THE ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE OF PRESCHOOLS AND ASSOCIATED CHARACTERISTICS.

A STUDY OF A GROUP OF PRESCHOOLS IN ENGLAND.

Sue Saunders
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Abstract

This study investigated the organisational climate of 26 preschools in England using a multi stage mixed methods design. Data collection included an initial questionnaire administered to all preschools, followed by a second questionnaire and interview process focusing upon preschools at the opposite ends of the climate continuum (high climate n= 6, low climate n = 5).

Using data from the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey, ECWES, (Bloom, 2010), preschool and staff variables showed no statistically significant association with the overall assessment of organisational climate. However, the data did reveal a significant statistical difference between staff from the high and low climate groups across each of the separate ECWES ten climate dimensions. In addition, there was a significant statistical difference between the perception of support staff and teachers in the low climate group across several climate dimensions.

Questionnaire and interview data revealed low pay as a variable, which was perceived negatively by many staff. However, the processes which differentiated to the greatest extent between the high and low climate groups, on a day to day basis, were social and operational in nature. The high climate preschools had transparent and effective organisational processes in place, which created a strong social system, where subsystems within the school were connected. In this positive environment staff felt supported, and there was an atmosphere where all staff worked harmoniously together with a collective drive to address problems and adapt to change. Preschools with smaller staff numbers, and where there was a discrete educational focus upon early years, appeared best suited to achieving these ends.

Future implications of this study appear twofold. The first suggests a need for greater communication across preschool subsystems for high levels of climate to be established. The second is a broader strategy and involves policy makers addressing the low levels of remuneration, and the heavy workload, which the constant drive for change has created for many staff. While the effective management and operational systems within high climate preschools were found to mitigate against such external challenges, where these systems were not in place organisational climate was negatively impacted upon.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CLASS	Classroom Assessment Scoring System
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DFE	Department for Education
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
ECERS-R	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- Revised
ECF	Early Childhood Forum
ECWES	Early Childhood Work Environment Survey
ELGs	Early Learning Goals
EPPE	The Effective Provision of Preschool Education project
EPPSE	The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education research project
EY	Early Years
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYFSP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
H&S	Health and Safety
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ISC	Independent Schools Council
KS1	Key Stage 1
LA	Local Authority
MCS	Millennium Cohort Study
MMR	Mixed Methods Research

NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NC	National Curriculum
NN	Nursery Nurse
NNEB	Nursery Nurse Examination Board
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OCDQ	Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire
OCDQ-RE	Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for Elementary Schools
OCDQ-RM	Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for Middle Schools
OCDQ-RS	Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for Secondary Schools
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OHI	Organisational Health Inventory
PACE	Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience project
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPA	Planning, Preparation and Assessment Time
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QRIS	Quality Rating and Improvement System
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SAS	School Assessment Survey
SAT(s)	Standard Assessment Task(s)

SCAA   School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

SENCO   Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SEND   Special Education Needs and Disability

SMT   Senior Management Team

STA   Standard and Testing Agency

SOC   Standard Occupational Classification

TA   Teaching Assistant

TSI   Teacher Satisfaction Inventory

UK   United Kingdom

3Rs   Reading, Writing and Arithmetic

Chapter 1

Locating the Study

1.1. Aims and Research Questions

This study's focus was upon the organisational climate of preschools and contributory variables impacting upon it.

The research investigated staff perceptions of preschools from which children transferred to a fee-paying independent girls' school in England over two consecutive years. Details of the sampling rationale, which was based upon a 'captive' convenience sampling approach, are presented in chapter 6, section 6.7 (p142 - 144). The four preschool types which made up the sample were: nursery classes within a state primary school, nursery classes within privately funded independent schools, private day nurseries offering care and early education for children from birth to 5 years of age and which charge for their services, and Montessori nurseries, which are a specific type of private day nursery with some connection to Maria Montessori's (1870 – 1952) child-centred methods. A summary of these different types of provision can be found in Appendix 1.

As preschools in England, all were required to follow the mandatory guidelines of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is a framework devised by the Department for Education for children from birth to 5 years of age, as set out in its published 34-page document (Department for Education, DFE, 2012; revised, DFE, 2014; revised DFE, 2017). The guidelines include requirements relating to learning and development and assessment, in addition to safeguarding and welfare.

Despite the adherence to one statutory curriculum and assessment procedure for all preschools however, the settings sampled did have differing structural and staff characteristics which differentiated between them, and which provided a range of variables for investigation for any association with organisational climate. These were in terms of staff ages, length of employment and qualifications, as well as the age groups which the preschools catered for, their size in terms of number of staff and whether or not they were an early years setting incorporated within a school.

The study's four research questions were:

- What were the differences in the nature of the organisational climates of a sample of preschools from which children transferred to a fee-paying independent school?

- Was there any association between a range of staff and specific preschool characteristics and organisational climate?

- What were the organisational characteristics that differentiated between individual preschools with strong and weak organisational climates?

- What were the most effective workplace characteristics in promoting a positive preschool organisational climate?

1.2. Rationale

In terms of the rationale for my research, the project held personal interest for me as an early years practitioner in its aim to address the lack of research attention given to the topic of school organisational climate per se. As a result, it did not focus upon the investigation of associations with child academic outcomes, which is an area that

has received prominent coverage in the organisational research of many prior works (Bodovski et al, 2013; Hoy, 2012; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Kraft et al, 2016; Lowenstein et al, 2015; MacNeil et al, 2009; Parish & Dipaola, 2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). In this respect the study reflected the position of Kraft et al, (2016), of developing our understanding of organisational climate in order to highlight ways of strengthening the climate in which teachers work and, by association, the learning environments which they provide.

1.3. Researcher Context and Experience

As my educational background and experience was a major aspect in the adoption of my research study this section will add a detailed context for the reader, which will also allow for a consideration of any unconscious bias and create an image of my position within the research.

After a teaching career of 40 years which spanned working in the maintained and private sectors teaching children between the ages of three to eight years, I retired from work in September 2016. My final teaching position was from 2006 to 2016 as the Headteacher of a Pre-Preparatory department in an English independent girls' school. My experience and training have given me insight of the daily routines and processes of the general early year's environment being studied. Throughout my career I have seen many new initiatives, which included what I regard as two major changes in terms of their impact upon classroom practice. The first was the 1988 Education Reform Act which established a national curriculum. The second was the introduction in September 2000 of a foundation stage for children aged three to the end of the reception year (age 5). The foundation stage was designed with an

associated curriculum, which became mandatory from September 2008. Both initiatives conflicted to a degree with my child-centred philosophy, which is centred around the developmental needs of pupils rather than a goal orientated curriculum. This resulted in my practice of combining the best aspects of the two ideologies, in a 'middle of the road approach', which was in keeping with the philosophies of the schools in which I was employed.

The fact that my professional development over my career took me 'outside' the classroom, provided me with another perspective to the workplace beyond classroom management and the development of my pedagogical skills. It helped me to develop a broader understanding regarding what constitutes 'good practice' in managerial and educational provision, including the importance of interpersonal relationships and clear management. It also provided me with first-hand experience of the many government initiatives in early years education in recent years, and a sense of a sector needing time to consolidate new ideas and reflect on their purpose and value. Alongside the longevity of my teaching career, a management role created within me a strong sense of a positive workplace as requiring not only well-qualified staff with the requisite skills to nurture the children in their care, but also the ability to work as a member of a team. It demanded within me as a manager the need for reflection in my everyday interactions with parents, staff, and other early years practitioners. This led to my realisation, from experience, that situations and behaviours can often be viewed and interpreted from differing personal perspectives and 'realities'.

1.4. The Current Early Years Context

Within the current early years context in England there is a recognition that ideological concerns remain for some stakeholders about the appropriateness of a formal educational curriculum at an early age, a preoccupation with 'school readiness' and the 'downgrading' of play-based activity (Hillman and Williams, 2015; Nuffield Foundation). All are tensions, as discussed in chapter 3, sections 3.5 to 3.7, which have been shown to have the potential to impact negatively upon the preschool environment, (Anning, 1998; Hillman and Williams, Nuffield Foundation, 2015; Keating et al, 2002; Kwon, 2003; McNess et al, 2003; Pollard et al, 1994; Preschool Learning Alliance, 2014). As a consequence, these are issues which are relevant to the context within which organisational climate is studied.

The rapid change in early years' education in England since the 1990s, with greater centralisation of policy, and in 2008 the adoption of a mandatory early years curriculum framework, has also been argued by some as having a negative practical impact upon the workplace for staff, (Alexander, 2010; House, 2011; Keating et al, 2002; Kwon, 2002; Pollard et al, 1994). This is in terms of a reduced lack of time for staff to complete administrative tasks such as planning and record keeping, a loss of job satisfaction for some staff, in addition to the use of a more formal style of teaching.

However, within this fast changing early years environment, where anecdotal, as well as empirical research have evidenced tensions and disquiet for many practitioners (Anning, 1998; Hillman and Williams, Nuffield Foundation, 2015; Keating et al, 2002; Laevers, 2005; McNess et al, 2003; Preschool Learning Alliance, 2014), there has also

been some evidence, as reviewed within the chapter heading 3.6, of a more positive perspective during the period of change and beyond. Where school context is positive, with support between staff and a strong and clear ethos in place, ways of working within the prescriptive and mandatory guidelines of the English framework have been shown to be achievable, even where personal educational principles are not fully reconciled with the framework (McNess, 2003; Sylva et al, 1999).

1.5. Prior Research

Within the limited number of early years studies specifically associated with school climate, there are those which focus upon climate and staff well-being (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Hur et al, 2016; Løvgren, 2016; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Royer & Moreau, 2016). These are critically reviewed in chapter 4, section 4.4. In addition, there are those studies which link perceptions of the workplace to the learning environment and the general quality of the classroom, as reviewed in chapter 4, sections 4.5 to 4.7 (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 1989; Cassidy et al, 2016; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower and Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014).

The preschool literature, in terms of a specific focus upon organisational climate, has been predominantly American based. However, when issues of transferability were considered between the English and American contexts, as discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.4, there were strong underlying educational similarities between the two contexts which favoured the transference of findings. These included, for example, similarities regarding the importance of school readiness and child outcomes,

regarded across continents as having not only long-term educational benefits (Sylva et al, 2002), but also a cost-benefit effect in terms of the economic return to society.

Added to the literature review were studies relating to the hierarchical structure of the early years workplace, critically examined in chapter 4, section 4.8. These studies, in common with those related to climate research, have investigated variables of communication, collaboration, and decision making, which have been shown to have a strong impact upon workplace perceptions, (Al-Hassan, 2006; Aubrey et al, 2012; Barkham, 2008; Butt and Lance, 2008; Lumsden, 2011; Ratcliff et al, 2011; Simpson, 2011; Van Laere et al 2012).

The pattern of collective findings from the literature review overall, as critically presented in Chapter 4, revealed a complex relationship between organisational climate and school characteristics. Variables of teacher's caregiving and emotional support (Cassidy et al, 2016; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014), job satisfaction, teacher burnout and emotional exhaustion (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Hur et al, 2016; Løvgren, 2016; Phillips, et al, 1991; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Royer & Moreau) and the quality of the classroom (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 1989; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower & Cassidy, 2007) were all found to have statistically significant associations with school climate. Within the complex environment of school climate investigation, and across research programmes, different aspects of climate were found to have varying levels of association with the different variables under study. Thus, while the over-arching finding has consistently supported the association between preschool climate and variables of well-being and classroom quality, the specifics of the nature of that

association have been more varied in their findings across the criteria under study, and the assessment tools and specific samples used.

1.6. School Climate Assessment

The school climate definition within which my research was set reflected the commonly accepted theoretical underpinnings of a general open system and social systems theory (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Scott & Davis, 2015), as discussed in Chapter 2. It was a definition developed by Tagiuri (1968) in his environmental model of school climate and used by many climate researchers responsible for the development of organisational climate assessment tools (Bloom, 2010; Cassidy, 2016; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Moos, 1995; Patterson et al, 2005). Within its operational dimensions Tagiuri's model included reference to the physical characteristics of the setting (ecology), in addition to characteristics of the people and groups within it (milieu), its social system of relationships and communication (social), and its belief system (culture), which would include aspects of the values of the workplace and levels of teacher commitment and expectations. Operationally the climate tool chosen for this study was specific to early years: The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom, 1989; Bloom, 2010). This was an instrument used in prior studies, (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 1996; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; McGinty et al, 2008; Pope & Stremmel, 1992), which as a result facilitated direct comparisons with previous works.

1.7. The Contribution to the Development of Knowledge

Through the use of a mixed methods approach, the aim of the study was to develop and extend the established research evidence, as discussed in chapter 4. The purpose of the research design was to bridge a gap in the evidence base of previous research findings, by investigating the concept of preschool climate, not only in terms of its association with a range of variables in statistical terms, as had been done in previous works (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Cassidy et al, 2016; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Hur et al, 2016; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Løvgren, 2016; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Royer & Moreau, 2016;) but also incorporating qualitative data related to the day-to-day 'lived experience' of staff, drilling into the processes which practically impacted upon staff perceptions.

The rationale for the use of a mixed methods approach is fully detailed in Chapter 5, section 5.1. The research design adopted, gave equal weight to quantitative and qualitative analyses, investigating emergent lines of enquiry from one stage to the next and following the data collection and analyses processes as detailed in section 1.8 and 1.9 of this chapter.

1.8. Data Collection

Due to the restriction of time and accessibility, the sample for the research was created using a 'captive' convenience sampling technique. This resulted in an initial sample of 28 preschools from the 32 approached, as detailed in chapter 6, section 6.7. The data was collected in two separate stages.

The first stage was designed to gather data for quantitative analysis relating to the structural characteristics of the individual preschools, such as preschool type, number and age of staff, length of employment and qualifications, concluding with an assessment of staff perceptions of the workplace. The data for this stage was gathered using a 'closed' questionnaire and the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom, 2010) to assess the organisational climate of the preschools. The rationale for the questionnaire content and layout, as well as the piloting procedure, can be seen in Chapter 6, section 6.6. The full questionnaire is presented in Appendix 5A for staff, and with several additional structural questions for managers in Appendix 5B. Data from the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey was used to explore preschool organisational climate as a broad overall concept, before also examining, as detailed in Chapter 7, staff perceptions of each of ten individual ECWES climate dimensions. The climate dimensions and full definitions are reported in Appendix 2.

The second data collection stage developed the lines of enquiry from the analysis of the initial data. The aim of this stage of the research design was to gain an insight into the day-to-day processes which impacted upon the climate of individual settings, by allowing respondents the freedom to use their own voice, rather than following a tightly arranged researcher agenda. It was a process which proved to be extremely valuable in expanding the initial database and allowing for patterns of characteristics to be identified. The rationale for this stage of the research is provided in Chapter 6, section 6.10, with details of my reflexive approach of describing and understanding the lived experience of others reported in Chapter 5, section 5.3. This second data

collection stage was achieved by the use of a second questionnaire administered to respondents from the high and low climate groups. The reduction in sample size at this stage of the research design followed the grounded theory approach of theoretical purposive sampling, in order to collect the most pertinent data to elaborate upon the developing lines of enquiry. This rational of aiding a comparative analysis and identification of differing characteristics between preschools of differing climates is detailed in Chapter 6, section 6.12. The questionnaire, as seen in Appendix 6, used predominantly open questions. The questionnaire content and piloting procedure can be seen in Chapter 6, section 6.11.

Following the completion of the second questionnaires a small number of staff were interviewed; their characteristics are shown in Table 6.5, Chapter 6, section 6.14 (p159), alongside my rationale for their selection. The interviewee process was used to further investigate questionnaire responses, and to elaborate on ideas, adding detail and clarification to them. The key issues identified from the second questionnaire defined the areas to be explored at interview, but also allowed room for divergence in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail.

1.9. Procedures of Analyses

The initial statistical analysis from the sample of 28 preschools used non-parametric techniques of the Fisher Exact Test as well as Chi-square. Both techniques were suitable for the data analysis procedure from two perspectives. The first was that they did not assume that the scores under analysis were drawn from a normally distributed population, which my study's sample was not. The second reason for their suitability was that they were both from the category of what Siegel and Castellan

(1988) refer to as 'ranking tests', where they were designed to be used with scores which:

> *'are not exact in any numerical sense, but which in effect are simply ranks'*
>
> *(p xv)*

The analysis of the qualitative data within the study followed a constructivist grounded theory approach, suggested by Lacey & Luff (2009) as well suited to answering research questions of breadth and depth, such as those in my research. In adopting the grounded theory definition of Charmaz (2014) the approach was a variation of grounded theory, which actively repositions the researcher as the author of a reconstruction of experience and meaning. It was an approach which complemented my interpretivist position and facilitated the flexibility required within my sequential and inductive mixed methods design. It was an approach where I was able to use 'analytic deduction' to build and test emerging ideas from the different stages of the research design, where qualitative data collection methods were flexible and flowed from the research questions. Full details and rationale of the grounded theory analysis used, which included engaging proactively with the literature from the beginning of the research process, are presented in chapter 5, section 5.6.

1.10. Choice of Paradigm

My adopted paradigm was one of an interpretivist and pragmatic approach, as discussed in Chapter 5. I saw the value of this research in terms of providing information which was relevant in practical as well as theoretical terms, which would

not only have a strong theoretical foundation, but which would incorporate a utility value of providing guidelines for preschool settings wishing to understand the mechanisms which facilitated a positive school climate. I accepted the presence of some inevitable subjectivity in my work and employed the practice of reflexivity. Greene (2012) highlights the intrinsic presence of values in social enquiry, which Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) suggest require the researcher to use a critical eye regarding one's own authority as interpreter and author. Using this process, I aimed for transparency in locating myself, my experience and my views within the study, as well as giving explicit attention to the relationship between the researcher and the researched in terms of tendencies towards procedural bias, social desirability and researcher interpretation.

1.11. My Developing Perspective

Throughout this study my reflexive approach involved an on-going evaluation of my research skills and of my personal perspective. My initial research experience had taken the form of an MA and was completed in 2006. It also focused upon the early years environment, although the topic related to parental involvement with children's reading, and any gain this had on achievement. The research used a qualitative design, in the form of a self-completed questionnaire, analysed using a nonparametric statistical technique. The reason I make this past reference is that I became aware as this current project progressed, that my previous study may have created a methodological 'leaning' more towards the statistical evidence base of my research. During the process of my work however, and as part of a reflective process, my interest shifted to that of acquiring respondents' perceptions of their 'lived experiences' within the workplace.

A retrospective analysis of the mixed methods design I adopted helps to explain this change in emphasis and provides an example of the process of critical reflection which I employed throughout this study. This was an important aspect of my work, exemplified within the data analysis from the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research and the variation between them in terms of their impact upon the research questions. As the research progressed I became aware of the limitations of the statistical analyses, which masked the complex narrative of workplace perceptions.

Mindful that the genuine level of integration between qualitative and quantitative methods in mixed methods research is sometimes questioned however (Cresswell, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013), this was a criticism which I tried to address during the reporting and discussion stage of my thesis. The design overall enabled a process by which staff perceptions could be explored in terms of the theoretical ideal, as well as in everyday practical terms, thus combining the two approaches of the past to the study of the preschool workplace.

As my work has progressed, I feel that my skills and attitudes have developed in several respects. My confidence in the choice of methodology in theoretical terms is clearer, and my understanding of the power of qualitative research to discover the subtle layering of social reality has grown. In a broader sense I also came away from the research process with the view, as professed by David (1998), that:

> *'There is no unambiguous foolproof way of doing research, of following the thread of an idea, through a maze of practice and then explaining it to others'*
>
> *(p12)*

Chapter 2

School Organisational Climate: A Definition

2.1. Introduction

The study of general principles of organisational theory in relation to increasing organisational effectiveness and employee satisfaction began to gather pace in the 1950s, with researchers studying various aspects of organisations. Argyris' 1958 study is one such example and illustrated the complexity of the nature of organisational study, where a range of interrelated variables were at play. These included variables related to the organisation, such as policies and procedures, as well as those related to the employee, such as individual needs, abilities and values. Due to the theoretical complexities, as well as the breadth of variables studied, the search for a definition of school organisational climate however was impeded over the years by the fact that:

> *'School climate has been studied with a multitude of variables, methodologies, theories and models, resulting in a not easily defined body of research'.*
>
> *(Anderson, 1982 p368)*

A review of the 'organisational climate' literature nevertheless does reveal common themes which have endured or regained some relevance across changing times. It provides an overview of organisational theory and early operational definitions designed to assess the workplace through the perception of employees, responding to the organisation's physical and social characteristics and its belief system. These are elements which hold relevance for today's schools in practical terms, and which explain the provenance for the current definition of preschool organisational climate.

2.2. Organisations: An Open Systems Perspective

The study of organisations has been an influential component in the development of a school climate definition. Prior to the development of an open systems perspective, theorists had viewed organisations through a rational or natural systems model, which emphasised structural and behavioural characteristics of organisations at the expense of environmental factors, (Barnard; 1938; Simon, 1947; Weber, 1947).

The open system perspective however which developed from the earlier work of Talcott Parsons (1960), incorporated into the systems model the importance of the environment. In addition to structural and behavioural characteristics, competition, resources, and political pressures from the environment were also seen as affecting the internal workings of organisations. This perspective supports the broad context of the study of preschool climate in England, as used in this thesis, where rapid and on-going Government initiatives, as discussed in Chapter 3, have created tensions in terms of ideology and practical difficulties for many educationalists.

In responding to the environment, the open system model emphasises the components that keep the organisation moving forward, sustaining it through a reliance on complex interdependent resources and inputs. This has been a concept developed and incorporated into the modern socio-ecological definition of preschool climate, discussed in section 2.6 of this chapter, where the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and values of staff, and the leadership that guides them, present a broad overall view of the quality of the characteristics of the organisation.

The entire organisation, as an open system, can be viewed at one level of conceptualisation as a set of roles and overlapping groups or subsystems. Reflecting the structure of early years organisations with teachers and support staff working side by side in classrooms, one operational open system is a hierarchical system which consists of multiple subsystems, not necessarily around power, but more around function (Scott & Davis, 2007). These hierarchical characteristics have been shown to have a strong impact upon the effective functioning of early years settings as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.8.

A process of feedback and adaptation is central to the opens system concept and to the efficient running of the organisation (Buckley, 1967; Galbreith, 1973; Lawrence, 1993; Weik, 1969). It is a concept which is incorporated into several climate assessment instruments (Brainard, 1987; Cassidy, 2016; Howard, Howell & Kottkamp et al, 1987; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Moos, 1995; Tschannen-Moran et al, 2006), including that used in this study (Bloom, 2010). As such the open systems model of organisations supports the premise built upon both theoretical and empirical studies, that once individual staff realise their role in the system and how their decisions and actions affect the whole, then communication and problem solving is more effective (Buckley1967; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Likert, 1961; Parsons, 1960; Scott & Davis, 2007; Scott & Davis, 2015).

2.3. The Search for an Operational Definition

Rationale

Sitting within the theoretical development of organisational theory, and influenced and inter-connected with it, was the seminal work of Andrew Halpin and his search for a definition of school organisational climate.

Halpin (1966), was of the view that there was a need for a stronger connection between research theory and practice. His work was crucial in the pursuit of an operational school climate definition, creating the foundation for the development of future assessment tools across school sectors. As a result, although the construction of the Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire, OCDQ (Halpin and Croft, 1963) and the revised version OCDQ-RE (Hoy and Clover, 1986) do not have direct relevance for my study, in terms of providing the assessment tool used to assess the climate of the early years settings in my sample, their design will be reviewed in this chapter. They clearly map the development of a definition of school climate and the provenance for future assessment tools, including that used in my research: The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom, 2010), where climate is defined as:

> *'a relatively enduring global perception of the quality of the characteristics of the organisation'*

which encompasses:

> *'the collective perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and values of the individuals in a work setting. It is a composite of the personalities that come together and the leadership that guides them.'* (Bloom, 2010, p45)

<u>A Theoretical Perspective</u>

From the beginnings of the search for an operational definition, Halpin's social constructivist view of multiple realities of 'truth' reflected to a large extent the epistemological standpoint of this thesis as explained in Chapter 5, section 5.2. It placed a strong emphasis on the collaborative nature of learning and the importance of cultural and social context and favoured the principle of 'complementarity' in the reading of theoretical models, rather than regarding them as 'competing explanations of the truth'. His view was that:

> *'The scientist can never be quite sure his picture is the only one*
> *which could explain his observations'*
>
> (*p18*)

Halpin's work was the precursor to the modern-day approach to organisational study, which rather than being rescinded over the years has been developed, amended and refined, as Halpin had hoped. This has been in practical terms, with revisions to the original OCDQ questionnaire by Hoy and Clover, 1986; Kottkamp, Mulhern & Hoy, 1987; Hoy, Tarter and Kottkamp, 1991, and Hoy and Tarter, 1997. These revisions adapted the questionnaire for different age groups and included that of the OCDE-RE for elementary schools, which is critically reviewed in section 2.5 of this chapter, and which is still in use, (Black, 2007; Dennis, 2008; Jankens, 2011; Kavouri, 1996; Kilinc, 2013; Pretorius & Villiers, 2009). The original OCDQ was built upon a clear definition of climate, which closely reflected that of the climate assessment tool used in this thesis, as identified on the previous page and in section 2.6. It incorporated multiple dimensions focusing upon interpersonal interactions

between staff and the principal, but also incorporating into its assessment reference to the efficiency of organisational processes, workload and the availability of resources.

Components of Halpin's Administrative Study

Writing as a social psychologist, Halpin's work was described by his colleague Roald Campbell as contributing to the investigation of the managerial level of organisations, rather than with the development of a theory of administration itself, (Foreword by Campbell, page v, Halpin, 1966).

The key concepts used by Halpin (1966) as the main components of his organisational climate work reflected a theoretical general open systems perspective, and were described as:

1. The Task – i.e. the purpose or mission of the organisation. The task may change over time due to an influx of families to the neighbourhood which may require a school to reconsider its priorities to accommodate new building works.

2. The Formal Organisation (within which exists informal networks) – including job descriptions, formal procedures, hierarchical structure.

3. The Work Group/s – i.e. in a small school Halpin proposed this would amount to two groups, the principal/headteacher and the teachers.

4. The Leader/s – incorporating two main dimensions of leader behaviour: Firstly, this included the dimension of 'initiating structure' which Halpin used

to refer to the leader's behaviour in delineating the relationship between themselves and the work group; and secondly 'consideration', which referred to the behaviour indicative of friendship, mutual trust, respect and warmth between the leader and staff members.

These are characteristics which have had enduring relevance to the discussion of organisational climate. They continue to be investigated to further develop our understanding of the quality of the workplace for staff, with the aim of enabling school improvement and development of best practice (Bevans et al, 2007; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Cassidy et al, 2011; Hoy, 2012; Hur et al, 2016 Kavouri, 1996; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran et al, 2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014). The characteristics of respect, hierarchical structure, communication and clarity of roles were mentioned frequently by respondents in my study in terms of describing the level of climate of their individual settings, as reported in the data analysis of Chapter 8.

<u>An early definition</u>

Halpin's (1966) work extended the search for a definition of climate by adding practical dimensions to previous broad statements. On-going theoretical work of the time, such as that of Tagiuri (1968), complemented Halpin's work. It emphasised the importance of the quality of the organisation in any definition as perceived from the organisation's internal environment, especially as experienced by the insider. Tagiuri's (1968) taxonomy of climate-related terms included four dimensions and is a model which has gained acceptance and been applied across subsequent organisational studies (Anderson, 1982; Bloom 2010; Cassidy, 2016; Ennis et al, 1989;

Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al, 2016; Shaw, 2009; Willms, 1992). The four dimensions of Tagiuri's (1968) taxonomy included:

1. 'Ecology' - the physical and material aspects of climate that are external to individuals, such as age and size of school.

2. 'the milieu' - the characteristics of people and groups, e.g. teachers' age and years of experience.

3. the social system - the patterned relationships of people and groups, such as communication/shared decision-making.

4. the culture - the belief systems, values, cognitive structures and meaning, e.g. teachers' commitment, expectations and the school's level of academic emphasis.

In accordance with these views Tagiuri's (1968) formal definition of organisational climate stated that:

> *'Organisational climate is a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organisation that a) is experienced by its members b) influences their behaviour, and c) can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the organisation.'*
>
> *(p27)*

The impact of this definition has been enduring. It has been adapted by school climate researchers to reflect the school environment and still holds resonance in current school climate definitions, as illustrated in Table 2.2, page 27 and Table 2.4, page 31.

2.4. Development and testing of the OCDQ

Halpin and Croft constructed the 'Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) for elementary schools. It was comprised of 64 Likert-type items which teachers and principals could use to describe the climate of their school and use for purposes of self-evaluation. Details of the pilot study and factor analysis of the OCDQ can be found in Appendix 3.

The development of the statements and categories to be included in the OCDQ was a process which has been used in subsequent designs of school climate instruments (Bloom, 2010; Cassidy 2016; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Kottkamp et al, 1987; Tschannen-Moran et al, 2006). They were built upon the rationale that:

- The statements and categories would make good 'factorial' sense (The 64 items in the OCDQ were assigned to 8 subsets which had been delineated by factor-analytic methods).

- The statements and categories would make good practical sense (teacher behaviour in the piloting of the OCDQ was observed and noted prior to analysis and initial classification of behaviours which were subsequently subjected to factor analysis).

- The statements and categories would be consistent with current theoretical knowledge at the time (links were made in the development of the OCDQ between 'empirical findings and theoretical knowledge about the nature of organisations and human personality. Many statements were in keeping with an open systems theory, and with Talcott Parsons' (1960) theory of social

systems and attention to hierarchical components of the school – i.e. leadership behaviour).

Completion of the OCDQ questionnaire required respondents to indicate the extent to which each statement characterised a teacher's perception of their school on a scale of four categories (rarely occurs; sometimes occurs; often occurs; very frequently occurs). Halpin (1966) also added the important caveat, which remains relevant to all research using climate assessment instruments, including my own research, that:

> *'Obviously, each teacher's perception of the school's climate*
> *is mediated through his own set of personal values and needs.'*
>
> *(p147)*

From the responses given, a school's profile could be categorised into one of six 'organisational climates'. These climates were differentiated along a quality continuum from 'open', which described an energetic organisation moving towards its goals, where task and social needs were easily accommodated, to 'closed', where there was a high degree of apathy, where the organisation was stagnant and where group members gained little satisfaction. The term 'authenticity' was used by Halpin and Croft (1963) to describe an open climate, which was 'for real', and not just a 'thin' and superficial acting out of professional roles. This compared with a 'closed' climate, where morale was low and 'authenticity' lacking.

For almost a decade after its conception, the OCDQ was one of the most popular instruments used in educational climate research to differentiate between the

climates of schools (Thomas & Slater, 1972). The studies in Table 2.1, as reported by

Anderson (1982), exemplify the OCDQ's early usage before its subsequent revisions.

Table 2.1: Early Studies to use the OCDQ (Halpin and Croft; 1966)

Early studies to use the OCDQ		
Andrews (1965)	All teachers in 165 self-selected schools in Alberta, Canada	Climate dimensions found to be related to teacher satisfaction, principal effectiveness and school achievement
Feldvebel (1964 a, b)	30 elementary schools in north east Illinois	Climate dimension related to principal behaviour (but not overall climate type)
Flagg 1965	10 elementary schools in Newark, New Jersey	Type of climate related to school size, staff turnover and principal characteristics but not to student achievement
Hale (1965)	Teachers in 13 schools	Only language achievement (not maths or reading) was found to be related to any climate dimensions
Sargeant (1967)	33 principals and 1024 teachers in 33 secondary schools in Minnesota	Staff position, teacher satisfaction, and perceived school effectiveness were associated with differences in climate type, but school size had no association
Miller, (1968)	Approximately 400 teachers from 29 elementary schools in Minnesota	Climate type was found to be related to school achievement, with teacher dimensions more important than principal dimensions
Watkins (1968)	40 principals and 1188 teachers in 48 elementary and secondary schools in Georgia	Climate type was found to be related to school and staff size, staff accountability, and staff position
Wiggins (1972)	Approximately 715 teachers and principals from 35 in southern California	Teacher and principal perceptions of climate were relatively independent. Principal behaviour was generally not related to climate type
Nwankwo (1979)	400 teachers from 40 secondary schools in Nigeria	School discipline was found to be associated with climate type: good discipline with open climates; poor discipline with closed climates

2.5. Subsequent Development of the OCDQ

From 1986 revisions to the OCDQ were undertaken (Hoy and Clover, 1986), including its adaptation for use in different educational sectors. For the purposes of this research however, due to a lack of direct relevance to the early years context, neither the middle school revision – OCDQ-RM (Hoy and Sabo, 1998) nor the secondary school revision – OCDQ -RS (Hoy, Tarter and Kottkamp, 1991) will be included for detailed analysis here.

The development of the OCDQ-RE for elementary schools however, illustrated the on-going pragmatic conceptualisation of school climate, which subsequent assessment tools were to utilise across educational sectors, including early years.

Just as the original OCDQ had used statistical analyses to arrive at its conceptual climate subsets, Hoy and Clover (1986) refined the original questionnaire through factor analyses to ensure a sound empirical basis for the new revised edition (OCDQ-RE). The process involved evaluating the existing OCDQ and discarding those items within subsets which had low factor loadings. Pilot testing of new items was undertaken, and factor analyses of the pilot data performed, before the new 42 item instrument was successfully tested with a new data set of 70 schools (Hoy and Clover, 1986).

