved in a transformative approach, as discussed in section 8.4.3. The effects of this approach on the individuals and groups of individuals involved should be one of empowerment. By this, I mean that teachers should be able to feel that they are working effectively with the parents in their setting and that they have established a sense of trust in their relationships with parents and children. By breaking the cycle of viewing 'British Asian' parents as difficult to work with and thus ensuring that these parents are kept at the margins of school life, teachers can be involved in transformative practices which enhance their own experiences in the setting as well as those of the parents and children. As a teacher myself, I know that there are few feelings better than the sense that you are working together with parents and children to 'make the difference', as Val articulates it in the case study at Orchard Road.

Parental involvement practices in a 'third space' approach should be empowering for parents and children. By allowing parents and children to 'name their worlds' we can move away from the phenomenon of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977)

revealed in the imposition of 'best' practice in terms of parental involvement. In the case of 'British Asian' parents, this is of particular importance since the structures of school are so closely aligned with the habitus of the white, majority population. The Field review acknowledges the importance of parenting in children's early years: "*What parents do in the home is at least as important as early years and school education.*" (Field, 2010 p.57). This is an empowering message for parents, which as practitioners we should seek to build on in our approach to parental involvement practices.

## **8.5 Implications for future research**

This small scale research study has opened up a small space where the voices of a group of 'British Asian' parents, their children and their children's teachers have been heard. In using a methodology in which participants voices can be heard, I have been able to demonstrate in a small way how early years settings in the UK could become the spaces for democratic participation visualised by Dahlberg and Moss (2005). There are several ways in which future research could further the dialogue I have begun in this study. Firstly, more research could be undertaken in schools and early years settings working with 'British Asian' parents. My research has shown that 'British Asian' parents can be subject to marginalisation in relation to parental involvement. I have outlined how my 'third space' approach to working with parents could move practice on from the tendencies for homogenisation and labelling parents as 'good' or 'bad' seen in the research of others (for example Crozier and Reay, 2005; Levine-Rasky, 2009). Further research with groups of

'British Asian' parents would give them a stronger voice in terms of discourses of parental involvement in the academic community.

Secondly, my research has examined perceptions of parental involvement practices, but in doing so I have revealed differences in perceptions of children's learning and appropriate support for that learning, with regard to the value placed on different homework activities, for example. In advocating a 'third space' approach to parental involvement, I must also recommend that future research allows 'British Asian' parents a voice in terms of identifying individual and cultural perceptions of children's learning and how this should be supported by the early years curriculum. We might also consider perceptions of parental involvement from the point of view of 'British Asian' children's extended families. Crozier and Davies (2006) assert that extended families are an unused resource in terms of parental involvement and the testimony of the parents at Orchard Road also suggests this to be the case.

Finally, my research has revealed some perceptions of parental involvement with regard to a group of 'British Asian' parents, but there are many more perceptions to be discussed. Different individuals and groups of research participants in different settings would undoubtedly perceive parental involvement in different ways. Furthermore, I have acknowledged in my research that there are some influences on perceptions of parental involvement of which I have but 'scratched the surface': with regard to religious identity, for example. The more we engage in dialogue with parents and allow them space to 'name their worlds' (Freire, 1996), the nearer we come to adopting a 'third space' approach in research methodologies as well as in early years practice. Future research with 'British Asian' families should consider the further development of methodologies in which parents' and children's voices can be truthfully heard.

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# Appendix One. Data from the two Nursery settings

## Appendix 1.1 Summary of clip log

### *Louise: Headteacher interview, Forest Hill*

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
lou0:00/0:10	26/03/06	NS sorting out paper and recorder	none
lou0:10/1:24	26/03/06	Went to school in UK. Enjoyed primary school but went to grammar two bus journeys from home, couldn't mix with children after school, didn't enjoy experience	feeloth, exed
lou1:24/2:27	26/03/06	Had secretarial jobs in London before teaching. Has worked in a play centre and 18months in Nursery but not favourite age group	exoth
lou2:27/3:17	26/03/06	Nursery using EYFS, plan collaboratively with Reception, set up activities which enable them to deliver those goals. Class teacher and a Nursery assistant, extra support in afternoon with children with toileting needs	excurr
lou3:17/3:32	26/03/06	learning through play, socialising, more formal learning such as colours, counting	excurr
lou3:32/3:48	26/03/06	children learning how to socialise, relate to each other and to adults	excurr
lou3:48/3:53	26/03/06	no full time places in Nursery; mornings or afternoons	exed
lou3:53/4:17	26/03/06	provision may change as lost after-school club, may need Nursery to provide wrap around care in future	opioth
lou4:17/4:26	26/03/06	three or four children in Nursery who speak EAL	knowlan, exlang
lou4:26/4:35	26/03/06	one child in Nursery has "very poor English"	opilan, exlang
lou4:35/4:51	26/03/06	SALT support with language in Nursery every Fri afternoon but not aimed at children with EAL specifically	exlang
lou4:51/4:57	26/03/06	can apply same principles from SALT programme to help children with EAL	exlang
lou4:57/5:13	26/03/06	Need minimum number of pupils who need support with EAL before you can access support from LA	exlang
lou5:13/6:00	26/03/06	Tried to get extra support for child of Polish origin who did not speak any English but none available as only three children needed support	exlang
lou6:00/6:22	26/03/06	One supply teacher who speaks Polish, so can help when in school	exlang

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
lou6:45/7:25	26/03/06	Most parents worked with have some English, one child in school Mum has no English at all, not child in Nursery	exlang
lou7:25/7:44*	26/03/06	"It was very much taking her to show her things, rather than being able to tell her what was going on. And just hoping that she understood"	expin, interin, exlang
lou7:44/8:01	26/03/06	supply teacher was able to talk to her when child first started to tell her a little about the school, "But that was just a lucky coincidence."	expin, interin, exlang
lou12:30/12:36*	26/03/06	"Both parties have got to do their best to get on with each other. It's a fifty fifty thing"	opipin, opirel
lou12:36/12:47*	26/03/06	general ethos of school comes from top, must be accessible, have an open door policy	opipin, opirel
lou13:06/13:24	26/03/06	wants parents to think we are welcoming, approachable, will do the best for their child, will listen, want to work with them	opipin
lou13:24/13:28*	26/03/06	"It isn't all about what we want, it's a partnership."	opipin
lou13:28/13:51	26/03/06	Some parents may not have had a positive experience of school themselves so think it's not their job, leave it to school	opipin, exed
lou13:51/14:03	26/03/06	parents who have had better school experience themselves want to be involved and are interested	opipin, exed
lou14:03/14:15	26/03/06	Some parents might want to be involved more, but it's a case of working out which are which	opipin
lou14:15/14:31*	26/03/06	parents' own school experience in the biggest influence on whether they want to be involved	opipin, exed
lou14:53/14:56	26/03/06	"Someone who will listen before they jump in with both feet." good parent	opipar, reppar
lou15:00/15:41*	26/03/06	good parent brings children to school on time, no unnecessary absences, helps child with reading and homework, wants child to become involved in school life, after school clubs, gives them opportunities, takes good physical care of child	opipar, reppar
lou15:51/16:34	26/03/06	induction evenings, discussion with staff about parental involvement, comes up at staff meetings, especially near parents evenings etc	knowpin, expin
lou16:34/17:13	26/03/06	three parent governors, are fairly good, could probably publicise who they are a bit better	opipin, expin
lou17:13/17:45	26/03/06	no longer any members of staff at school with children there.	expin

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
lou17:53/18:32	26/03/06	doesn't think extended schools etc will change parental involvement. Parents will see out of hours as being separate even if in same place, education side of things is different	opipin, opipar

***Abi: Nursery Teacher interview, Forest Hill***

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
abi0:00/0:22	18/02/06	Intro and NS asking question	none
abi0:22/0:33	18/02/06	Born in Whitby and went to school there	exed
abi0:33/0:43	18/02/06	At age of 8 moved to Swansea, went to English speaking school not Welsh	exed
abi0:43/0:54	18/02/06	Went to school in UK, as far as aware no children with EAL in class	exed
abi0:54/1:03	18/02/06	Picked up odd word in Welsh but couldn't have conversation	exlang, exed
abi1:03/1:14	18/02/06	noise on tape; NS asking questions	none
abi1:14/1:22	18/02/06	Cried when first started school	feeltran, exed
abi1:22/1:29*	18/02/06	Remembers clinging onto Mum, hated it correction not hated it but really nervous	feeltran, feelchn, extrans, exed
abi1:29/1:43	18/02/06	Always been shy and quiet, one of main things remembers from school	exed
abi1:43/2:02*	18/02/06	Has talked to own Mum about clinging on, feels more for parents when children are upset	feeltran, feelchn, extrans
abi2:02/2:12*	18/02/06	Wants parents to know that children will be all right if they leave them	feeltran, extrans, interoth
abi2:12/2:27	18/02/06	Separation hard, especially horrible when parents cry	feeltran, extrans
abi2:27/2:37	18/02/06	NS talking about M starting Nursery	none
abi2:37/2:43*	18/02/06	Try to bear in mind that I was like that and be sympathetic to them	feeltran, interoth
abi2:43/3:06	18/02/06	NS explaining question about class	none
abi3:06/3:07	18/02/06	Middle class	exoth
abi3:07/3:15	18/02/06	noise on tape	none
abi3:15/3:17	18/02/06	ethnic origin is white	origin
abi3:17/3:38	18/02/06	NS asking question	none
abi3:38/3:40	18/02/06	Definitely think parents should be involved	opipin
abi3:40/3:47*	18/02/06	It's their child, they should be involved in everything we do	opipin
abi3:47/3:56*	18/02/06	Relationship starts really well with home visit	opipin, interfor
abi3:56/4:04	18/02/06	We try to put them at ease, they get to know us, we get information from them	knowsch, extrans, interfor
abi4:04/4:10*	18/02/06	home visits informal, hopefully parents do not feel any pressure	opipin, interin, extrans, interfor
abi4:10/4:13	18/02/06	Try to put parents at ease on home visits. visit all parents	feelrel, interin, extrans, interfor