As with the original, the revised version (OCDQ-RE) conceptualised organisational climate using a personality metaphor. In this sense personality was to the individual as organisational climate was to the organisation:

*'Schools feel different. As one moves from school
to school Each has a ''personality'' of its own'.*
(Hoy & Clover, 1986, p94)

As with the original OCDQ, the revised version had its roots based in earlier organisational global models and taxonomies, particularly that of Tagiuri's (1968), as can be seen in the similarities between the two definitions in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2: Similarities in Climate Definitions (common themes highlighted in bold)

Tagiuri's 1968 definition	Hoy and Clover's 1986 Definition
*'Organisational climate is a **relatively enduring quality** of the internal environment of an organisation that* *a) **is experienced by its members*** *b) **influences their behaviour,** and* *c) can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the organisation.'*	*'The concept of organisational climate can be summarised as a **relatively enduring quality** of the school environment that* *a) is affected by the principal's leadership,* *b) **is experienced by the teachers,*** *c) **influences members' behaviour** and* *d) is based on collective perceptions.'*

Both the original and new version of the OCDQ conceptualised teacher – principal interactions in terms of open and/or closed. An open school climate would be one in which teacher and principal behaviour was supportive, genuine, and engaged, and where teachers enjoyed a sense of accomplishment from their work. By contrast, a closed climate would be characterised by restrictive principal behaviour, where teachers felt over-burdened and where there was a lack of collegiality.

The dimensions used within the OCDQ, and its revision, also incorporated aspects relevant to the investigation of this thesis. These included a consideration of staff collegiality, supervisor support, goal consensus, and the model for decision making

within the school, the clarity of its processes and the degree of emphasis placed on purposeful planning.

The descriptors of teacher and principal behaviours between the two versions of the OCDQ were very similar, despite the factorial analysis prompting a reduced number of climates in the new version, as well as a reduced number of teacher behaviours. For ease of comparison the principal and teacher behaviours used in the original OCDQ as well as those of Hoy and Clover's (1986) revised form, are tabulated in full on the following page, showing the reduction in number, but also the use of several common descriptors of behaviours.

Table 2.3: OCDQ - Original and Revised Dimensions

	Halpin and Croft (original OCDQ) 4 teacher and 4 principal behaviours	Hoy & Clover (OCDQ- revised) 3 teacher and 3 principal behaviours
Teacher Behaviour (Open)	Intimacy refers to the teachers' enjoyment of friendly social relations with each other.	Intimate teacher behaviour: Teachers know one another well, are close personal friends and provide strong support for one another.
Teacher Behaviour (Open)	Esprit refers to 'morale'. The teachers feel that their social needs are being satisfied, and that they are, at the same time, enjoying a sense of accomplishment in their job.	Collegial teacher behaviour where teachers are proud of their school, enjoy working with colleagues and are enthusiastic and mutually respectful of one another's professional competence.
Teacher Behaviour (Closed)	Hindrance refers to the teachers' feeling that the principal burdens them with routine duties, committee demands, and other requirements which the teachers construe as unnecessary busy-work.	Disengaged teacher behaviour where there is a lack of meaning and focus to professional activities. Teachers are simply putting in time and are non-productive in group efforts of team-building; they have no common goal orientation. Their behaviour is often negative and critical of colleagues and the organisation
Teacher Behaviour (Closed)	Disengagement indicates that the teachers do not work well together. They pull in different directions with respect to the task; they gripe and bicker among themselves.	
Principal Behaviour (Closed)	Aloofness refers to behaviour by the principal, which is characterised as formal and impersonal. He 'goes by the book' and prefers to be guided by rules and policies rather than to deal with the teachers in an informal, face-to-face situation.	Directive principal behaviour where principals maintain close constant control over all teacher and school activities, down to the smallest detail.
Principal Behaviour (Closed)	Production Emphasis refers to behaviour by the principal, which is characterised by close supervision of staff. He is highly directive, is task-orientated and is not open to feedback from staff.	Restrictive principal behaviour where the principal burdens teachers with paperwork and other demands that interfere with their teaching responsibilities and thus hinders their work.
Principal Behaviour (Open)	Thrust refers to behaviour marked not by close supervision of the teacher, but by the principal's attempt to motivate the teachers via the example which he personally sets. He does not ask the teachers to give of themselves anything more than he willingly gives of himself; his behaviour, though starkly task-orientated, is viewed favourably by the teachers.	Supportive principal behaviour where the principal listens and is open to teacher suggestions and where praise is given genuinely and frequently, and criticism is handled constructively.
Principal Behaviour (Open)	Consideration refers to the behaviour by the principal, which is characterised by an inclination to treat the teachers 'humanly', to try to do a little something extra for them in human terms.	

2.6. Enduring Themes and Links with the Early Years Sector

With the development of the OCDQ-RE in 1986, there was a growing consensus about the nature of school organisational climate and the variables used in its assessment. Since the 1980s, theoretical foundations of environmental theory (Tagiuri, 1968) and the natural systems work of Talcott Parsons (1960), have been extended and combined to provide researchers, including those of early years studies (Bloom, 2010; Cassidy, 2016; Cassidy et al, 2011; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al, 2016; Zinsser et al, 2014) with a socio-ecological conceptualisation for climate research. This stresses the dynamic, interactive nature of person - environment variables. Within this framework studies of preschool organisational climate, as reported in Chapter 4, have continued to define climate as a collective staff perception, assessed by a range of dimensions (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 2010; Cassidy, 2016; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al, 1997; Hur et al, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2006).

In terms of the specific early years environment, Dennis (2008) used the Organisational Climate Questionnaire, OCDQ–RE, alongside the Early Work Environment Survey (ECWES), which is the instrument used in my research project. The two climate assessments complement one another in their shared conceptual framework and theoretical origins, as the following points highlight:

- Both refer to the personality of school settings.
- Both assess the global climate of settings through a range of dimensions.
- Both refer to the seminal work of Halpin and Croft, as instrumental in the development of their assessment items.

- Both reflect the framework that any assessment tool should be consistent with current theoretical knowledge and make good 'factorial' as well as practical sense.

- Both utilised the climate definition of Tagiuri (1968) as tabulated below:

Table 2.4: Shared Theoretical Origins ECWES and OCDQ-RE (highlighted in bold)

	ECWES (Bloom, 2010, p45)	OCDQ-RE (Hoy & Clover, 1986, p94)
Definition of organisational climate	'***the collective perceptions***, *attitudes, beliefs, and values of the individuals in a work setting. It is a composite of the personalities that come together and the **leadership that guides** them.'* '*it is a **relatively enduring** global perception of the quality of the characteristics of the organisation.'*	'*the concept of organisational climate can be summarised as a **relatively enduring quality** of the school environment that* *a) is affected by the **principal's leadershi**p,* *b) is experienced by the teachers,* *c) influences members' behaviour and* *d) is **based on collective perception**s.'*

In addition, Bloom's (2010), practical description of the range of climates within early years settings was also very similar in tone to that of Halpin's (1966) original OCDQ, as set out in Table 2.5 on the following page:

Table 2.5: Practical Descriptions of Organisational Climate

Practical Descriptions of organisational climate	
Halpin (1966)	**Bloom (2010)**
'In one school the teachers and the principal are zestful and exude confidence in what they are doing. They find pleasure in working with each other; this pleasure is transmitted to the students, who thus are given at least a fighting chance to discover that school can be a happy experience. In a second school the brooding discontent of the teachers is palpable; the principal tries to hide his incompetence and his lack of a sense of direction behind a cloak of authority, and yet he wears this cloak poorly because the attitude he displays to others vacillates randomly between the obsequious and the officious…. A third school is marked by neither joy nor despair, but by hollow ritual. Here one gets the feeling of watching an elaborate charade in which teachers, principal, and students alike are acting out parts.' (p131)	*'In some centres you immediately feel sense of liveliness and enthusiasm as you enter. The director and teachers exude a spirit of vitality and positive energy. They are dynamic, happy, and enthusiastic about their work and appear warm and supportive in their interactions with children, with families and with one another. In other settings, though, the general mood may be quite different. An air of discontent and tension may permeate the work environment, creating a kind of gloominess to daily activities and staff relations. Competition, mistrust, and resentment may be characteristic, and staff may complain about their roles, responsibilities, and general working conditions'. (Bloom, 2010, p45)*

2.7. OCDQ-RE and ECWES as Data Collection Instruments

In addition to the examination of the conceptual foundations of the data collection instruments mentioned, and the process of their development, a brief examination of their application will help to determine their efficacy. Both the OCDQ-RE, designed for use in elementary/primary schools and the ECWES, designed for use in preschools have been used in research projects to assess school climate, (Black, 2007; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Dennis, 2008; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Jankens, 2011; Kavouri, 1996; Kilinc, 2013; Lower and Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; Phillips et al, 1991; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Pretorius, 2009).

All of the above studies found the assessment tools effective in differentiating between the schools or preschools which formed their samples, allowing them to address the research questions of their studies. Pretorius et al (2009) in their study of school climate used the OCDQ-RE. Their findings, revealed a clear level of differentiation between schools within their sample. Data from the 6 primary schools and 178 staff, suggested that primary school teachers in the southern Cape of Africa perceived their relations with their principals as relatively closed for 5 out of the 6 schools, with the monitoring exercised over teachers and school activities tightly controlled.

Jankens (2011) was similarly able to address his research questions in his quantitative climate American research, focusing on child outcomes within a one year period, for any association with school climate. From a sample of 11 schools employing 355 teachers in total, Jankens' results, from the staff responses to the Likert statements of the OCDQ-RE, indicated a significant statistical relationship between both principal

openness and student outcomes over the one-year period, and also between teacher openness and student outcomes during this time. Such studies of school climate provide an on-going impetus for complimentary work in the early years environment and demonstrate the interconnection across sectors in establishing the impact of climate upon employee attitudes, their well-being and productivity, and the teaching and learning environment which they provide, (Bizumic et al,2009; Bloom, 1988; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Brookover et al, 1978; Cassidy et al, 2016; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Grayson and Alvarez, 2008; Hur et al, 2016; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lavian, 2012; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008; Zinsser & Curby, 2014).

In relation to early years, the research studies shown in Table 2.6 on page 35 highlight works which have all used group workforce data from the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) in the pursuit of their research aims. All studies revealed a range of climate assessment scores, which indicated a clear difference in perception between different settings.

Table 2.6: Research Studies using ECWES

Study	Year	ECWES survey used	Number of centres and respondents from each setting	Mean global climate score	Focus of study
Jorde-Bloom	1988	Full survey	Centres n=65 Centre staff n=629	68.03	An Analysis of teacher and administrator perceptions of Organisational Climate in the Early Years Setting
Boyd & Schneider	1997	Full survey	Centres = n= 45 Staff = n =137	No mean global score provided	An exploration of the relative strength of work environment dimensions as predictors of burnout
Iutcovich et al	2001	Full survey	Centres n=60 Centre staff n=546 Average number of staff across settings = 11	65.3	Professional Development and The Quality of Child Care: An Assessment of Pennsylvania's Child Care Training System
Haveman	2006	Full survey	Centres n=53 Centre staff n=413	67.56	Organisational climate of church-affiliated Child Care Programs: Links to program instability Rates and educational levels
Lower and Cassidy	2007	Short survey	Minimum 2 staff in each setting; maximum 24 Average number of staff = 9	Not reported although mean individual statement score = 3.97 (from total available score of 5)	Child Care Work Environments: The relationship with learning environments
Gerber et al	2007	Short survey	Centres n = 43 Headteachers = n = 69	71.30	Association between teacher characteristics, setting characteristics and observed teacher sensitivity in the classroom
Appel-Drazin	2016	Full Survey	Centres n = 9 Total centre staff = 160	No mean global score provided	Work Environment, Leadership, and Teacher Retention in Early Childhood Education

Where the use of ECWES has been compromised in prior research, has not been in

the design of the instrument itself but in relation to flaws in the methodological

design of particular studies, where the instrument has been used in a way for which

it was <u>not</u> appropriate. Dennis (2008), for example, used ECWES in her American

early years study with a random sample of 37 community-based child care centres that served low-income children, including those aged 3 to 4 years of age.

Unfortunately, what a close examination of the Dennis (2008) study revealed, was the presence of researcher error in the practical operational use of ECWES, which compromised the application of the findings to future works. Only one randomly selected teacher from each centre was invited to participate in the study, and as a result the climate of each preschool was assessed from the perception of only one member of staff. This process was not appropriate to the design of ECWES, or to the commonly accepted definition of school climate, which is based upon the <u>collective perceptions of staff</u>, (Bloom, 2010; Cassidy 2016; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Kottkamp et al, 1987; Tschannen-Moran et al, 2006).

2.8. Summary

The current accepted definition of school climate, reported in Table 2.4, page 31, evolved from the theoretical administrative theory of the mid twentieth century. It reflects the theoretical underpinnings of a general open systems theory and gained its early impetus from Halpin and Croft's (1966) empirical approach and scientifically orientated practice.

Since Halpin and Croft's seminal work, alongside the theoretical developments of the 1960s, there has been a consensus that school climate is a relatively enduring global perception of the quality of organisational characteristics, which reflects the collective perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and values of individuals in a work setting (Bloom, 2010; Cassidy et al, 2016; Howard et al, 1987; Hoy et al, 1991; Tagiuri, 1968; Tschannen-Moran et al, 2006). Within this definition there is a variance of

perspective, associated with differing climate tools. However, all stem from the same theoretical foundations. They share the same aim and rationale, expressed by the authors of climate assessment tools, in their belief that a positive climate can promote personal as well as professional satisfaction in the workplace for staff and the children in their care (Bloom, 2010*;* Cassidy et al, 2016; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Howard et al, 1987; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Hoy et al, 1997; Moos, 1995; Patterson et al, 2005).

Chapter 3

The Changing Early Years Educational Scene: An Overview of Early Years

Education in England

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the context of preschool education in England today, (November 2017) and examines the rapid changes which have taken place over the last 25 years and their potential for impact upon the workplace and associated staff perceptions. It does so from a macro, as well as from a micro level.

The period of the 1990s can be seen as a watershed in English educational reform, due to the economic recession of the 1980s, which led many European countries to reconsider and reform their education systems (Shuayb & O'Donnell, 2008). The model adopted in England was reflected in the Government's desire to raise pupil performance in literacy and numeracy, with an increasing target-focused culture gradually becoming embedded in the primary and early years curriculum.

At the macro level this chapter will document ideological and educational standpoints regarding preschool practice, alongside government policy, with a particular focus on the period post 1990. At the micro level it will explore stakeholders' and practitioners' perceptions of change from the 1990s and beyond, and also assess and develop an understanding of the processes involved by identifying any enduring themes. This contextualisation is relevant in highlighting issues which continue to impact upon the early years workplace. This is both in practical and ideological terms and, by association, with practitioners' attitudes towards and perceptions of the organisational climate of their individual settings.

3.2. The 'Quality' Curriculum Prior to the 1990s

Prior to the period of rapid change from the 1990s, the curriculum and its implementation within English preschools allowed practitioners relative autonomy (Alexander, 2010; Kwon, 2002; Soler and Miller, 2003). It incorporated policies which espoused a child-centred approach (Hadow, 1933; Plowden, 1967), and emphasised the importance of a child's experimental learning through real life experience. Curricular principles from the 1970s to the 1990s were widely cited in early years training courses to include a child-centred programme, based on first-hand experience and play. These principles formed the basis of all pre-school provision, regardless of the sector in which it was based (Sylva et al, 1992). The practice at this time had much in common with influential work taking place in America (Epstein et al, 1978; Ramey et al, 1982; Schweinhart et al, 1986; Weikart, 1972). The findings of these studies came to support the premise, on both sides of the Atlantic, as discussed in section 3.4, that preschool education of a certain 'quality' could make some long-term positive difference to its pupils (Hillman and Williams, 2015; Sylva et al, 2002).

3.3. The Pace of Educational Reform from the 1990s

As the demand for preschool services in England began to outstrip supply, (Rumbold, 1990), due to employers needing to attract mothers of young children back to work, Government initiatives began to grow in frequency and influence regarding the expansion of early years provision.

The Start Right Report of 1994 chaired by Sir Christopher Ball was a prominent early report to Government of the time, arguing that investment in high-quality early years' education was valuable in giving a worthwhile social and economic return to society. It reported the existing pattern of provision at the time in England as 'insufficient and not good enough' and recommended that the Government take statutory responsibility to provide a first class education for all children from age 3.

Following the Start Right report, the Conservative government in 1996 added increased momentum to educational initiatives, and announced measures aimed at raising standards and improving the quality of preschools. This included the introduction of a set of curricular guidelines and learning goals for children across six curricular areas, entitled: Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education (School Curriculum Assessment Authority; SCAA, 1996). This was to have a far-reaching impact upon the early years environment in terms of the pace of change and the on-going centralisation of policy, as reported in the following paragraphs.

Implications of greater centralisation

With the introduction of the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning (1996) the flexibility which practitioners could exercise in terms of their curricular approach, as had historically been the case, was reduced by the indirect pressure brought to bear upon early years settings to comply with the new guidance. Preschools had to show school inspectors, through the government's inspection process, that the education they offered led children towards the learning targets set out in the Desirable Outcomes guidance. This was a situation regarded by many, as presented throughout

this chapter and specifically in section 3.7, as a clear statement of intent that early childhood education was now an issue on the national policy agenda with politicians holding the balance of power (Alexander, 2010; Kwon, 2002).

The election of the New Labour Party in 1997 saw education retain this high political priority. Subsequent reforms were to be many and swift. With the publication of the 'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' (QCA, 2000), a new stage of education was introduced for children aged 3 to the end of the reception year when they were 5, rising 6. It outlined the early learning goals, which pupils were expected to achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage and provided a series of 'stepping stones' of prerequisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for children to acquire as they advanced towards these goals. As the process of centralisation continued, comprehensive guidance for the organisation and planning of activities to meet these ends was extended to include pedagogical content.

A revised curriculum was introduced in 2007 by the government for children from birth to 5 years of age, entitled the 'Early Years Foundation Stage' (EYFS), which became mandatory in September 2008 for all early years settings. This secured the process of centralisation of the early years curriculum, which had begun several years before. The principle of a child's readiness or otherwise for school continued to be the central premise of the document, as defined by their achievement in specified learning goals across curricular areas, assessed at the end of the reception year.

A prescribed framework of early years quality was now in place, which arguably diminished a sense of professionalism for staff. Not only had there been a lack of constructive discourse between educationalists and the government in the

formulation of the early years framework, but there had also been a diminished level of autonomy introduced for early years practitioners due to the prescriptive nature of the new mandatory curriculum (Alexander, 2010; McGillvray, 2008; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016; Urban, 2008). Early years staff in the Tanner et al, (2006) study, for example, which took place in a large urban local authority in England, supported the introduction of minimum standards, but felt constrained by the focus on targets. Much of the resistance voiced by staff in the study was of a practical nature. It related to the administrative burden which was part of the detailed information now required for every child in a setting, and which for some interviewees led to feelings of reductions in quality, because staff had less time to spend in contact with the children. Other objections were associated with the perceived 'regimented' national standards, which clashed with staff notions of early childhood as encompassing some time for free play. One interviewee, commented that the Foundation Stage was important in preparation for school, but that:

> *Children learn a lot through everyday play anyway…. They learn social skills through everyday things like learning to sit together at the table, learning to share, learning to respect one another'*
>
> *(Tanner et al, 2006, p10)*

The rapid centralisation and the operational workplace pressures of managing associated change, had implications for early years staff in terms of ideology (as will be discussed in section 3.5), as well as in terms of a practical impact (as discussed in section 3.6). Both had the potential to impact upon staff attitudes towards the workplace, in terms of their perceptions of climate and upon staff behaviours and actions.

3.4. The Value of Early Years Education

Underlying the rapid changes examined in the previous section has been the position of successive Governments regarding the value of early years education. An examination of this position is important in providing a backdrop from which the ideology of the current early years curriculum in England can be viewed, alongside the practices it promotes and the tensions it can create for those with opposing educational views.

The Government

The importance and value of high quality early years education has been promoted by successive governments in terms of its impact upon outcomes. It is an approach highlighted by the Department for Education (2014) in their statement that:

> *'A child has more chance of getting better exam results and ultimately earning higher wages by receiving pre-school education, a study published today (September 9 2014) has shown.*
>
> *The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary (EPPSE) research shows children who go to pre-school are projected to earn £27,000 more during their career than those who don't. They are also more likely to get better GCSE results - the equivalent of getting 7 Bs compared to 7 Cs.'*
>
> *(p1)*

Incorporated into the Governments drive to raise pupil attainment in England and educational ratings internationally, improving child outcomes at the end of the early years stage (age 5) has been regarded as crucial in its impact upon later educational success. While this premise will be discussed in pages 47 to 50, the on-going changes

to the early years curriculum since 2000, and to the EYFS assessments, have made any analysis of improvements in early years outcomes over recent years difficult to ascertain.

The Department for Education report of the national early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP) results for 2016, reported what they termed as 'modest' improvements in children's current attainment, with 69.3% of children achieving a good level of development, an increase of 3 percentage points from 2015. The increase in the percentage of children at age 5 achieving a good level of development since 2012 (from 47% to 66%) was reported by the Department for Education as a positive trend in outcomes. However, as Perera et al (2016) point out, the less finely-tuned assessment and scoring system of the new EYFSP, introduced by the government in 2012, meant that progression was measured from a different and broader perspective from the past, thus invalidating direct definitive comparisons with previous years.

Moreover, added to the problem of any comparison of early years outcomes incurred by changing assessment processes, and what Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, (2016) refer to as the 'datafication' of early years education, has been the uncertainty the on-going changes to assessment procedures have created for staff. These uncertainties, on occasion, have also been exacerbated by elements of disorganisation in the implementation of new practices. The most recent proposed introduction of new baseline assessments, and the change in status of the associated EYFS profile to non-statutory, due to have been put in place from September 2016, exemplify this point. Despite practitioners making extensive preparations for the new

initiative on the advice of the Department for Education, preschools were informed

only several months before the start of the new academic year, (September 2016),

and the introduction of the new measures, that they had been postponed. This was

as a result of the findings of the Standards and Testing Agency (April 2016) that:

> *'there is insufficient comparability between the 3*
> *reception baseline assessments to enable them to be used*
> *in the accountability system concurrently.'*
>
> *(p20)*

In August 2016, the Standard Testing Agency informed schools they should continue

to complete the current early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP) in the following

summer term, and that the decision would enable the STA to take the time to review

options for assessment in the reception year beyond 2016 to 2017. At the time of

writing, this position remains unchanged.

In terms of the Governments drive to raise pupil attainment in England and

educational ratings internationally, linked to early years child outcomes at age 5,

England's 2012 rating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA),

was regarded by the Department for Education as a cause for concern. In 2015 the

situation however had not improved, when over half a million students, representing

28 million 15-year-olds in 72 countries, took the internationally agreed two-hour PISA

test. Students were assessed in Science, Mathematics, Reading, collaborative

problem solving and financial literacy. The OECD report (2016) of PISA mean scores

recorded the achievements of UK students in terms of rank order across 70 countries.

For these English students aged 15, their early years education, if undertaken in

England, would most likely have reflected the framework of the Foundation Stage curriculum introduced by the QCA in 2000 with its focus upon early learning goals.

The results from the PISA test gave the UK position as 15th in Science, 21st in Reading and 27th in Maths. Mean scores since 2012 had fallen in each of these three subjects, from 514 to 509 in Science, 494 to 492 in Maths, and 499 to 498 in Reading. The OECD reported that 17% of students in the United Kingdom (and 17% in England) were low performers in Science. They could not draw on their knowledge of basic science content and procedures to identify an appropriate explanation, interpret data, and identify the question being addressed in a simple experiment. This was a proportion which had remained unchanged since 2006. In Reading, 18% of pupils in the UK (and 18% in England) did not attain the baseline level of proficiency. This was defined within the report as a level at which students begin to demonstrate the reading skills that would enable them to participate effectively and productively in life. In Maths, 22% of 15-year-olds in the UK (and 22% in England) did not reach the baseline level of achievement. Their skills were described in the OECD (2016) report, as enabling success in solving problems involving clear directions and requiring a single source of information, but not enabling success where engagement in more complex reasoning was required to solve the kinds of problems that are routinely faced by adults in their daily lives.

Within the context of these PISA results and the drive for improving standards across educational sectors, there sits an on-going early years educational debate concerning the issue of school readiness. This questions the emphasis of school readiness in England upon child outcomes and its appropriateness to the development of young

children as discussed in section 3.5, as well as regarding the conflicting evidence of the efficacy of this approach, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

<u>The debate regarding school readiness</u>

A synthesis of the research surrounding the expansion and benefits of preschool education was undertaken by Melhuish et al (2015). Their comprehensive review of the effects of early education pointed to the last 40 years of international research as supporting the overarching finding, that quality preschool does benefit children from all environments. This is particularly in terms of children from disadvantaged backgrounds helping prepare them for school entry. Early intervention programmes, as well as attendance at preschool for all children, have been shown by several research studies to be successful in enhancing children's initial cognitive development and school attainment (Attanasio et al, 2016; Garber, 1988; Goodman and Sianesi, 2005; Harrison et al, 2010; Howes et al, 2008; Magnuson et al, 2007; Ramey et al, 1982; Sammons et al, 2002; Sammons & Smees, 1998).

Recent research overviews of preschool education and any maintenance of effects (Attanasio et al, 2016; Bailey et al, 2015; Melhuish et al, 2015) however, acknowledge some discrepancy within the findings. In some studies there is evidence of a continuation of preschool effects for several years and into early adulthood (Campbell et al, 2001; Garber, 1988; Melhuish et al, 2008; Sylva et al, 2004a; Sylva et al, 2014; Vandell et al, 2010). In other studies there are no findings of long term effects (Attanasio et al, 2016; Bassok et al, 2015; Lipsey et al, 2015; Lowenstein, 2011; Magnuson et al, 2004).

The Abecedarian Project early intervention, which is a frequently cited work, found persistence in patterns of cognitive growth curves between the ages of 3 and 21. Although a decline was seen in both the control and the treatment groups after middle childhood, the trajectories were relative to national norms and did not converge (Campbell et al, 2001). However, the impact of preschool interventions on children's cognitive development, and associated academic attainment, have been shown by many studies to fade over time (Attanasio et al, 2016; Bassok et al, 2015; Lipsey et al, 2015; Lowenstein, 2011; Magnuson et al, 2004), with any academic advantage disappearing in some studies as early as ages 8 to 12 (Attanasio et al, 2016; Schweinhart et al, 2005).

The reasons behind any maintenance of effects, or the different pace of fadeout across studies is not yet fully understood, where in some cases early impacts fade to reappear at a later stage (Sammons et al, 2011). The extent to which this 'reappearance' may be due to the maintenance of earlier educational input, or to new or alternative sources however requires further investigation. Within this research context, the variables impacting upon the later development of preschool children is focusing upon the suggestion of a multi-stage process (Attanasio et al, 2016; Reynolds et al, 2004; Sylva et al, 2004a). In this context the quality of the teaching and learning environment is seen as a critical variable, both at the preschool and the subsequent primary/elementary stages, with the teaching of transferable skills and the building of positive dispositions to learning (Bailey et al, 2015) regarded as mediating variables impacting upon any long-term effect.

In England the findings of the Effective Preschool and Primary Education; EPPE 3-11 Project (Sammons et al, 2008), also supported the concept of a multi-stage process

in the maintenance of preschool effects, highlighting the importance of the quality of the learning environment provided. They found that preschool quality and effectiveness, in terms of outcomes, remained statistically significant predictors of attainment and social behavioural outcomes in Year 6 (age 11), although the pre-school quality influence on progress was not as strong as that of the primary school academic effectiveness. Multilevel analysis, controlling for confounding variables such as parental education levels, showed that attending a preschool compared with not attending one, showed a positive effect on children's later outcomes in English (Effect size = 0.22), Mathematics (Effect Size = 0.26) and Pro-social behaviour (Effect size = 0.19) at the end of Year 6. However, children who had attended low quality preschools no longer showed a significant cognitive benefit in attainment after six years in primary school, in that their scores were not significantly different from the group who had not attended preschool.

3.5. The Early Years Curriculum and Ideological Differences

The learning environment and the curriculum around which it is based is an aspect of early years education which is central to the concept of preschool quality. It is an area which sits within differing ideological positions, and one which has the potential to impact upon perceptions of organisational climate where there are tensions for staff with the target led approach of the current early years curriculum.

Melhuish et al's (2015) review of the literature, found that although didactic and academic programmes may be as effective, or even superior to, developmental approaches in achieving cognitive and language goals in the short term, several studies revealed that long term benefits, including school achievement, were greater

for developmental programmes (Marcon, 2002; Montie et al, 2006; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

Marcon, (2002), found that by the end of their sixth year in school, children whose preschool experiences had been academically directed gained significantly lower grades, compared to children who had attended preschool classes where the pedagogy was more child-centred. Marcon posited that overly teacher-directed approaches that tell young children what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, could curtail development of initiative which is a necessary component of later learning*:*

> *'The foundation of critical thinking may be found in early*
> *childhood experiences that foster curiosity, initiative,*
> *independence and effective choice'*
>
> *(p9)*

However, as will be discussed in section 3.8, the pressures upon practitioners in England to achieve expected levels of achievement for their young pupils, as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage, has caused some uncertainty and conflict for some staff in their pedagogical approach and led to the adoption of a formal style of teaching to meet this end.

3.6. The Practical Impact of the Process of Change

The extent to which the process of change since the 1990s has impacted upon the on-going daily life of early years staff and children within preschool settings, is difficult to quantify, and has not been a specific focus of empirical studies over the period of change. This is particularly the case for comparisons with more recent years, which may be due to changes becoming more established and/or direct

comparisons more difficult to explore due to the passage of time. However, Pollard et al (1994), McNess et al (2003) and Kwon (2003) have provided some insight into the changes and their impact on daily practice as they were experienced at that time.

Although the McNess et al (2003) study focused on English primary schools, rather than on the preschool sector alone, reception class teachers were included in the sample and, as such, there is relevance in examining their work. McNess et al drew upon the evidence from the Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience longitudinal study (PACE; Pollard et al, 1994), which took place after the introduction of a national curriculum in England in 1988. The study was designed to '*discover how classroom life in infant schools might change or develop in terms of teaching method, time spent on different subjects and curriculum emphasis*'. (Pollard et al, 1994, p3)

The PACE study examined the effects of government policies on the lives of a sample of teachers. This was not a nationally representative sample, but at its widest level it collected data from 150 primary teachers (Reception to Year 6) and headteachers in 48 schools from eight English local education authorities. The researchers' aim was to achieve a balance in socio-economic variables, urban/rural areas and a geographical spread in the North, Midlands, South-East and South-West of England. At its more specific level, data was based on the perspectives and practices of nine teachers from each year of the study (18 teachers and classrooms reported within the Key Stage 1 section mentioned here). The sample of infant schools investigated between 1988 and 1991 was drawn from a sector of the local education authority which had been nominated by local advisors as broadly representative of the LEA as a whole. From each of these lists six schools were then selected to reflect different

socio-economic locations and distinctive features, such as religious denomination or styles of internal organisation. The researchers of the PACE project had worked from the premise that government policies in England and the introduction of a highly prescriptive national curriculum, could have a strong impact on teaching practices. Their reasoning was based upon the introduction of accountability of teachers to parents and governors, stronger management structures in schools, and procedures for teacher appraisal. The study examined the daily pedagogy and practice of teachers and their experiences. McNess et al (2003) re-examined and collated the initial data. This had included teacher questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, detailed case studies of Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms, and pupil interviews and observations during classroom activities. Data was coded from the many open-ended questions and field notes made for subsequent analysis, with observers coding simultaneously in classrooms to establish greater reliability. The findings of the McNess et al study supported the original study's view of diminishing teacher autonomy in the classroom. The original PACE study had reported positive interview comments from staff, who saw the changes imposed by the introduction of the national curriculum as having the effect of focusing and confirming their instructional role, or of leading them towards closer cooperation with colleagues. However, negative comments were also in evidence in 1990, which by 1992 had intensified in relation to the time spent on administration, (47%; 65%), the sense of imposed external priorities (20%; 43%), increased planning, (39%; 46%), and increased stress and anxiety (25%; 35%). Teachers who perceived themselves as strongly child-centred in their approach, a central ideology of early years education at the time,

were reported in the original study, as those who often felt that they had the most to lose under the changes.

Moreover, although the work of Pollard et al took place almost 25 years ago, its investigation of teacher responses to external change retains relevance to the preschool environment today. The centralised imposition of new initiatives has remained constant since the 1990s, as documented in section 3.3 of this chapter, and tensions between the Government and early years educationalists have remained on-going (Adams, 2016; Anning, 1998; Early Childhood Forum, 2011; Faulkner & Coates, 2013; Gaunt, 2016; Hillman & Williams, 2015; Laevers, 2005; Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2013; Preschool Learning Alliance 2014; Shuayd & O'Donnell, 2008).   These tensions have relevance to the study of preschool climate, operating from the premise that the unique personality of each workplace setting and the quality of its characteristics could influence the behaviour and attitudes of its members (Boyd and Schneider 1997; Cassidy et al, 2016; Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al, 2016; Lower and Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Pope & Stremmel, 1992). A positive staff approach within the workplace also has implications from the perspective of the open systems theory of organisations, where the ability to manage change is a crucial component for an organisation's continued health and survival (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Parsons, 1960; Scott & Davis 2015).

Subsequent to the research of Pollard et al (1994), the investigation of on- going change within the primary and early years educational environment continued. Kwon (2003) observed similar issues, from her comparative analysis of preschool

education in Korea and England. Kwon's narrative documented the particular attention which the English government had paid to raising standards and its 'back-to-basics' approach and examined how early education had been affected by different historical, philosophical and government policies.