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
abi4:13/4:20	18/02/06	Can't do home visits for children who start in the middle of term	extrans, interfor
abi4:20/4:48	18/02/06	After home visits, have days when parents stay in Nursery. Children who start in middle of term don't get home visit but ask parents to stay.	extrans, interfor
abi4:48/4:53	18/02/06	Parents staying gives them an opportunity to ask any questions might have	extrans, interfor
abi4:53/5:02	19/02/06	Did do a home visit for Imran	extrans, interfor
abi5:03/5:32	19/02/06	All in September, home visits in first week, then family days, last year had four family days	extrans, interfor
abi5:32/5:38	19/02/06	This year only been able to give time to one family day	extrans, interfor, time
abi5:38/5:47*	19/02/06	Encourage all parents to come to family days, for their sake. Come and be nosey, come and see what we do.	extrans, interfor
abi5:47/5:58*	19/02/06	Parents may have questions after family day. They probably do want to know what we are up to.	knowcurr, knowsch
abi5:58/6:10	19/02/06	NS asking question	none
abi6:10/6:12	19/02/06	Children all start Nursery at once	extrans
abi6:12/6:30	19/02/06	Try to encourage children to come to same session for family day (morning or afternoon) as will to Nursery so can meet other children. Parents meet other parents as well	extrans, interfor
abi6:30/6:41	19/02/06	After family days, "they all just come in"	extrans
abi6:41/6:54	19/02/06	At beginning parents will come in and stay with children until they settle, make sure OK before leave	feeltran, extrans, time
abi6:54/7:18*	19/02/06	First session half an hour shorter. I mean , we don't usher them out the door.	extrans, time
abi7:18/7:29*	19/02/06	Last year there was only one child upset in morning and two in the afternoon.	feeltran, extrans
abi7:29/7:40	19/02/06	Children knew us, knew the area, knew where most of toys were as had chance to come and play with Mum and Dad before	knowsch, extrans
abi7:40/7:51	19/02/06	At family days, see if parents can leave children for 5 minutes	extrans
abi7:51/8:17	19/02/06	parents evenings and meeting every term which parents can come to	expin, interfor
abi8:17/8:24	19/02/06	parents can speak to us when drop off or pick up children	expin, interin
abi8:24/8:35*	19/02/06	do try to make ourselves available, especially to new families coming in	expin, interin, extrans
abi8:35/8:53*	19/02/06	Tries to be at the door, welcoming, speak to parents, if they need to talk to her can find her	expin, interin
abi8:53/9:12	19/02/06	newsletter for Nursery parents every term	interfor
abi9:12/9:30	19/02/06	newsletter started up by me, just lets them know what we are doing, if they want to do	knowcurr, interfor

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
		anything at home	
abi9:30/9:50	19/02/06	only brief, never exactly sure what we are going to do, don't want to commit to anything	knowsch, interfor
abi9:50/10:06*	19/02/06	if we give them newsletter, will have some idea, e.g. this week we are talking about shape, then if they want to can talk about that at home	knowcurr, interfor
abi10:06/10:24	19/02/06	Never nice to tell parent if child has been naughty or if has had accident	feeloth, knowoth, interoth
abi10:24/10:40	19/02/06	You want to let parents know that something has happened, but you don't want to make them cross because it has happened	feelrel, knowoth, interoth
abi10:40/10:50	19/02/06	Not had a parent being difficult with me	interoth
abi10:50/11:14	26/02/06	NS asking question; NS and Abi laughing; unclear tape	none
abi11:14/11:30	26/02/06	At previous Nursery had some extreme behaviour difficulties, incidents of children being scratched etc and staff not noticing	extea
abi11:30/11:51	26/02/06	If incident happens which wasn't noticed, keeps watch to make sure nothing else	knowoth, exoth
abi11:51/12:00*	26/02/06	Happy with relationships with parents, thinks that the start had helps, can build relationships right from the start	feelrel, opirel, interoth
abi12:00/12:14*	26/02/06	Can have a proper chat to parents on family days, they feel at ease, don't feel that Abi there to judge them	opirel, interin, extrans, interfor
abi12:14/12:24	26/02/06	Thinks that so far, parents who are worried have come to her to talk	opirel, interin
abi12:24/12:48	26/02/06	Was difficult to explain to Imran's Mum when he was bitten. Language barrier is difficult but Mum brings sister-in-law (SIL) to meetings to translate	exlang, interfor
abi12:48/13:00	26/02/06	SIL was there when did home visit as well	extrans, interfor
abi13:00/13:07*	26/02/06	When did home visit, did not realise that Mum did not speak English very well	exlang, interfor
abi13:07/13:11	26/02/06	I don't know if English not very good or if doesn't understand	knowlan, exlang, interoth
abi13:11/13:19	26/02/06	Maybe she is just not confident in situations like that (home visit)	feellang, feelrel
abi13:19/13:46	26/02/06	NS and Abi talking about A's Mum phoning SIL for translation, conversation all in English, maybe confidence?	feellang, knowlan, method, interoth
abi13:46/13:50	26/02/06	Maybe Imran's Mum would get flustered on her own	feellang, exlang, interoth
abi13:50/14:02*	26/02/06	Maybe Mum all right in every day conversation but not with "teachery" things	feellang, exlang, interoth
abi14:02/14:12	26/02/06	SIL is very good, maybe they chat beforehand about what they want to say	exlang, interoth
abi14:12/14:42	26/02/06	Abi makes sure she addresses Mum, as that is who she is talking to, not SIL	exlang, interoth

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
abi14:42/14:52	26/02/06	Even so, sister-in-law (SIL) still answers for Mum sometimes	exlang, interoth
abi14:52/15:13	26/02/06	NS sharing experience of interviewing Mum and SIL and SIL being more confident	method
abi15:13/15:26	26/02/06	Also Polish child (P) in Nursery, translator was there on home visit	exlang, extrans, interfor
abi15:26/15:39	26/02/06	Now Mum always brings P into the Nursery	expin
abi15:39/15:48*	26/02/06	She understands us, we always make the effort to say hello	interin, exlang
abi15:48/15:54	26/02/06	P's Mum will try to communicate	exlang, interoth
abi15:54/16:07	26/02/06	It's been harder for P's Mum because she doesn't have anybody	feellang, exlang
abi16:07/16:13	26/02/06	The person who translated for P's Mum didn't really know her, they hadn't lived here long before home visit	interin, exlang
abi16:13/16:29	26/02/06	P's sister at other school, Mum met other Polish family on playground, Mum acted as translator at home visit	exlang, extrans, interfor
abi16:29/17:15	26/02/06	Abi talking about P's speech difficulties in Polish, translator has come in with Mum on one other occasion	exlang, interoth
abi17:15/17:41	26/02/06	Just found out that there is another Polish child in Y4, could have asked for translation, e.g. letter about sports day which was sent home in English	exlang, interfor
abi17:41/17:50	26/02/06	Imran's Mum gets her husband or SIL to translate letters for her	knowsch, exlang, interfor
abi17:50/17:59	26/02/06	Abi "gets the impression" that Dad and SIL are local	knowoth
abi17:59/18:27	26/02/06	Imran did not talk, Abi did Nursery talk programme with him	exlang, interoth
abi18:27/18:42	26/02/06	programme helped, Imran talks a lot more now, didn't talk much before	exlang, interoth
abi18:42/18:53*	26/02/06	Because Imran not talking, hard to tell if speaking in English or not bothered or what need was	exlang
abi18:53/19:05	26/02/06	speech therapist said he was missing off sounds	exlang
abi19:05/19:34	26/02/06	Abi explaining about Nursery talk programme	exlang
abi19:34/20:00	26/02/06	Nursery talk practitioner did one to one sessions with Imran, then showed Abi how to do it	knowoth, exlang
abi20:00/20:05	26/02/06	Nursery talk practitioner videoed Abi with Imran	exlang, interoth
abi20:05/20:22	26/02/06	Imran talks a lot more, more confident to talk	exlang
abi20:22/20:26	26/02/06	Imran seems a bit more open in general	exlang
abi20:26/20:34*	26/02/06	Wasn't sure how much Mum understood about Nursery talk programme	knowoth
abi20:26/20:43*	26/02/06	Abi did explain it to her, there were letters she could take home, assumes she shared them with Imran's Dad	knowcurr, exlang, interfor



Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
abi20:43/20:51*	26/02/06	Mum signed letter, was happy for us to go ahead with it all	interfor
abi20:51/20:56	26/02/06	Mum was aware that Imran has speech difficulty	knowoth
abi20:56/21:01	26/02/06	NS asking question	none
abi21:01/21:25*	26/02/06	Abi can't remember when first aware of Imran's speech problem, thinks it was on home visit. Abi instigated Nursery talk programme intervention.	knowoth, exlang, interfor
abi21:25/21:40*	26/02/06	presented to parents as training for teachers, but child will benefit too	knowoth, interoth
abi21:40/21:46	26/02/06	only did Nursery talk programme with A	exlang
abi21:46/21:57	26/02/06	Imran's Mum was happy with it, did talk about it on parents evening when she asked a little more, did explain it again	knowcurr, expin, interfor
abi21:57/22:09	26/02/06	Parents were happy, asked if Imran was talking more at home and they said he had been	feeloth, interoth
abi22:09/22:40*	26/02/06	Halal food not an issue, Imran came for Christmas dinner, not often here for dinner but when he does we've got a badge for him which says he's vegetarian	knowrecu, belifood
abi22:40/22:50*	26/02/06	Has vegetarian option. Has badge, dinner ladies cannot always remember	knowrecu, belifood
abi22:50/23:06*	26/02/06	Is Mum happy for Imran to participate in Christmas activities? Yes, letter went home to everyone about Christmas dinner, she let him	excurr, interfor, belirel, belifood
abi23:06/24:10	26/02/06	unclear tape	none
abi24:10/24:14	26/02/06	NS telling Abi that Imran goes to mosque school, Abi said wasn't aware	knowrecu, exfam, belirel
abi24:14/24:24*	26/02/06	if there's something they want to tell us, it's normally Dad who will come in and say it	interin
abi24:24/24:32	26/02/06	the only thing Imran's parents have talked to me about is the fact that he eats soap	interin
abi24:32/24:48	26/02/06	Dad came to ask us to make sure Imran doesn't eat soap at Nursery. We haven't noticed but Dad says he can smell it on his breath when he gets home from Nursery	interin
abi24:48/25:18	26/02/06	Abi not sure if he actually has eaten soap at Nursery	knowoth
abi24:10/25:50	26/02/06	NS and Abi talking about how horrible soap tastes! NS asking if there is anything else Abiwants to add with regard to working with Imran or other children with EAL	none
abi25:50/25:59	26/02/06	always say that I don't really know how to help children with EAL	knowcurr, knowlan
abi25:59/26:13	26/02/06	Abi not had any training on working with EAL children	knowqual, knowlan, extea, exed

***Ayesha and Habiba: Parent interview, Forest Hill***

<b>Clip</b>	<b>Date added</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Categories</b>
aye0:00/0:40	26/03/06	Ayesha lived in UK for 8 years. Habiba born in UK From Pakistan, home language is Punjabi	exhmc
aye0:00/1:14	26/03/06	NS talking to Madeleine	none, method
aye1:14/1:33	26/03/06	reading, painting, playing being on a train; Imran talking to Mum about Nursery	knowcurr, exed
aye1:33/1:44	26/03/06	Imran likes Nursery, is happy to come	feelchn, interin
ay01:44/2:01	26/03/06	Imran likes painting, outdoors, building stuff	feelchn, excurr
aye1:44/2:56	26/03/06	At home, Imran likes watching TV. Also likes arranging all his toys on the carpet, doesn't let anyone touch it. Likes going on the computer upstairs, singing along to music on his Mum's mobile	exfam
aye2:56/3:09	26/03/06	Goes to sisters house and Mums house with Imran, up town, soft play	exfam
aye3:09/3:21	26/03/06	Mum and sister both live on Forest Hill estate	exfam
aye3:21/3:27	26/03/06	Other sister lives in same town, but not Forest Hill area	exfam
aye3:27/3:42	26/03/06	chose this Nursery as close to home	opied, exed
aye3:42/4:06	26/03/06	NS encouraging Madeleine to share with I	none, method
aye4:06/4:19	26/03/06	all children in family been to Forest Hill, including Ayesha's younger brother	exfam, exed
aye4:19/4:39*	26/03/06	When Imran started Nursery he wouldn't speak, cried	feeltran, feelchn, extrans
aye4:39/4:48	26/03/06	Imran can be hard work when he starts crying	feelchn, extrans
aye4:48/5:19*	26/03/06	When started, Imran wasn't speaking at home or at school, had speech problem. Only stopped crying now he is speaking.	exlang, extrans
aye5:19/5:33*	26/03/06	Imran speaks in English at Nursery but uses English and Punjabi at home	exlang
aye5:33/6:03*	26/03/06	Imran used to be OK at Nursery, then cry at home to Mum	feelchn, extrans
aye6:03/6:17*	26/03/06	Imran enjoyed Nursery, still wanted to go every day, but cried about it at home	feelchn, extrans
aye6:17/6:32*	26/03/06	don't often talk to teachers	interoth
aye6:32/6:59	26/03/06	Can find time to talk to teachers but lack confidence in own ability to explain self	feelrel, interoth
aye6:59/7:10	26/03/06	Brings sister in law to parents' evenings to translate	exlang, interfor
aye7:40/7:58	26/03/06	Like Nursery as close to home, teachers are nice, Imran has come along a lot with his learning	opied, opitea
aye7:58/8:34	26/03/06	teachers did not pick up on Imran's speech difficulty quickly enough, did not put support in straight away	opied, opitea

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
aye8:34/8:45*	26/03/06	if one child needs more attention then that child should get it	opied
aye8:45/9:14*	26/03/06	children should not be left to play on own, Imran didn't talk for months, children should be learning something every day	opied, opitea
aye9:14/9:26*	26/03/06	"This is their time to learn." children pick things up quickly at young age	opichn, opied
aye9:26/9:41	26/03/06	speech therapy stopped when Imran started Nursery	exed
aye9:41/10:16	26/03/06	speech therapy through health visitor, did ask for support at parents' evening	exed, interfor
aye10:16/10:31	26/03/06	NS talking to Madeleine	none, method
aye11:30/11:51*	26/03/06	Imran doesn't get any extra support because he has EAL	exlang, exed
aye11:51/12:03	26/03/06	not happy about lack of support for Imran. Probably would have started talking sooner if had got support he needed	feellang, opilan
aye12:03/13:11*	26/03/06	Imran has only just started talking and is 4 tomorrow. Only family could understand him properly before. Still stammers. Really needs support from school.	opied, exed
aye13:11/14:08*	26/03/06	Imran speaks Punjabi at home, didn't know that some teachers use home languages, probably not possible here, happens in city as more Asians. Gets Punjabi at home, want to improve English at school	opilan, opied, exfam, exlang
aye14:08/14:28*	26/03/06	"It's English he's going to learn all his subjects in and pass his exams in, one day."	opilan, opied
aye14:28/14:38*	26/03/06	English is the language which will help Imran get on in school, "It is in this country, it is in this country, yes."	opilan, opied
aye15:10/15:13*	26/03/06	"Most of the foods they've got on offer is their foods."	exoth, belifood
aye15:13/18:14*	26/03/06	Fareeda given non Halal meat on two occasions. On first occasion she did not realise and ate it (chicken). On second occasion she told dinner supervisors who said she should just eat the peas which came with it	opirel, knowrecu, exoth, excrit, belifood
aye16:45/16:52*	26/03/06	They told her 'All you have to do is just eat the peas, not the other stuff in there and it's better if you bring your own meals.'	opirel, knowrecu, exoth, excrit, belifood
aye18:14/19:25*	26/03/06	Sister's children are more confident, go to school with nearly all Pakistani children. Fareeda is more confident since started going to mosque school with other Asians	opied, exfam, belirel
aye19:37/19:43*	26/03/06	"Sometimes it feels like, sending them to an all English school is putting them behind, really."	opied
aye19:43/20:00*	26/03/06	"All the white children play together, and she used to be stood on her own." Imran's sister has had problems being left out by other children	feelrel, feelchn

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
aye20:00/20:34	26/03/06	Spoke to teachers about F's problems but nothing really happened. She doesn't even look that different, quite white, since started mosque school is more confident and has made couple of friends	feelchn, extea
aye20:34/21:07	26/03/06	Children go to mosque from age 3 1/2 to 4, start with learning alphabet, need to learn to read Qu'ran	exfam, exed, belirel
aye21:07/21:47	26/03/06	two hours a day at mosque school. Older children moan but A loves it	exfam, exed, belirel
aye21:47/22:00	26/03/06	Nursery teachers do not know about mosque school	knowrecu, belirel
aye22:00/22:40	26/03/06	other parents ignored Ayesha when she smiled or made eye contact when first started at Nursery	interin, extrans
aye22:40/23:53*	26/03/06	Ayesha experiences "sniggering" and comments from other parents about her clothes. Can't understand all of them, but "I suppose that's the fashion for them" overheard	exoth, interoth
aye23:53/24:07*	26/03/06	"That wouldn't happen where my sister's kids go, because it's all Asian women."	opicom, exoth, interoth
aye24:12/24:16*	26/03/06	"These parents in Forest Hill shouldn't be like this because we live in Forest Hill. I'm sure they've seen us walking around."	opicom
aye24:16/24:35	26/03/06	NS expressing shock at incident re clothes	method
aye24:35/25:30	26/03/06	parents need to spend time with children, teaching numbers, colours, drawing, older children spellings and homework, reading books	opipin, opied

**Chris: Headteacher interview, Orchard Road**

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
cri0:0/0:23	18/03/06	NS intro interview	none
cri0:23/0:30	18/03/06	white, middle class, British	origin
cri0:30/0:45	18/03/06	lived in UK all life	exhmc
cri0:45/1:12	18/03/06	primary and secondary in Coventry, then boys grammar in Lewes	exed
cri1:12/1:19	18/03/06	took GCEs	exed
cri1:19/1:30	18/03/06	sixth form in newly formed comprehensive	exed
cri1:30/1:38	18/03/06	At OR since November 2000	extea
cri1:38/1:47	18/03/06	head teacher at junior school	extea
cri1:47/2:05	18/03/06	was deputy at similar school in terms of size and ethnicity of pupils	extea
cri2:05/2:19	18/03/06	class teacher in similar school	extea
cri2:19/2:21	18/03/06	always worked in Birmingham	extea
cri2:21/2:30	18/03/06	NS and Chris laughing; fuzzy tape	none

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
cri2:30/2:41*	18/03/06	parent involvement is a good idea in theory and in practice	opip
cri2:41/2:46	18/03/06	NS asking question	none
cri2:46/3:01	18/03/06	parents visited at home before child starts Nursery	extrans, interfor
cri3:01/3:08	18/03/06	stay and play group	expin
cri3:08/3:15	18/03/06	only small no of children go to stay and play	expin
cri3:15/3:21	18/03/06	now 2 stay and play groups operating	expin
cri3:21/3:30	18/03/06	stay and play means meeting more families	expin
cri3:30/3:42	18/03/06	parents encouraged to stay during settling in period	opipin, expin, extrans
cri3:42/3:46	18/03/06	settling in can be a matter of weeks	extrans
cri3:46/3:55	18/03/06	parents encouraged to stay at beginning of session	opipin, expin
cri3:55/4:00	18/03/06	one or two parents asking to help as volunteer	expin
cri4:00/4:05	18/03/06	need to develop parents helping in school	opipin
cri4:05/4:16	18/03/06	challenge for school to allow volunteer help	opipin
cri4:16/4:22	18/03/06	more offers of help than can take	exoth
cri4:22/4:40	18/03/06	not so much parents as others wanting placements eg work experience	unsure
cri4:40/4:51	18/03/06	most on placement want early years	unsure
cri4:51/5:07	18/03/06	less help in upper school, don't want to overload lower years with help	opipin
cri5:07/5:13	18/03/06	CRB checks take long time	exoth
cri5:13/5:22	18/03/06	health and safety issues for volunteers	unsure
cri5:22/5:34	18/03/06	if parents not CRB checked then monitor movements	unsure
cri5:34/5:59	18/03/06	may have to pay for CRB checks for volunteers	unsure
cri5:59/6:15	18/03/06	twice yearly parents evenings	expin, interfor
cri6:15/6:28	18/03/06	information meetings for parents	expin, interin, interfor
cri6:28/6:37	18/03/06	workshops on parenting/curricular subjects	expin, interfor
cri6:37/6:46*	18/03/06	lots of staff have close personal relationship with families	opitp, opitea, interin
cri6:46/6:55*	18/03/06	teachers give informal support to families know well	opitp, interin
cri6:55/7:00*	18/03/06	many families open to staff	opipar, opitp, interin
cri7:00/7:21*	18/03/06	one family invited whole staff for Eid lunch	opipar, opitp, interin
cri7:21/7:43*	18/03/06	teachers have informal contact even when child no longer in class	opitp, interin
cri7:43/7:46*	18/03/06	open door policy to parents	opipin, opitp, interin
cri7:46/7:52*	18/03/06	most of contact through individual teachers	expin, interin
cri7:52/8:02	18/03/06	headteachers newsletter for parents on ad hoc basis	expin, interfor
cri8:02/8:10	18/03/06	newsletter not regular as hard to manage	expin, interfor
cri8:10/8:15	18/03/06	part of plan is to make newsletter regular	interfor

cri8:26/8:44*	18/03/06	started to use translation service for some communications eg governors report	opicom, opilan, interfor
cri8:44/8:55*	18/03/06	new letterheads will have home language script asking parents to come into school if want translation	opicom, opilan, knowlan, interfor
cri8:55/9:12*	18/03/06	translation is more of a courtesy, not sure how helpful for parents	opicom, opilan, opipar, interfor
cri9:12/9:27*	18/03/06	not many parents could access Urdu as it is not the same as Mirpuri	knowlan
cri9:27/9:34*	18/03/06	parents dialects cannot be used in letters as spoken	opicom, opilan, knowlan
cri9:34/9:39*	18/03/06	value of translation in making info available?	opicom, opilan, knowlan
cri9:39/9:45	18/03/06	NS asking question	none
cri9:45/9:55	18/03/06	parents are the child's primary teacher	opipar, opied
cri9:55/10:08	18/03/06	most of pre-school learning from members of family	opipar, opied
cri10:08/10:43*	18/03/06	school needs to take child on from learning at home, join up not separate	opied, opitea
cri10:43/11:01	18/03/06	teachers following on from parents leads to breadth of learning	opied, opitea
cri11:01/11:19*	18/03/06	parent involvement leads to potential for conflict	feeloth, opipin
cri11:19/11:33*	18/03/06	teachers as experts, not as flexible as could be in listening to parents	opitp, opitea
cri11:33/11:43*	18/03/06	evidence shows that parents know what children need better than teachers	opipar, opitea
cri11:43/11:52*	18/03/06	teachers not always receptive to parents knowledge of own child	opitp, opitea
cri11:52/12:19	18/03/06	Nursery parents very rarely come to talk to Headteacher about child	expin, interin
cri12:19/12:23	18/03/06	parent concerns are worked out in Nursery rather than going to Head	expin
cri12:23/12:44	18/03/06	Headteacher has little contact with parents thro school over educational matters	expin, interin
cri12:44/12:52	18/03/06	NS asking question	none
cri12:52/13:26	18/03/06	when worked in junior school, parents came to see him more	expin, interin
cri13:26/13:35	18/03/06	parents at previous school more confident about talking to Head	opipar, opitp, expin, interin
cri13:35/13:46*	18/03/06	parents think they should deal with home, and teachers deal with school	opipin, opipar
cri13:46/13:52*	18/03/06	need to work on the overlap between school and home	opipin, opirel
cri13:54/14:11	18/03/06	teachers talk to parents rather than going to Headteacher	opipar, opitp, expin, interin
cri14:11/14:15	18/03/06	parents don't only talk about concerns	exoth
cri14:15/14:27	18/03/06	would like to be more involved with homework; parents talk to class teacher about it	opipin, opitp
cri14:27/14:43	18/03/06	NS asking question	none
cri14:43/15:08	18/03/06	head responsible for strategies for parent involvement, engaging staff, policy etc	expin

cri8:26/8:44*	18/03/06	started to use translation service for some communications eg governors report	opicom, opilan, interfor
cri15:08/15:20	18/03/06	reliant on class teachers, TAs, team leaders re parent involvement	expin
cri15:20/15:50	18/03/06	NS asking question	none
cri15:50/15:56*	18/03/06	impossible to say what makes a good parent	opipar, reppar

**Val: Senior Management Team interview, Orchard Road**

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
val0:00/0:16	25/02/06	NS introducing interview	none
val0:16/0:32	25/02/06	daily contact with parents	interin
val0:32/1:07	25/02/06	parents meeting teachers daily at gate	interin
val1:07/1:52	25/02/06	change in daily contact when children get to KS2	interoth
val1:52/2:38	25/02/06	parents reading at beginning and end of day in foundation and key stage 1	expin, interfor
val2:38/3:02	25/02/06	meetings with parents	interfor
val3:02/3:07	25/02/06	NS other ways parents are involved	none
val3:07/3:33	25/02/06	community classes for parents/learning mentors	knowqual, exoth
val3:33/4:10*	26/02/06	success of adult education classes what do parents want?	opipin, knowqual
val4:10/5:06	26/02/06	personal contact is most effective assemblies Eid celebrations home language letters not effective	opicom, opipin, opilan, interin, interfor
val5:10/5:18	26/02/06	NS explaining about asking parents	none
val5:18/5:29	26/02/06	why letters not effective	interfor
val5:29/6:17	26/02/06	when val first came to school as teacher parents' evening first generation	extea, exfam, interfor, time, timp
val6:18/6.43*	26/02/06	present day parents' evenings change in parents questioning of teachers	opicom, opipar, knowcurr, knowsch, interfor, time, timp
val6:43/6:59	26/02/06	parents speaking English	knowlan, time, timp
val6:59/7:26*	26/02/06	parents' attitude parents' place in society	opibac, opisoc, opipar, time, timp
val7:26/7:35*	26/02/06	parents never questioned teachers	opicom, opitp, expin, interoth, time, timp
val7:35/7:48	26/02/06	change in parent attitude changes in society	opisoc, opipar, time, timp
val7:48/8:05	26/02/06	phone ringing	none
val8:05/8:17	26/02/06	more parents splitting up more problems with drugs	exfam, time, timp
val8:18/8.33	26/02/06	parents having discipline problems with teenagers children not listening to parents children not having same respect for authority	opipar, opichn, exfam, time, tim
val8:33/8.53	26/02/06	parents more worried about discipline than education would not approach teachers but would talk about when sent for	opipin, opipar, opitp, opichn, interfor