Kwon's sample of English preschools was designed to try to capture the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds in the London area, and comprised of settings in both outer and inner London. Questionnaires were sent to staff in all 60 nursery schools and classes and to all 83 playgroups in the two local authority areas, thus avoiding a biased selection. Ninety-one questionnaires were returned (63% return rate), which meets the generally accepted criteria of an adequate response rate, regarded as a minimum of 60% by some commentators (Robson, 2011). The presence of a confounding bias in the non-responses however could not be discounted.

Kwon (2003) made use of triangulation, and observations were also carried out in six preschool settings which were selected in terms of representing variation across type and location, as well as socio-economic mix. The researcher spent one week in each setting and made unstructured qualitative observations to gain contextual information, as well as structured observations following four target children and tracking their experiences every two minutes within a 30-minute period.

Within the goal-orientated national framework in England, the majority of the 91 sampled practitioners in the London preschools were reported by Kwon as supporting the principles and ideology of child-centred developmentalism. They agreed that children's self-chosen and self-directed play was an important component of this.

However, investigating this finding further, once Kwon moved away from an examination of practitioner's theory to their practice, she found a somewhat different picture with some disparity between the two perspectives. This resonated with the earlier findings of Pollard et al (1994), where teachers' attempts to reconcile external demands with their educational beliefs necessitated difficult choices regarding their practice.

Thus, although the majority of practitioners (54.9%) in the London preschools of Kwon's sample claimed to support child-centred integrated teaching in preschool classrooms, which was in evidence during Kwon's observations, four of the six preschools in the observation sample had also introduced separate literacy and numeracy teaching times for children. Kwon reported that 89% of the 91 practitioners indicated in their questionnaire responses that the Early Learning Goals and new Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspection regime, had very much influenced their planning and teaching. Despite only 9.9% of the 91 practitioners agreeing with the use of worksheets, which data from interviews supported, respondents also said that in accordance with the demands of the curriculum framework and inspection criteria, their planning had become detailed and extended and that they were providing more formal literacy practices. This was evidenced in observations of activities in Kwon's study, 21% of which were related to the direct teaching of the 3Rs and use of worksheets.

The suggestion by Kwon that government demands for raising standards impacted upon the balance of teacher's priorities in terms of their classroom practice, not only makes sense intuitively, but is supported by the earlier qualitative data of

Pollard et al (1994), at the start of the period of change where the following teacher comments were made:

> *'I feel that we're being asked to pack so much into each week that I do think we're in danger of being shallow' (p115)*
>
> *'I feel far more constrained. We must follow the syllabus and the artistic, creative side is being squeezed out'*
>
> *(Pollard et al, 1994, p115)*

Kwon reported her conclusion, as evidenced from her data, that government policy had had a strong influence on the daily routines of English preschools in the following terms:

> *'Even though the majority of early childhood educators claimed to have child-centred philosophies, these were not always, or even consistently, applied in their practices. The majority of English preschool educators claimed to disagree with structured teaching approaches such as using worksheets, structured small group lessons and subject-specific teaching. In practice, a considerable proportion of English preschools provided these activities.'*
>
> *(Kwon, 2003, p490)*

Keating et al (2002) had found a similar situation in examining Reception teachers' attitudes to play in the classroom, where a number of tensions between ideology and practice were highlighted. They found that the pressure on teachers to provide evidence of learning attainment had placed them in a dilemma whether to choose to encourage what they viewed as quality learning through active play, or to opt for formal work which in their view 'sacrificed the quality of learning'. As a result of curriculum pressure, play was often regarded as a reward for the completion of work.

However, conversely, some settings have been reported as able to effectively mediate between the two ideological standpoints, and to find a position facilitated not only by the personal biographies and career trajectories of staff, but also by the school context and the existence of a collaborative school climate, (McNess et al, 2003). The Effective Provision of Preschool Education, or EPPE project (Sylva et al, 1999), supported this view. Their sample included 140 centres, across six English local authorities, selected to cover urban, suburban and rural areas and a range of ethnic diversity and social disadvantage. Their findings evidenced that in some preschools a child-centred approach could exist alongside the new early years framework. Within the settings in the Sylva et al study, where the two ideologies sat effectively side by side, there also appeared to be a good school climate in terms of a collaborative approach with clear objectives. Sylva et al reported that in these preschools:

> *'strong leadership was characterised by a strong philosophy for the setting, which was shared by everyone working in the setting. These philosophies varied from being strongly educational to strongly social or a mixture of both, but all were very child-centred.'*
> *(p120)*

This presence of a strongly held and shared workplace collective outlook, which is a dimension of school climate measures (Bloom, 2010; Cassidy et al, 2016; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Moos, 1995; Patterson et al, 2005), appears as a potentially crucial variable in enabling a more positive and successful approach to managing educational change than might otherwise be the case.

3.7. Enduring Themes

Themes which have remained constant within the context of early years education since the 1990s, and which are pertinent to the study of organisational climate in the tensions which they have created for practitioners, centre around three areas. These are firstly issues of ideology, secondly issues of who holds power and control over early years initiatives, and thirdly issues associated with excessive workload. The first two aspects are areas which Alexander (2010) stated as having impacted not only upon the character and quality of early years education, but also upon those who work there. Writing as editor of the Cambridge Primary Review, Alexander (2010) suggested that:

> *'From the early 1990s…. Primary education was a problem to be fixed, and the fixers were not to be teachers or local authorities, for they had had their chance and blown it, but central government…. The difference between then and now is that the government's imposed solution has become, in the eyes of some, the problem.'*
>
> (*p1*)

The ongoing presence of these issues, in addition to that of excessive workload, will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

<u>Issues of Ideology</u>

The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum has been welcomed by teaching organisations over time in terms of the structure and guidance it has provided. Researchers have found that practitioners have become increasingly comfortable with considering their practice within a formal written curriculum (Alexander, 2010; Stephen, 2010; Hillman and Williams, 2015).

However, the presence of conflicting principles within the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum framework has continued to cause concern for early years practitioners, with statements within it for the need for 'purposeful play', sitting incongruously alongside the mandatory statement of expected attainment by the end of the EYFS regardless of age, background or individual needs.

Corroborating the existence of on-going tensions, The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (2013) questioned the prescriptive English preschool approach in terms of providing a checklist of skills that children should have before they enter school. This is in contrast to the tradition found in some Nordic countries where the curriculum provides:

> 'guidelines for those involved, including parents, about the values and purposes of early education and care.'
>
> (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2013, p3)

Similarly in November 2016, several early years schools, consultants and practitioners, as well as early years organisations (Association for Professional Development in Early Years; Early Childhood Forum; Early Education; Early Excellence; Foundations Teaching School Alliance) expressed concern at Dame Keeble's report on 'Effective Primary Teaching Practice' (2016), which mentioned bringing Year 1 approaches into the reception year to improve 'school readiness'.

Despite the report's assertion that it was not advocating formal drilling, the early years practitioners regarded its content as reflecting a very limited view of early years pedagogy, centred around the teaching of phonics and number. While the practitioners acknowledged the importance of providing pupils with a strong

foundation for their future educational experiences, they emphasised the evidence, as reviewed in section 3.4 and 3.5 of this chapter (p43 – 50), that effective early years pedagogy is that which develops confident and able learners. Pushing children into formal learning and testing too early with a narrowing of the curriculum and an over-reliance on the 'basics', in the view of many educationalists, can have a negative impact upon their subsequent achievement (Anning, 1998; Alexander, 2010; Bertram & Russell, 2002; Burt et al, 1992; Laevers, 2005). This conflict in ideological positions was a recurring theme in submissions to the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander 2010), where a number of staff were reported as giving evidence which highlighted the tensions created for them due to ideological differences. The resulting workplace environment which this created was arguably not conducive to a positive atmosphere where:

> *'Reception teachers told the Review that they were under considerable pressure to ensure that outcomes were improving, and this tended to skew the curriculum in the same way that SATS did in later years'.*
>
> (*Alexander, 2010, p165*)

Issues of Power

The Preschool Learning Alliance (2014) on behalf of its 14,000 preschools, mirrored the concerns regarding school readiness, but also highlighted a second area of tension which was associated with the issue of power. Since James Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976, expressing the view that educational initiatives were not the sole prerogative of educationalists, the balance of power regarding the content of educational change has arguably been in favour of politicians and policy makers

(Alexander, 2010; Osgood, 2009; Urban, 2008). In practical terms, Urban (2008) has suggested that this lack of dialogue and 'openness' creates an uncertain professionalism for staff. In this situation practitioners:

> *'seek, sometimes desperately, to avoid uncertainty, mistakes and 'failure' constructing themselves, in their responses to studies, in conversations with parents or in the public sphere, as 'experts' who know what to do.'*
>
> *(Urban, 2008, p143)*

Their recognition as 'experts' however, in any 'discussion' with the government has been limited, as echoed throughout the period of change from a range of stakeholders (Adams, National Association of Headteachers, 2016; Alexander, 2010; Hillman & Williams, 2015; House, 2011; Nutbrown, 2013). The statement of the Preschool Learning Alliance in 2014, illustrates the tensions relating to the lack of constructive discussion between the Government and other interested parties:

> *'Government guidance on conducting formal consultations states: "Engagement should begin early in policy development when the policy is still under consideration and views can genuinely be taken into account". However, this does not appear to have been the case in the formulation of early years policy over the past two years. In fact, there have been several instances where the Department for Education has run a formal consultation on a policy, the results of which have shown that the majority of respondents are opposed to the proposal, and yet the policy has been implemented regardless. More concerning still, in some cases, policies have been introduced with no formal consultation at all.'*
>
> *(Preschool Learning Alliance, 2014, p4)*

Many staff in the early years workplace, as suggested by Siraj-Blatchford (1993), can feel disempowered where debate is stifled and set within a one-way framework of communication based on government evaluations and reports.

<u>Issues of Workload</u>

Staff concerns regarding an increase in workload to excessive proportions, as evidenced at the onset of the educational changes of the 1990s (Pollard et al, 1994), also retains resonance in the current preschool environment, negatively impacting upon perceptions of the workplace. The Preschool Learning Alliance (2014) survey of 1270 early years practitioners reported three issues identified by respondents as creating the most negative aspect of their work. Excessive paperwork was one, alongside constantly changing government policy and feeling undervalued and underpaid. The Alliance, which in 2014 supported 14,000 settings, reported that:

> *'Respondents argued that paperwork and other administrative requirements associated with working in the early years are becoming increasingly burdensome, especially for smaller providers, and are limiting the amount of time that practitioners are able to spend with children and families. This is, in turn, having a detrimental impact on job satisfaction. They added that this problem has been exacerbated by frequent changes in government policies, with which providers must keep up to date.'*
>
> (*Preschool Learning Alliance, 2014, p52*)

Research evidence over the years supports lack of time as a commonly perceived constraint (Cassidy et al, 2011; Cottle, 2011; King et al, 2016; Wagner and French, 2010). Pollard et al's early study (1994), reported comments from staff of inadequate time to complete their administrative tasks. This was replicated in Barkham's (2008) Bristol study and that of Cottle's (2011) research, examining the perspectives of 115 practitioners from 11 Children's Centres from inner and outer London suburbs, as well as across two shire counties. Cottle found that lack of time was mentioned by

practitioners from 10 of the 11 centres, reportedly impacting negatively on their daily

practices. A teacher from Northfield Children's centre exemplified this point of view:

> *'I think we all get a sense of confusion about wanting to*
> *be with the children and be in there at the grass roots,*
> *and getting frustrated about paperwork and that takes*
> *away from our energy levels.' (p257)*

3.8. Summary

Since the 1990s there has been stronger centralisation of power and control of the

early years' sector, which has included the introduction of a prescribed curriculum,

expected child outcomes and inspection regimes for providers. While the Early Years

Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework is now well-established, there remains

ideological concerns, supported by research, about the appropriateness of a formal

educational curriculum at an early age with a preoccupation on 'school readiness'

and a 'downgrading' of play-based activity (Hillman and Williams, 2015; Nuffield

Foundation; Keating et al, 2002; Kwon, 2003; Tanner et al, 2006).

While it is difficult to definitively compartmentalise teachers in terms of their

concerns and values at any point in time, the changes introduced since the late 1990s

have had some impact upon practice. This has been in terms of an increased

workload caused by administrative tasks, as well as, for some, the attempt to find a

way to mediate between external requirements of the EYFS goal-orientated

principles, and their own personal ideologies (Keating et al ,2002; Kwon, 2003;

Tanner et al, 2006). Several early years organisations in 2016 have voiced their

concerns that mediating between external requirements of the new EYFS goal-

orientated curriculum and personal ideologies can create difficulties in classroom

practice (Association for Professional Development in Early Years; Early Childhood Forum; Early Education; Early Excellence; Foundations Teaching School Alliance).

Within this broad context, individual settings have had to manage change in an environment where their profession has not held the balance of power. However, what is important to take from this overview in relation to the study of school climate, is not only an awareness of the wide-ranging nature of the changes and the tensions which still remain, but the way in which change can be handled at a micro level. Pollard et al (1994) referred to this as the ability of some staff to take charge of events and to mediate change rather than simply respond to it. Alexander (2009), in her study of early years practitioners' perception of quality, made a similar observation between two different collective staff strategies. One was observed in settings where there was a culture of debate and where:

> *'Practitioners constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed their understandings as a team.' (p17)*

Meanwhile in other settings:

> *'there was more constraint and less evidence of dynamism, as practitioners struggled to understand new roles in the face of rapid change or to challenge deeply entrenched attitudes and structures.' (p17)*

Variables associated with the decision to conform, mediate or even reject change, are arguably related not only to staff personal histories and values, but also to the climate of early years settings in terms of structural issues, such as reward systems, as well as interpersonal process variables such as staff collaboration, support, and processes of organisation that promote efficiency and clarity. It is these aspects of preschool climate that this research study has explored.

Organisational Climate, Work Life and a Quality Classroom Environment

4.1. Introduction

The literature regarding preschool organisational climate and any association with classroom processes is small, but can be separated into two categories. The first focuses upon staff well-being (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Hur et al, 2016; Løvgren, 2016; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Royer & Moreau, 2016). The second links staff perceptions of the workplace to the learning environment. This is either in terms of the emotional support and care-giving provided by staff towards the children (Cassidy et al, 2016; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014), in terms of staff turnover, (Appel-Drazin, 2016), or in terms of the general quality of the classroom (Bloom, 1989; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower and Cassidy, 2007).

Organisational climate assessment is regarded by many educational researchers as a framework for improving the quality of work life (Bizumic et al, 2009; Bloom, 1999; Burns et al, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Grayson and Alvarez, 2008; Lavian, 2012; Whitebook et al, 1989). As such it is seen as enabling the creation of a work environment that is both personally and professionally satisfying, helping to meet the needs and well-being of employees. Where a positive climate is not established it is argued that teacher well-being can suffer. From this perspective, Goodlad produced a seminal paper (1983), which reported on his work in the American research project 'A Study of Schooling'. Surveys were completed by principals,

teachers, parents, and students and observations undertaken of 1,016 classes in 38

schools across rural and urban areas. Goodlad suggested that in terms of school

improvement, the preoccupation with establishing a link between positive work

attitudes and higher levels of productivity, which in the education sector equates to

child outcomes, might be too narrow a perspective. He argued that:

> *'Improving schools does not mean improving the quality only of teachers, principals, teaching, administering, curricula, and materials as though each were a separate entity. It means improving all of these together'.*
>
> *(p39)*

The school workplace in Goodlad's view, needed to be researched not only from a

psychological perspective exploring human development, learning and teaching

methods, but also from a sociological and cultural perspective, investigating the

actual functioning of the school as a social system within a larger cultural context. In

this sense schools would be viewed as a place to nurture adults as well as children.

They would employ practices that promoted quality in the workplace as a valuable

end in itself where:

> *'The principles involved probably are in harmony with academic achievement but... they are not necessarily the same and they are more encompassing'.*
>
> *(p48)*

The context within which the research of preschool climate has developed, has

incorporated this theoretical perspective. It has been one of an ecological viewpoint

(Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 1999; Cassidy et al, 2016; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013;

Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Zinsser et al, 2014), reflecting the inter-

connectivity of different aspects of the educational environment. Within this open organisational system perspective, children's experiences are viewed as occurring within the context of teachers' professional well-being and the climate of the workplace. As such, the child the teacher and the environment are viewed as interconnected parts of the classroom system.

4.2. Limitations of Prior Climate Research

Although the association between workplace characteristics and preschool climate and quality have been consistently supported from the research findings (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Cassidy et al, 2016; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al 2016; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Zinsser & Curby, 2014), the processes involved are not yet fully understood, as demonstrated by on-going research into this topic (Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al, 2016).

Limitations within and across preschool climate studies are generic in nature and are well-reported and acknowledged within the literature. They are mentioned briefly here as an overview, which is not meant to imply a reduction in the importance of the preschool climate findings, but as a cautionary note of the complexities involved.

Small sample size in preschool climate studies is often cited as a limitation (Burns et al, 2013; Cassidy et al, 2016; Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al 2016; Manlove et al, 2008; Pope & Stremmel, 1992). It is regarded as a variable which has the potential to limit the generalisation of research findings (Burns et al, 2013), as well as having the potential to contribute to a lack of significant statistical findings, (Cassidy et al, 2016;

Pope and Stremmel, 1992). In terms of generalisability, comparisons between research studies and the consistency of effects across studies can be difficult to ascertain, due to differences between contexts and the inability of controlling for any unexplained variance between them.

Comparisons across studies is also exacerbated by the wide range of climate, workplace and quality variables used, assessed in different ways and employing varying definitions. Thus, Pope and Stremmel (1992), assessed job satisfaction through the five facets of the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey; ECJSS (Bloom 1988d). The ECJSS was designed to assess co-worker relations, supervisor relations, the nature of the work itself, working conditions and pay and promotion opportunities. Hur et al, (2016) however, assessed job-related satisfaction with the inclusion of an assessment of stress, using an adaptation of the Attitude toward Teaching as a Career questionnaire (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). Included in the Likert statements were six items about teachers' satisfaction and seven items asking about teachers' stress. Similar differences occur with operational definitions of preschool climate. A large number of researchers have used the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom, 1989; Bloom 2010) to assess overall preschool quality, (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 1989; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Pope & Stremmel, 1992). The ECWES assesses 10 dimensions of preschool climate as detailed in Appendix 2. These include aspects such as collegiality, decision making, professional development, reward system and clarity. Conversely other research teams (Hur et al, 2016; McGinty et al, 2008), have assessed preschool climate in

terms of two subscales from the Teachers' Sense of the School as a Community Questionnaire, (Battistich & Solomon, 1997). These subscales are designed to determine the level of collegiality (supportive relationships among teachers and staff) and influence (degree of involvement in decision making). Alternatively, some preschool researchers have designed their own climate tools to address their specific research questions. The Teacher Satisfaction Inventory (TSI) was one such instrument, recently designed by Cassidy, (2016d) to assess teacher health and job satisfaction, including relationships with colleagues, professional development opportunities and teachers' physical, financial and emotional health. The TSI has been recently used by Cassidy et al in 2016 to research the preschool environment, as well as by King et al (2016), in their focus upon teachers' perceptions of their financial situation, although further usage is required to establish its utility.

On another note, and again generic to research statistical techniques, the correlational analyses of many preschool studies (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Grayson & Cassidy et al, 2016; Hur et al, 2016) negates against establishing the directionality of associations between variables, as reported by the authors of the referenced studies mentioned in this paragraph.

 Finally, some researchers point to the limitations of climate tools themselves in the study of school climate, with the suggestion that they capture only part of the story, omitting an overview of the processes involved (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Hur et al, 2016; Zinsser & Curby, 2014). This cautionary note was accepted in the rationale for the research design of my study, reported in chapter 5, where a mixed methods design was used to facilitate a broader understanding of the research aims. In this

way the qualitative aspect of the research was used to elaborate and extend the earlier quantitative findings, adding detail of the everyday experiences of staff to the earlier lines of enquiry.

4.3. Criteria for Inclusion in the Literature Review

Within the large number of general preschool workplace studies in the literature (Cassidy et al, 2011; Little, 1982; McGillivray, 2008; Sharrocks, 2014; Siraj-Blatchford, 1993; Tanner et al, 2006; Torquati et al, 2007; Whitaker et al, 2015), employing an equally large range of dependent and independent variables, it was necessary to decide upon a selection criteria for this review. The decision of making a unilateral choice of variables for investigation and omitting others was decided against. Instead, only those workplace studies which examined workplace characteristics closely embedded and operationalised within the construct of preschool organisational climate would be included. Studies focusing only on preschool climate and the association with child outcomes were not included. Although this exclusion may have resulted in the removal of some climate impact links, the review did incorporate a range of studies which investigated the quality of the classroom in terms of the emotional support provided by staff and the concept of overall classroom quality, as well as the preschool workplace in terms of hierarchical structures. All of these concepts reflected the focus of the research aims reported in Chapter 1, section 1.1, investigated within an early years environment of an open systems theoretical framework, discussed in chapter 2, section 2.2, where sets of hierarchical roles exist across overlapping subsystems.

Available studies were found to be predominantly from America, although for the purposes of my research they were viewed as interchangeable with the English context due to similarities of working conditions, such as low pay and status of the early years workforce across both contexts (Hall-Kenyon et al, 2014; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; Nutbrown, 2012; Phillips et al, 1991; Torquati et al, 2007; Whitebook et al, 2014). There are also similarities between the English and American context in relation to policy makers' adoption of preschool structures and in relation to policy direction based on a shared research base, as discussed in section 6.4, (p131 – 134).

4.4. Preschool Climate Studies and Staff Well-Being

Two early preschool studies which investigated the association between organisational climate and staff well-being without the added focus on classroom quality or child outcomes was that of Pope and Stremmel (1992) and Boyd and Schneider (1997). As with studies from other age groups, which also investigated climate and staff well-being, (Bizumic et al, 2009; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Lavian, 2012), their work originated from the premise that the unique personality of each work setting could influence the behaviour and attitudes of its members.

The aim of Pope and Stremmel's study was to explore child care organisational climate and its relationship to job satisfaction, defined as the positive emotional state which results from evaluating one's job experiences. It built upon the workplace study of Phillips, Howes & Whitebook (1991) where job satisfaction was found to be significantly associated with wages (F = 5.70; p ≤ .001), paid preparation time, (F = 2.79; p ≤ .01), and the quality of provision for adult needs (F = 3.10; p ≤ .01).

The sample for the Pope and Stremmel study included 27 settings from Virginia, USA, with teachers and teaching assistants completing 94 questionnaires for analysis. Staff were reported as indicating 'The work itself' as creating the greatest satisfaction for them and 'Pay and Promotion' the least satisfaction. Significant positive correlations were found between overall organisational climate scores and overall job satisfaction (.47 p ≤ .001), providing a strong impetus for further research in this area and to the subsequent recognition of the importance of school climate to staff and children alike.

The research study of Boyd and Schneider (1997) extended Pope and Stremmel's approach by examining aspects of teacher burnout for any association with the separate dimensions of preschool climate. Using a sample of 137 child care providers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 10 dimensions of climate (the definitions of which are provided in Appendix 2), were assessed. This was achieved, as with the Pope and Stremmel study, using the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom, 1989). Level of burnout was assessed by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). To analyse the degree of association between the dimensions of the work environment and the three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment), a Pearson product moment correlation was calculated for each pair of variables. From the 30 paired analyses there were 17 significant associations. The weakest association in terms of level of statistical significance was at - .18 (p ≥ .05) between the climate dimension of task orientation and emotional exhaustion. Where there was less emphasis placed on organisational effectiveness and efficiency, including productive meetings, the

greater was the degree of emotional exhaustion. The strongest association in terms of level of significance was also negative, at -.34 (p ≥ .01) between decision making and depersonalisation. The greater the degree of autonomy given to staff regarding decision making, the less detached staff were from their colleagues.

In order to investigate the relative strength of the climate dimensions as predictors of burnout, Boyd and Schneider (1997) employed a stepwise regression analyses controlling for staff age and all other climate dimensions. The data revealed that only 2 of the 10 ECWES climate dimensions - decision making and goal consensus, accounted for a significant association with burnout. Decision making was a predictor for both emotional exhaustion (-.24, p = .003) and depersonalisation (-.32, p =.007). The practical significance of the dimension of decision making was also included in the analyses, using the R^2 statistic, which is the measure of effect size used in multiple regression. It indicated the climate dimension of decision making as accounting for 6% of the variance in staff emotional exhaustion (feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources), and 10% of the variance in depersonalisation (a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one's service or care). While other variables were clearly at play in their impact upon these two components of burnout, the importance of the impact of workplace dimensions was established. The climate dimension of goal consensus explained a lower level of variance than decision making, with depersonalisation at - .19, p = .03, (R^2 = 3%) and with personal accomplishment at -.30, p = .0001 (R^2 = 9%).

From the analysis of the three burnout dimensions, detachment from the work environment and the negative interactions which it engendered was the burnout

facet with the strongest correlations to the perception of overall school climate. This is of particular importance in an environment where young children are under the care and supervision of early years professionals, and where there is growing evidence that teachers have considerable influence on classroom quality and child outcomes (Cassidy et al, 2016; King et al, 2016; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; Mashburn et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014).

Hur et al, (2016) developed the earlier work of Pope and Stremmel specifically regarding job satisfaction and climate. They examined climate in terms of teacher's perceived 'collegiality' and 'influence' within the workplace for any association with child-centred beliefs, mediated by job satisfaction and stress. Two subscales were used from the Teachers' Sense of the School as a Community Questionnaire (Battistich & Solomon, 1997) to determine the level of collegiality (supportive relationships among teachers and staff), and influence (degree of involvement in decision making). Data was analysed from the 522 responses from preschool teachers in 323 Midwestern American early education centres. The analysis revealed a positive association between teachers' job-related satisfaction with their perceived collegiality (.39, p≤ .01) and influence (.40, p≤ .01) and a negative correlation between stress and collegiality, (-.27, p≤ .01) and between stress and influence (- 46, p≤ .01). Teachers who worked in a more positive work climate, as measured by collegiality and influence, reported higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of stress.

Also supporting the findings of Boyd and Schneider (1997), staff opportunities for decision making alongside a sense of goal consensus were revealed by Hur et al,

(2016) as having a strong impact on the teaching and learning environment. This appeared to take precedence over perceptions of collegiality.

Adding further weight to the importance of work related characteristics found within the Hur et al study (2016), was the finding that none of the teacher background characteristics, such as level of education, or years of experience, were significantly related to teachers' job-related satisfaction. This is in keeping with the findings of several early years studies, where teacher characteristics were not found to be associated with their sense of collegiality (McGinty et al, 2008), and where the variables of staff experience, education level, and staff salaries were not significantly associated with emotional support dimensions provided by teachers to the young children in their care (Gerber et al, 2007; Lower and Cassidy 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014). However, there are contradictory findings within the literature of significant associations between teacher background characteristics (age, race, experience, salary) and staff well-being, as well as significant associations between teacher background characteristics, including staff salaries with preschool climate, job satisfaction and classroom quality (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Cassidy et al, 2016; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Iutcovich et al, 2001; King et al, 2016; Kruif et al, 2000; Phillips et al, 1991). This leaves the debate regarding the impact of teacher characteristics as inconclusive.

In terms of the importance of the perception of decision making to staff well-being, further evidence was provided from Royer and Moreau's (2016) Canadian study. The aim of their research was to describe early childhood educators' psychological well-being in terms of several workplace variables, including that of autonomy. An

adaptation of the Autonomy Need Satisfaction Scale (Gillet et al, 2008) was used to assess levels of perceived autonomy, consisting of 5 items across a 7-point Likert Scale. The Index of Psychological Well-Being (Dagenais-Desmarais, 2010) was used to describe staff perception using a 5-point Likert scale across 5 subscales: interpersonal fit at work, thriving at work, feelings of competency, perceived recognition and desire for involvement. From questionnaires administered to 199 establishments throughout Quebec one should note the possibility of some confounding bias due to the small participation rate of 23%, where the reasons for non-participation could not be accounted for. The use of only positive terms within the survey may have also created the problem of poorly constructed response sets, where to avoid the tendency of respondents' to reply to attitude scale items in a particular way almost irrespective of content, both positive and negative statements are used.

Within this cautionary note however the findings were important in adding to our understanding of the well-being of staff from the previous works reviewed in this section. Using a multiple regression analyses incorporating the variables of autonomy; type of setting (home or centre); experience; and interaction between work setting and experience; only autonomy explained a significant proportion of variance in well-being scores (F = 109.15; p = .001). An important finding for the mixed methods approach of my research, which investigated the daily 'lived-experiences' of respondents, as well as their perceptions across several climate dimensions, was the finding of a particular importance of autonomy in relation to aspects of the day to day running of the classroom. This was in terms of choice of teaching activities, the establishment of daily routines and the development of group

supervision strategies. Interestingly, after 5 years of work experience staff perceptions of recognition at work, desire for involvement and a sense of autonomy were diminished, only to improve again in the later stages of employees careers (post 20 years' experience). This suggests the interconnection of a complex range of variables, where further investigation of the characteristics of staff composition and the social processes of the workplace have the potential to broaden our understanding of preschool climate in practical terms. A change of role within a setting, for example, as well as additional responsibilities/remuneration, elements of seniority bestowed by longevity of employment or a strong familiarity with the workplace may all impact upon staff perceptions.

The final study to be reviewed in this section is that of Løvgren (2016). Her work was an interesting addition to the review, not only in terms of identifying any work attributes that contributed to emotional exhaustion in child care workers, but also due to the study's investigation of these attributes in terms of the separate roles of teachers and assistants. The study was set within the context of Norway, where teachers' responsibilities (from administration to pedagogical tasks) were reported by Løvgren as defined by law in contrast to the responsibilities of assistants which were not.

The sample of the study was large and included 2549 employees (1192 teachers and 1357 assistants) from 588 professional day-care centres. The day care centres were selected randomly from all Norwegian public and private day care centres, from which there was a response rate of 58%. The Norwegian translation of the 9 subscales of the MBI-Human Services Survey, (Richardsen and Martinussen, 2004) was used to

assess emotional exhaustion, encompassing feelings of being emotionally extended and exhausted by one's work. Workplace variables of competence, work roles, expectations and work tasks were assessed via a five-point Likert scale using statements such as '*I know exactly what is expected of me at work*' and '*I can trust my colleagues to help me if I need them to*'.

From the regression analysis, controlling for a range of variables such as work position, age, and number of years' experience, Løvgren reported three important aspects of a childcare workers' day, across both teacher and assistant roles, as determinants of emotional exhaustion. These were: co-worker support (-1.167; p ≤ 0.01); confidence in one's ability at work, (-1.125; p ≤ 0.01) and role expectations, (-1.107; p ≤ 0.01).

In terms of the difference between the roles of teacher and teaching assistant, a notable difference was reported in terms of the time spent on administrative tasks (5% for assistants and 20% for teachers). Assistants were also found to work less often with parent-oriented tasks. Differences in work tasks were reported as accounting for the main difference between the emotional exhaustion levels of preschool teachers and assistants, where a larger proportion of time spent on administrative and management tasks did not correlate with being emotionally exhausted, but where tasks involving contact with parents and teaching did correlate with higher levels of emotional exhaustion. While Løvgren found this element of her results surprising in that teachers were educated to manage parent relations and to teach children, it serves to emphasise the multi-faceted nature and demands of the role of early years teachers, and suggests the need for skills, such as those of an

interpersonal nature, in addition to those which are taught as part of initial teacher training.

In relation to workplace characteristics, the studies of Pope & Stremmel (1992), Boyd & Schneider (1997), and Hur et al (2016), highlight the statistically significant relationship between climate and well-being, which Royer & Moreau (2016), and Løvgren (2016) further developed in their findings of the important role which staff autonomy and the levels of parent-oriented tasks have to play in promoting well-being. Where staff were involved in fewer parent-oriented tasks, where they were provided with greater opportunities for decision making and autonomy in the day to day routines of the classroom with a sense that the whole staff was working towards a similar goal, there was the potential for an associated strengthening of staff job-related satisfaction and emotional well-being. In such an environment there was an absence of 'detachment' and a greater commitment of staff to the teaching duties within the classroom.

4.5. Organisational Climate and the Classroom Environment

The literature research relating to classroom environment revealed a larger number of preschool studies associated with organisational climate, than was the case for the investigation of climate and staff well-being. Within this body of research, reference is sometimes made to the 'quality' of the environment, as examined in the workplace studies reviewed in section 4.7 of this chapter. Reference to the current accepted definition of the term is helpful in setting the boundaries of the debate where the term is used.

In general, 'classroom quality' is used to refer to variables that are presumed to affect children's development (Pianta et al, 2002; Sylva et al, 2007). The construct is commonly viewed by researchers studying this topic as multidimensional, incorporating process variables relating to teaching activities and classroom interaction, as well as structural activities that assess the physical aspects of the environment and available resources (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower & Cassidy, 2007). The quality construct is commonly explored through one of three categories:

- one which focuses on the structural dimensions of quality such as the physical setting and resources

- one which focuses on the dynamic inter-personal interactions within the classroom

- one which combines the process and structural components and aims to assess the global quality of a setting as utilised in most studies of organisational climate

The following 4 studies focus upon one aspect of classroom quality in terms of teachers' interpersonal interactions with the children and the emotional support and caregiving which they provide.

4.6. Preschool Climate and Teacher Emotional Support

McGinty et al (2008) in their investigation of preschool climate examined the concept of preschool teachers' senses of school community. They used the definition of 'sense of community' from Battistich et al's (1997) conceptualisation, combined into

two dimensions: <u>collegiality</u>, and <u>influence.</u> Their study asked the question of the extent to which a preschool teachers' sense of community related to their attitudes towards their teaching and to their instructional quality within the classroom.

By the use of questionnaires incorporating Likert scales, information was collected from a sample of 68 preschool teachers. Classroom quality was assessed by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System – Preschool Version (CLASS: Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2006) utilising one of the three CLASS dimensions, that of: emotional support.

McGinty et al's (2008) results showed a positive significant relationship between sense of community and teachers attitudes towards teaching as a career (collegiality r .26, p ≤ .05; influence r .33 (p ≤ .01). In terms of teachers' senses of community and classroom quality, the aspect of decision making was highlighted as a prominent predictor. Teacher's perception of their influence in the school correlated at a statistically significant level with teachers' emotional support for the children in the classroom (r .27, p ≤ .01), although there was no significant association between teachers' emotional support and the second aspect of the school community dimension: collegiality.

The significant correlational associations between workplace characteristics and staff emotional support highlighted the importance of empowering preschool staff through greater involvement in decision making. This appeared to have the potential to make a greater impact upon preschool quality than actions to improve staff collegiality.

Manlove et al's (2008) investigation of the quality of teachers' observed caregiving, used the scales of sensitivity and detachment from the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS; Arnett, 1989). The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey, ECWES (Bloom, 1989) was used to assess the professional growth dimension of preschool climate. The Concepts of Development Questionnaire; CODQ (Sameroff & Feil, 1985), was used to determine practitioners degree of complexity in reasoning about child development issues. The study examined the interaction of professional growth with teachers' complexity of thinking as it related to quality of caregiving. The sample comprised 56 teachers within 24 separate classrooms from 11 different child care centres in Pennsylvania.

While there were no significant differences found in the overall quality of caregiving for teachers rated higher or lower in their level of complex thinking, there was a significant difference in the caregiving of those who viewed opportunities for professional growth favourably or otherwise. To test for any association between staff perceptions of professional growth with the complexity of thinking as it related to quality of caregiving, two MANOVA contrasts were tested for each model. The first tested the mean difference in degree of sensitive and detached caregiving, respectively, for low and high complex thinking teachers who rated professional growth unfavourably. This process was then repeated for teachers who rated professional growth favourably. The findings revealed no significant difference between the level of caregiving from high and low complex thinking teachers who perceived professional growth within the workplace as favourable. In contrast, where there were unfavourable perceptions of professional opportunities there was

a significant difference between teachers low and high on complexity of thinking, (F = 4.68, p ≤ 0.05 at a large effect size of 0.81) in the sensitivity which they displayed to the children in the classroom. When teachers perceived low levels of professional growth opportunities in their preschool, high complexity of thinking teachers were more sensitive and responsive to children than their less cognitively complex thinking colleagues.

Zinsser et al's (2014) study used a sample of 120 American Headstart centres with 370 preschools classrooms serving 3 and 4-year-old children. The aim of their study was to answer the research questions: 1. To what extent ratings of classroom emotional support dimensions were attributable to the centres? 2. Which characteristics of a centre, or its director, best predicted aspects of teachers' emotional supportiveness?

As with the McGinty et al (2008) study, observations of Emotional Support dimensions (Positive Climate, Teacher Sensitivity and Regard for Student Perspectives) were coded using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Positive Climate described the extent to which teachers created an emotional atmosphere conducive to learning, such as promoting enthusiasm. Teacher Sensitivity described teachers' interactions that supported individual pupils' needs, both academic and emotional. Regard for Student Perspectives described the degree to which teachers' interactions with pupils placed an emphasis on pupils' interests and motivations.

Findings from the statistical technique of hierarchical linear modelling, used to determine variance in the emotional support outcomes, did support the hypothesis

of centre impact variables. The degree to which there was centre level variance in each of the emotional support dimensions accounted for emotional support: at 18% for positive climate, 23% for teacher sensitivity and 34% with regard for student perspective. However, when investigating further into the centre characteristics impacting upon these differences in emotional supportiveness, the findings showed a lack of association with most characteristics under study. The regression coefficient relating to the level 1 predictor of student: teacher ratio showed no significant association with positive climate, teacher sensitivity, or regard for student perspectives. Level 2 predictors of director education, director salary, supportive management and management challenges similarly showed no significant association, and there was no significant association between directors' job satisfaction and either positive climate or teacher sensitivity. The one positive significant association found was between the level of directors' job satisfaction with one dimension of emotional support, that of regard for student perspectives (0. 15, p ≤ .05). Where directors enjoyed their jobs, there tended to be teachers working alongside them who were more ready to empathise with the emotional needs of their pupils. From the coded observations of the emotional support dimensions from the Classroom Assessment System (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), these teachers were rated high on positive emotional climate and were described as creating an emotional atmosphere conducive to learning. They fostered close relations with the children engendering enthusiasm and respect. They were not over-controlling and would provide opportunities for the children to have some degree of autonomy appropriate for their age and to take some responsibility within the classroom.

One result from the Zinsser et al study (2014), which extended that of Pope and Stremmel's (1992), earlier work, was the finding of no association between preschool climate and staff turnover. Centres with higher turnover the previous year, had higher levels of the emotional support dimension of positive climate within their classrooms. This is counter to the general preschool and school literature, where turnover is reported to be a negative indicator of preschool quality and climate, and where supportive professional environments are more likely to retain their staff, and also to maximise effective teaching and learning (Allensworth et al, 2009; Appel-Drazin, 2016; Bloom, 1988; Bloom, 1990; Cassidy et al, 2011; Kraft et al, 2016; Loeb et al, 2005; Phillips et al, 1991). The reasons for the contrary and inconclusive findings of the Zinsser et al study cannot be ascertained in any definitive sense, but serve to highlight the limitations reported in section 4.2. In this sense, their specific sample of Headstart preschools serving children from disadvantaged areas, may have made this study, as suggested by its authors, unique to its specific context.

The final study to be reviewed in this section is that of Cassidy et al (2016). Their sample was made up of 101 child-care centres from a variety of types (urban, rural, Head Start, non-profit, private), with responses from 94 lead teachers. The level of teacher professional well-being was assessed by a new measure designed by researchers at The University of North Carolina, Greensboro: The Teacher Satisfaction Inventory (Cassidy, 2016b). The design of a new climate assessment tool for the early years context was an important development in the field. It signified a growing interest in the research topic, alongside an associated narrowing of the research focus in order to further develop our understanding of a set of specific characteristics strongly associated with staff perceptions of climate. The direction of

the investigation was thus towards a consideration of the micro processes at play, rather than a wider climate perspective. The assessment tool developed by Cassidy collected data relating to staff perceptions of professional well-being which related to; teachers' wages, teachers' perceptions of the fairness of their wages, teachers' feelings about their work and teachers' autonomy in their work environments. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Toddler (La Paro et al, 2012) was used to assess the level of emotional support provided by staff, reflecting the choice of instrument of both McGinty et al (2008) and Zinsser et al (2014).

Controlling for structural variables within the classrooms such as the differences in space and furnishings, the authors reported significant associations between the CLASS Emotional Support measure and two aspects of the professional well-being measure. Teachers' ability to make decisions regarding the hiring of teachers was associated positively with Emotional Support at a level of significance at, .47 p = .003. This supports the findings of Boyd & Schneider (1997), McGinty et al (2008) and Hur et al (2016), in highlighting the importance of decision making to teacher well-being and to their interactions and the quality of their classrooms. In addition, there was a significant association between teachers' perception of the fairness of their salary and emotional support, (.61; p = .048). Teachers who perceived their salary as unfair compared to others in the profession were also in classrooms rated lower in emotional support.

These findings add further support to the importance of a supportive work environment for staff and to the learning environment which they create. In combination with the findings of the previous studies reviewed, they serve to

highlight the breadth of the variables involved and the complexity of their interconnectivity, as illustrated in the broad overview of the impact of school climate shown in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: School Climate; Interconnected Variables
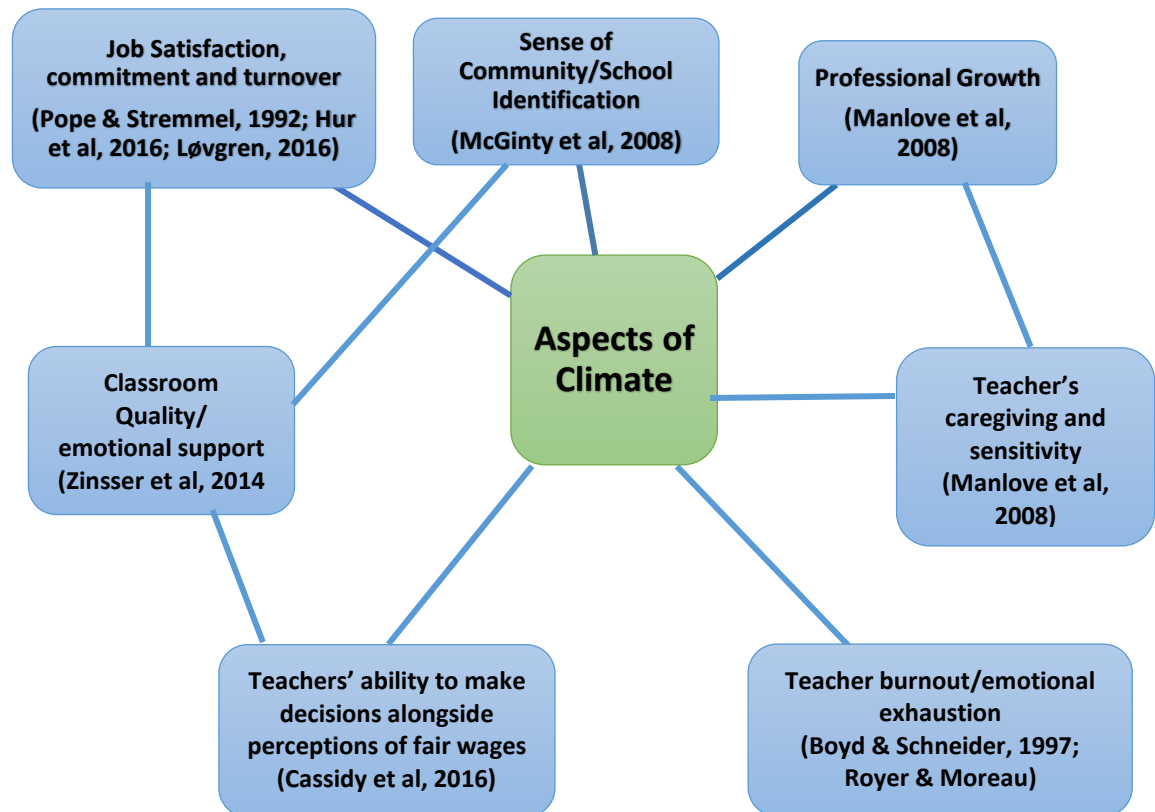
4.7. Preschool Climate and Classroom Quality

In keeping with the early years studies which investigated a single aspect of classroom quality in terms of emotional support (Cassidy et al, 2016; Manlove et al, 2008; McGInty et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014), the work of Appel-Drazin (2016) also focused upon one aspect of preschool quality, although in relation to the characteristics which impacted upon staff turnover. Appel-Drazin's study examined the perspectives of the work environment of leaders and teachers working in early

childhood centres and the relationship of the environment to teacher retention. Her study's definition of quality rested upon the premise that the consistency of care which teachers and assistants provided, and the attachment bonds which they formed with the children, was one of the most important aspects of providing quality care for young children. Her work was important to my research in its findings of a link between organisational climate dimensions and duration of employment, which was one characteristic investigated in this thesis as reported in Chapter 7, section 7.9. The study also had the additional value of adding further weight to the findings of the importance of decision making processes, highlighted in several of the studies reviewed in section 4.6 as associated with a positive workplace.

To answer the question of the extent to which teachers' perceptions of the early childhood work environment related to a quality environment in terms of teacher retention, Appel-Drazin used a convenience sample of 150 teachers/assistant teachers and 30 directors from nine childcare centres located in a major Midwestern American city. There were 160 staff who completed the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom 2010) across all ten climate dimensions. From the analysis of the ECWES scores Appel-Drazin reported several key factors of the respondent's work environment which related to their perceptions of a quality early childhood work environment which promoted staff retention. One key area was that of decision making for staff, where she found a strong correlation with the ECWES dimension of supervisor support ($r = .50$, $p < .01$). Teachers who rated decision making at a higher level also rated supervisor support at a higher level. It should be noted however that the causal relationship which Appel-Drazin suggested where

leaders were perceived as more supportive where they gave teachers the independence to make decisions was somewhat flawed, due the correlational nature of the findings where directionality could not be confirmed.

Further statistical findings from the Appel-Drazin study mirrored the earlier work of Bloom (1988) in highlighting the association between teacher commitment and perceptions of climate, which added to the findings of the breadth and relevance of the climate debate. Teachers who were committed to their centres had significantly higher ratings in all 10 of the ECWES dimensions than those teachers who were not committed (p = < .01). The most significant results were in the dimensions of reward system, (t = 4.27, p < .01) and innovativeness, (t = 4.21, p < .01). This suggested a strong association between staff commitment with both their perception of pay and work benefits, as well as with their organisation's ability to adapt to change including the processes it had in place to facilitate staff attempts to find creative ways to solve problems.

Studies which are reviewed in the remainder of this section moved beyond one aspect of classroom quality to explore the relationship between the broad concept of classroom quality and organisational climate (Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower and Cassidy, 2007). All of these studies adopted a definition of quality as operationalised through the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale; ECERS (Harms et al, 2005). This is an observational quality measure of preschool classroom environments commonly used over the last 30 years (Mashburn et al, 2008). The measure includes 7 dimensions and associated items, which include: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language reasoning, activities, interaction,

programme structure and provision for parents and staff. All of the studies in this section also assessed overall organisational climate through the use of the Early Childhood Work Environment Scale, (Bloom, 1989).

An early study investigating the broad concept of quality was that of Iutcovich et al (2001). Their work built upon the findings of Bloom (1989), of a significant association between organisational climate and programme quality in terms of teacher-child interaction, curriculum, the physical environment and aspects of health and safety. The Iutcovich et al sampling frame included 119 Pennsylvanian early years centres. Staff perceptions were analysed for any correlation with classroom quality for each of the separate organisational 10 climate dimensions of the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey: Collegiality, Professional growth, Supervisor support, Clarity, Reward system, Decision making, Goal consensus, Task orientation, Physical setting and Innovativeness. The strongest significant correlation ($p \leq 0.01$) was with professional growth at 0.41, followed by clarity 0.32, ($p \leq 0.05$) and goal consensus at 0.32 ($p \leq 0.05$). However, contrary to the findings that the dimension of influence and decision making was a strong predictor of classroom emotional support (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Cassidy et al, 2016; Hur et al, 2016; McGinty et al, 2008), Iutcovich et al found no association between decision making and the overall assessment of classroom quality (0.17, no significance), although it is noteworthy that the ECERS measure of overall quality which they used, devoted only 7 of its 43 items to the assessment of classroom interaction.

The work of Iutcovich et al (2001) was extended by Lower and Cassidy (2007), with the construct of programme administration added to the investigation of classroom

overall quality. Leadership and management practices were investigated through the use of the Program Administration Scale; PAS (Talan & Bloom, 2004) based on the reporting of directors. Additional data was used in the form of preschool documentation and observation, as well as teachers' perceptions of their workplace using the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom, 1989). The Lower and Cassidy research questions explored the presence of any relationship between organisational climate and overall quality, between programme administration and overall quality, and between programme quality and organisational climate. The sample comprised of two hundred and twenty-five teachers from 26 settings in North Carolina. In relation to the study's aims, the relationship between organisational climate and overall classroom quality was supported at a significant level ($r = .301$; $p = .045$). Programme administration, which assessed 25 items, such as personnel cost and allocation, children's assessments and marketing and public relations, was also significantly related to overall classroom quality ($r = .291$; $p = .031$). However, there was no significant relationship between programme quality and organisational climate.

Adding to the organisational climate research, the final study to be reviewed in this section was the work of Gerber et al (2008). Their Northern Californian study of 43 preschools incorporated the investigation of preschool climate for any association with classroom quality in terms of emotional support, as well as for any association with overall classroom quality. Sensitivity was measured with the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS; Arnett, 1989). The subscale of 'attunement' assessed the level of teacher warmth, attentiveness to pupils and engagement with them, and the

subscale of 'harshness' measured the level of teacher punitive and critical interactions. Gerber et al used a series of multiple regression analyses to identify which separate teacher characteristics (in addition to which preschool characteristics), made a unique contribution to teacher attunement and harshness. After controlling for other predictors in each of the models, no teacher background characteristics, such as age, education or years in teaching, were found to have a significant association with attunement/teacher support. This finding was in keeping with several other studies (Gerber et al, 2007; Lower and Cassidy 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014). Only one background variable, more early years training, was found to make a significant contribution to lower levels of harsh behaviours, (-.51; p≤.05). In contrast, several preschool characteristics were found to have significant associations with teacher sensitivity. These included classroom quality, smaller preschool size and school accreditation to the American National Association for the Education of Young Children; NAEYC, standards.

At the class level, classroom quality had a significant statistical association with both attunement (.55 p≤ .001) and harshness (-.55 p≤ .001). At the centre level preschool size had a significant association with attunement (-.31, p≤.05). Organisational climate was found to have a significant association with both attunement (.40, p≤.05) and harshness (-.32, p≤.05). Teachers' perceptions of their setting and the work environment within it was shown to be associated with teacher sensitivity towards the children. Where there were higher staff perceptions of organisational climate there was also found to be stronger levels of teacher engagement and attentiveness to the children, with warmer relationships between them. Where organisational

climate was weak there was a corresponding rise in staff critical interactions with the children and punitive disciplinary actions. The findings of the study supported the importance of school climate and the influence which it can have upon a teacher's effectiveness and for the organisational contexts which they create and in which they teach. It supported the findings in previous climate research, where the importance of organisational characteristics was highlighted, not only in terms of the positive work environment which it provides for staff, but also in the impact which it has upon classroom quality in terms of the teaching and learning environment.

4.8. The Hierarchical Structure of the Preschool Environment

The final section of this chapter is given to a review of the early years workplace in relation to the staff roles of teachers and teaching assistants. This was seen as a pertinent line of enquiry due to the specific early years working environment, where the importance of the relationship between teaching assistants and teachers has been highlighted in establishing a positive workplace. Løvgren (2016), found that the support variables in early years centres, which would include that provided by teaching assistants in the classroom, diminished the levels of emotional exhaustion felt by teachers, where there was a trusting relationship between colleagues.

The hierarchical system within most preschool settings reflects the general open systems theory of organisations, as reported in Chapter 2, section 2.2, which emphasises the components that keep the organisation moving forward and highlights the need for a connection across staff roles.

<u>Clarity of role definitions</u>

Research which has focused upon the clarity of role definitions for teaching assistants has presented an association with the successful implementation of organisational processes designed to promote a positive workplace environment (Al-Hassan, 2006; Aubrey et al, 2012; Barkham, 2008; Ratcliff et al, 2011).

Van Laere et al (2012) reported on the tensions surrounding the role of support staff, where policy documents or official regulations rarely covered the responsibility of assistants unlike the position for the 'core' practitioners. Within the hierarchical structure of early years settings several studies report hierarchical characteristics as obstructing strong communication and work practices between teachers and teaching assistants, including teaching assistants with higher qualifications (Barkham, 2008; Butt and Lance, 2008; Lumsden; 2011; Ratcliffe et al, 2011; Simpson, 2011). The situation is not eased, as pointed out by Barkham (2008) and Ratcliff et al (2011), where only a small minority of teachers are trained to work with teaching assistants. As a consequence of this lack of training there can be a misunderstanding of the detailed nature of one another's roles which has the potential to impact upon peer cohesion and supportiveness between staff, both of which are variables viewed by climate researchers as facilitators of a strong school climate (Bloom, 2010; Burn and Machin, 2012; Dennis and O'Connor, 2013; Howard et al, 1987; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Kottkamp et al, 1987; Moos, 1995; Tschannen-Moran et al, 2006).

Ratcliffe et al's (2011) workplace research study illustrated a difference in perception between teachers and support staff. This related to the duties which support staff carried out, as well as to the levels of communication between teachers and support

staff, and to the relationship which support staff had with the children. The researchers collected survey data from 159 teachers and 161 support staff. The surveys, which were completed anonymously, were designed to capture data that would show the degree to which teachers and support staff agreed on the nature of the support staff's typical duties. Twenty-three support staff were randomly selected for a 40-minute observation to classify the range and frequency of their duties, which would then be compared with the range of duties described by teachers and support staff in the surveys. All observations were unannounced to help ensure that the behaviour observed was as typical of a normal day as possible. Using a six-point Likert scale, teachers and support staff were asked to indicate the frequency with which support staff performed particular tasks, such as instructional small group or individual work with the children, or non-instructional routines such as cleaning or paperwork. The data was then analysed using one-way analysis of variance to determine any variation between group means. For all of the indicators, support staff said that they performed activities significantly more often than the teacher reported they did (p values ranging from 0.046 to 0.003). When asked to identify how often support staff undertook additional tasks, responses were coded on a five-point Likert scale (4 signifying every day; 0 as never). Statistically significant differences were again found between teachers and support staff perceptions in relation to the frequency with which support staff helped in: developing activities ($F = 4.273$, $p = 0.040$); marking pupils work ($F = 7.071$, $p = 0.008$) and cleaning the classroom, ($F = 18.230$, $p = 0.001$). In all three cases support staff reported that they performed these tasks more often than the teachers reported they did. Finally, differences were also found between teachers' opinions of how their support staff related to both

teachers and pupils, and the support staff opinions concerning the same relationships. Support staff felt significantly more positive about their relationships with pupils (F = 4.101, p = 0.044), as well as feeling significantly more positive that the feedback they received from teachers was helpful (F = 7.38, p = 0.007). Teachers meanwhile felt that they had taken the opinion of support staff into consideration more often than support staff felt they did, (F = 5.597, p = 0.019).

Collaboration and Decision Making

Collaboration between staff and decision making in the early years workplace were additional variables suggested in the early years literature regarded as important in promoting a positive workplace. Aubrey et al (2012) used a case study approach with 12 early childhood English settings from the Midlands to investigate the characteristics of high quality leadership models. The preschool settings were selected by local authorities as demonstrating high quality leadership practice, and multiple methods were used in the data collection process. These included questionnaires to all staff and governors, semi-structured interviews with the headteachers of each of the 12 settings, group interviews with 6 staff from each setting, and a 'day in the life' video vignette of each headteacher. Coded analysis of headteacher and staff interview data found that although the decision-making in the 12 settings tended to be seen as 'top-down' by leaders and staff, both groups felt that they 'had a big say at every level'. This conveyed an underlying expectation and created a collaborative culture. Foundation stage leaders in classes in these primary schools, were found to share the multiple leadership roles:

> *'The foundation-stage leaders were all experienced practitioners,*
> *confident in their leadership role to work collaboratively, as well*
> *as support the personal development of less-qualified staff.'*
>
> (*Aubrey et al, 2012, p20*)

All of the settings reported strong cohesive teamwork with effective communication, and the organisations were seen as:

> *'hierarchical at the strategic level and collaborative at*
> *the operational level'*
>
> *(Aubrey, et al, 2012, p19)*

Communication was seen to be effective, and relationships in these high quality led settings were described as:

> *'both task and person-orientated, with foundation stage*
> *leaders successfully completing work with and through*
> *others, while maintaining respect and trust'*
>
> (*Aubrey et al, 2012, p20*)

<u>Positive relationships</u>

The importance of a quality relationship between teacher and support staff in promoting effective team management and a positive working climate is similarly strongly supported in the literature (Aubrey et al, 2012; Barkham, 2008; Groom, 2006; Little, 1982; Ratcliffe et al, 2011).

In Barkham's (2008) study, the changing roles of adults in the classroom was explored through the researcher's use of a 'participant observer' role in an infants' school in Bristol, where she adopted the role of teaching assistant. Data collection included interview data from six class teachers, four teaching assistants and the headteacher. While one should acknowledge the possible 'interference variable' which the

researcher's 'adopted position' as teaching assistant may have created in her research, and the inability of her work to confer generalisability, the findings did highlight the importance of positive relationships. All four teaching assistants were described as having a close relationship with their teacher classroom colleagues and the head teacher's reallocation of support staff to work with specific teachers had been regarded by staff as an important and positive move.

However, although teaching assistants' and teachers' responses evidenced effectiveness in their teamwork within this particular school, there were caveats mentioned regarding their relationship. One teacher, commented on the skills of the teaching assistants she had worked with:

> *'Variation is from very high calibre – some go on to be a teacher –
> to others who have a poor handle on English and Maths: I have
> had a general assistant who I was teaching too!'*
>
> *(Barkham, 2008, p848)*

4.9. Summary

The review of the literature revealed teacher background characteristics of age and length of employment, as well as staff: pupil ratios and teacher salaries, as inconclusive in their relationship with classroom quality, teacher well-being and preschool climate. Conversely, in relation to the focused review of preschool climate, the literature pointed to the consistent finding of complex but significant patterns of associations between climate and staff well-being, as well as between climate and classroom quality.

Across research studies, different dimensions of climate have been shown to be associated with varying aspects of teacher well-being and classroom quality, with the dimension of decision making appearing as a prominent and consistent predictor. The significant associations reported point to an important relationship between school climate and workplace characteristics with several inter-connected variables, further supported by the literature relating to hierarchical aspects of the early years workplace. These include:

- Staff psychological well-being in terms of burnout and/or emotional exhaustion, (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Royer & Moreau, 2016).

- Job satisfaction and commitment, promoting greater staff retention and effort and pride in one's setting (Appel-Drazin; Hur et al, 2016; Løvgren, 2016; Phillips et al, 1991; Pope and Stremmel, 1992).

- Classroom overall quality, relating to structural aspects of the workplace such as space and furnishings, as well as the quality of classroom activities, interactions with the children, provision for parents and the professional needs of staff (Bloom, 1989; Gerber et al, 2007; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower and Cassidy, 2007).

- Staff care giving and emotional supportive interactions with the children (Cassidy et al, 2016; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Zinsser et al, 2014).

The potential impact of preschool organisational climate is thus wide and far-reaching for staff, children and parents alike.

Chapter 5

Methodology: An Overview of Associated Theories and Principles

5.1. Introduction

The overarching aim of my research was to explore the organisational climate of a small sample of individual preschools in terms of the collective perceptions of their staff. Details of the sample and sampling technique are reported in chapter 6, section 6.7, with the choice of climate rating scale, and its design, detailed in chapter 6, section 6.4 and 6.5.

Four specific research objectives were identified, relating to the differences in the nature of the organisational climates of the sampled preschools, as presented in chapter 1, page 2.

My research aims and objectives were mixed in their purpose. They began with an assessment of organisational climate in objective terms, with the investigation then expanded and developed to explore the possible reasons for any climate differences. My aim was for the nonparametric statistical analysis from my initial questionnaire and attitude scale assessment data to highlight lines of enquiry for a second, more open-ended questionnaire and interview process to explore and expand upon. One approach was meant to complement the other, providing corroboration and triangulation between the alternative types of data collection, and/or possibly providing alternative routes for investigation where the data revealed unexpected or conflicting outcomes.

The methodological choice which I adopted followed Cohen et al's (2011) advice of avoiding a choice of methodology between qualitative and quantitative data, instead capturing the most valuable features of each by using a mixed methods approach. My rationale for this decision reflected Creswell & Plano Clark's (2007) definition of mixed methods research as:

> '*a research design with <u>philosophical assumptions</u> as well as methods of inquiry…. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.*'
>
> *(p271).*

This pragmatic approach to social research, which some theorists go as far as to present as a third paradigm, (Greene, 2008; Howe, 1988; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), complemented my philosophical position, as will be discussed in section 5.2, as well as complementing the research questions. It was an approach which required a synthesis of 'facts' with 'values' to form a body of data from 'lived experience'. It involved the use of what Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011) referred to as 'methodological eclectism' and reflected the features of pragmatism highlighted by Robson (2011) that:

- '*Different, even conflicting theories and perspectives can be useful… to gain an understanding of people and their world*

- current truth, meaning and knowledge are tentative and changing over time

- traditional dualisms should be rejected (e.g. facts vs values)

- Knowledge is both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in'

(Robson, 2011, p28)

5.2. A Mixed Methods Approach: Theoretical Position

Many within the mixed methods community have argued that ontological, axiological and epistemological concerns can be preserved within a pragmatic approach. As part of this process methodology is viewed as much more than a debate regarding methods (Freshwater and Cahill, 2012; Sparkes, 2015) and instead as 'multiple ways of seeing' (Creswell, 2011).

Concurring with this viewpoint, my research accepted Johnson's (2008) suggestion for the need for a pragmatism where *'philosophy be used as a partner to mixed research, not its dictator'*. I adopted his epistemological position that there are multiple important and 'valid' kinds of knowledge which overlap, and which can be combined or integrated, rather than stand as mutually exclusive.

Maxwell and Mittapalli (2010) similarly argue that research practices are not determined by, or dependent on, philosophical paradigms, although they do suggest that we should not underestimate the *influence* of philosophical assumptions on research methods as:

> *'These assumptions inevitably influence researchers' purposes and actions to some degree, and are often implicit and not easily abandoned or changed'*
>
> *(p2-3)*

They suggest that a realist ontology which views a real world as existing independently of one's perceptions, theories and constructions can be integrated with an interpretivist epistemology, where our understanding of the world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint. Scott (2005) explains the critical realist ontological viewpoint as seeking:

> 'to reconcile the context-bound and emergent descriptions that are
> made about the world with the ontological dimension that exists
> outside of, and is independent of, attempts to describe it.'
>
> (p636)

This was the ontological position which I adopted for my study, which Altheide & Johnson (2011) argue as an especially valuable philosophical perspective from which to understand the differences in meanings for actors located in the same or similar situation or context.

5.3. Axiology and Reflexivity

Greene (2012) speaks of the inevitability of values as intrinsic to social enquiry and that an acceptance of the presence and influence of self in a research study implies an acceptance of values as well. She explains that the process of reflexivity is used as a methodological response to the challenges for the researcher of merely mirroring one's own view of the world, rather than describing and understanding the life experiences of others. In this way, interpretivists use the process of reflexivity where they openly locate themselves and their values in a given study. This is a process which Greene purports as having the aim:

> 'to understand this experience – as it happens on the ground,
> as it contributes to our broader understanding of similar

> *experiences, as it connects to more abstract and conceptual theorising about such experiences, and as it can inform others' understandings of how to improve the human condition.'*

> *(Greene, 2012, p762)*

Building upon this premise my aim was one of:

> *'interpreting my own interpretations, looking at my own perspective from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto my own authority as interpreter and author'.*

> (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, pvii).

The challenge, however, as Finlay and Gough (2003) stated was to do reflexivity well.

Rather than trying to eliminate researcher effects, which Cohen et al (2011) suggests is impossible, I followed the advice of Alvesson and Sköldberg, who suggested a route that requires the researcher to:

> *'steer between …….clue-lessly unreflexive and paralyzingly reflexive attitudes towards the understanding of social phenomena'*

> *(p3).*

To contribute towards this goal, I used a process of moving back and forth between the data, formulating ideas during this recursive process with the aim of developing theories from the specifics being explored. Quantitative and qualitative data were combined in the development of ideas, as reported in chapter 6, searching for patterns within the information to create further knowledge. Crucial to the process was reflection over time without succumbing to too hasty an approach.

5.4. My Insider Position within the Research:

My starting point associated with the process of reflexivity was to reflect upon my workplace experience and position within the research as detailed in Chapter 1, section 1.3. Within the context of my research, preschool managers were all aware of my position as headteacher of the school to which some of their children were transferring. This was an important consideration, due to the social critique focus of the interview aspects of my work and the need to manage what Finlay and Gough (2003) refer to as the power imbalance between researcher and participant and tensions arising from different social positions, as discussed in section 5.7. (p118-121).

In the mixed methods community where attention to axiological concerns is arguably not always prioritised (Biddle & Schaff, 2014) researcher position is an area of debate which is beginning to gain more prominence. Heyvaert et al (2014) identified only three out of thirteen mixed methods quality appraisal frameworks that included the criteria of clear reporting of researcher impact on the research process. Biddle and Schaff (2014) suggested that further specification is required to establish, not only the overarching shared values that inform what the mixed methods community means by good and useful research, but also to establish the commitment of the researcher where reflective and recursive practice is central to the research methods adopted and to the relationship with the knowledge created.

In this situation I took actions to diminish, where possible, the disadvantages associated with my 'insider' status and to promote its advantages.

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) have outlined several key positive aspects of being an insider researcher. These include:

- having a greater understanding of the culture being studied

- having the ability to interact naturally with members of the group, which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth

- being able to incorporate traditionally ignored or unrecognised perspectives into theory

- being less inclined to construct stereotypes

- finding it easier to gain acceptance, trust and cooperation

The first aspect to note when considering my 'insider' status was the level at which it was positioned. It was not one of a strong intimacy with the participants, which can result from other research approaches, such as that of participant observer. Participants in my study were not my immediate colleagues, and we did not work in the same preschool. Instead, the shared ground between myself and the participants was in our positions as early years practitioners. In general, as suggested by Smyth & Holian (2008), 'insider' researchers have a great deal of knowledge, which takes an outsider a long time to acquire. Maxwell (2005) suggests that:

> *'Traditionally, what you bring to the research from your background and identity has been treated as bias, something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it'*
>
> *(p37).*

My knowledge allowed me to have a sound understanding of the basics of the practice that participants described in their questionnaire and interview responses,

which facilitated the gathering of focused data. It enabled access to information beyond the factual through 'a developed instinct' for the lines of enquiry, which could reveal the rationale, feelings, and perceptions about the processes participants were describing. I was aware, for example, from first-hand experience, of the common feeling of the burden of playground and other additional duties, the lack of time to complete tasks, and the frustration felt by many to on-going change, which impacted upon practice. While I needed to be constantly aware of avoiding bias in my assumptions, my insider status facilitated the search for patterns of contrast and comparisons between the data collected from different preschools and was an aid to the development of related hypotheses. My experience of the hierarchical structure of the early years workplace was particularly useful, for example, in developing lines of enquiry from the initial data collection stage. It incorporated the research of teacher and support staff roles into the climate debate and revealed the importance of efficient and equitable hierarchical structures in promoting a positive climate.