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
val8:53/9.45*	26/02/06	would like parents to be more pro-active and take a leading role suggestion box parents joining in with summer fayre	opipin
val9:45/10:30	26/02/06	parents good at coming along to things if invited parents who help in class	opicom, opipin, opipar
val10:30/10:35	26/02/06	val trying to remember something she wanted to say	none
val10:35/11:30*	26/02/06	all staff used to be white, mono-lingual now LSAs often speak same language as children, mix of ethnicities in school ex-pupils working in school	exlang, origin, time, timp
val11:32/12:08	26/02/06	change in school intake towards predominantly Muslim children	origin, time, timp, belirel
val12:08/12:38	26/02/06	why do non-Muslim children not come to this school? historically and now	opirel, exfam, time, timp, belirel
val12:38/13:39*	26/02/06	what do parents think about school? parents generally think everything is fine	opipar, opied
val13:39/14:13	26/02/06	parents asking questions at parents' evening	opicom, interfor
val14:13/15:20*	26/02/06	what do you think is a good parent? two way thing would like parents to ask more, be more critical parents don't come to open day to watch teaching	opipar, opitp, reppar
val15:20/16:20*	26/02/06	homework not most important, parent support for school at home, parents helping to make book week costumes, joining library, reading stories	opipin, expin
val16:20/16:52*	26/02/06	children taking reading rucksacks home parents wanted times tables	expin
val16:52/17:33	26/02/06	teachers going round to children's houses for tea	interin
2val0:00/0:13	26/02/06	val laughing about how long she has been at school	extea, time, timp
2val0:13/0:33	26/02/06	teenagers rejecting parents' traditions	opichn, time, timp
2val0:33/0:41	26/02/06	lots more parents separating, won't stay in arranged marriages which don't work	opisoc, time, timp
2val0:41/0:58	26/02/06	teenagers and arranged marriages, further education	exfam, time, timp
2val0:58/1:03	26/02/06	children not wanting to go to mosque	opichn, opirel, time, timp, belirel
2val1:03/1:19	26/02/06	unclear tape, talking about conflict in families	nnone
2val1:19/1:33	26/02/06	influences on local community	none
2val1:35/1:48	26/02/06	phone ringing	none
2val1:48/2:03*	26/02/06	families are changing, becoming more "Islamic"	opisoc, opirel, time, timp, belirel
2val2:03/2:13	26/02/06	unclear tape	none
2val2:13/2.56	26/02/06	Community feeling under threat, more girls covering self, parents clamping down on girls as can't with boys	opibac, opisoc, opirel, time, timp, belirel
2val2:56/3:02*	26/02/06	only seeing community from outside	opibac
2val3:02/3:19	26/02/06	NS winding up interview	none
2val3:19/3:42	26/02/06	contact with parents in person is most	opicom, opipin, interin



Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
		important	
2val3:42/4:17	26/02/06	NS and val chatting about NS research	none

***Roma: Nursery Teacher interview, Orchard Road***

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
rom0:00/0:22	29/05/06	roma talking about her NNEB students taping her lectures	exoth
rom0:22/0:36	29/05/06	ns asking question	none
rom0:36/0:45	29/05/06	OR parents more supportive than at other schools in experience	opipar, expin
rom0:45/0:57	29/05/06	parents want their children to do well	opipar
rom0:57/1:03*	29/05/06	parents would like to support their children but they don't know how to	opipar
rom1:03/1:15	29/05/06	parents very open to suggestions but don't get support within school	opipin, opipar, expin, exoth
rom1:15/1:26*	29/05/06	parents need professional help, there should be a teacher assigned to work with parents	opipar, opied
rom1:26/1:32*	29/05/06	need to start from parent's level and take it from there	opipin
rom1:32/1:41*	29/05/06	whole system in this country is completely different; prevents parents supporting children	opipin, opied
rom1:41/1:57*	29/05/06	parents don't understand the value of the home-school agreement	opipar, knowpin
rom1:57/2:10*	29/05/06	in home language, you send your child to school and that is it, here the attitude is different and parents are involved, parents don't understand this	opipin, opibac, opipar
rom2:10/2:18	29/05/06	parents aren't informed enough about involvement eg in after school clubs	knowpin
rom2:18/2:31*	29/05/06	half of parents have different expectations to teachers because they are not born here	opipar
rom2:31/2:44	29/05/06	parents coming as refugees have other problems to deal with other than school	exfam, extrans, exoth
rom2:44/2:55*	29/05/06	not that parents don't care about school, but they have so many other issues to sort out first	opipar
rom2:55/3:03	29/05/06	Nursery has refugee families who come and go	extrans, exoth
rom3:03/3:17	29/05/06	don't have long enough to build up relationship with children from refugee families	feeltran, feelrel, extrans, exoth, time
rom3:17/3:29*	29/05/06	lots of parents have strong links with home country	exhmc
rom3:29/3:35*	29/05/06	parents values are based on home country	opipar, opiioth, belioth, belihom
rom3:35/3:42*	29/05/06	parents do realise that some things have to be done because they are living here	opipar, exoth

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
rom3:42/3:50	29/05/06	parents think that their children just need basic education, want to get the girls married off young	opipar, opied
rom3:50/3:55	29/05/06	parents would like children to do well at school as don't want them to be a problem	opipar
rom3:55/4:06*	29/05/06	parents don't know how to support children, don't know about education as not educated themselves	opipar, knowcurr
rom4:06/4:15	29/05/06	majority of parents aren't educated or professional people, working class people, just expect children to follow in their footsteps	opipar, opied, knowqual
rom4:15/4:32*	29/05/06	parents would like to have high expectations for children but they haven't as not educated themselves	opipar, knowqual
rom4:32/4:49	29/05/06	parents think Nursery children are babies so don't need homework	opipar, opied
rom4:49/5:15	29/05/06	some parents support idea of homework	opipin, opipar
rom5:15/5:28	29/05/06	attitude changes in Reception as teachers put upon parents that need to support children	opipin, opipar
rom5:28/5:33	29/05/06	Reception teachers force idea onto parents so they feel obliged to stay	opitp
rom5:33/5:53	29/05/06	wouldn't get parents staying in Reception in other schools, but OR parents don't know any better and because they don't work, they stay	opipin, opipar, expin
rom5:53/6:09	29/05/06	not sure what Reception do about parents who stay but don't speak English; expect TAs support them	opipin, opilan, knowlan, knowoth
rom6:09/6:34	29/05/06	in other schools where worked, parents have minimum contact with school, just leave them and collect them	expin, interin
rom6:34/6:41	29/05/06	parents at other schools where worked don't want to know, even about behaviour	opipar, expin, interin
rom6:41/7:01*	29/05/06	this is the first school worked in where mainly Muslim pupils	extea
rom7:01/7:14*	29/05/06	in this school parents just go along with things, in other schools parents tend to know about the state system	opipin, opipar, knowedpol
rom7:14/7:21	29/05/06	parents in other schools have attitude that don't have to be involved, that reflects on the children's attitudes	opipar, opichn, expin
rom7:21/7:29	29/05/06	children in other schools tell you that their parents say it's not their job to teach them to read	expin
rom7:29/7:37	29/05/06	parents at other schools send in notes telling you haven't got time to do homework	opicom, opipar, expin
rom7:37/7:48	29/05/06	parents at OR try their best, those who don't speak "the language" feel embarrassed	feellang, opilan, opipar

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
rom7:48/8:01*	29/05/06	parents don't know how to approach teachers. do want to help children but don't know how to go about it	opipar, opitp
rom8:01/8:10	29/05/06	parents in other schools do know how to go about getting support but choose not to	opipar, knowoth, exoth
rom8:10/8:31	29/05/06	need member of staff in Nursery and playgroup who works with parents not children	opipin
rom8:31/8:51*	29/05/06	need to ask parents for their opinions as such a range of cultures, families coming from all over Indian subcontinent	opicom, opipin, interoth
rom8:51/8:55	29/05/06	some parents have very high expectations, some have not	opipar
rom8:55/9:00	29/05/06	parents do expect children to learn because that's just having family values	opipar, opied
rom9:00/9:18	29/05/06	some parents from the old school of thinking just expect school to get on with it	opipin, opipar
rom9:18/9:21	29/05/06	other parents willing to support child but want telling how to do it	opipin, opipar
rom9:21/9:32*	29/05/06	parents need telling how to support child but Nursery teacher hasn't time to do it	opipin, opipar, interin, exfam, time
rom9:32/9:44	29/05/06	people in authority need to see value of working with parents	opipin
rom9:44/9:50*	29/05/06	parents need support with babies and under threes	opipar
rom9:50/10:16	29/05/06	parents need help with babies as still do things same as in home country; use baby slings because don't know you can get proper carriers in Mothercare	opipar, knowrecu, knowcare
rom10:16/10:22*	29/05/06	"They're good parents, they just don't know how to be good parents in this community."	opipar
rom10:22/10:31	29/05/06	parents just do the basics at home; don't know about sterilisation of baby bottles, just boil the water	opipar, knowcare
rom10:31/10:44	29/05/06	parents don't know about sterilising for babies, could harm them as don't know	opipar, knowcare
rom10:44/10:52	29/05/06	need telling what baby products are on the market	opipar, knowcare
rom10:52/11:14	29/05/06	depend on NN to do translating with parents	interin, exlang, interfor
rom11:14/11:24*	29/05/06	as Asian myself can understand the culture	opibac, opitp, opioth, knowrecu
rom11:24/11:42*	29/05/06	if you were from different ethnic group to parents you would have difficulty, takes a long time to learn the culture	opipar, opitp, opioth, knowrecu, time, timp
rom11:42/11:49	29/05/06	roma talking to child who comes into office	none
rom11:49/12:04*	29/05/06	roma doesn't approach Bengali parents and they don't approach her because of "language thing"	interin, exlang
rom12:04/12:12	29/05/06	Bengali parents go straight to Annisa	interin, exlang

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
rom12:12/12:19	29/05/06	Bengali parents don't have a relationship with teachers	opilan, opitp, interin, exlang
rom12:19/12:25*	29/05/06	parents see teachers as outside of culture; will approach TAs	opitp, opioth
rom12:25/12:38	29/05/06	ns talking about when she taught at school	exoth
rom12:38/12:45	29/05/06	most of English speaking parents come to me as got to know me	opilan, opitp, interin, exlang
rom12:45/12:59	29/05/06	once parents get to know you they will approach you as the teacher(in preference to TA)	opitp, interin, time
rom12:59/13:12	29/05/06	can pick up bits of parent's home language	exlang
rom13:12/13:17	29/05/06	understand parents but haven't confidence to speak back	feellang, exlang
rom13:17/13:35	29/05/06	roma hears conversations between TA and parents, knows what talking about but can't join in	exlang
rom13:35/13:51*	29/05/06	one particular Mum wants to have relationship, smiles, have 3 way conversation through TA	opicom, opilan, opitp, interin, exlang
rom13:51/14:01	29/05/06	Mum knows roma understands so now makes more of effort	opipar, opitp
rom14:01/14:14	29/05/06	unclear tape	none
rom14:14/14:24*	29/05/06	started relationship with Mum because of new baby; that's why need contact with playgroup	opirel, interin
rom14:24/14:31	29/05/06	playgroup completely separate from Nursery because that is how those in authority want it	opipin
rom14:31/14:37	29/05/06	roma would like playgroup to join Nursery	opioth
rom14:37/14:44	29/05/06	roma feels isolated; parents don't know her	feelrel, feeloth
rom14:44/14:56	29/05/06	just Nursery teacher, not fulfilling role as EY coordinator	none
rom14:56/15:19	29/05/06	roma doesn't know what is happening in Reception	none, knowoth
rom15:19/16:16	29/05/06	roma talking about her frustration with school SMT	feelrel, feeloth
rom16:16/16:30	29/05/06	if children's centres are to work, need specialists working with parents and under fives	opipin, opipar, opied
rom16:30/16:51	29/05/06	emphasising need to specialists in EY	opipin, opied
rom16:51/17:06*	29/05/06	need time on day-to-day basis to talk to parents	interin
rom17:06/17:35	29/05/06	roma had to tell parent that her baby needed toys, she should buy him a rattle and where to get them from	opipar, knowcare, interin
rom17:35/18:43*	29/05/06	need a specialist to tell parents what to do with their children; toys for babies, use a pushchair, eye infections etc	opipar, knowcare
rom18:43/18:59	29/05/06	all Nursery children are Muslim this year	none, belirel

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
rom18:59/19:05*	29/05/06	children being Muslim has no effect on what happens in Nursery	opirel, belirel
rom19:05/19:14	29/05/06	altho children Muslim, still follow EY curriculum, which caters for every need	opirel, opied, belirel
rom19:14/19:20*	29/05/06	religion is not an issue, parents don't want it to be an issue	opipar, opirel, belirel
rom19:20/19:28*	29/05/06	Muslim children should have the same education as everybody else	opirel, opied, belirel
rom19:28/19:38	29/05/06	never had parent come to say not happy re religion	interin, belirel
rom19:38/19:48*	29/05/06	most parents think home is home and school is school	opipar, opied
rom19:48/19:57	29/05/06	parents just want children to learn English education system	opipar, opied
rom19:57/20:21*	29/05/06	religion has nothing to do with education, it is a personal thing and you keep it separate	opirel, opied, opieth, belirel
rom20:21/20:30	29/05/06	just need to teach respect for other religions and cultures	opirel, belirel
rom20:30/20:54	29/05/06	had Christmas tree, talked about presents, no-one seemed worried	belirel
rom20:54/21:20	29/05/06	had Christmas party, was low key, have been to church, doesn't think parents mind	opipar, opirel, belirel
rom21:20/22:07	29/05/06	we had celebration for Eid, this was school issue (not own decision in Nursery)	excurr, belirel
rom22:07/22:26	29/05/06	parents weren't worried about Christmas celebrations, no comeback	interin, belirel
rom22:26/23:13	29/05/06	did Diwali, Chinese New Year, following EY curriculum, didn't do pancake day but would have liked to. Would be good to do Easter as children like chocolate and see Easter eggs in shops. Need to educate them, they don't have to follow it	opirel, opied, excurr, belirel

### ***Annisa: Teaching Assistant, Orchard Road***

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
ann0:00/0:36	15/08/06	NS explaining to Annisa that had difficulty persuading parents to talk about religion	belirel
ann0:36/0:49*	15/08/06	Annisa not sure why parents reluctant to talk about religion. she is from same religion	opirel
ann0:49/1:01	15/08/06	all Sunni Muslims but culture is very different	knowrecu, belirel
ann1:01/1:14	15/08/06	not all parents using same mosque	knowrecu, belirel
ann1:14/1:42	15/08/06	Pakistani and Bengali family use different mosques	knowrecu, belirel
ann1:42/2:01	15/08/06	some Pakistani families go to different mosque, their belief is a bit different	knowrecu, belirel

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
ann2:01/2:35	15/08/06	all mosques Sunni Muslim, but slight differences	knowrecu, belirel
ann2:35/2:49	15/08/06	all have five pillars of Islam, give percentage of earnings to mosque and pilgrimage to Mecca	knowrecu, belirel
ann2:49/3:09	15/08/06	all keep fast in Ramadan	knowrecu, belirel, belifood
ann3:09/3:29	15/08/06	way in which pray, beliefs about Muhammed and Qu'ran slightly different	knowrecu, belirel
ann3:29/3:36*	15/08/06	parents never talk to Annisa about religion	interoth, belioth
ann3:36/4:55	15/08/06	Nursery child asking if we have seen his lost puppet!	none
ann4:55/5:10*	15/08/06	parents don't like to talk about religion in case Annisa has different opinion	opirel, interoth, belifood
ann5:10/6:02*	15/08/06	parents don't seem concerned about religion in school, except Halal food. One child would only eat if Annisa said OK as she is Muslim too	belifood
ann6:02/6:20	15/08/06	NS asking question	none
ann6:20/6:32*	15/08/06	over last 12 years, change from most parents born abroad to most parents born and brought up here	exhmc
ann6:32/6:43*	16/08/06	children whose parents were born and brought up here are different	opicom, exhmc, belihom
ann6:43/6:53*	16/08/06	children are much better at speaking English than 12 years ago, never used to hear English spoken at home	knowlan, exlang
ann6:53/7:09*	16/08/06	certain family still uses home language at home, because of extended family not speaking English	knowlan, exlang
ann7:09/7:20*	16/08/06	if both parents brought up here, English is better. If one parent comes from abroad, "They keep their own language."	knowlan, exlang, exhmc
ann7:20/7:25	16/08/06	especially if Mum comes over from Pakistan, she will speak to the children in Urdu	knowlan, exlang, exhmc
ann7:25/7:33	16/08/06	its not that Mums don't have opportunity to learn English, they don't want to	opilan, opipar
ann7:33/7:42*	16/08/06	they don't need to learn, they've got their own community, they don't need to go out "They've got all the community that they need."	opicom, opilan

### ***Parent Group Meetings, Orchard Road***

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
orp0:00/0:14	26/02/06	NS asking question. Children learn at Nursery; <b>Majeda</b>	none knowcurr
orp0:14/0:28	26/02/06	translation	none
orp0:28/0:38	26/02/06	children learning colours, numbers, shapes	knowcurr