However, it was also important for me to be aware of the shortfalls of 'insider' status in order to address these where possible. Where the relationship between researcher and researched is very close, such as in that of participant observer, there may be a tendency, as Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) highlight, for the researcher to over-rely on participants that he/she feels most comfortable with, or for the researcher to be seen as an advocator by some. The more generalised insider status of my research however, where there was no close relationship between myself and the participants, and where there was no prolonged engagement, mitigated to a large extent against this occurring.

The accepted problem of issues of bias (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; DeLyser, 2001; Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Smyth & Holian, 2008; Unluer, 2012), where the researcher may fail to notice pertinent issues due to their familiarity with the context and make assumptions without seeking clarification for the rationale upon which particular actions were based, appeared as a greater potential problem. My strategies to address these issues were three-fold. The first involved a reflexive approach, as detailed in section 5.3, where one 'steps back' from the data, revisits it from different perspectives, continually aware of one's own social background and experience which may have shaped personal assumptions. The methods used in the constructivist grounded theory approach which I adopted facilitated this process, as outlined in section 5.6 of this chapter. The second strategy used to minimise researcher bias was integral to the adoption of a mixed methods approach, where data was used to expand the breadth of the research base allowing a range of perspectives to emerge through 'open' and 'closed' questionnaire techniques, as well as through interview. This process of triangulation facilitated corroboration between the different data sets, with the inclusion of an interview process to increase the potential of collecting subtle and detailed information. Underlying these approaches was my adherence to an interpretivist epistemological stance in pragmatic terms, where knowledge is constructed using the 'voice' of the participants, alongside the experience of the researcher. In this context neither party's contribution can be viewed in a vacuum, as their perspectives become integrated in the search for 'reality', 'knowledge' and 'theory'. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to this approach as one where the researcher uses the skills of an 'interpretive bricoleur' who assembles images, where:

> *'research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal*
> *history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity*
> *and those of the people in the setting'*
> *(*p5)

5.5 Framing Validity within my Research

In terms of the necessity of framing validity within my research I was mindful of

Altheide and Johnson (2011) description of validity for qualitative research as:

> *'very different from that of the positivist world, where there are*
> *not multiple perspectives, vastly different methods and materials*
> *with which to work and myriad uses and audiences'*
>
> (p593)

I adopted the main focus of Altheide and Johnson's validity framework as needing to

address the connection between a study's components; that it is apparent and, to

the extent possible, transparent. There is a generally accepted view of validity

amongst qualitative researchers, as evidenced in the application of their research

designs, as multi-faceted, which includes authenticity and transparency throughout

the research process (Robson, 2011; Cohen et al 2011; Heyvaert et al, 2013; Newman

et al, 2013; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2010). My aim was to avoid Robson's (2011) list of

threats to validity described by the general categories of:

- Incomplete data

- Invalid interpretation by imposing a meaning on what is happening

- A lack of consideration of alternative explanations

- Researcher bias, particularly with prolonged involvement

My epistemological interpretivist position, alongside the process of reflexivity, as previously detailed, were both crucial in addressing the problems of invalid interpretation and researcher bias. However, in practical terms further strategies were also adopted to address Robson's cautionary note. With regard to the problem of incomplete data, I was present at all data collection sessions not only in an attempt to avoid incomplete data, but also to answer questions regarding completion of questionnaires should they arise. This strategy was successful in facilitating completion of initial questionnaires from all 244 staff from the 28 preschools. It provided comprehensive data, as reported in chapters 7 and 8, some of which supported prior research, as well as generating worthwhile lines of enquiry specific to the English preschool context of this sample, to extend the climate knowledge base.

To help determine my confidence in the 'truth' of qualitative findings, the techniques of triangulation and negative case analysis were used to enable cross-checking of data. Triangulation of methods was part of my mixed methods design, complimented by a certain degree of triangulation of source, where interviewees from individual settings were chosen from those with different hierarchical roles (i.e. teaching assistants as well as teachers). Negative case analysis was used from questionnaire and interview data to refine conclusions and was reported alongside patterns of associations where categories of statements were given frequencies in order for the reader to establish the volume of different responses. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) state the importance of negative cases as a key feature in developing an understanding of

the processes under study, while Robson, (2011) identifies the importance of the search for negative cases as a means of countering researcher bias.

In search of transferability, showing that the findings can be applied in other contexts and dependability, ensuring that the findings can be replicated, Remenyi et al (1998) suggest that a detailed understanding of the context in a particular study could provide for better understanding of those issues in other similar settings. In this sense, I was aware of the need to report a full description of my methods for future reference, alongside providing a dependable audit trail to enable an examination of the process of enquiry, the accuracy of the data and how it was collected and stored. Koch (2006) suggests that a study's trustworthiness may be more achievable if a reader is able to follow the events, influences and actions of the researcher.

Several authors in qualitative and mixed methods research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Loh, 2013; Shenton, 2004; Walsham, 2004) have also suggested that a researcher can generalise via concepts, theory or specific implications. Thus, although my study employed a very specific preschool sample which would preclude the direct transferability of its findings to the samples of other studies, it could, as Yin (2014) suggested, provide 'analytic generalisations' (as opposed to statistical generalisations), which may be of interest in going beyond the specific case. In relation to my research, the finding of an impact upon preschool climate of hierarchical issues and the level of consensus between teachers and teaching assistants, within and between departments, could thus be used as an analytical generalisation incorporated into future investigations of preschool climate and incorporated into its theoretical underpinnings.

Figure 5.1 on the following page draws together the validity aspects discussed in this chapter. It was created on the premise that authenticity and transparency are critical and valuable components of the research process, as suggested by Cohen et al (2011). Personal exchanges where there is a 'connection' between the interviewer and interviewee for example can illustrate this point, such as in my study when an interviewee recognised my empathy with the fact that she did not enjoy playground supervision, resulting in a light moment of shared laughter and understanding during the interview.

Figure 5.1: Validity Framework

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                              ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                              │        AUTHENTICITY         │
                              └─────────────────────────────┘
                                           │
                                           ▼
                              ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                              │ Adoption of a 'true' personally relevant │
                              │ research topic to initiate a meaningful  │
                              │           endeavour          │
                              └─────────────────────────────┘
                                           │
                                           ▼
  ┌──────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────┐
  │ Pragmatic Approach │  ──▶  │     Conceptual Framework    │  ◀──  │  Interpretivist Position  │
  └──────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘        │  Multiple 'valid' kinds of │
                                           │                          │         knowledge          │
                                           ▼                          └──────────────────────────┘
                              ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                              │     Research Methodology     │
                              │        Mixed Methods         │
                              └─────────────────────────────┘
                                           │
                                           ▼
                              ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                              │  Multi-levels of Data Collection to  │
                              │    identify patterns and aid         │
                              │ corroboration between data sources.  │
                              └─────────────────────────────┘
                                           │
                                           ▼
                                  ┌──────────────────┐
                                  │        A         │
                                  │    Recursive     │
                                  │     Process      │
                                  └──────────────────┘
                                           │
                                           ▼
  ┌──────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
  │ Researcher           │ ──▶  │  Constructive Grounded Theory │ ◀── │ Openness and Engagement   │
  │ Reflexivity and self- │      │     Analysis and Reporting    │     │ Trustworthiness;          │
  │ awareness.            │      └─────────────────────────────┘      │ Transparency within the   │
  │ Consideration of      │                                           │ research process and      │
  │ positions of          │                                           │ avoidance of conflict; audit │
  │ hegemony within       │                                           │ trail                     │
  │ the research context  │                                           └──────────────────────────┘
  └──────────────────────┘
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5.6. A Grounded Theory Approach

The choice of a grounded theory approach which I adopted for the analyses of the second level of my data collection, was in keeping with my mixed methods pragmatist approach, against the backdrop of an interpretivist and critical realist position, as discussed in section 5.2.

In my adoption of this method, I was aware of the limitations of the grounded theory approach (Fassinger, 2005; Charmaz, 2014) from both a logistical and conceptual perspective. These have included concerns relating to the labour-intensive nature of the process, which draws heavily on the perceptual skills of the researcher. Criticisms from a conceptual basis have extended from exactly what stands as grounded theory as an evolving method, how it is interpreted and implemented, to scepticism from positivist researchers regarding its analytical rigour. There have also been criticisms regarding its excessive fragmentation of data in the name of theorising.

However, on balance, the strengths of the approach outweighed the problems for use in my small study. It was consistent with my mixed methods research design where there were clear research stages from which ideas developed, creating the next stage of data collection, analyses and theorising. This flexibility is regarded by Charmaz (2014) as the very strength of the technique.

The approach I adopted followed a current and explicit form of constructivist grounded theory, developed from the original method devised by its two originators, Glaser & Strauss (1967). It was a reconceptualization driven by the work of Kathy Charmaz, (2014), where its methods:

> *'can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis rather than stand in opposition to them.' (*Charmaz, 2014, p16*)*

It was the aim of Charmaz to initiate a more justified base for the method, where epistemological assumptions were central to the process, but pragmatist in conception. As such, it emphasised the elements detailed in Table 5.1 below, purposefully contrasting with a more objectivist process.

Table 5.1: Objectivist and Constructivist Grounded Theory

Objectivist Grounded Theory	Constructivist Grounded Theory
Foundational Assumptions • Assumes an external reality • Assumes discovery of data • Assumes conceptualisations emerge from data analysis • Views representation of data as unproblematic • Assumes the neutrality, passivity, and authority of the observer	Foundational Assumptions • Assumes multiple realities • Assumes mutual construction of data through interaction • Assumes researcher constructs categories • Views representation of data as problematic, relativistic, situational, and partial • Assumes the observer's values, priorities, positions and actions affect views
Objectives • Aims to achieve context-free generalisations • Aims for parsimonious, abstract conceptualisations that transcend historical and situational locations • Aims to create theory that fits, works, has relevance, and is modifiable	Objectives • Views generalisations as partial, conditional, and situated in time, space, positions, action and interactions • Aims for interpretive understanding of historically situated data • Specifies range of variation • Aims to create theory that has credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness
Implications for Data Analysis • Views data analysis as an objective process • Sees emergent categories as forming the analysis • Sees reflexivity as one possible data source • Gives priority to researcher's analytic categories and voice	Implications for Data Analysis • Acknowledges subjectivities throughout data analysis • Views co-constructed data as beginning the analytic direction • Engages in reflexivity throughout the research process • Seeks and (re)represents participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis

(Taken from 'Constructing Grounded Theory' p236, Kathy Charmaz, 2014)

Unlike the original grounded theory methodology, I made use of the extant literature, viewing the formulation of ideas as not only emerging from the data, but as an interaction between the researcher's position alongside that of the respondents. The

application of my grounded theory approach in terms of the data analysis is reported in chapter 8, section 8.3 onwards. It incorporated the processes of:

- Initial coding, exploring respondents' words, phrases and sentences to organise the data.

- Focused coding, comparing the initial codes to distinguish interconnecting areas and shared meanings which had the greatest analytic power. In keeping with prior studies (Jacobsson et al, 2004; Smith et al, 2011), this process was used to identify substantive codes/concepts to form more abstract categories, which were the first steps in the theorising process.

- The search for any 'unanswered questions' using the constructivist term 'abduction', described as a form of imaginative reasoning.

- The narrowing of the research focus to discern variation, through theoretical purposive sampling (the rationale of which is explained in chapter 6, section, 6.12).

- Reflection and theorising of distinctions revealed in the data, in terms of the actions of people and the wider theoretical organisational concepts.

5.7. Validity as Ethical Issues

In addition to the primary ethical obligation of the researcher which Hammersley & Traianou (2012) regard as answering worthwhile questions to the required level of validity, any assessment of a study's credibility will also include a consideration of ethical issues associated with appropriate codes of practice (Christians, 2011). Within this broad overview Robson & McCartan (2015) raise the need for social scientists to

consider the dilemma of the *cost/benefits r*atio to their research. This includes any likely benefits, but also any repercussions, both positive and negative to the individuals taking part, and the steps which will be taken to prevent harm or risk to them. Any study, covering sensitive topics or otherwise, can raise delicate issues for people such as personal relationships or health matters, however remote from the subject matter these may seem.

Alongside an adherence to ethics codes however, the researcher must move from principles and rules to application with the awareness that definitive pre-planned measures, as highlighted by Hammersley & Traianou (2012), may need some re-adjustment where they are set within a flexible and emergent research design. Robson & McCartan (2015) and Punch & Oancea (2014) guide the researcher to give careful thought to the specific implications ethical considerations have for one's research project and to make clear the practical measures proposed to meet one's ethical obligations. This is a suggestion embraced by Stutchbury & Fox, (2009), who produced an extensive and practically useful ethical framework, involving issues such as fairness, collaboration and benefits (individual/group/societal), each with associated questions to guide the researcher through the research process. In this way their aim was to help create a process for effective ethical analysis taking into account the behaviour of the researcher and maintaining the integrity of the research at all levels so that any ethical decisions could be transparent.

In the design, implementation and writing of my research, attention was paid at the macro level to ethical considerations as defined by the Cardiff Metropolitan University and the British Psychological Society 2009 codes of practice. Following this

guidance, the principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity were incorporated into the ethical considerations. Indeed, Cohen et al (2011) highlight the importance of achieving cooperation and goodwill and suggest that:

> *'Researchers should never lose sight of the obligations they owe to those who are helping, and should constantly be on the alert for alternative techniques should the ones they are employing at the time prove controversial'*
>
> *(Cohen et al, 2011, p86)*

The remainder of this section details the critical ethical issues within my research and the measures by which I approached them.

<u>Issues of Hegemony</u>

An important consideration in any social research is the positioning of the researchers and the respondents and the relationship between them, particularly in respect of issues of power. Sikes (2006) states that 'How we feel about who and what we are and how others see us is bound to be significant.' Cohen et al, (2011) advises the researcher to consider the two questions of: How one presents oneself and as whom one presents oneself. Such considerations Maxwell (1996) argues are important issues at the design and planning stage of the research process.

Mindful of these issues I followed the accepted model of practice (Ahern, 1999; Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009; Ritchie et al, 2013; Stutchbury & Fox, 2009) that a researcher should be aware of the associated balance of hegemony <u>throughout</u> the research process. In relation to my research, respondents may have held assumptions about my professional position and also about my research agenda. All preschools in the sample were aware of my role as Head of a Pre-Preparatory

department of an independent school, of the academically selective entry to the school, and of my direct relationship professionally to their schools.

Within the interpretivist epistemological research tradition which I adopted Karnieli-Miller et al (2009) highlight the balance required between developing a positive relationship with participants and maintaining the distance that will allow the researcher to exercise professional judgment. Towards this end I took note of Bassey's (1999) advice regarding 'respect for persons' (p77). This was a process which involved several measures. Initially, in order to avoid conflict between the researcher and the researched, I followed the generally accepted advice (Ahern 1999; Cohen et al, 2011; Punch & Oancea, 2014) of identifying the interests of management groups, or gatekeepers, and their disposition towards my research. I was aware that co-operation from prospective participants was more likely if the research objectives were seen as valuable and relevant to them. As a consequence I attempted to engage positively and authentically with all preschool settings, explaining why their setting had been requested to participate and providing clear information about the objectives and purpose of the study in identifying the enabling facilitators which could lead to a positive climate.

I was sensitive to the hierarchical structure of the settings, by first approaching headteachers/managers to request access and to explain the involvement of staff in the research. I was responsive to any concerns or sensitivities raised, such as issues of time management and the release of staff and was flexible in my responses. I accepted headteachers'/managers' advice regarding the date and time for the

completion of questionnaires and interviews and conditions for anonymity and confidentiality were explained as reported in the following section.

I followed the advice of Hammersley & Traianou (2012) that the aim of the researcher should transcend any personal motives for the adoption of the research topic and that it should focus upon the generation of knowledge. I attempted, during all visits, to position myself in the distinct role of a researcher of early years, rather than purely as a fellow early years worker. I kept a distance from participants whilst they completed their questionnaires and answered any questions as clearly, professionally and consistently as possible. This was an approach designed to present myself neutrally in order to minimise the extent to which my presence might impact upon the generation of authentic accounts.

I was also aware that within such social research environments there are several further social contaminants, relating to the power positions of the researcher and participant. Those most commonly highlighted in research textbooks (Cohen et al, 2011; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Robson & McCartan, 2015) are indicated in Table 5.2 on the following page, with my adopted strategies by which I attempted to address them. However, an important aspect to note here, is that within my interpretivist epistemology, my position as researcher was one of constructing knowledge alongside the participants. My background, values and behaviour, viewed alongside those of the participants, formed part of the research context within the specific time and place of the investigation from which the data was collected and the analyses made. A reflexive process and the use of a constructivist grounded theory approach,

as discussed in chapter 5, section 5.6, (p 114 - 116), were important facilitators of

this process.

Table 5.2: Social Contaminants

EFFECT	DESCRIPTION	COUNTER STRATEGIES USED IN MY STUDY
SOCIAL DESIRABILITY	The tendency of respondents to answer questions in a way that will be viewed favourably by others.	1. Piloting measures. 2. Leading questions avoided in questionnaires and interviews 2.Questionnaire responses confidential and anonymous 3. Combination of methods to aid corroboration 4. Researcher sensitivity to context
HAWTHORNE EFFECT	The tendency of some people to work harder and perform better when they are participants in an experiment.	1. Researcher awareness of the importance of informal employee groups. 2. Researcher recognition that the individual attention to feel 'chosen' may skew results 3. Interviews were used to substantiate and expand on prior questionnaire responses which were given before interviewees were selected. 4. Avoidance of interviewee self-selection
PROCEDURAL BIAS	Applying undue pressure on questionnaire respondents to complete their responses quickly or at an inappropriate time.	1. Liaison with managers of settings regarding dates for my visit and completion of questionnaires, in groups or individually determined by operational constraints of each setting. 2.Reseacher sensitivity
BIAS IN RESEARCHER INTERPRETATIONS	The tendency for researcher expectations and hopes for the research outcomes to create bias in interpretations of the data.	1. Self-awareness and critical reflection using a recursive, iterative and inductive process 2. Corroboration between interview respondents and between interview and questionnaire data 3. Equal attention given to analysis of all data collected, including negative data analysis where data did not conform to a general pattern 4. Consideration of alternative explanations 5. Balanced reporting of interview data with a conscious attempt made not to 'over-report' statements which supported the study's hypothesis. To this end negative cases were included in data presentation and frequencies of all categories of statements were supplied and exemplified in subsequent discussion.

<u>Informed Consent</u>

The apparent relevance of the principle of informed consent at the initial stage of any research project is well accepted, where it is necessary to address access to the institution or organisation where the research is to be conducted and to gain the permission one needs prior to embarking on one's study, (Cohen et al, 2011; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). This is a context suggested as offering the best opportunity for researchers to establish their own ethical position with respect to the proposed research.

Prior to sending letters asking for consent from the preschools to take part in the study, I contacted all settings by telephone to make my request in person to the manager/headteacher. During this conversation I explained the rationale for the work and was able to answer any queries either at the time, or at a later date, providing my workplace contact details for this purpose. Follow-up letters of consent, as seen in Appendix 4, were then distributed with stamped addressed envelopes provided. The aim of the study was clearly stated and all preschools who agreed to take part gave their written consent, without duress. Ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity were also explained in the letter of introduction to the study, as well as with staff during my visit to the school. At the stage of visiting the preschools for completion of the first questionnaire I was able to meet with staff to remind them of the aim of the study, to answer any questions they might have and to thank them for their goodwill in providing the raw data. The right to withdraw at any time from the study was explained to the Heads/Managers of all preschools within the sample and extended to include any of their staff.

In relation to participation in the interview stage of the research, arrangements to interview employees was given by headteachers/managers, with oral consent gained from all interviewees for participation as verified by recordings. During the process of interview itself, I was aware, as Ritchie et al (2013) suggest, that although participants may appear comfortable and may disclose information apparently willingly during an interview, that they may later regret having been so open. As a result, I attempted to ensure that the participants were given a clear understanding of the issues to be discussed at interview prior to asking for their consent. I was also aware, as recommended by Cohen et al (2011), of the need to ensure that my use of language was tailored to the capabilities of the interviewees. In terms of hegemonic issues, it was my aim to show awareness of the developing power relations during interview, as well as to the circumstances of the participants and the sorts of sensitivities or emotions that might be raised by the research topic. One employee, for example, spoke of a particular relationship in the classroom which had resulted in her losing confidence in her abilities.

To allow interviewees time to reflect on the interview, a few minutes time was spent after its conclusion for informal conversation. This was undertaken to give the participant an opportunity to return to some of the issues discussed, or to turn to more everyday subjects, outside the context of the interview.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Within the literature a standard protection for the participants in any study is the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality, withholding participants' names and other identifying characteristics (Christians, 2011; Cohen et al, 2011; Hammersley &

Traianou, 2012; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). These safeguards are sometimes referred to as employing direct attribution (if comments are linked to a name or a specific role) and indirect (by reference to a collection of characteristics that might identify an individual or small group).

To address these issues, I took all reasonable steps to ensure the anonymity of participants, including preschools from which the children were transferring, and their staff. No names were used at any point in the reporting for either the pilot, or the main study group. Instead groups and individuals were coded either numerically or alphabetically. This was a process which also allowed for identifiability and traceability to be assured should any individual or school make a request for withdrawal of data, (a situation which did not occur during the research), or should I need to revisit any data sets during the process of analysis. In terms of indirect attribution I took particular care, which involved the process of constant editing throughout the writing process including through to the final draft. Careful consideration was given in reporting specific comments, on occasion choosing to make a point in a more general way where issues of identifying characteristics arose. Regarding implications for data storage, transcripts and recordings were not labelled in ways which could compromise anonymity or confidentiality, using numerical or alphabetical systems instead. All data was stored securely away from the school setting.

5.8. Summary

This chapter has highlighted the importance of theoretical assumptions for my adopted research methodology and the connection with an interpretivist

perspective, studying social phenomenon through the multiple lenses of the world of lived experience. It has raised the necessity of considering issues of reflexivity and ethics, where the researcher is part of the context of the research they are conducting and where aspects of hegemony are present between the researcher and the researched. Aspects of validity for those adopting an interpretivist perspective have been shown to include, as a central tenet, aspects of authenticity and transparency, which should be present throughout the research process (Cohen et al 2011). In the following chapter the research methods and processes used against this theoretical backdrop will be discussed, documenting the consecutive and separate stages of the research design.

CHAPTER 6

Application of Research Design: Methods and Process

6.1. Introduction:

This chapter details the consecutive research stages of my study. It discusses the appropriateness of my choice of methods and instrumentation, the composition of the research sample and the processes involved at each research stage. The study's results are then reported in the following two chapters. The choice of methods was commensurate with my epistemological and methodological position, as discussed in the previous chapter, and was selected to best facilitate the collection of factual as well as perceptual data relating to the workplace.

The flow chart on the following page, Figure 6.1, itemises the separate components of the data collection and analyses, and also the timeline involved.

Figure 6.1: Data Collection and Stages of Analyses

Preschool sample 1
n=14 preschools
(number of employees
in each preschool from
2 – 11)
Selected from
September 2011 intake
to reception class

Preschool sample 2
n = 14 preschools
(number of employees
in each preschool from
3 – 16)
Selected from
September 2012 intake
to reception class

STAGE ONE DATA COLLECTION

'Closed' Questionnaire &
ECWES rating scale completed
by all preschool staff (n =116)
Oct – Dec 2011

'Closed' Questionnaire &
ECWES rating scale completed
by all preschool staff (n = 127)
Oct' – Dec 2012

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION
NB -Sample reduced to 26
preschools due to response from
only 1 staff member in 2 preschools

High climate
preschools n = 8

Mid climate
preschools n = 10

Low climate
preschools n = 8

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

STAGE TWO DATA COLLECTION

'Open' questionnaire completed by all
respondents from high and low climate
preschools that agreed to take part (n =
11 preschools) **Oct' 2013 to May 2014**

Same day Interview n = 2 respondents
with different roles from each preschool
Oct' 2013 to May 2014

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

6.2. Stage 1: The Use of Questionnaires: Rationale

Despite an acceptance by researchers of the inherent and generic problems associated with questionnaires, (Brown & Dowling, 1998; Cohen et al, 2011; Oppenheim, 1992; Robson, 2011) these are counterbalanced by several recognised advantages that make them a practical and effective tool for the collection of data. The disadvantages which include social desirability response bias, ambiguity and associated misunderstanding of questions, and the possible lack of commitment in responses are well documented (Brown and Dowling, 1998; Cohen et al, 2011; Oppenheim, 1992; Robson, 2011). However, the same authors draw one's attention to the advantages of the questionnaire. Brown and Dowling (1998) state that from the point of view of limited time and resources, it is an efficient data collection method and it also avoids the problem associated with interviews of interviewer bias. Closed questions in questionnaires are also easy and quick to answer. In a busy working environment, as in my sample where some preschool staff had only one hour's break in a long working day, this was a positive characteristic. Robson (2011) makes the additional point that questionnaires allow anonymity, which can encourage frankness when sensitive areas are involved, as was the case in my study. Cohen et al (2011) highlight the usefulness of highly structured, closed questions in generating frequencies of responses appropriate for statistical treatment and analysis, which as Oppenheim (1992) suggests, also allows efficient analysis of group comparisons. Questionnaires are also useful for landscaping 'the big picture', for identifying issues for further in-depth investigation, and for identifying potential participants for further data collection. All of these positive points were relevant to my research process.

6.3. Stage 1: Questionnaire Content and Piloting

The content of the first questionnaire was designed to collect data relating to preschool and staff characteristics from which any association with organisational climate could be investigated. In addition to closed questions relating to variables such as staff ages, qualifications, length of employment and preschool size, an organisational climate survey formed the final section of the questionnaire. The assessment climate rating scale used was the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey, as detailed in section 6.4 and 6.5. The aim of this data collection stage was directly linked to the study's initial research aims. These were to determine the nature of the organisational climates of the preschool sample, and also to identify any association between a range of staff and preschool characteristics and organisational climate.

<u>Attitude Rating Scale</u>

The inclusion of the attitude scale in my questionnaire served the purpose of assessing the climate of each individual preschool, as well as having additional methodological benefits. I was aware that Likert scales can be used to build a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response into a questionnaire design, with the ability to determine frequencies, offer potential correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis, (Cohen et al, 2011). They provide more precise information than a dichotomous question can and allow for a range of associated items to be included, related to the attitude in question. Although it should be noted that attitude scales cannot in themselves provide absolute ratio-based comparisons, they are valuable for providing some precision in data related to frequency and ranking of

opinions and perspectives. The use of a Likert scale could provide variety and interest to the format of the closed questions for the respondents, and hopefully avoid perfunctory responses (Robson, 2011). It provided a collective overview of a preschool's organisational climate, combining individual staff perspectives and allowing one layer of data to be collated and used for analysis and evaluation regarding the next steps of enquiry.

6.4. Choice of Organisational Climate Rating Scale

When searching for a climate assessment for inclusion in the first questionnaire the major criteria to be fulfilled was two-fold. It needed to be 'fit for purpose' in accessing the specific nature of the early years workplace and also to encompass the conceptual framework adopted for this study. The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey; ECWES (Bloom, 2010) first developed in 1985, and currently one of only two available early years climate instruments, was chosen as fulfilling these requirements. The second early years climate assessment tool (Cassidy et al, 2016), now currently available, was not operational at the time of the data collection of my research. Considerations undertaken in the adoption of ECWES for my research are reported below, with its design features presented in section 6.5.

<u>Operational appropriateness of ECWES</u>

The Early Childhood Work Environment survey was developed from the need for an instrument which was context and situation-specific to the demands of early childhood work environments. It had also been used in prior research to differentiate

between the climates of different settings, as indicated in the preschool research

studies in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Breadth of Usage of ECWES

Date	Author	Context
1988	Bloom	Closing the Gap: An Analysis of Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Organisational Climate - 25 states of America
1992	Pope and Stremmel	Organisational Climate and job satisfaction among child care teachers - Virginia
1996	Jorde Bloom	The Quality of Work Life in NAEYC Accredited and Non-accredited Early Childhood Programs - 33 states of America
1997	Boyd & Schneider	Perceptions of the work environment and burnout in Canadian child care providers - Winnipeg, Canada
2001	Iutcovich et al	Professional Development and the Quality of Child Care - Pennsylvania
2006	Haveman	Organisational Climate of Church-Affiliated Child Care Programs: Linkages to Program Instability Rates and Educational Levels - USA
2007	Lower and Cassidy	Child Care Work Environments: The Relationship with Learning Environments - North Carolina
2007	Gerber et al	At the heart of child care: Predictors of teacher sensitivity in centre-based child care - Northern California
2008	Manlove et al	The Quality of Caregiving in Child Care: Relations to Teacher Complexity of Thinking and Perceived Supportiveness of the Work Environment - Pennsylvania
2013	Dennis & O'Connor	Re-examining Quality in Early Childhood Education: Exploring the relationship between organisational climate and the classroom - New York
2014	Talan et al	Building the leadership capacity of early childhood directors: An evaluation of a leadership developmental model. - Illinois
2016	Appel-Drazin	Work Environment, Leadership and Teacher Retention in Early Childhood Education - Major Midwestern city of America

An important point for consideration with regard to the appropriateness of the rating scale, was its cultural transferability. While the ECWES rating scale had been used extensively in work environments in America, to my knowledge and at the time of writing it had not been used in an English research study. An examination of the problems posed by the change in national context however led me to conclude that ECWES remained the most effective instrument for my purpose, and that the survey was relevant for the English context. My decision was made on the grounds of the shared cultural environment between American and England, as well as the operational and pedagogical similarities of the American and English preschool educational approaches. These included:

- The existence of for-profit and non-profit settings in both countries.

- The existence of organisations to address the needs of disadvantaged children i.e. SureStart in England and Headstart in the USA.

- The existence of educational guidance for practitioners that promote very similar aims. These are exemplified in the English mandatory document 'The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (DFE, 2014; revised 2017) and in the American document from its largest professional organisation, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2013), which outlines guidelines of 'developmentally appropriate' practice. Both documents include the acceptance of the need for a play-based environment with activities planned around the needs and interests of each individual child. Also emphasised in both documents is the importance of a partnership with parents, the need for a clear curriculum to ensure quality

and consistency, the need for assessment and also the need for equality of opportunity.

- The existence of a similar research emphasis in both countries, with the focus from the 1990's emphasising the association between 'quality' and the organisational contexts of early years settings and child outcomes (Kraft et al, 2016; Peisner-Feinberg et al, 1999; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Sylva et al, 2014; Uline & Tschannen-moran, 2008).

- Associated with the above, there has been the use of the same early years tools to measure the 'quality' of settings i.e. ECERS – The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005). ECERS was used, for example, in the longitudinal EPPE project based in England (Sylva et al, 2002) as well as in several American studies (Cassidy et al, 2011; Early et al, 2007; Gerber et al, 2007; Phillips et al, 1991).

From a political standpoint, similarities were also apparent between the English and American preschool contexts. There have been increases in state and federal support for early education programmes in the United Sates (Magnuson et al, 2007) which have rested upon the premise that such investments lead to higher levels of academic and social skills, which then translate into long-term benefits. This is an argument which is shared by policy makers in England, as discussed in chapter 3, section 3.4, and which has also been mirrored by increased spending. The Department for Education policy, 'Improving the quality and range of education and childcare from birth to 5 years' (GOV.UK, 2013) stated that providing children with good quality education and care in their earliest years can help them succeed at

school and later in life. In December 2015 the Government stated its position of investing an extra £1 billion per year in preschool education by 2019-2020. This included extending the free childcare entitlement for working parents by September 2017, from 15 hours to 30 hours over 38 weeks of the year, (DFE, 2015). This is a position which has been maintained, with a Government consultation paper looking into the logistical arrangements for providers published in August 2016 (Department for Education; DFE, 2016).

The similarities already noted between the English and American early years context minimised my preliminary concerns regarding the use of a rating scale instrument designed for use outside the English context. Telephone contact with the instrument's author, Paula Jorde Bloom on 10th June 2011, to discuss usage of ECWES in a new context highlighted no concerns which I had failed to consider. The piloting of the instrument for use in my study, details of which can be seen on page 139 to 142, also indicated that it was fit for purpose for use in English preschools.

6.5. Early Childhood Work Environment Survey

The design features of the ECWES rating scale were developed in order that:

- The organisational climate dimensions discriminated between settings.

- Items cohered as a dimension.

- The dimensions measured distinct but related features of the work environment.

Both empirical and conceptual criteria, as discussed in chapter 2, were used to determine the ten dimensions (climate subscales) included in the ECWES survey. The ten dimensions, of which the full definitions can be found in Appendix 2, were: Collegiality, Professional growth, Supervisor support, Clarity, Reward system, Decision making, Goal consensus, Task orientation, Physical setting and Innovativeness. Content validation was arrived at through an initial Q sort by early years staff from across 20 American states, where participants ranked a series of statements related to the climate of the early years workplace. Participants worked in a range of settings: public and private, and non-profit and for-profit based. The practical underpinnings of this methodology were then refined through interview data and feedback from practitioners using several pilot versions of the instrument. Using a sample of 739 staff from 65 settings, analysis of variance procedures showed sufficient agreement between staff about their setting for a mean score to be descriptively accurate, ($p \leq$ .001). All ten climate dimensions also discriminated significantly between centres ($p \leq$ .001), indicating that the likelihood of finding the differences by chance was less than 1 in 1000. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), measuring the degree of coherence of items within each subscale, was high. The expectation when using the coefficient alpha is for the measure to be above 0.7 before the test is regarded as internally consistent (Muijs, 2004). The total scale alpha coefficient was .93, ranging from .65 (physical setting) to .83 (supervisor support). The subscale intercorrelations ranged from 0.2 (physical setting and professional growth) to .63 (supervisor support and decision making), suggesting that the dimensions measured different, though related characteristics of the organisation. Two month test-re-test reliability on the instrument was calculated for

120 individuals for all ECWES dimensions. Reliabilities, varied from a low of .60 for physical setting to a high of .89 for decision making. Nine of the ten dimensions had a reliability at .70 or above.