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
orp0:39/1:04	26/02/06	books given to take home	knowpin, expin, excurr
orp1:04/1:31	26/02/06	parents and children sharing books at home	expin
orp1:31/1:53	26/02/06	silence and translation	none
orp1:53/2:09*	26/02/06	not really aware of routine in the Nursery <b>Indra</b>	knowsch
orp2:09/2:22	26/02/06	children telling parents what they do at Nursery	knowsch, interin
orp2:22/2:49	26/02/06	parents' evening-all came. No-on wants to give opinion on what they think of parents' evenings!	opipin, opirel, interfor
orp2:49/2:57	26/02/06	translation	none
orp2:57/3:10	26/02/06	translator:parents only speak a little English so don't understand NS <b>Indra</b>	knowlan, interoth
orp3:10/3:29	26/02/06	children speaking English before/since starting Nursery	knowlan
orp3:29/3:33	26/02/06	parents like the fact that children learning English	opilan, opied
orp3:33/4:09*	26/02/06	children using home language/English at Nursery <b>Hina</b> "In this country, it is good to know English" <b>Ranjita</b> doesn't mind which language use in Nursery	exlang, knowlan, opilan
orp4:09/4:20	26/02/06	NS asking question	none
orp4:20/4:42	26/02/06	happy with what children learning, might get confused if more new things introduced <b>Ranjita</b>	opied
orp4:42/5:02	26/02/06	children settling into Nursery. hard to leave them, children all cried	feeltran, feelchn, extrans
orp5:02/5:18*	26/02/06	why children get upset, all new, leaving parents <b>Abida</b>	feeltran, feelchn, extrans
orp5:18/5:32	26/02/06	older siblings went to school in Bangladesh, cried when left at school there <b>Charu</b>	feeltran, feelchn, extrans
orp5:32/5:49	26/02/06	translation	none
orp5:49/6:05	26/02/06	children crying because couldn't speak English when came from Bangladesh <b>Charu</b>	feeltran, feellang, feelchn, knowlan
orp6:05/6:25*	26/02/06	crying when start Nursery is just part of life <b>Majeda</b>	feeltran, feelchn, opichn
orp6:25/6:42	26/02/06	how long did children cry for? children's feelings about Nursery	feeltran, feelchn, extrans
orp6:42/6:50	26/02/06	family new to Nursery	none
orp6:50/7:07	07/03/06	NS asking if parents had older children at Nursery	none
orp7:07/7:24	07/03/06	NS asking what it was like when children cried, translation and parents laughing	feeltran, feelchn
orp7:24/7:30*	07/03/06	better to leave child when crying than to stay <b>Abida</b>	feeltran, feelchn, opichn
orp7:30/7:42	07/03/06	hard to leave children crying	feeltran, feelchn
orp7:42/8:23*	07/03/06	home visits: children very happy to see teachers	feeltran, feelrel, interin, extrans, interfor

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
orp8:23/8:37*	07/03/06	parents like teachers visiting house	opipin, opitp, interin, interfor
orp8:37/8:46	07/03/06	child hid from teachers on home visit <b>Abida</b>	interin, interfor
orp8:46/8:59	07/03/06	NS telling group about all children who cried on one home visit	none
orp8:59/9:16*	07/03/06	home visits good as one-to-one, can find out more <b>Indra</b>	opipin, interin, interfor
orp9:16/9:33	07/03/06	NS asking what parents knew about Nursery before child started	none
orp9:33/9:40	07/03/06	parents know little bit but everything changes <b>Abida</b>	knowsch
orp9:40/9:50	07/03/06	parent chose which would be best Nursery in area <b>Charu</b>	opioth
orp9:50/10:18	07/03/06	most parents just looked at YT Nursery as it is closest <b>Abida</b>	exoth
orp10:18/10:38	07/03/06	parent born here, went to Nursery but can't remember <b>Sabrina</b>	exed
orp10:41/10:49	07/03/06	no facilities in Bangladesh for young children	exed, exhmc
orp10:49/11:12	07/03/06	went to school in Bangladesh when 5 <b>Dali</b>	exed, exhmc
orp11:12/11:24*	07/03/06	no parents in group went to school before age of 5	exed
orp11:24/11:37	07/03/06	good that children come to school at 3/4, they learn more <b>Dali</b>	opied
orp11:37/11:54	07/03/06	would rather child at Nursery than at home, they learn things more quickly <b>Indra</b>	opichn, opied
orp11:54/12:02	07/03/06	all parents prefer children at Nursery than at home	opichn, opied
orp12:02/12:27	07/03/06	parents like Nursery for children, also good for self. children want to do "Nursery activities" at home	opichn, opied
orp12:27/12:35*	07/03/06	children ask to do painting, sticking, gluing, colouring at home <b>Dali, Charu</b>	exfam, excurr
orp12:35/12:44	07/03/06	children take story books home <b>Aliya</b>	expin
orp12:44/12:59	07/03/06	children bring friends home <b>Aliya</b>	exoth
orp12:59/13:10	07/03/06	children ask to go to school at weekends	feelchn
orp13:10/13:23	07/03/06	children ask every morning if can go to school	feelchn
orp13:23/13:37	07/03/06	children like school, want to come every day	feelchn
orp13:37/13:53	07/03/06	NS thanking parents	none
orp13:53/14:06*	07/03/06	teachers will always make time to listen to parents <b>Indra</b>	opitp, opitea, interoth, time
orp14:06/14:26	07/03/06	NS asking all parents if talk to teachers	none
orp14:26/14:48*	08/03/06	difficult to talk to teachers if don't speak English <b>Charu, Dali, Hina</b>	interin, exlang
orp14:48/15:00	08/03/06	someone available to translate for Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents	interoth
orp15:00/15:07	08/03/06	teachers always try to find interpreter	opitp, opitea, interoth
orp15:07/15:14	08/03/06	parents can normally talk to staff if want to	opitp, opitea, interoth
orp15:14/15:30	08/03/06	parents don't talk to Headteacher	interoth



Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
orp15:30/15:38	08/03/06	parents don't feel need to talk to Headteacher	opitp, opitea, interoth
orp15:38/15:42	08/03/06	NS thanking parents	none
2orp7:25/7:27	08/03/06	family is more important than friends	opioth
2orp7:34/7:44	08/03/06	just including family in house	exfam
2orp010:17/10:19	08/03/06	children like watching cartoons <b>Tahmid</b>	exfam
2orp 11:11:08	08/03/06	children don't like our own channels <b>Majeda</b>	exfam opichn
2orp11:46/11:50	08/03/06	children only watch cartoons I watch other channels <b>Tahmid</b>	exfam
2orp 11:55/12:15	08/03/06	go to mosque school at age 5/6	exfam belirel
2orp15:15/15:21	08/03/06	school can support religion eg Eid <b>Indra</b>	belirel
2orp14:42/15:47	08/03/06	school could not do more to support religion <b>Sabrina</b>	belirel
orpf1	06/08/06	parents giving their criteria for what makes a good teacher	reptea
orpf2	06/08/06	<b>Majeda, Aliya, Hina</b> giving opinion on Nursery staff	opitea
orpf3	06/08/06	talking about what happens when children hurt themselves	feelcrin, feelchn, excrit
orpf4*	06/08/06	think it is cruel that teachers are not allowed to touch children <b>Sabrina</b>	opichn, opitea
orpf5*	06/08/06	children are not just there to study, need affection and to feel secure <b>Hina</b>	feelrel, feelchn, opied
orpf6*	06/08/06	teachers do not always deal with problems appropriately. <b>Majeda</b> relating incident when son soiled himself and she was out shopping	feelcrin, feelchn, opitea, excrit
orpf7	06/08/06	teachers tell parents things to do at home	opitp, interfor
orpf8	06/08/06	children learn if you play games and sing songs with them <b>Sabrina</b>	opied
orpf8*	06/08/06	the colours book is no good as children not interested <b>Sabrina</b>	opied, expin
orpf9*	06/08/06	no point in just giving children books to take home, they don't know how to read or speak English and nor do some of parents <b>Anjali Jhuma</b>	opipin, opilan, knowlan, expin, exlang
orpf10*	06/08/06	parents talking about useful activities: computers, talking, shopping	opipin, opied, expin
orpf11*	06/08/06	parents are not involved in Nursery on a day-to-day basis <b>Majeda</b>	knowsch, expin
orpf12	2006-08-06	parents would like report on weekly basis about what is happening	knowcurr, knowsch, knowedpol, interfor
orpf13	2006-08-06	parents talking about workshops and bookbags	opipin, expin, interfor
orpf14	2006-08-06	difficult to get to parents' evenings because children not settled, mornings would be better <b>Majeda</b>	expin, interfor
orpf15	2006-08-06	teachers treat parents OK	opitp, opitea

<b>Clip</b>	<b>Date added</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Categories</b>
orpf16	06/08/06	teachers probably don't like parents when complain	opitea
orpf17	06/08/06	parents don't want to answer "what do teachers think about parents?"	feelrel, feeloth, opipar, opitea
orpf18	06/08/06	Nursery teacher avoided speaking to <b>Majeda</b> after she complained to Chris	opitp, interin
orpf19	06/08/06	not had occasion when wanted to complain but couldn't	expin, interoth

**Sabrina: Parent interview, Orchard Road**

Clip	30/12/99	Description	Categories
sab0:00/0:07	31/05/06	had four children go through Nursery	exed
sab0:07/0:24	31/05/06	has felt "quite involved" in what children do at Nursery	expin
sab0:24/0:39	31/05/06	am kept up-to-date with how children are getting on	knowcurr, knowsch
sab0:39/0:54	31/05/06	don't do much at home, as have hands full with four children	expin, time
sab0:54/1:06	31/05/06	help children if have homework such as colouring or counting	expin
sab1:06/1:12	31/05/06	hard to find time when have five children	expin, time
sab1:12/1:33	31/05/06	ns asking question	none
sab1:33/1:43	31/05/06	not sure what you mean by question	none
sab1:43/1:50	31/05/06	school takes part in religious festivals	excurr, belirel
sab1:50/2:08*	31/05/06	School celebrate festivals, plenty of time for children to learn more, do it at home anyway	feelrel, opirel, knowcurr, time, belirel
sab4:00/4:17*	31/05/06	Spoke English at home but only with Dad as Mum didn't speak English	exlang
sab4:17/4:41*	31/05/06	Uses English more at home with own children. Husband is from Pakistan but he understands a bit.	exlang
sab4:43/5:04*	31/05/06	"I don't mind, although my Mum says, you know, 'There's plenty of time for the kids to pick up English. We find, when speaking in their own language they stumble a bit, but we're like that, mind you, cause we've been speaking, you know once we get up to school, er, you know and we started, with our brothers and sisters we never used our own language. Even now, we speak to each other in English."	opilan, exlang
sab5:04/5:19*	31/05/06	Only uses home language when with her Mum. Mum gets upset as Sabrina and brothers and sisters do not always pronounce word properly.	feellang, exlang
sab5:19/5:58*	31/05/06	Sabrina's Mum worries as her children can't translate from English into home language, Sabrina a bit better than the others. Sabrina's brother can hardly speak "our own language"	feellang, knowlan, exlang
sab5:58/6:17*	31/05/06	Own children are moving away from "their own culture"	exfam
sab6:17/6:32*	31/05/06	Most families in our generation aren't really bothered, but I want my children to know their own religion and culture	opicom, opisoc, opirel, exfam
sab6:37/6:39*	31/05/06	"I want them to always know where they come from."	opichn, opioth, origin
sab6:39/7:05*	31/05/06	Most people my age not so worried, but I still strongly believe in own religion	opirel, belirel

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
sab7:05/7:34*	2006-05-31	"I'm worried that this generation, because it's already half and half, you know this generation is going to be more further on with that. But I'm gonna keep my family, well I'm gonna try, as much as possible, you know, for them to know where they come from and their own religion. Obviously because we're living here we have to do some things which are, you know, British, but I think it's right to know your own language and your own religion."	feeltran, feellang, feelrel, opilan, opirel, extrans, belirel, belihom
sab7:34/7:47	2006-05-31	school could do more to support children in keeping own language, knowing where they come from, but mostly down to parents	opilan, opirel, opied
sab7:47/8:00*	2006-05-31	"Oh , I suppose, how would, at school because there's loads of religions, like Bengalis and Hindus and Jews, they can't exactly teach them all, could they?"	opirel, opied, belirel
sab8:13/8:19	2006-05-31	"My age group, I think they are mostly leaning to the British way. I think they are actually drifting away from their own culture and religion"	opisoc, opirel

## Appendix 1.2 Example of data spreadsheet

Child	Experiences	Representations	Opinions
Aqib		Daddy and baby are playing at Nursery	
	That is Nanu		
	Daddy brings me to Nursery and then goes to work		
Umayr		Mummies in picture playing with toys	Don't know why Mummies don't come to play with toys in Nursery
	Mummies don't come to Nursery and play with toys		Would be nice if Mummies came to Nursery to play with toys
Noreen	Mummy doesn't come in to Nursery every day	The Mummies are smiling	My Mummy would like making books
	My Mum comes to Nursery to talk to Mrs H		
	Doesn't know what Mum and Mrs H talk about		
Raheema	Mrs H and my Mum talk about the baby		

## Appendix 1.3 Example of field notes transcript

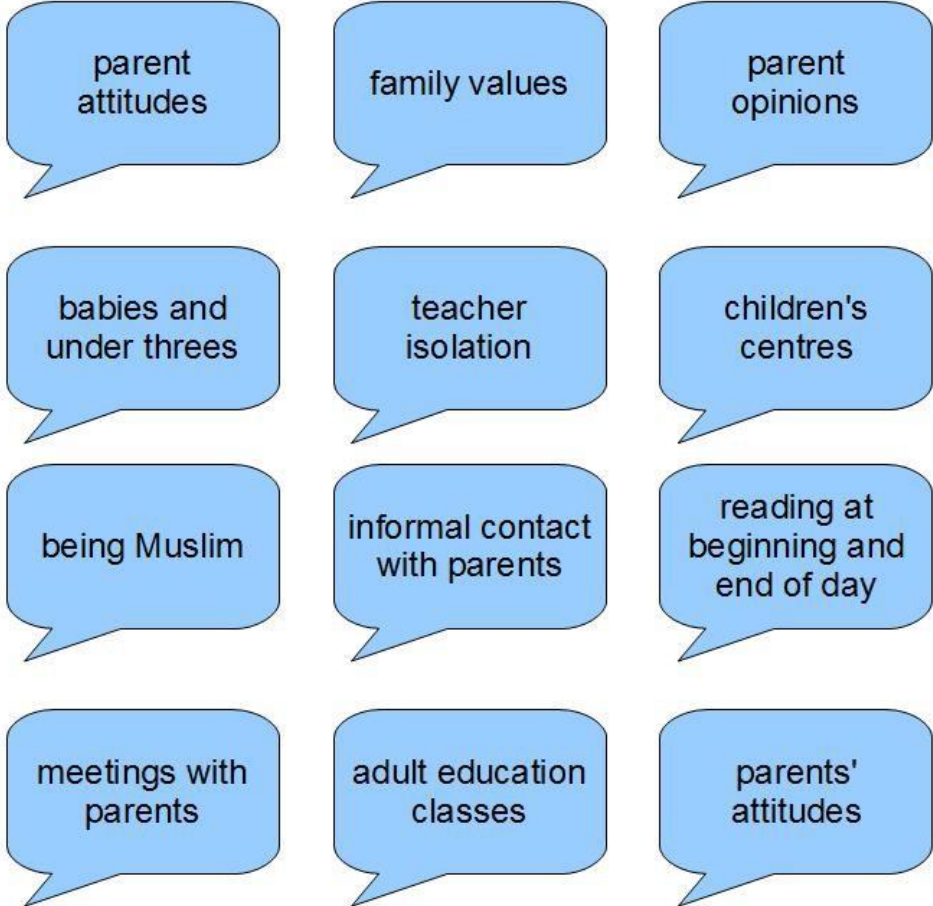
### Field Notes Forest Hill

Date 01/03/06  
 Location Forest Hill  
 Purpose of visit Parent meeting  
 Participants NS, Ayesha and Habiba

Reference	Notes
aye2fn1	no extra support provided for EAL
aye2fn2	Imran needed help with talking in home language and English but wasn't given any
aye2fn3	involved in talking programme but only because teacher needed training
aye2fn4	want Imran to speak English at school and Punjabi at home.
aye2fn5	English is the language for passing exams
aye2fn6	had problems with halal food in school
aye2fn7	niece ate non-halal meat
aye2fn8	next time, niece told to just eat the peas. "It's not OK to just be eating peas, is it?"
aye2fn9	niece brings own meals now
aye2fn10	parents need to help with numbers, alphabet and homework
aye2fn11	good teachers make sure children are learning and look after them
aye2fn12	Mum is not spoken to by other parents
aye2fn13	other Mums laughing on playground "At the bright colours I was wearing. One said 'I suppose that's the fashion in Pakistan.'"
aye2fn14	"we are used to it cos we were the only Asians at our school."
aye2fn15	Dad sent them to all white, all English school to help them integrate

# Appendix Two. Data Analysis

## Appendix 2.1 Example of content analysis



## Appendix Three. Information

### Appendix 3.1 Information sheet given to school staff

#### Parents and Schools A Research Study

I am completing this research study in order to write a PhD thesis. I will be conducting research in two schools. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me, Nicola Smith in the Nursery on a Thursday morning.

This study is supervised by Professor Tony Bertram, Centre for Research in Early Childhood, St Thomas Centre, Bell Barn Road, Birmingham

The aims of this research study are;

- to find out what teachers, parents and children think about partnership between schools and parents, and how their opinions are similar or different
- to find out if there are specific issues for 'British Asian' parents relating to partnership between schools and parents
- to suggest ways in which partnership could be improved in the future

I will be carrying out the following activities in order to complete the research in school;

- talking to parents, teachers and children in the Nursery about parent partnership
- reading school policies relating to parent partnership and letters which staff send home to parents

All staff, parents and children will be invited to take part in the research study. Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants can decide at any time that they no longer wish to take part in the study. All names will be changed so that individuals cannot be identified.



## **Appendix 3.2 English translation of letter sent to parents**

Dear Parents/Carers

My name is Nicola Smith, although you may remember me as Miss Simpson, who used to teach in Nursery. I am studying for a PhD in early years education. I am researching the opinions of parents of Asian origin on their children's Nursery education. I need to find at least eight parents who would be willing to tell me about their experiences of having a child at Nursery. Please talk to me in the Nursery on a Thursday morning if you would like to take part in the research.

Thank you

Nicola Smith