To minimise the problem of response sets, i.e. the tendency to reply to attitude scale items in a particular way almost irrespective of content, both positive and negative statements were used.

For my study I chose to use the short version of ECWES due to the constraints on time, which I anticipated would be felt by many respondents. The short version was designed for directors and researchers as a more informal and quicker assessment of organisational climate (Bloom, 2010). It includes 20 statements, (two for each dimension) and asks respondents to indicate on a Likert-type scale from 0 (never) to 5 (always) the extent to which a statement describes the organisational climate at their setting. The range of total scores is from 0 to 100, with the average score for the setting calculated by dividing the total individual scores by the number of respondents.

The dimension correlation coefficients ranged from moderate to strong between the long and short versions of ECWES for a sample of 300 individuals and were sufficient for the validity of the instrument to be maintained. Correlations between the long and short versions of the ten ECWES climate subscales are shown in Appendix 7. The descriptors of 'moderate' and 'strong', as used by Bloom 2010, reflect the commonly accepted semantics used in research textbooks to report the strength of correlational findings (Cohen et al, 2011; Urdan, 2001). The general rule reported in correlational findings (although not an indicator of their practical relevance) is as follows:

- Between -.20 and +.20 indicates a weak relation between two variables

- Between .20 and .50 (either positive or negative) represents a moderate relationship

- Those larger than .50 (either positive or negative) represent a strong relationship

The correlation between the long and short versions of the ECWES for overall climate (total of the subscale scores) was r = .82.

6.6. Stage One Questionnaire Content and Layout

The stage one questionnaire for staff can be viewed in Appendix 5A. The characteristics chosen for investigation related to staff characteristics of qualifications, age, and length of employment. Preschool characteristics included preschool type, the number of staff employed, and whether the setting educated children of only early years age, or whether it was a department within a school teaching children beyond 5 years of age. These characteristics mirrored those used in prior early years and organisational climate research, where associations with either preschool type or school climate had been identified (Bloom, 1988; Haveman, 2006; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Mathers et al, 2011; Mistry and Sood, 2012; Sammons et al, 2002; Mathers et al, 2011).

The questionnaire for managers/headteachers of settings can be viewed in Appendix 5B. It had additional questions related to structural information concerning type of preschool, total number of staff, number of children attending, and daily and annual opening times.

In terms of the practical considerations regarding the design of the questionnaire, I was mindful of the established guidance from researchers of questionnaire design such as Oppenheim (1992), of the need to bear two sets of considerations in mind:

> '*the internal logic of the inquiry, and the likely reactions of the respondents – often these will have conflicting requirements*'.
>
> (*p109*)

The logistical layout promoted by researchers of questionnaire design to best facilitate such conflicting requirements, is one which creates initial interest for the respondent, clearly matching the main focus of the research with subsequent modules increasing in difficulty or sensitivity (Fanning, 2005; Oppenheim, 1992). Oppenheim also suggests the avoidance of asking for personal and sensitive information at the outset of the questionnaire, which may alienate those taking part and detract from the main focus of the research aim.

Following this suggestion, my questionnaire design incorporated a build-up of question modules. The first set of questions, followed the general advice of Fanning (2005) that:

> '*they should be easy to complete, be interesting and connect with the purpose of the survey. 'If not, you risk losing your respondents' trust and focus.'*
>
> (*Fanning 2005, p5*)

Several preschools from which children had transferred to the school in which I worked had incorporated some element of the Montessori philosophy into their approach, as briefly described in Appendix 1, irrespective of whether or not they were Montessori preschools. As a result, my initial question related to the

educational philosophy of the settings, anticipated as a topic of interest for respondents. From here the questionnaire moved to factual questions, relating to personal employment data, which incorporated tick boxes and checklists for ease of completion. These were designed to be non-controversial in content and to help establish a relationship with the topic that could smooth the way for more difficult or sensitive questions.

The questionnaire then 'built up' to the more complex and sensitive attitude statements central to the research relating to the preschool's climate.

The progression of the separate sections would hopefully create an *'interesting, sensible and non-threatening experience for the respondent'* (Oppenheim, 1992), which from the pilot study evaluation, reported below, was the opinion of the pilot participants.

<u>Pilot Study of First Questionnaire</u>

In July and August 2011 staff from three local preschools completed a pilot of the first questionnaire. To ensure representativeness in relation to the main sample and to avoid an arbitrary selection, all staff from the pilot preschools (n = 18 across the 3 preschools) took part in the pilot. Two of the preschools were private day nurseries, the other was a nursery class in a primary school. The rationale for this selection was that:

- The preschools included the two types of early years setting identified in Department for Education census reporting. This distinguished between 'childcare', which included private day nurseries and 'other early years providers' such as nursery schools and primary schools with nursery classes (DFE, 2014).

- From past years' intake to the school in the study both types of preschools (private day nursery and early years department within a school) were predicted, as eventuated, as being present in my main sample.

- Staff characteristics of the pilot group were anticipated, as eventuated, as similar to the main sample. Staff were of different ages and educational backgrounds. They had been working in the early years sector for varying amounts of time and held a range of different qualifications and roles. This included teachers with a degree, to teaching assistants with GCSE and City and Guilds Level 3 qualifications.

- None of these pilot preschools were regular 'feeder preschools' into the school used in the study and as such it was anticipated (as was the outcome) that they would not form part of the main sample.

Initial contact was made with the individual preschools by phone with an explanation of the process, which was repeated to staff on my arrival.

Pilot Group Feedback

Format/Layout of the Questionnaire:

- The existing font was regarded by staff as clear.

- The length and order of the questionnaire received positive feedback from staff.

- One member of staff with a NNEB qualification did not know which Teaching Agency or Children's Workforce Development Council level (CWDC) her qualification fell within. A statement was therefore added to the questionnaire to explain that if this was the case, then the respondent should state the qualification in the 'other' section.

Semantic queries:

The first discrepancy related to some uncertainty around the meaning of the phrase:

Does your setting have any specific educational philosophy/practice which it follows, instead of, or in addition to, the practice and ideas set out in the EYFS?

As a result of the feedback, I provided a reference point to possible answers in terms of an example. The new wording read:

Does your early years setting, as a whole, follow any specific educational philosophy such as Montessori, or use any practice not included in the EYFS, which you think sets it apart in a positive way from other settings?

I also made an amendment to clarify that the question related to the whole early years department, as some staff were unsure whether they should consider only their own individual practice or that recommended and promoted by their setting as a whole. Regarding other statements in the initial sections, there was one comment regarding length of employment in the respondent's current role in the setting. A member of staff highlighted that this gave no opportunity to identify any change in role, and the questionnaire was amended accordingly.

Organisational Differences:

The final query related to the ECWES climate rating scale and was linked to the organisational structure of the preschool in terms of whether the early years department should be seen as existing as 'standing alone', or whether it should be seen within the context of the wider primary school. In order to match the questionnaire context to the conceptual organisational climate framework used in

my study, as detailed in chapter 2, section 2.2 (p16 – 17), my advice was that where a department was set within a larger school and where there was interaction between them, staff should give their perceptions of the workplace as a whole in their responses to the ECWES climate survey. Guidance relating to this issue was given verbally to staff on receipt of the questionnaires.

Finally, from my conversation with staff during the pilot process, it was felt that my presence during completion of the questionnaire was positive and should be replicated for the main study. No staff said they felt intimidated by my presence and they commented that having queries answered immediately helped to keep staff engaged.

6.7. The Research Sample

The sample for the first stage of the research was created using what Teddlie and Yu (2007) referred to as a 'captive' convenience sample technique. It avoided an individual selection of preschools, thus reducing the element of researcher bias and targeted all preschools from which children joined the reception class of the independent school in which I worked. This sample of preschools would simply represent itself and was a non-representative subset of the larger population of preschools from which children transferred to an independent fee-paying school. The sampling technique was deemed as fit for purpose, in that there would be no attempt to generalise findings beyond the sample in question. It drew from a sample of preschools that was both easily accessible and willing to participate in the study and which was anticipated, as was the outcome, to include several types of preschools with a range of differing structural and staffing characteristics. In order to create as

wide a degree of variance between the preschools as possible the sample was created over two years rather than one, in effect doubling the number of preschools, as shown in Table 6.2 on page 144. As the research progressed through its initial stage this increase in number of preschools was also important in facilitating greater breadth and depth in the data collected. This was seen as providing a more rigorous analytical process, particularly in terms of the qualitative analysis, where patterns of workplace characteristics associated with a positive climate could be more readily identified and investigated from a wider collection of staff responses.

However, due to the high socio-economic status of the majority of parents in the study, as derived from the National Statistics socio-economic classification of 2010, it was unlikely that the available range of type of preschool would include those which provided social support to families, such as Children's Centres. From the Department for Education's (2013) list of 7 different types of early years settings, my sample included three of these as identified by bold print in the list below. Descriptors of each type of preschool can be found in Appendix 1 (p292).

- **Nursery classes which are part of a primary school**.

- Nursery schools which offer places to children between the ages of 2 and 5.

- **Day nurseries which often offer care and early education for children from birth to 5 and which are normally open all day. They can be run by private individuals, community groups, Montessori organisations, commercial businesses or by employers.**
  (NB In my study these day nurseries were separated into the two categories of private day nurseries and Montessori nurseries. This was due to their similar number included in the sample which added to the variation, and to prior preschool research suggesting a differential in characteristics and outcomes between the two types of nursery as reported in chapter 7, section 7.5 - p167).

- Children's centres which offer early education places and a range of health and family support services.

- Playgroups and pre-schools which offer early education for children between 2 and 5 and are often open for 3 or 4 hours a day.

- Childminders

- **Independent schools with early education provision for 3 and 4 year olds**

Table 6.2 below categorises the final sample by preschool type.

Table 6.2: Research Sample by Preschool Type

Type of setting	2011-2012 intake	2012-2013 intake	Total
Private Day nursery	3	5	8
Montessori Nursery	4	3	7
Nursery class of a fee-paying independent school	6	5	11
Nursery class of a maintained school	1	1	2
TOTAL NUMBER	14	14	28

The sample numbered 14 preschools out of a possible sixteen from each academic year. The attrition of 4 preschools included 2 Montessori preschools and 2 nursery classes in maintained schools. One Montessori preschool was in Hong Kong and did not reply to my emails; the other agreed to take part but then withdrew from the study by failing to respond to requests for a meeting to complete the questionnaires. From the two maintained schools who did not take part, one school responded that they would not be willing to do so; the other school was not forthcoming with any response despite several approaches by telephone and email. Although the number

of preschools not taking part in the study was small (12.5%), the presence of a

resulting confounding bias regarding this particular sample could not be discounted.

With only 7% of school children nationally attending independent schools (ISC

Census, 2015), the sample included a disproportionate number of independent

schools with early years provision and included only a small number of nursery

classes within maintained schools.

6.8. Administration of Stage One Data Collection

The initial data collection used the first questionnaire detailed in the previous section

as seen in Appendix 5A for general staff and 5B for managers, directors and/or

headteachers. The sample of the preschools across the two years totalled 243 staff.

Table 6.3: Overview of Staff Characteristics

Age of staff	Length of Overall Early Years Work Experience	Length of Service at current preschool	Qualifications (As defined by the Teaching Agency Qualification levels: Department for Education)	Position/Roles
24 or under: 12%	0-5 yrs (35%)	Less than 1 yr: 15%	Level 2 (GCSE): 6%	Of the 243 staff 70 held qualified teaching roles; 25 were managers and 148 were support staff such as teaching assistants or nursery nurses
25 – 34: 29%	6-10yrs (22%)	1 – 5 yrs: 34%	Level 3 (A Level): 31%	
35 – 44: 25%	11-20yrs (30%)	6-10 yrs: 24%	Level 4 (Diploma): 11.5%	
45 – 54: 26%	21-30yrs (12%)	Over 10yrs: 26%	Level 5: (Foundation Degree) 6%	
55 – 64: 8%	31+ yrs (2%)		Level 6: (1st Degree) 40%	
65+: 0.4%			Level 7: (Masters and Above) 5.5%	

Mindful of the implication of hegemonic issues, as discussed in Chapter 5, section

5.9, I followed Ahern's (1999) suggestion that in qualitative research one should

avoid conflict between the researcher and the researched, by identifying the interests of management groups, or gatekeepers, and their disposition towards your research. My approaches to all settings incorporated the requests of management in their choice of days in which I could attend, and the format and available room in which I could meet with staff. The logistical arrangements and structure of each individual setting varied considerably and dictated whether questionnaires would be completed by individual staff one at a time, or with staff as a whole. The administrative organisation of the questionnaires involved thirteen preschools completing the questionnaire as a whole staff group, with the remaining thirteen preschools releasing staff to complete the questionnaires individually. The differing structures of the preschool types was reflected in the organisation of the questionnaire completion. Nine of the eleven classes in independent schools, and both of the classes in the two maintained schools released staff as a whole. All six of the Montessori preschools, and five of the seven private day nurseries preferred to release staff individually. The presence of a resulting confounding bias cannot be discounted in terms of any perceived freedom of responses felt by staff relating to who was or was not present in any particular group. Confidentiality and anonymity however were emphasised to all participants before completion of the questionnaire, as elements embedded into the research design.

6.9: Data Analysis: Questionnaire and ECWES Rating Scale

The choice of statistical test was limited by the small sample sizes and the use of an ordinal scale in my data collection. Non-parametric measures were used to determine whether groups of preschools were related or independent of one

another and to determine the 'significance of the difference' between them. This analysis was in terms of a range of preschool characteristics, as detailed in chapter 7, sections 7.5 and 7.6 (p167 – 169) and their association with the preschool's organisational climate determined by ECWES climate scores.

The choice of the Fisher Exact Test for 2X2 Table was made, as it is a useful technique where sample sizes are small and where sample sizes do not need to be the same (McDonald, 2009; Siegel and Catellan, 1998). Where sample sizes were larger the Chi-Square test was used.

The data collected at the first research stage was subjected to a descriptive as well as a statistical analysis. This was on the grounds that statistical significance, although of importance to this study, should not be confused with significance per se, especially where small sample sizes are involved. The first analysis stage was separated into two sections. The initial process was an analysis of the broad overall construct of preschool climate for any association with a range of preschool and staff characteristics. This was then developed and complemented by an analysis of the separate ten dimensions of climate in relation to the high and low climate preschools. The preschools in the 'middle ground' were omitted at this point in the research, in order to 'tap into' the cases where the greatest variance existed. This approach reflected a theoretical purposive sampling technique used as part of my grounded theory approach and as discussed in section 6.12 and 6.13 of this chapter. Lines of enquiry which arose from the two parts of this first analysis stage were then developed in the subsequent stages of the research. This process is detailed in Figure 6.2 on the following page.

Figure 6.2 Research Process from First to Second Stage

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│ July - Aug 2011     │
│ Piloting of 1st     │
│ Questionnaire       │
│ n = 3 preschools    │
└─────────────────────┘
      │
      └──▶ ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │ Oct - Dec 2011 preschool     │
           │ sample 1                     │
           │ n = 13 Questionnaire 1       │
           │ administered to assess level │
           │ of global school climate     │
           └──────────────────────────────┘
                 │
                 └──▶ ┌────────────────────────────────────┐
                      │ Oct - Dec  2012 - preschool        │
                      │ sample 2;  n =13;                  │
                      │ Questionnaire 1 administered       │
                      │ Subsequent analyses of preschool   │
                      │ characteristics from both years    │
                      │ for any association with climate   │
                      └────────────────────────────────────┘
                            │
                            └──▶ ┌────────────────────────────────────┐
                                 │ Combined preschool sample n = 26   │
                                 │ Preschools analysed for any        │
                                 │ differences between high and low   │
                                 │ climate groups in relation to 10   │
                                 │ separate climate dimensions.       │
                                 └────────────────────────────────────┘
                                       │
                                       └──▶ ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                            │ July - Aug 2013 Piloting │
                                            │ of 2nd Questionnaire     │
                                            │ n = 2 preschools         │
                                            └──────────────────────────┘
                                                  │
                                                  └──▶ ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                       │ October 2013 - May 2014  │
                                                       │ (n = 11 preschools)      │
                                                       │ Questionnaire 2 and      │
                                                       │ Interview administered   │
                                                       │ to high (n=6) and        │
                                                       │ low (n=5) climate        │
                                                       │ preschools               │
                                                       └──────────────────────────┘
```

6.10. Stage Two: Questionnaire and Interview Rationale

Open questions within questionnaire designs, as well as interviews, are particularly suited to the investigation of complex issues (Cohen, 2011). With this advice in mind and in order to drill into the specific processes which impacted upon staff perceptions of climate, my second questionnaire, viewed in Appendix 6, was used to develop the line of enquiry from the first analysis stage using predominantly open questions. Within these open questions freedom was given to the respondents in their choice of answers, with any bias arising from a restricted or forced choice of answer

categories theoretically avoided. The second questionnaire also had an additional purpose of aiding my identification of potential interviewee participants from each preschool, to include staff with different hierarchical experiences (e.g. teachers and teaching assistants). This was in order to pursue the stage 1 findings of differing levels of consensus between staff in the high and low climate groups, with the aim of adding subtlety and richness to the data in terms of incorporating respondents' descriptors of the processes within their workplaces.

In terms of the interview process, Oppenheim (1992) and Cohen (2011) guide researchers in their choice of methods. They advocate that where the question schedule is longer, more difficult and contains more open-ended questions, as well as having the possibility of some sensitive comments arising within the research, that as a general rule, the more important it is to conduct face to face interviews for data collection.

In order to mitigate as much as possible against a 'threatening' atmosphere during the individual staff interviews, they all took place in available rooms in the interviewees' settings. They were often undertaken in the interviewee's own classrooms or in other private areas away from colleagues, where discussions could be held confidentially and in comfortable surroundings.

6.11. Stage Two: Questionnaire Content and Piloting

The second questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix 6. Its content was drawn from aspects identified from the first stage of data analysis, as well as from the extant and most relevant literature associated with school climate. In addition, aspects related

to the hierarchical organisation of staffing in the early years workplace, as discussed in the literature review (chapter 4, section 4.8) were included. The overall content included topics related to: task characteristics regarding the level of workload and how staff spent their working time (Al-Hassan, 2006; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988), the effectiveness of general and administrative procedures (Lavian, 2012) and the network of teacher support and clarity of roles (Cottle, 2011; Groom, 2006; McGinty et al, 2008; Mistry and Sood, 2012; Wagner & French, 2010).

To develop the topics mentioned above the open-ended questions focused upon several areas. These included practitioners' individual roles and duties which they were satisfied/dissatisfied with, and any manageable changes they would make to create greater satisfaction with their day to day duties and responsibilities. The final section gathered data relating to staff perceptions of the current organisation of staff roles, in terms of any positive effect for staff in the workplace as a whole and any negative aspects which could be improved.

During the development of the second questionnaire I was aware that a challenge in constructing free-response questions is avoiding making the questions too vague, resulting in respondents not referring to the issues you would like addressed and filling the space with unrelated views (Black, 2005). As a result, I included in these sections of the questionnaire an outline of 'topics' or prompts which the respondent could refer to. These included references to: *specific duties, the way in which jobs were shared, the cover provided for absent staff, time available to complete duties, clarity of roles, the matching of staff strengths and skills to the roles prescribed, the overlapping and sharing of roles and the value attached to different roles.* These

prompts were chosen from aspects highlighted in prior research (Al-Hassan, 2006;

Cottle, 2011; Groom, 2006; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; McGinty et al, 2008; Mistry

and Sood, 2012; Wagner & French, 2010).

Piloting Process

The same preschools that had piloted the first questionnaire were again approached

for the pilot of the second questionnaire. One of the private day nurseries could not

take part and, as a result, the pilot group for the second questionnaire comprised 12

staff. These were the same staff who had piloted the first questionnaire. The

rationale behind this selection for the pilot mirrored that of the first, as detailed in

section 6.6 of this chapter.

 The use of the same staff for the purpose of the second pilot was decided upon due

to the positive engagement they had shown with the first pilot and the thoroughness

and variety of their responses. On balance this countered the generic concerns

regarding the possibly of a lack of engagement which might occur from approaching

a pilot group for a second time, as well as a consideration of the same perspective

which they might bring to the exercise possibly limiting the breadth of overview.

The pilot of the questionnaire was positive, with no major amendments suggested

by staff. No-one raised any concerns regarding its length or choice of wording. There

was one small query relating to the question of the daily hours staff worked in the

private day nursery, as their setting used a rotational shift system. However, as I was

present to give consistent advice the staff annotated the four shift sessions as I

requested. I therefore decided not to add another section to the questionnaire which might have increased its completion time.

Despite the prompts provided with the open-ended questions, I was aware that there might be an absence of responses for reasons related to diversity of the sample itself. From the wide range of staff working within early years settings I anticipated that some would be more confident in completing an open-ended questionnaire. However, this was only realised to a certain extent as all staff completed most or all sections of the questionnaire as specified, using the term 'none' where they did not wish to or could not provide a response.

6.12. Administration of Second Questionnaire

The aim of the second questionnaire was to gather data from the preschools where there was the greatest variance in climate, as determined from the responses to the climate survey (ECWES), contained within the first questionnaire. The high and low climate groups both consisted of 8 preschools and, as reported in chapter 7, sections 7.7 and 7.8, they had high levels of variance between them regarding the two variables of size and structure. These were variables highlighted from the stage one analysis as warranting further investigation. In contrast, the general data trends had not highlighted the middle climate category of preschools as a discrete group with any outstanding differences from either the high and low climate categories.

This reduction in sample size, although accompanied by a reduction in the representativeness of the data of the sample as a whole, was introduced to narrow the focus of the research in terms of discerning and understanding the processes

connected with the identified variation. It reflected my constructivist grounded theory approach, discussed in chapter 5, section 5.6 (p 114- 116), where the use of a theoretical purposive sampling technique was built upon the rationale of developing earlier lines of enquiry. The analytical focus then moved from whether a difference existed in terms of a preschool's climate, towards a focus of what conditions facilitated a positive climate.

As a result, the second questionnaire was administered to the 6 high and 5 low climate preschools who agreed to take part in this second stage of the research. I remained on site during the completion of the second questionnaires, and my practice in relation to my insider status and the balance of hegemony between myself and the participants remained as discussed in section 5.4 (p105 – 109), and section 5.7, (p118 – 121) of the previous chapter.

6.13. The Interview Process

The issues explored at interview were all developed from the responses to the second questionnaire and were thus part of the inductive and iterative process of the research design, illustrated in diagram 6.3 on the following page. The process was used to corroborate a mutual understanding between the interviewee and myself regarding their questionnaire responses, and to enable expansion and elaboration of those responses. It was a process which I found extremely important in providing strength to the patterns identified within the research, creating a subtle layer of detail to the questionnaire responses and a clearer 'picture' of individual workplace characteristics and processes. All interviews were conducted with staff individually and were recorded for transcription.

Figure 6.3: Inductive Research Process

Analysis of 1st Questionnaire and identification of issues raised	Development of open-ended questionnaire to extend understanding of issues raised	Interview process to provide further detail, subtlety and depth of understanding of open-ended responses
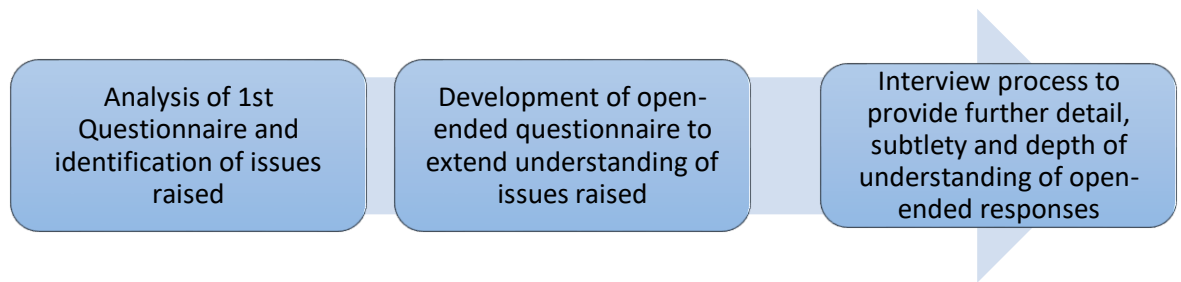
I took note as Yin (2014) suggested that the questions needed to be relevant at different levels. Yin regarded the difference between these levels of questioning as highly significant and stated the importance of disentangling them in their most basic form. The two levels of questioning used in my interviews were:

Level 1: Questions asked of specific interviewees, i.e. the actual questions posed, which Yin refers to as the 'verbal line of enquiry'.

Level 2: Questions asked for the individual case, i.e. - the specific preschool. These needed to keep in mind what Yin referred to as the 'mental line of 'inquiry'.

In this sense the level 1 questions followed those of the second questionnaire in terms of verifying and extending responses. The level 2 questions aimed to explore the broader research issues and to develop an understanding of any underpinning processes linked with a preschool's climate, and any links between these processes. These level 2 issues related to aspects of hegemony, to the degree of consensus between staff, the level of supportive leadership, the presence, or otherwise, of professional relationships, and the processes in place to facilitate efficient communication, decision making and positive teamwork.

In order to avoid inhibitions for the interviewees and to establish trust, I attempted to allow interviewees to: *'address the issue in their preferred way',* as suggested by

Cohen et al (2011). This on occasion meant that responses strayed a little from the focus of the questionnaire, although a small number of probes were used as appropriate to avoid distractions, (as detailed in Appendix 8.) being mindful however that this was the opportunity for the interviewees to have the 'power' to offer their contributions as they felt appropriate.

The interviews took place on the same day as the questionnaire completion. This was in order to reduce the number of appointments which needed to be made with each preschool and to minimise the disruption for staff to their daily work routine. Collecting the two types of data with the minimal time gap also had the aim of allowing the train of thought previously recorded by respondents to be more easily continued, elaborated upon or amended. Interviews were organised at a time convenient for each preschool, according to their different routines. The private and Montessori nurseries chose a time during the work day for my visit. The independent schools chose the end of the work day, or lunchtime, when the majority of their staff would be free. Where necessary, classroom cover was provided by the manager/headteacher for the interviewee to enable sufficient time for the interview to reach its conclusion. The interview location was the choice of the interviewee, or the manager/headteacher where a classroom was unavailable. All areas were quiet and allowed for an uninterrupted confidential discussion to take place.

Staff were informed before they completed the questionnaire of my request to organise one-to-one interviews later in the day, to expand on the comments provided by them. As the second questionnaires were completed, staff replied to my request to interview as they handed their individual questionnaires back to me.

6.14. The Interview Sample

The overall interview sample was created from a series of discrete sampling events. These were independent of one another and involved each of the 11 preschools in turn. The criteria for the potential sample from each preschool was based on a clear rationale. The aim in each setting, as far as was pragmatically possible, was to facilitate a selection of interviewees which reflected the characteristics of the respondents of the second questionnaire and the range of views they expressed. The components of the initial criteria are identified below:

1. The need to interview 2 members of staff from each setting with different hierarchical roles (e.g. teacher and teaching assistant) in order to further explore the hierarchical processes within the school. On-going reflection of the data collection/analysis and lines of enquiry to this point of the research had highlighted perceptions of staff in different roles as a potential indicator of differences in preschool climate.

2. Respondents from each preschool with a spread of characteristics in terms of age and length of employment. (This was achieved, and closely reflected the characteristics of the second questionnaire sample, as shown in Appendix 20.)

3. Interviewees who had provided information to at least 2 of the 5 open questions. This decision was made in order to pursue the most fruitful and diverse lines of enquiry, enabling corroboration, expansion and development of themes to take place.

From the initial framing criteria, the interviewee selection evolved according to the constraints of each individual preschool. This was initially in terms of staff availability, which was dependent upon non-contact time for the staff from the children, or upon arrangements for staff to be freed from their duties. The selection rationale and its development as a pragmatic process are presented in figure 6.4 below.

Figure 6.4: Interview Selection Process

Framing of initial selection criteria to reflect the range of staff characteristics, hierarchical roles and breadth of questionnaire responses → Individual preschool constraints of staff availability and small numbers of staff impacting upon the selection process → Final selection made of 2 staff from each setting with responses to 2 open questions, with different staff characteristics and hierarchical roles

The circumstance of low staff numbers within settings was a major constraint in the selection process, with 4 of the 11 preschools having only 3 to 5 staff completing the second questionnaire. When the issue of availability was applied the potential sample was reduced, on occasion predetermining the selection as shown in Table 6.4 on the following page. Moreover, with the additional criteria of completion of 2 open questions, the sample in 5 of the 11 settings was pre-set, leaving 6 preschools only for which the remaining criteria of staff roles and staff characteristics needed to be considered.

Table 6.4: Interviewees: Availability and Question Responses

Preschool	Number of potential staff for interview in terms of consent and availability	Staff who met the additional criteria of responses to 2 open questions
H1	5 consented; **4 available**	**4 staff**
H2	6 consented; **5 available**	**3 staff**
H3	5 consented; **4 available**	**4 staff**
H4	2 consented; **2 available**	**2 staff**
H5	3 consented; **3 available**	**2 staff**
H6	1 consented (Teacher); **1 available**	**1 staff**
L1	3 consented; **3 available**	**3 staff**
L2	4 consented; **4 available**	**4 staff**
L3	1 consented (Teaching Assistant); **1 available**	**1 staff**
L4	3 consented; **3 available**	**3 staff**
L5	3 consented (nursery department only**); 2 available**	**2 staff**
NB Prefix 'H' denotes High Climate Preschool; Prefix 'L' denotes Low Climate Preschool		

The characteristics of the 20 interviewees from all 11 settings are presented on the

following page.

Table 6.5: Characteristics of Interviewees

Preschool	Staff Role	Age	Period of Employment
H1 – 2 staff	A. Nursery Deputy B. Nursery Assistant	A.56yrs B.30yrs	A. 19yrs B. 1½ months
H2 – 2 staff	A. Assistant Manager B. Nursery Nurse	A.37yrs B.44yrs	A. 5yrs B. 20 months
H3 – 2 staff	A. Deputy Manager B. Senior Practitioner	A.50yrs B.56yrs	A. 16yrs B. 18yrs
H4 – 2 staff	A. Room Leader B. Nursery Assistant	A.29yrs B.25yrs	A. 11yrs B. 8 months
H5 – 2 staff	A. Room Leader B. Nursery Nurse	A.53yrs B.31yrs	A. 6yrs B. no information provided
H6 – 1 staff	A. Teacher	A.52yrs	A 4yrs
L1 -2 staff	A. Head of Department B. Teaching Assistant	A. 58yrs B. 23yrs	A. 35yrs B. 5yrs
L2 – 2 staff	A. Nursery Assistant with previous managerial experience B. Nursery Assistant	A. 42yrs B. 20yrs	A. no information provided B. 2yrs
L3 – 1 staff	A. Teaching Assistant	A. 48yrs	A. 9yrs
L4 – 2 staff	A. Room Leader B. Nursery Practitioner	A. 39yrs B. 26yrs	A. 3 months B. 3 months
L5 – 2 staff	A. Teacher B. Teaching Assistant	A. 41yrs B. 54yrs	A. 2½yrs B. 10yrs
NB Prefix 'H' denotes High Climate Preschool; Prefix 'L' denotes Low Climate Preschool In the 2 preschools where only one member of staff was interviewed this was as a result of the lack of availability of staff in either a teacher or teaching assistant role.			

6.15. Data Analysis Stage Two

Mason's (1996) suggested that:

> *'you are never taking it as self-evident that a particular interpretation can be made of your data but instead that you are continually and assiduously charting and justifying the steps through which your interpretations are made'*
>
> *(p150)*

In order to best address this need, I adopted a constructive grounded theory

approach which several researchers (Bryant, 2009; Charmaz, 2014; Jaconsson et al,

2004; Mills et al, 2006; Smith et al, 2011) suggest as a useful analytic framework to follow up what is happening within the social context of the data. The guidelines I followed are reported in chapter 5, section 5.6. The analytic process began with an initial search within the transcripts of the data for preliminary codes of responses. Focused codes were then distinguished representing similar concepts and interconnected meanings. From this stage of the analysis a tentative theoretical direction could be formed, to be reaffirmed, or otherwise as further data emerged.

6.16. Summary

This chapter has presented the practical aspects of my study's research design based upon its interpretivist/constructivist assumptions and pragmatic approach. Each stage of the research was selected on the basis of a rationale linked to a practical purpose. This process recognised the impact of my researcher position in constructing knowledge with the participants. It emphasised the crucial role through each research stage of the reflexive process, where an iterative approach and use of a constructivist grounded theory approach was adopted to facilitate the generation of new knowledge associated with preschool climate research.

Chapter 7

Results and Stage 1 Analysis: Preschool Characteristics and Organisational Climate

7.1. Overview of study

This chapter details the results and analysis of the first stage of the investigation which addressed the research questions:

- What are the differences in the nature of the organisational climates of a sample of preschools, from which children transfer to a fee-paying independent school?

- Is there any association between a range of staff and preschool characteristics and organisational climate? The characteristics under study were; preschool type, preschool size and structure, staff qualifications, age and duration of employment.

- What are the organisational characteristics that differentiate between individual preschools with strong or weak organisational climates?

This chapter will present the analysis of the broad overall climate of the preschools in statistical as well as descriptive terms, highlighting any further lines of enquiry uncovered. It will then report upon the subsequent narrowing focus of the data analysis to include the separate dimensions of climate, moving the analysis towards a consideration of the organisational characteristics which differentiated between the climate groups.

7.2. Broad Overall Perceptions of Organisational Climate

The first part of the data analysis was to determine if there were any differences between the 28 preschools in terms of their organisational climate. The number of preschools was reduced to 26 due to the data from two preschools being available from one member of staff only, as surveys from the settings were either incomplete or with information incorrectly inputted. This decision was taken on the basis that the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES), used to assess preschool climate in my thesis, was built upon the definition of climate representing the collective perception of staff (Bloom, 2010).

7.3. Range of Composite scores in Relation to Prior Studies

Composite climate ECWES scores range from a possible 0 to 100 and reflect the sum of the ECEWS ten dimension scores. Reflecting differing research aims, composite climate mean scores have not always been reported in individual studies, where instead, the focus has been upon separate dimension (subscale) scores and the comparison between them (Bloom, 1988; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Haveman, 2006; Iutcovich et al, 2001; Lower & Cassidy, 2007). However, from those studies which have reported mean composite scores, the range has been from 65.3 to 71.3, as shown in Table 7.1 on the following page.

Table 7.1: Mean Composite Climate Scores of Prior Studies

Study	Mean scores of combined ECWES dimensions from individual preschools	Range of individual preschool composite scores
Pope & Stremmel (1992)	63.34 (For-Profit Centres) 69.08 (Not-for-Profit Centres) NAEYC accredited (70.66) Not NAEYC accredited (66.22)	Not reported
Gerber et al (2007)	71.30 (including both NAEYC accredited and non-accredited centres)	28 to 97
Dennis & O'Connor (2013)	69 (non-public school-based centres)	37 to 90
NB: NAEYC accreditation refers to the quality standard criteria promoted by the National Association of Education for Young Children for preschools in America.		

From the 26 preschools used in the data analyses of my thesis, the range of scores was from 64 to 92.3, indicating a higher baseline score than reported in previous studies. The mean Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) scores similarly indicated a positive skew, at a mean of 79.28, with a standard deviation of 7.98. Scores from 71.3 to 87.26 accounted for 68% of the preschool sample. The statistics indicated a more positive perception of climate from the sample used in my study to that of others.

7.4. Grouping the Individual Preschool Data

In the absence of a norm referenced benchmark for the ECWES measurement tool with no hypothetical 'average' score, it was difficult to group the preschools in as meaningful a way as possible that would permit parsimonious comparison and contrast in order to investigate the most significant differences between them. This

situation was exacerbated by the truncated range of scores from my sample. The aim was to create three groups from those with a high climate, through a mid-level, to a low climate, in order to assess any differences between them. The mid group would also be useful in creating a division between the high and low climate groups, where the greatest level of variance was in evidence. Rather than creating boundaries from an arbitrary range of scores (i.e. 60 - 70; 70 - 80; 80 - 90), the rank order of the preschools was used as a guide in the search for groups of a similar size. The aim was to find three useful groups, where usefulness was defined by the goals of the data analysis, searching for levels of variance for a statistical, but also a descriptive analysis in order to highlight further lines for enquiry. As a result, the preschool climate scores were organised into three categories by rank order across the spread of scores. The climate categories for the individual preschools is shown in Table 7.2 on page 166. Approximately one third of preschools was in each category. Levels of separation between the groups occurred where the scores were most dissimilar – (i.e. preschool rank 9, was closer to that ranked 10, than to 8; preschool 19 was closer to 20 than to 18).

Despite the risk of creating 'false' boundaries, minor changes to the groupings would not have significantly changed the reported findings. Any change in boundary line between the groups of one or two preschools would not have included Montessori preschools in the lower climate group, would not have changed the positions of the maintained preschools from their mid-climate position, and would not have included any additional types of preschool in any climate category. The descriptive findings of the potential importance of preschool size and structure, as well as length of

employment upon climate would thus have remained. In addition, with the truncated range of scores within the small sample, (median score 80.70) an alternative allocation of groupings would have been unlikely to have significantly changed the statistical findings, where there was no significant statistical association between preschool climate and any of the preschool or staff characteristics under study.

Table 7.2: Preschool Composite Mean Climate Scores

Climate Categories Classified by rank order	Rank Order of Mean Scores of 26 preschools over 2 years' data collection	Preschools closest to Median scores
High Climate Category 8 Nurseries **Range 85 – 92** **(7 points)** **Median Score 87.1**	1. Class in Independent School (92.3)	
	2. Montessori (90.4)	
	3. Private Day nursery (88.2)	
	4. Private Day Nursery (87.6)	*
	5. Class in Independent School (86.6)	*
	6. Montessori (86.25)	
	7. Private Day Nursery (86)	
	8. Montessori (85.8)	
Medium Climate Category 10 Nurseries **Range 76- 84** **(8 points)** **Median Score 80.7**	9. Class in Independent School (84.2)	
	10. Montessori (84)	
	11. Class in Independent School (81.85)	
	12. Class in Maintained School (81.5)	
	13. Montessori (81)	*
	14. Class in Independent School (80.4)	*
	15. Montessori (80.2)	
	16. Class in Maintained School (79.8)	
	17. Private Day Nursery (78.25)	
	18. Class in Independent School (76.5)	
Low Climate Category 8 Nurseries **Range 64 – 75** **(11 points)** **Median Score 69.8**	19. Private Day Nursery (73.3)	
	20. Class in Independent School (72)	
	21. Class in Independent School (70.11)	
	22. Private Day Nursery (69.9)	*
	23. Class in Independent School (69.7)	*
	24. Private Day Nursery (66)	
	25. Class in Independent School (65.5)	
	26. Class in Independent School (64)	

7.5. Organisational Climate and Preschool Type

The investigation for any association between preschool type and overall climate was included in my research aims, to complement the earlier high-profile work of the Effective Provision of Preschool Education Project (EPPE). The initial part of the EPPE project undertaken between 1997 and 2003 had found differences in the levels of several workplace characteristics associated with their preschool type, such as staff working conditions, staff training, recruitment and turnover, and opportunities for professional development (Taggart et al, 2000). Of particular interest to my study, in terms of its high socio-economic sample of parents, was the EPPE study's reference to: *'the relationship that the, (mainly private), settings had developed with their middle-class parents'* (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2003, p127). This was highlighted in the EPPE case study information in relation to a Montessori centre case study. The Montessori preschool in question served an area with many professional and upper middle-class families who employed nannies to assist with childcare, which was a similar situation to the children transferring to the Reception class within my research. Following this line of enquiry, Montessori preschools were grouped as part of the analysis process as a separate category from the private day nurseries within the climate groups, as reported below, in order to investigate the characteristics that they displayed.

Categories of Preschools and Their Climates

The preschools included within the climate range were from low (64-75), through medium (76-84) to high (85-92) as detailed in Table 7.2 on the previous page. Private day nurseries, independent schools and Montessori preschools were present within

the high and mid-range climate categories. The 2 maintained schools were both in the mid-range of climate scores. Only 2 preschool types were present in the lower band; these were classes in independent schools and private day nurseries.

The Montessori preschools were proportionally more highly represented within the high, (50%) and medium climate groups, (50%). As such, they presented the most positive climate scores of all four preschool types. Private Day nurseries also had a high proportion of their preschool number in the highest global climate range (43%), although they had an equal number in the lowest category (43%), indicating greater variability than for the Montessori preschools. The classes within independent schools had the largest proportion of their schools in the lowest climate category (46%) and the lowest number of preschools in the highest climate category (18%).

The investigation of any statistical difference between two types of preschools, (Montessori and classes in independent schools), in terms of their presence in the high and low climate groups, was tested with the Fisher Exact Test For 2 x 2 Tables. This was in order to determine whether they differed in the proportions which they fell, into the two classifications. A critical value of 0.05 was used as the cut off for significance. However, as the p-value was greater than 0.05 (0.088), a conclusion of a significant difference between the Montessori and classes in independent schools could not be upheld. There was no statistically significant difference between Montessori preschools and preschool classes in independent schools, in terms of how their staff perceived the organisational climate of the settings, or insufficient difference between them within this small sample to be significant statistically.

7.6. Preschool Characteristics Investigated: Statistical Analysis

Additional variables investigated for any association with preschool climate were adopted from those investigated in prior studies (Appel-Drazin, 2016; Cassidy et al, 2016; Gerber et al, 2007; Hur et al 2016; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; Lower and Cassidy, 2007; Manlove et al, 2008; McGinty et al, 2008; Zinsser & Curby, 2014; Whitebook et al, 1982). They included the variables of size of preschool in terms of number of staff, preschool structure, staff length of employment, staff age and staff qualifications.

However, at the initial analysis there was no statistical significant association between any of the preschool or staff variables with the assessment of overall organisational climate, as detailed in the table in Appendix 9, page 317. The usefulness of the data in terms of its descriptiveness however remained, as will be reported in the following sections of this chapter, where the additional variables of preschool structure and number of staff, in particular, were highlighted as providing further lines of enquiry. The analysis of the descriptive data was an important stage in the research, widening the scope of the investigation and linking it with the second research stage. It was an important point in the research design, which I found crucial in helping to determine the questions to ask beyond the quantitative analysis, which had only been of minimal value in addressing the specific research questions.

7.7. Size of Preschool in terms of Number of Staff

Total staff numbers of the individual preschools ranged from 3 to 21. I organised the preschools into three groups, based on the number of staff in situ, all of whom took

part in my research from the individual settings. The staffing levels were thus categorised at the following levels: 3-6 staff, 7-10 staff and 11-20+ staff. Of the 26 preschools, 10 (38%) had staff within the 3 to 6 range, 8 (31%) preschools had staff numbering between 7 to 10 and 8 (31%) preschools had staff with numbers over 10. Individual preschool staff numbers from small (3-6 staff) through mid-range (7-10 staff) to large (11 +) were present across climate levels as reported in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Number of Staff and Organisational Climate

Number of staff in the Department	Highest category climate score n = 8 preschools	Mid category climate score n = 10 preschools	Lowest category climate score n = 8 preschools
3-6 staff (10 preschools)	4 (40% of preschools with staffing levels 3-6)	6 (60% of preschools with staffing levels 3-6)	0
7-10 staff (8 preschools)	2 (25% of preschools with staffing levels 7-10)	2 (25% of preschools with staffing levels 7-10)	4 (50% of preschools with staffing levels 7-10)
11-20+ staff (8 preschools)	2 (25% of preschools with staffing levels 11+)	2 (25% of preschools with staffing level 11+)	4 (50% of preschools with staffing levels 11+)
	N = 8 preschools 50% 3-6 staff 25% 7-10 staff 25% 11+ staff	N = 10 preschools 60% 3-6 staff 20% 7-10 staff 20% 11+ staff	N = 8 preschools 0% 3-6 staff 50% 7-10 staff 50% 11+ staff

Preschools with the largest number of staff (11-20+ staff) and those with the 7-10 staff were present in all climate groups, although they had their largest proportion of preschools in the lowest climate group. Conversely, preschools with 3 to 6 staff were not present in the lowest category of climate settings at all. The positive impact of smaller staff numbers upon staff collegiality, which is one dimension of the overall construct of organisational climate, is a hypothesis supported by prior research (Bloom, 1988; McGinty et al, 2008). While prior studies have indicated that size of

organisations failed to demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with the overall construct of job satisfaction or organisational climate, the investigation of individual dimensions of climate has shown that exceptions can appear. Bloom, 1988, found that the larger the setting (in terms of pupil and staff numbers) the lower staff rated team spirit, cooperation and group cohesiveness. The descriptive analysis within my study also supported the presence of some relationship between number of staff and preschool climate. In so doing, it not only extended the boundaries of the extant literature to include the English context, but also raised the issue for further development within the subsequent stage of analysis, of the impact of relationships of people and groups within the preschool environment.

7.8. Preschool Structure and Organisational Climate

The investigation of preschool structure in prior research for any association with organisational climate and/or job satisfaction has indicated a positive association. Research in America has suggested that the financial structure of non-profit versus for-profit status may be linked to the quality and organisational climate of the workplace, with teachers working in not-for-profit settings rating organisational climate significantly higher than teachers working in for-profit centres (Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; Lower and Cassidy, 2007; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Whitebook et al, 1982). The rationale is that settings run on a non-profit basis may allocate greater financial resources in operational terms to the setting, paying higher salaries and providing greater benefits and opportunities for professional growth, than their for-profit counterparts. The separate categories of not-for-profit and for-profit settings also exist in preschools in England, with The Childcare and Early Years Providers

survey (DFE, 2011) reporting that average pay was typically higher in not-for-profit settings than in for-profit settings.

Within my sample private day nurseries, Montessori preschools and independent schools, were organised on a for-profit basis, with the smallest category of only two maintained preschools, organised on a non-profit basis. As a consequence of this small number of for-profit settings, a comparison across the climate categories relating to this aspect of structure could not be statistically investigated.

However, in terms of the structure of the preschools in relation to the age range of the children they served, a clear distinction existed between them. Some were discrete early years preschool settings, providing education and care for children to age 5 only. Others taught children of a wider age range from early years up to age 7, or beyond to age 11, 13 or 18 years. Table 7.4 below identifies the number of settings within each of the three climate categories:

Table 7.4: Preschool Structure and Organisational Climate

	Composite climate score 85 – 92 Most Positive Climate	Composite climate score 76 – 84 Mid Climate	Composite climate score 64-75 Least Positive Climate
Discrete Settings **n= 13**	6 (46% of discrete settings)	4 (31% of discrete settings)	3 (23% of discrete settings)
Departments within schools (i.e non-discrete settings) n = 13	2 (15.4% of departments within schools)	6 (46% of departments within schools)	5 (38.5% of departments within schools)
	n = 8 preschools 75% discrete settings 25% departments	n = 10 preschools 40% discrete settings 60% departments	n = 8 preschools 37.5% discrete settings 62.5% departments

The greater proportion of the discrete settings was within the highest climate category, whilst the non-discrete settings which served children beyond age 5 had the smallest number of preschools in the highest climate category. This differential may be as a result of the discrete settings having one educational focus in terms of the age group being taught, without being 'nested' within management tiers within a school which had additional requirements to address. The tiering of departments within larger schools may limit the optimum condition for a positive organisational climate to develop, particularly where strong communication procedures are not in place. The findings of McGinty et al (2008) and Mistry and Sood (2012) support this hypothesis. McGinty et al's investigation collected data from 68 preschool teachers and focused upon school climate and sense of community. Their analysis of the hierarchical regression models which they undertook, examined preschool organisational features for any association with the variable of teacher's sense of collegiality scores. Neither the type of preschool programme, a teacher's preschool experience, nor teacher's education made any statistically significant contribution in explaining the variance in collegiality scores. The size of preschool, based on the number of preschool classrooms in the building however, was a significant predictor at a correlation of 0.26 ($p \le .05$). The important aspect to note here was not the size of the building per se, but teachers' feelings of a stronger workplace collegiality where there were a greater number of early years staff and classes of early years children in the school. Similarly, Mistry and Sood (2012) reported that early years staff working within primary schools felt that their colleagues in other departments had very little understanding of what their work involved. The communication and

proximity between early years staff to collaborate and share planning opportunities is an area which is further explored and reported in chapter 8.

7.9. Duration of Staff Employment and Organisational Climate

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, which reflects the socio-ecological conceptualisation of climate used in this study, accepts that a person's conception of an environment can develop over time. Length of employment was thus hypothesised by me as another variable to explore for any association with climate. Iutcovich et al's (2001) study indicated that reduced turnover rates resulted in a more stable workforce and was associated with a more positive climate, although the direction of this association could not be verified by their correlational findings. The findings of Appel-Drazin, (2016) and of Cassidy et al's (2011), investigation of teacher turnover in preschool classrooms also supported an association between the impact of staff turnover and preschool operational processes. The Cassidy et al study found that although turnover could impact negatively upon classroom quality, well-embedded management strategies could mitigate against this. Where positive strategies were in place to assist the turnover process, such as inviting new appointees into the setting to 'shadow' the current staff member staff, any negative impact upon classrooms, teachers and families, could be minimised.

Categories of length of employment within my preschool sample were created to reflect the information given in the questionnaire responses. The categories were:

1. Less than 1 year (17.3% of sample)

2. 1-5 years (43.2% of sample)

3. 6-10 years (20% of sample)

4. Over 10 years (19.5% of sample)

The range of years that the 236 sampled staff had worked in their current early years setting varied from less than 1 year to 33 years. This was a range which complimented that found in previous studies. Bloom (1988) reported a range from 0 to 25 years in her early years study and Lower and Cassidy (2007) reported a range from less than 1 year to 28 years from their sample of 225 preschool teachers. The most frequent length of employment within my sample was 1-5 years. As shown in Table 7.5 below, preschools with the highest climate scores had less variance in their staff employment and retention than the other preschools. 1-5 years was the duration for the majority of their staff employment, followed by staff employment of over 10 years. Conversely, preschools in the lower climate group had the most evenly spread employment profiles across the timeframes used, with marginally more of their staff employed for longer than 5 years when compared with the other climate categories.

Table 7.5: Duration of Employment and Organisational Climate

	Preschools with majority of staff employed for less than 1 year n = 2 preschools	Preschools with majority of staff employed for 1-5 years n = 14 preschools	Preschools with majority of staff employed for 6-10 years n = 3 preschools	Preschools with majority of staff employed for over 10 years n = 5 preschools
Composite climate score of 85-92 n = 8 preschools		7 (87.5% preschools from highest climate category)		1 (12.5% preschools from highest climate category)
Composite climate score of 76-84 n = 9 preschools	1 (11% preschools from mid-range climate category)	5 (56% preschools from mid-range climate category)	1 (11% preschools from mid-range climate category)	2 (22% preschools from mid-range climate category)
Composite climate score of 64-75 n = 7 preschools	1 (13% preschools from low range climate category)	2 (29% preschools from low range climate category)	2 (29% preschools from low range climate category)	2 (29% preschools from low range climate category)

The descriptive data suggests that having the majority of one's preschool staff employed beyond the 5-year period could be detrimental to a preschool's organisational climate, while staff retention from 1-5 years, coupled with some long-standing employees has the optimum effect. The findings reflect those of prior studies, where higher staff turnover was generally viewed as negatively associated with organisational climate, but where longer time at a workplace also showed some negative relationship with certain dimensions of job satisfaction, (Bloom, 1988; Haveman, 2006). Bloom, for example, reported length of employment as showing a negative relationship with perceptions of pay and opportunities for promotion.

However, it should be noted that the balance of staffing characteristics within individual settings was absent from this first stage of my analysis, which was statistically based and where the data was not designed to encompass the finer detail of the workplace. As a result, the extent to which different variables were interacting together, confounded by preschool size or other interpersonal variables, for any optimum climate to be reached could not be ascertained.

7.10. Age of Staff and Organisational Climate

Iutcovich, et al (2001) found the average age of teachers to be significantly related to all dimensions of organisational climate, as measured by the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey, (ECWES). Settings with older workers had a more positive work environment and an older more stable workforce was closely associated with a positive organisational climate. Iutcovich et al hypothesised that there was a reciprocal effect where a positive organisational climate resulted in a more stable workforce and vice versa. The five age categories used in my research can be seen in

Table 7.6 below. The findings showed the proportion of staff in different age groups as very similar across all 3 categories of organisational climate groups from the most positive to least positive climates. However, the highest climate preschools did have marginally more of their staff aged 55-64 than staff in the mid or low climate groups (10.9% compared with 5.1% and 8.1%). This mirrors, to some extent, the findings of Iutcovich et al (2001) and partially supports Aubrey et al's (2012) observation, which suggested that a setting was more likely to achieve its optimum climate where there was a combination of staff of an older age and with greater experience, alongside younger staff.

Table 7.6: Age of Staff and Organisational Climate

	Age 24 or under	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-64	Age 65+
High Climate Composite score of 85-92 n = 8 preschools n = 64 staff	8 staff (12.5% of staff in highest climate band)	19 staff (29.7% of staff in highest climate band)	11 staff (17.2% of staff in highest climate band)	19 staff (29.7% of staff in highest climate band)	7 staff (10.9% of staff in highest climate band)	0 staff
Mid-Climate Composite score of 76-84 n = 10 preschools n = 79 staff	8 staff (10.1% of staff in mid climate band)	21 staff (26.6% of staff in mid climate band)	22 staff (27.8% of staff in mid climate band)	23 staff (29.1% of staff in mid climate band)	4 staff (5.1% of staff in mid climate band)	1 staff (1.3% of staff in mid climate band)
Low Climate Composite score of 64-73 n = 8 preschools n = 87 staff	11 staff (12.6% of staff in lower climate band)	27 staff (31.1% of staff in lower climate band)	25 staff (28.7% of staff in lower climate band)	17 staff (19.5% of staff in lower climate band)	7 staff (8.1% of staff in lower climate band)	0 staff

7.11. Staff Qualifications and Organisational Climate

Staff from all 26 preschools were asked in their questionnaire to identify their highest qualification. The responses covered a broad range, from GCE/GCSE level to PhD. At the time of writing, 'full and relevant' early years' qualifications were defined by The Teaching Agency, which took over this role from the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) in March 2012. The Teaching Agency Qualifications Finder, located on the Department for Education website (DFE, 2013), catalogued 417 Early Years qualifications across seven levels. Indeed, the Nutbrown Review (2012) referred to the breadth of qualifications as a 'confusing' system. In its view, there were too many qualifications, many of which it regarded as not equipping the workforce with the knowledge and skills required to provide high quality early education and care.

The current Teaching Agency qualification levels broadly reflect the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The following are illustrations as used in my study. Level 2 qualifications included GCSE at grades A* to C; Level 3 qualifications included AS and A level, City and Guilds and NVQ level 3; Montessori Diplomas were at Level 4; Foundation Degrees at Level 5; Professional Diplomas and First Degrees at Level 6; Masters Degrees at Level 7 and Doctorates at Level 8.

All preschools in my study when taken collectively across the 3 climate ratings employed staff holding qualifications of all levels. A high proportion of level 6 staff qualifications were found across the range of organisational climate categories. The schools in the highest global climate rating group, as detailed in Table 7.7 on page 180, had the highest proportion of their collective staff in the Level 3 qualification

level (42%), with 39% of their collective staff holding a Level 6 qualification. The data however does not identify the number of staff in a support role, as exists in many nursery classes within schools, where teaching assistants or nursery nurses usually hold lower level qualifications and are employed to support the qualified teachers. A comprehensive picture of how staff with differing qualifications were employed and organised in the settings was not therefore apparent within this data analysis.

However, due to the lack of differential between the preschools in the three organisational climate categories and the very similar mean qualification levels between them, the descriptive data did not provide evidence of an association between qualification levels per se, and organisational climate scores for this particular sample.

Table 7.7: Staff Qualifications and Organisational Climate

	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7 plus	Mean Qualification Level
High Composite climate score of 85-92 n = 8 preschools n = 67 staff	**1 staff** (1.5% of staff in highest climate band)	**28 staff** (42% of staff in highest climate band)	**7 staff** (10% of staff in highest climate band)	**2 staff** (3% of staff in highest climate band)	**26 staff** (39% of staff in highest climate band)	**3 staff** (4.5% of staff in highest climate band)	**4.49**
7 of the 8 preschools in the high scoring climate band had staff with a level 6 qualification or higher							
Mid Composite climate score of 76-84 n = 10 preschools n = 80 staff	**4 staff** (5% of staff in mid climate band)	**20 staff** (25% of staff in mid climate band)	**14 staff** (17.5% of staff in mid climate band)	**2 staff** (2.5% of staff in mid climate band)	**35 staff** (43.75% of staff in mid climate band)	**5 staff** (6.25% of staff in mid climate band)	**4.73**
9 of the 10 preschools in the mid scoring climate band had staff with a level 6 qualification or higher							
Low Composite climate score of 64-73 n = 8 preschools n = 89 staff	**9 staff** (10.1% of staff in lower climate band)	**26 staff** (29.2% of staff in lower climate band)	**6 staff** (6.7% of staff in lower climate band)	**5 staff** (5.6% of staff in lower climate band)	**38 staff** (42.7% of staff in lower climate band)	**5 staff** (5.6% of staff in lower climate band)	**4.58**
All of the 8 preschools in the lower scoring climate band had staff with a level 6 qualification or higher							

7.12. The Separate Dimensions of Climate

To develop the descriptive analysis of the ECWES global climate scores where the variables of preschool size and structure, in particular, appeared as potentially valuable lines for further enquiry, alongside that of length of employment, the ECWES data was analysed further in terms of the separate ECWES climate dimensions. This stage of the analysis is reported in the subsequent sections of this

chapter. It used a narrower focus, continued into the second stage of the research design, using data from the high and low climate preschools only. A discussion of the rationale for this reduction in sample size based upon a theoretical purposive sampling technique is presented in Chapter 6, section 6.12 (p152-153).

The ten individual dimensions examined in this stage of the analysis, which collectively formed the overall ECWES climate assessment, were: Collegiality, Professional Growth, Supervisor Support, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting and Innovativeness. The definition of each dimension, as supplied by the author of ECWES (Bloom, 2010), is shown in Appendix 2.

This stage of the analysis focused upon the collective individual staff responses from preschools in the high climate category, compared with the collective staff responses from staff in the low climate category. The investigation of any statistical difference between the two groups in their perceptions of each ECWES climate dimensions was tested with the Fisher Exact Test For 2 x 2 Tables. A critical value of 0.05 was used as the cut off for significance.

The Individual staff responses varied to a small degree, due to some omissions in responses, but numbered approximately 63 from the high scoring preschools and 80 from the low scoring preschools. The findings revealed a high statistically significant difference (p values from 0.0001 to 0.000005) between the way in which staff from the high climate groups perceived each of the ten climate dimensions, compared with staff from the low climate group.

Staff within preschools which achieved a high organisational climate felt far more positive across all dimensions than staff in preschools with low climates. The reward system dimension which focused upon the degree of fairness and equity in the distribution of pay, fringe benefits, and opportunities for advancement, was where the greatest significant difference was identified between the two groups, followed by the dimension of innovativeness, professional growth and supervisor support.

7.13. Staff roles and Perceptions of Climate

My next step was to try to determine why the individual climate dimension profiles of the high and low climate preschool differed so significantly.

From the earlier descriptive analyses, that preschools with the highest staff numbers had a greater representation within the lowest climate group and conversely, that preschools with the smallest staff numbers had a higher representation within the highest climate group, I hypothesised that this diversity may have had some association with the organisation of hierarchical roles and duties. This line of enquiry was prompted by prior research which had identified difficulties between the roles of teacher and teaching assistant in primary and preschool settings (Al-Hassan, 2006; Groom, 2006; McGinty et al, 2008; Mistry and Sood, 2012), which anecdotal experience from my insider status also supported.

To investigate this aspect of the preschool environment further, responses from staff employed in teacher roles as opposed to support roles, such as teaching assistant roles, were analysed across the ten ECWES climate dimensions using the Fisher Exact Test. In the high climate group there were three preschools that employed staff in

both of these roles. Collectively, there were 8 teachers and 19 support staff. In the lowest climate group there were five preschools with 13 teachers and 21 support staff collectively. The Fisher Exact Test is described by Siegel & Castellan (1988), as particularly useful for analysing discrete data (either nominal or ordinal) when the two independent samples are small, and where it is not necessary for the two samples to be the same.

The responses from the teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses in the high climate preschools were very similar and showed no statistical difference in relation to any of the ten climate dimensions. However, the responses from staff employed in the two different types of roles within the low climate preschools, revealed a very different profile with significant differences in perception across five of the ten dimensions.

The findings revealed a strong unified response between teachers and support staff in the high climate preschools, which contributed to the high composite climate rating which they achieved. This consensus was at its strongest in three areas: that of 'supervisor support' (p= 0.9), involving such aspects as facilitative leadership and the level of useful evaluative and appraisal processes; 'task orientation' (p = 0.9), where time is used effectively and where there is a focus on outcomes and accountability, and the dimension of 'physical setting' (p = 0.9), with its reference to the general layout of classrooms/spaces, and availability of supplies and equipment.

Staff groups in the low climate setting however, were far more divided in their perceptions of individual climate dimensions, particularly regarding the dimension of decision making (p = 0.0001). Their perceptions differed regarding the emphasis

which the setting placed on organisational effectiveness and efficiency (p = 0.004), such as the efficient use of time (the dimension of task orientation). This was in direct contrast to the situation in the high climate preschools. Lack of consensus between teachers and support staff in the low climate group was also significant (p= 0.01) in terms of the extent to which they viewed policies, procedures and responsibilities, as clearly defined and communicated (the dimension of clarity), alongside the degree of fairness and equity in the distribution of pay, fringe benefits and opportunities for advancement (the dimension of reward system), p = 0.01. Finally, the two staff groups also differed significantly in their perceptions of the climate dimension of innovativeness, (p = 0.04) which describes the extent to which a setting adapts to change and encourages staff to find creative ways to solve problems.

7.14. Summary

The descriptive analysis of the initial ECWES data suggested size and structure of preschools, in addition to length of employment, as variables with some association with preschool overall climate. From the analysis of the ECWES data for the two preschool groups with the largest degree of variance between them, these findings were then investigated in terms of each separate climate dimension. This revealed a statistically significant difference between staff in the high and low climate groups regarding each of the ten climate dimensions. In addition, there was found to be a statistically significant difference in the level of consensus between teachers and support staff in the low climate groups across 5 climate dimensions (p = 0.04 to p = 0.0001), which was not present between teachers and support staff from the high

climate preschools. Chapter 8 reports on the qualitative data analysis which explored

these differences in terms of the day-to-day lived experience of staff.

Chapter 8

Findings and Analysis of Stage Two Data

8.1. Aims

This chapter reports on the second questionnaire and interview data from two subsets of preschools. This sub-sample comprised those preschools which had been identified in the initial stage of the research with a high category of organisational climate, and those identified with a low category. From the initial 8 high climate preschools, 6 preschools agreed to take part in this second research stage; and from the initial 8 low climate preschools, 5 agreed to take part.

The development of the lines of enquiry for stage 2 arose from the two parts of the stage 1 analyses reported in the previous chapter, supplemented by reference to the extant research literature reported in chapter 4, section 4.8, relating to hierarchical roles within the early years workplace (Al-Hassan, 2006; Aubrey et al, 2012; Barkham, 2008; Butt and Lance, 2005; Groom, 2006; Lumsden, 2011; Mistry and Sood, 2012; Simpson, 2011; Van Laere et al, 2012).

The findings of the stage one analysis of staff responses, including the analysis of the ten ECWES climate dimensions, reported in sections 7.12 and 7.13, highlighted the potential importance of the social processes and organisational structures within preschools in their association with preschool climate. The stage one findings suggested that in order to create a strong level of consensus between staff, there was a need for high levels of <u>supervisor support</u>, collaborative <u>decision making</u>, clearly defined and communicated procedures and responsibilities (<u>clarity</u>), adaptation to change with a positive attitude to problem solving, (<u>innovativeness</u>),

and an emphasis on organisational effectiveness and efficiency, including productive meetings (task orientation). The dimension of task orientation, was a significant dimension for staff cohesion in the high climate preschools, as well as a dimension identified with division between the perceptions of staff in the low climate settings. The value of these findings was key to the subsequent research stage which was directed towards adding a real-life perspective to the investigation. They provided a direction towards the most relevant questions to include within the second questionnaire and highlighted for me the importance of flexibility and on-going reflection within the research design, and the need to work alongside participants in the search for avenues of exploration best suited to fulfilling the research aims.

The second stage of the research collected data using a second questionnaire and interview process. It was designed to capture the differences in the process variables identified above, and the way in which they impacted upon staff perceptions of the early years environment. Its focus was upon the 'social system' dimension of Tagiuri's (1968) climate model, as presented in chapter 2 (2.3, p21 -22). This relates to the importance of relationships between people and groups in the workplace and the way in which decision making and communication are organised. The design of the second questionnaire with its open questions also enabled staff the freedom to include related information, as they did. This allowed an analysis of their responses in terms of Tagiuri's climate model and the three remaining dimensions of 'ecology' (physical and material aspects), 'milieu' (characteristics of the staff, such as age or length of experience), and 'culture' (the belief system of the school, its values, levels of teacher commitment and level of academic emphasis).

The dimension of 'reward system', identified as a significant ECWES dimension in the difference between the high and low climate groups in the first analysis stage, was not included as a specific area of focus in the final stage of this investigation. This decision was made due to the stronger line of enquiry highlighted from the first questionnaire data analysis stage relating to the social structure of the workplace. Numerous studies have confirmed that many early years staff feel underpaid (Barkham, 2008; Butt & Lance, 2005; Cassidy et al, 2011; Hossain et al, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012; Pope & Stremmel, 1992), as reported in several comments within this study's second questionnaire. On this basis there appeared less to be gained by specifically pursuing the impact of reward systems, in comparison with that of social structure issues, where there appeared a greater potential for original findings.

8.2. Data Collection

The data was collected from the sample of 69 respondents from 11 preschools. This process followed the rationale explained in chapter 6, section 6.12. Respondents numbered 30 from the high category preschools and 39 from the lower category, as shown in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1: Second Questionnaire Data Collection Stage: Staff Numbers

	Teachers/Middle Managers/ Room Leaders	Support staff	Total number of staff
High Climate preschools	13	17	30
Low Climate Preschools	15	24	39

Data from this second research stage was analysed in accordance with a constructivist grounded theory approach. It employed a system of initial coding, with

subsequent refinement using a focused coding stage to distinguish interconnected concepts/codes which provided the greatest potential to develop earlier insights. The terminology and process of focused coding is a recognised and well-used constructivist grounded theory practice (Charmaz, 2001; Macomber, 2011; Sbaraini et al, 2011; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). It is one recommended by Charmaz (2014) and involves the development of higher order aggregate codes of the most promising tentative initial categories, which are woven together to develop initial lines of enquiry. The aim was then to gain an understanding of how these focused codes might relate to one another, highlighting substantive areas and a theoretical direction from the emerging lines of enquiry. The aspects of this full process are detailed in chapter 5, section 5.6. The objectives relating to stage 2 of the analyses were:

- To compare and contrast, in detail, the organisational characteristics of a sample of 11 individual preschools in relation to their organisational climates.
- To critically explore any characteristics found to be most effective in promoting a positive organisational climate, and ways in which these are established in the workplace.

Staff questionnaire comments relating to areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the workplace created the starting point of the analysis, which when analysed collectively, highlighted several wider focused codes from which to gain a deeper insight of the processes involved and any relationship between them. This process is presented in the following paragraphs.

8.3. Areas of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

The questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix 6, (p309 – 314) with the processes relating to its construction and piloting detailed in chapter 6, section 6.11.

<u>Areas of Satisfaction for staff</u>

In answer to the question: **'Identify any aspects of your job/role which you are very satisfied with'**; the 69 staff across the two climate groups made 78 comments in total. The number and percentage of comments in each initial coded category from the high climate preschools can be viewed in Appendix 10, (p 318 – 319) and from the low climate preschools in Appendix 11, (p320 – 321). The initial codes, directly identified from the words and phrases of questionnaire responses are shown below and supported prior research (Pope and Stremmel; 1992; Wagner and French; 2010; Cottle, 2011) where staff reported 'the work itself' (child interactions), as creating most satisfaction for them.

1. Contact with the children (29 comments; 37% of total comments)

2. Organisation of the setting e.g. allocation of duties and rota system (14 comments; 18% of total comments)

3. Teamwork (19 comments; 24% of total comments)

4. All aspects of the job (4 comments; 5% of total comments)

5. Singular, school specific local issues (12 comments; 15% of total comments)

However, beyond the initial codes which emerged, collective references from staff, in keeping with comments relating to areas of dissatisfaction, as discussed on pages 193 -196, could be grouped into three broader interconnecting areas for further

investigation. These focused codes are shown in Figure 8.1 below and included the three areas of: breadth and depth of issues, any interdependence between organisational processes and teamwork, and levels of consensus across hierarchical roles.

Figure 8.1: Initial and Focused Codes
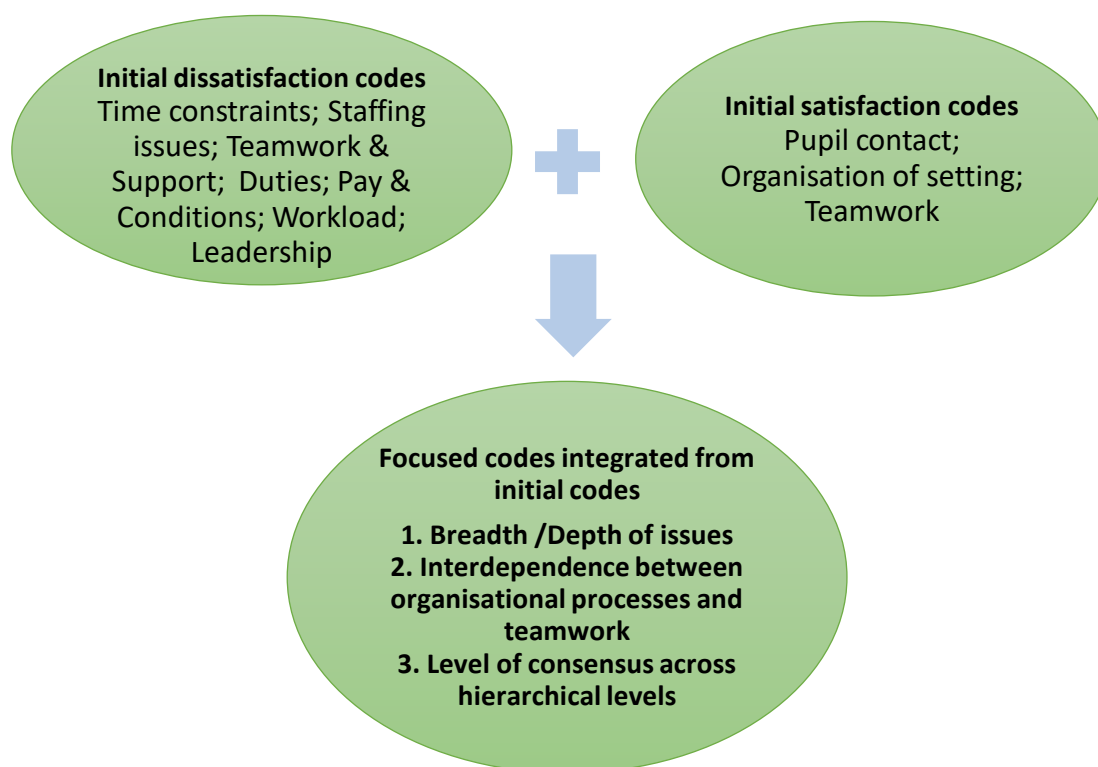
Analysis of the breadth of the comments from staff in the 6 high climate preschools suggested a perspective of satisfaction gained from aspects of the workplace beyond, as well as within, the immediate classroom. Not only was there a slightly higher percentage of positive comments from the high climate group relating to teamwork and the organisation of the setting than for the low climate group (45% compared with 37%), but the comments themselves were broader and stronger in context. This is illustrated in the statements from middle managers from the two climate groups reported in the following paragraph.

Statements from 6 of the 13 middle managers in the high climate preschools evidenced a <u>connection and overview</u> of the separate variables of the preschool educational experience (environment, staff, children and parents), which was not in evidence to the same extent from the middle manager comments in the low climate settings, and which emerged as a substantive characteristic in the development of a positive climate. The six middle managers from the high climate preschools spoke of their pleasure in overseeing the nursery team, in their satisfaction with their special educational needs role, which included meeting with other professionals, satisfaction with taking part in parents' evenings, with organising the environment, with their safeguarding role. A senior practitioner in one high climate preschools, wrote of her feeling that:

> *'Overall, I am lucky to enjoy my responsibilities towards children, parents and colleagues'.*

A head in a different setting mirrored this sentiment with their written comment that:

> *'Overall I am very pleased with the dire*ction *and my role in overseeing the Nursery and staff team'.*

In contrast, from the fifteen middle managers in the low climate group, only one made a comment relating to aspects of their role outside the classroom. This was in terms of the enjoyment which they gained from attending management meetings and overseeing the Christmas play.

The analysis of any interconnection between teamwork and organisational processes, as a focused questionnaire code, also revealed a strong operational

system within the high climate settings. These operational systems impacted positively upon <u>all</u> layers of the hierarchical system, reinforcing the importance of the concept of connectivity within and across the workplace. This supported the stage 1 findings of a strong level of agreement in the responses to the ECWES climate rating scale between teachers and support staff in the high climate settings. Staff comments implied a positive inter-dependence between teamwork and organisational processes which did not appear to the same extent in the low climate settings. The two following support staff comments are used as illustrations of this point. The first is from a member of staff in a high climate setting:

> *'The rota is set so that all jobs are shared equally, spread between
> each member of staff so it's fair.'*

This compares with a comment from a staff member from the low climate group who wrote that:

> *'Some roles are overlapped or (some staff are) trying to take
> over some people's responsibilities'*

<u>Areas of dissatisfaction</u>

When staff from both climate groups were asked to comment on areas of their job/role which they were **NOT satisfied with**, there were 83 responses from the 69 staff. The initial codes which emerged from the transcripts of responses are reported in Appendix 12, (p322 -323) and Appendix 13, (p324 – 325) for the separate climate groups. They were:

- Time constraints (21 comments; 25% of total comments)

- Singular, school specific local issues (16 comments; 19% of total comments)

- Dissatisfaction with duties (13 comments; 16% of total comments)

- Staffing issues i.e. staff absences, poor quality of staff (10 comments; 12% of total comments)

- Pay and conditions (9 comments; 11% of total comments)

- Lack of teamwork/support (6 comments; 7% of total comments)

- Excessive workload (4 comments; 5% of total comments)

- Leadership issues (4 comments; 5% of total comments)

Support staff in both climate groups mentioned inadequacies in level of teamwork and excessive workload as areas of dissatisfaction, although both at low frequencies, (5.5% and 5.5% for the high climate group and 6% and 3% for the low group). Similarly, teachers in both climate groups rated time restraints as the highest area of dissatisfaction for them, (42% for the high climate group and 20% for the low climate group). However, the analysis of the focused codes again identified differences in breadth and emphasis of comments. There was a wider cross-section of perceived difficulties within the low climate preschools than in their high climate counterparts, as well as differences in consensus between staff groups within the two climate categories.

Areas of dissatisfaction for staff in the low climate settings reflected a breadth of dissatisfaction, referring to logistical daily problems such as lack of resources, and volume of emails. In addition, there was reference to more deeply rooted and arguably less resolvable problems, such as the lack of professional development, top-heavy assessment, and leadership problems. The following comments made by staff

from four different low climate preschools exemplify the presence of such deeply rooted problems as staff spoke of:

> *'Frustration with early years not really given a high status'*
>
> *'Little praise from managers'*
>
> Dissatisfaction *'with the quality of staff being employed into the setting'*
>
> *'not feeling valued'*

Such strong areas of dissatisfaction were also set within an environment where staff perceptions were less unified. While middle managers and support staff in the high climate preschools shared consensus that time management was by far their greatest concern, for middle managers and support staff from the low climate preschools this was not the case, with support staff raising their most prominent concerns in relation to their everyday duties, such as lunchtime supervision and after school clubs. The sharing of duties across hierarchical roles, which created satisfaction for respondents from the high climate preschools, as illustrated in the comment on page 193, regarding the sharing of rotas fairly and equally, was not evidenced within the low climate preschool data to the same extent. Figure 8.2 on the following page details the characteristics associated with a positive climate, as identified from the focused coded analysis of the data.

Figure 8.2: Characteristics Associated with a Strong Climate

8.4. Questionnaire Comments and Teamwork

A difference in emphasis between the two climate groups was further supported in the subsequent sections of questionnaire responses. These additional comments extended the process of theorising used in the grounded theory approach employed, as well as corroborating earlier information reported. The comments related to questions of any manageable changes which respondents felt would improve their day to day duties and create greater satisfaction for them, and to the ways in which staff roles were organised which had a positive effect on the workplace for staff. The initial response codes are reported in Appendix 14 and Appendix 15.

In terms of manageable changes to the workplace, the preliminary analysis of the initial codes showed that staff from the high climate preschools made no references

to improvements to their workplaces which related to teamwork. In contrast, 18% of the comments made by respondents from the low climate group (n = 8 comments) did make reference in relation to improvements which related to teamwork. When these comments were analysed in terms of the focused codes of breadth and depth of issues, interdependence between organisational processes, and levels of consensus across staff roles, an additional substantive issue emerged of a lack of empathy and understanding between staff with the need for stronger organisational processes to support greater cohesion. This supported the earlier theoretical direction of the need for connectivity within the workplace. These comments are exemplified below from individual staff in four different preschools:

> *'The need to be complimented on our work.'*

> *'When we are off sick not to get a text expecting us to be in the next day and feeling we are letting the team down.'*

> *'More open communication from staff who have concerns or issues.'*

> *'The introduction of team building activities for staff to improve team work.'*

The importance of the quality of staff relations and shared understandings, was highlighted by Sharrock (2014) as an important dynamic in facilitating feelings of appreciation of one's efforts, as supported here in the findings of this study. Moreover, it is a dynamic which has relevance, not only for studies of school climate and staff well-being, but also as Ekholm and Hedin (1987) and Bloom (1996) reported, for the impact that teamwork can have upon the commitment which staff have to the school programme and the effort which they put into their work.

Initial coded comments from the two climate groups in response to the question '**Identify any ways in which staff roles are organised which have a positive effect for staff'**, can be viewed in Appendix 16 (p330 -331) and Appendix 17, (p332 - 333). Typical of the 17 positive comments (8 from the high climate group and 9 from the low climate group), were references to staff supporting one another and sharing ideas. Comments from two teaching assistants in a low climate setting also made reference to the friendly environment and to good working/social relationships in their preschool.

However, again, analysis of the focused codes provided insights into the association between teamwork and operational aspects of the workplace and added further weight to the importance of shared understandings and support between staff. From the 6 high climate preschools, 14 of the 28 comments (50%) were related to the organisation of staffing roles and associated support. This compared with 4 comments from staff in the low climate group (16%). Different respondents from four high climate preschools made reference to the supportive mechanisms in place for staff, which were not present in comments from the low climate group. This was in terms of more experienced staff taking additional duties, to extra support from management, reference to well-experienced room leaders developing the skills of their colleagues, an acknowledgement of the additional duties of teaching assistants in contrast to their teaching colleagues, and sharing roles with senior members of staff in the absence of the room leader. A manager in one of the high climate preschools captured the importance of this supportive approach to the positive climate of their workplace in the comment:

> *'Students and apprentices supported by nursery practitioners.*
> *Nursery practitioners supported by room leaders.*
> *Room leaders supported by the Deputy.*
> *Deputy supported by Manager.*
> *Manager supported by management team.'*

Similarly, in terms of the deployment of staff, the focused analysis of breadth and depth of comments highlighted further differences between the two climate groups. While typical comments across the groups referred to responsibilities being evenly distributed within preschools and to staff strengths being utilised effectively, comments from the high climate settings added reference to the way in which staff in different roles, and with different personal characteristics and experience, connected and worked together. Staff from 3 different high climate settings spoke of:

> *'Diversity of staff; old and young bringing different strengths to the settings: wisdom and experience on the one side and energy on the other.'*

> *'Experienced room leaders, developing skills of practitioners and enabling good levels of communication'.*

> *'All staff having some additional responsibilities.'*

Recognition of the abilities of staff as individuals by management in the high climate preschools, suggested an environment where <u>all</u> roles were valued across the staff team. It mirrored the findings of prior research where the quality of staff relationships between co-workers was highlighted as an important variable in positive workplace perceptions, as well as mediators of stress (Aubrey et al, 2012; Cottle, 2011; Groom, 2006; Ratcliffe et al, 2011; Sharrocks, 2014*)*.

The sentiment of bringing different strengths to the workplace and actively developing the skills of practitioners were areas which required development within

the low climate preschools, where three respondents from different settings referred to the need for improvements, which included:

> '*More mature staff, with staff old enough to know what they are doing*'

> '*The pairing of experienced staff with those who are less experienced.*'

> '*The need for a clearer understanding of the roles of TAs and teachers, and how to respect these*'.

This is a difference between the two groups which develops the Stage 1 data analysis findings. Not only did the highest climate preschools have marginally more of their staff aged between 55-64, than staff in the mid or low climate groups (10.9% compared with 5.1% and 8.1%), but the data from the second questionnaire revealed that they made better use of their skills and attributes in terms of the support and positive role modelling that they could provide. A younger staff member in one preschool had commented that roles were '*shared very well*' between older and younger staff, with younger staff being '*more active*' and the older staff '*giving wise advice*'. A teaching assistant in another preschool recognised the '*sharing of knowledge*' between two reception class teachers, where one was experienced and the other had '*new and fresh ideas*', while in a third preschool a room leader in a setting with several younger staff, spoke of the older manager and deputy manager helping practitioners to develop their skills.

From the stage 2 questionnaire responses of staff in the low climate preschools, the organisational processes related to teamwork did not appear as facilitating the strength of inclusivity, understanding and connectivity found within the high climate preschools. They did not have the same organisational processes in place to manage or promote aspects of the workplace such as practitioner skill development, or

student appraisal. Instead there were many more comments related to the generic theme of teamwork, but without reference to how this was promoted by organisational processes. The implication from these comments is arguably that good teamwork in the low climate settings may have relied to a greater extent on individual personalities and motivation, rather than well-developed organisational structures designed to connect staff and departments within the workplace.

8.5. Interview data

The full interview process is detailed in chapter 6, section 6.13 and 6.14, and includes the characteristics of the 20 interviewees as provided in Table 6.5 on page 159. Initial interviewee questions related to the answers which respondents had given to the open questions in the second questionnaire. This allowed respondents the opportunity to corroborate and/or extend their questionnaire answers, by adding additional detail, or by making connections with other associated workplace issues. Depending on the direction of discussion, and interspersed with this line of enquiry, was also an approach which Yin (2014) refers to as the 'mental', rather than the 'verbal' line of enquiry. This was an approach which allowed the development of prior findings from the study, which had raised the importance of operational systems which fostered a connectivity across staff roles, where there was a strong understanding and support amongst staff which extended across departments.

As with the analysis of the questionnaire responses, initial codes were identified from the transcripts of the words and phrases within the responses. Across the wide range of initial codes from the high and low climate interviewee responses, three codes emerged with potential interconnections between them for further

investigation. These three codes are shown in bold print in Figure 8.3 on page 203.

While two of these overarching initial codes (teamwork and organisational aspects of the setting) expanded those identified in the questionnaire analysis of open responses, the code of resolution of problems emerged as a new code, not identified within the previous data set.

The overarching initial codes related to:

1. Teamwork

2. Resolution of problems

3. Organisational/Operational aspects of the workplace

A fourth overarching code of 'Community' was identified for the high climate interviewee responses, although this was not present at all for the low climate responses. For ease of identification the community code is highlighted in the following diagram with a yellow background.

Figure 8.3: Interview Codes: interconnecting Themes
NB: The category of Sense of Community related to the High Climate Group only

Communication/Open Forum

Approachable Management

Warmth/Good relationships

Local families/intake

Varied Length of Employment

Resolution of Problems

Teamwork

Sense of Community

Speed of action

Clarity of systems in place

Action Plan

Religious ethos

Committed Staff

Leadership/Management Support

Organisational/ Operational Processes

Staff Meetings

Planning

Time Constraints

Negative Comments

Professional relationships

Roles of responsibility

Administrative paperwork

Staff Unity

Covering for absent staff

Staff Roles/Job Descriptions

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Within the broader range of interviewee comments, compared with those from the questionnaire responses, teamwork was again distinguished as a potentially strong focused code for investigation, incorporating the association with organisational and operational processes. Analysis of breadth and depth of interviewee comments, alongside the level of consensus and inclusivity across hierarchical roles, were areas of analysis which also remained a focus. These focused codes mirrored those of the questionnaire analysis. They remained as areas which appeared as having the potential to develop further insights into the enabling processes of a positive climate and to further develop the tentative theoretical direction of the analysis in terms of the importance of the social processes within the workplace, in particular the existence of a connection and an understanding and empathy between staff. This included strong operational and supportive systems which impacted upon all hierarchical levels, where all roles were valued.

Each overarching initial code will be examined in the following sections, drawing upon the focused areas for analysis as presented above, and highlighting any relationships between them and with the quality of staff relations.

8.6. Interview Comments and Teamwork

Similarities

Interconnected with interviewee comments relating to teamwork, were responses which highlighted the strong impact of clear communication upon preschool climate, where there was an open forum for the sharing of ideas. This emerged as a facilitator of mutual support and of the development of processes which were perceived positively across hierarchical roles. References to communication processes and

contact between staff was a thread running through the majority of the high climate preschool interviewee responses, with 10 of the 11 staff (which numbered 47 comments in total), making unsolicited positive comments regarding mutually supportive teamwork incorporating the process of strong communication. Staff from the low climate preschools also made varied references during interview to aspects of teamwork including communication (31 comments in total), especially in Preschool 1, where 12 of the 31 comments were made. Typical positive interview comments from both groups of preschools, in terms of teamwork and the sharing of knowledge and ideas are exemplified below:

- High Climate: '*New assistants advised to approach other staff for help and advice.'*

- Low Climate: '*There is a font of knowledge within the school*.'

- High Climate: '*Everyone listens at meetings and are willing to 'try things out'.'*

- Low Climate: '*You can contribute to staff meetings, even whole school staff meetings.'*

Differences

However, there were also clear differences highlighted from the interview analysis that complemented and extended the questionnaire responses relating to the breadth and strength of comments. Not only was there greater detail in the interviewee comments relating to communication from the high climate preschools, which during the analysis added to the impression of the strength of teamwork and inclusivity across hierarchical levels, but there was also a connectedness and understanding between staff across departments (e.g. nursery and reception

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classes), which linked with earlier staff responses related to a broad overview of the workplace. References to this were made from staff in all 5 high climate preschools which implied a sense of an open and supportive environment.

Interviewees within the high climate preschools spoke of levels of open communication where staff were accepting of the opinions of others and the fact that *'everyone makes mistakes'*. One comment was made that: *'If someone wasn't happy they wouldn't keep it to themselves and people wouldn't take things to heart'.* The 2 interviewees within the setting where these comments were made corroborated one another's perceptions of the positive teamwork in the setting, making 15 'teamwork' comments in total. They mentioned that: *'staff know what's going on and how they can improve';* that there were *'no tensions when issues were raised – it's <u>how</u> you bring things up'.* There was an *'open atmosphere of sharing'* where, *'all work well together which makes it a better environment for the children'.*

A second high climate preschool spoke of a system of '*working partners*' who supported one another, while a third preschool spoke of a 'culture' of talking to one another, especially where any misunderstandings may have occurred between colleagues. This inclusive atmosphere of communication and positive contact between staff was present in the three remaining preschools where comments referred to staff who were willing to '*try things out',* to, '*a very strongly knit team'* who could, '*rely on one another*', and to comments taken positively at staff meetings. The open systems within which these high climate preschools functioned appeared to have communication circuits which embraced their entire system and facilitated a positive level of understanding, cooperation and consensus between staff.

While there was one low climate preschool which did appear to have such strong communication and understanding within the nursery team, the absence of any reception class staff for interview in this setting, precluded the investigation of the extent to which this positive ethos was present across departments.

From the analysis of teamwork and communication/contact comments within the remaining four low climate preschools however, and in contrast with the high climate preschools, evidence of negativity and a lack of engagement and understanding between staff roles and across subsystems emerged. Comments made within one low climate preschool, specifically related to problems across departments of the school. The interviewee spoke of staff getting on well, but also spoke of management within the setting not understanding the frustrations which staff experienced. The early years department where this particular interviewee worked, was set within an independent fee-paying primary school, teaching children beyond the stage of early years. This is a finding which supports the stage 1 analysis (section 7.8), where preschool structure, in terms of the breadth of age range taught, was identified as a characteristic associated with climate. The interviewee in the early years department of this school commented that senior management did not spend enough time in the early years department, and that:

> *'overall the Head doesn't know what goes on in Early Years'.*

The interviewee continued, that the Pre-Prep Headteacher would occasionally visit, although the respondent felt that the Head did not know how hard staff worked in the nursery.

This lack of a shared understanding within and between departments in the low climate preschools was also reported by interviewees from the remaining three settings. The initial interviewee in one setting highlighted the difference between the working environments across the early years departments where in her department the climate was positive, compared with that of other sections of the school. This had led her to believe that:

> '*It is the people in the setting, rather than the way the setting is organised, which gives the setting a positive feel'*.

The second interviewee within the same setting also made reference to a lack of inclusivity and understanding across staff roles, where she spoke of the school's current operational systems as creating unnecessary segregation of staff roles and responsibilities. In a third low climate preschool, mention was made of an atmosphere at staff meetings where there were opportunities to speak out, but where some staff were unsure about doing so in case their comments upset their colleagues. Such restrictions in communication, also had an additional element of negativity in the remaining low climate preschool, where an interviewee spoke of staff meetings where, '*comments are valued as long as it is not directed at anyone…You are free to express yourself but make sure you are not attacking anyone.'* Whilst this could be seen as a positive comment, the implication was that inappropriate comments had been made in the past.

Further evidence of a lack of connectivity across departments and hierarchical roles within this preschool were also apparent in the interviewee's comment that:

> '*the room in which I work has a good mixture of staff…I think*

It's the maturity of staff; they know what they're there for, whereas in other rooms there's a bit of a mix of staff not really knowing what am I here for; am I just filling the time to get my pay.'

A statement from the interviewee's colleague meanwhile, raised the issue of a lack of understanding between staff and their respective roles, as she questioned the authority of the room leaders in the setting. She spoke of her perception that staff with these additional responsibilities, acted unfairly towards their workmates, making requests of them which were predominantly driven by hierarchical rather than operational considerations, and a sense that, '*I'm the room leader so I will give out this rule to do this and that*'.

The analysis of the interview data relating to teamwork, reflected the questionnaire comments reported in section 8.4 of this chapter. It suggested that the reliance upon personalities alone to facilitate an ethos of positive teamwork was not sufficient for it to have an impact beyond the immediate environment. Instead, for this to take place, and as theoretical constructs of organisations suggest, as reported in Chapter 2, section 2.2 (Katz & Khan, 1966; Meyer, 1978; Parsons, 1960; Scott & Davis, 2015), there needed to be a shared understanding of roles and behaviours across all its separate departments. Strong communication systems enabled an understanding for staff across the workplace of how to make best use of communication channels and appeared to provide them with the confidence to use them. This included an ethos where the sharing of ideas was both valued and welcomed.

8.7. Operational Issues

The initial coded interview comments relating to operational issues can be viewed in Appendix 18 for the high climate group and Appendix 19 for the low climate group. The analysis and evaluation of the comments again highlighted the facilitating variable of <u>clear and open communication systems</u>, linked with strong operational systems, and the substantive issues of <u>a 'connectedness'</u> between aspects of the workplace, and a <u>supportive and empathetic environment</u>.

The most typical comments within both climate groups, were factual references to staff contact at regular staff meetings. A crucial difference between the staff meeting comments however, was again found in the presence of negative references. Interviewees in the high climate group made no negative comments relating to staff meetings. This was in contrast to staff in the low climate group, where there were negative comments from 3 of the 5 preschools, as illustrated below. These referred to a lack of effective time management and to interpersonal staff issues concerning communication, including a lack of inclusivity and guidance relating to codes of practice:

> *'If there is no specific staff meeting agenda and staff bring up issues, it can become a bit 'rowdy', so it's not really very productive for someone who has worked from 8.00am to 6.00pm and then has to stay, because staff meetings are after work.'*
>
> *'Time is not used effectively at some whole school staff meetings where all of the assistants have to attend, when for a lot of the time it is not relevant for them.'*
>
> *'TAs (teaching assistants) don't attend official staff meetings, they have a separate TA meeting. We don't know the reason for this.'*

Beyond the operational aspect of communication/contact at staff meetings, there were similar differences between the climate groups in their emphasis on procedural processes to facilitate the smooth running of the workplace, supporting the evidence from the questionnaire responses reported in section 8.4. The interviewee comments from the 3 high climate preschools, which mentioned aspects of planning, contained no negative comments, but included reference to procedures designed to ease the burden of workload for staff, providing a supportive environment across hierarchical roles. Teacher comments from 5 of the 6 preschools in the high climate group evidenced the operational support offered in terms of administrative tasks, two examples of which are provided below from staff in different settings:

'The manager is aware of problems with paperwork and did try to resolve this by giving staff a little time in the afternoon'

'Staff already have additional time in which to complete the children's files'

Support in the high climate preschools also included senior staff taking the responsibility for completing the planning paperwork, as well as the efficient use of time. The three sets of comments specifically related to planning were that:

'We plan together. The weekly planning is shared'.

'The room leader does the planning with input from the girls'.

'We plan on a day when there are fewer children so that we can get together. We all give input to planning, then it is completed by the room leader'.

Interview comments from the 5 low climate preschools reflected those from the high climate group in their reference to the sharing of the administrative workload, where staff commented that:

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> *'Everyone stays for planning after work on Thursday'*
>
> *'Everyone is involved in planning'*
>
> *'Planning is completed in your own year groups'*

However, this positive perspective was again counter-balanced by negative comments. Staff in 2 separate low climate preschools mentioned that:

> *'There is no specific time for planning'*
>
> *'Teachers do the planning, with no teaching assistant input'*

An interviewee from a preschool in a third low climate group specifically mentioned a lack of support with paperwork, where she described the level of administrative work as: *'just too much',* adding that, if staff got behind with their paperwork*:*

> *'they get into trouble……Planning has to be done quickly …each*
>
> *person will plan separately'.*

Such findings support those of Wagner and French's (2010) study of motivation and work satisfaction which emphasised the importance of operational characteristics and processes, rather than personality traits, upon their association with behaviours and attitudes within social groups. This again included the need for effective communication between staff, where informational feedback between colleagues facilitated a greater degree of staff persistence, motivation and well-being. In addition, Wagner and French's (2010) findings also suggested an association between motivation and teamwork, and the presence of choice within organisational systems, allowing some control for individuals in making decisions.

The promotion of individual responsibility and challenge for staff in the high climate preschools was an aspect which supported this proposition. Comments from staff in 3 of the 6 high climate preschools specifically mentioned the issue of responsibility and challenge, where they had an individual as well as a collective role and where:

> *'Staff have their own designated areas that they are responsible for; it really does work!'*

> *'Challenge is given to new appointees as and when they are ready'*

> *'Recruitment is not as crucial as empowering people'*

This was an approach which was not mentioned in comments from the interviewees in the low climate preschools, and which, as reported in section 8.3 of this chapter, may have impacted upon the narrower and fragmented perspective of the workplace which they adopted in contrast with their high climate colleagues.

8.8. Resolution of Problems

From the focused analysis of the comments related to resolution of problems there was further support regarding the importance to preschool climate of interconnections between teamwork and organisational structures, with a connectivity and shared understandings between staff, alongside further evidence of the enabling variable of strong communication circuits. Many interviewees emphasised management's desire to resolve problems which, in turn, facilitated positive perceptions for staff. The managers of three of the six high climate preschools were specifically referred to as people who would listen, take responsibilities and resolve problems where they arose.

This was an aspect which clearly differentiated between the contact and communication circuits of the two climate groups. While comments were made from 5 of the 6 high climate preschools relating to resolution of problems in a positive way, with no direct negative comments at all, the statements made by interviewees in the low climate preschools contained both positive and negative comments.

Staff in the high climate settings, spoke of a process where all staff were involved in the resolution of problems. Where:

> '*At staff meetings everyone discusses any problems*'.

They gave examples of ways in which organisational difficulties had been resolved, such as the absence of collective meeting times to share ideas for the following week's activities, which was overcome by staff annotating their ideas to the planning sheet placed on the notice board. In another preschool, the aim of creating a better work life balance was achieved by introducing a new working system of 4 full days and 1 half day each week. This had been introduced by management after input and discussion with all staff.

In contrast, although interviewees in the low climate settings spoke of management '*sorting out problems*', there was also reference across all 5 low climate preschools of a strong negativity, where staff felt their perceptions of problems were not listened to or acted upon. Staff from 4 different preschools spoke of situations where:

> '*Staff do know who to go to with any problems, but whether the problems will be dealt with is another matter*.'

'Staff are listened to and things are written down, but they seem to go round in circles.'

'If the room leader informs the manager that someone isn't carrying out their duties, she is told 'It's you job; sort it''.

'Everybody knows who their line manager is, but not everyone feels 'heard'.

In addition, within three of the low climate preschools, where staff had put ideas forward for the resolution of problems, it appeared that there were occasions when they felt that these had either not been grasped, or not discussed. A staff member in one preschool, for example, mentioned that her request for PPA time (planning, preparation and assessment time) had not been resolved, and that as a result, she was: *' probably just going to be proactive about taking some time'.*

The lack of a 'voice' and recognition of an individual presence by staff in some of the low climate preschools, again emphasised the importance of a shared identity and shared ownership in the workplace, in facilitating a positive workplace. This is an element found by several researchers to be an important characteristic in achieving preschool quality and a strong organisational climate (Anning et al, 2010; Aubrey et al, 2012; Butt & Lance, 2005; Cottle, 2011; Groom, 2006; McGinty et al, 2008; Pavey & Faress, 2009; Ratcliff et al, 2011). Preschool staff responses to interviews from the Pavey and Faress (2009) Somerset study, and from the Cottle (2011) study of centres in London and two shire counties, both spoke of their perceptions of quality being linked to having an individual, as well as a collective purpose. Within such an environment, staff from the Pavey and Faress (2009) and the Cottle (2011) studies commented that their confidence was promoted and that they felt their opinions were valued. Cottle (2011) moreover, directly linked the presence of a collaborative

culture, also highlighted as important at the operational level by Aubrey et al (2012), as providing the conditions for addressing challenge:

> *'Whether challenges are perceived as overwhelming or merely as 'hurdles' appears to be dependent on the particular organisational climate of each setting, in other words the attitudes and understandings of the practitioners and their relationships'*
>
> *(Cottle, 2011, p261)*

8.9. Community

Staff from 5 of the 6 high climate preschools also made unsolicited and spontaneous comments relating to a sense of community, including:

> **'***We have lots of committed staff who stay after work because they love their jobs and they love the children and their families.'*
>
> *'The children come from the immediate local area. They have lots of returning families...Most staff enjoy seeing the children coming in. They enjoy the rapport they build up with them and then with their family. That's what possibly makes you work to the best of your abilities. If you get personal with people you feel a responsibility to them.'*
>
> *'Parents and families are local, and a lot of children have had siblings here. It's a community feeling; everyone knows everyone. It makes it quite good.'*

A specific reference was made by an interviewee in one preschool when she was asked if she had anything to add to her comments. She responded that the element which 'joined the staff together' was the religious ethos of the school, where their core faith bound them together. She mentioned a 'character development programme', which she explained was based upon the virtues of obedience, order

and respect. She explained that these virtues filtered into all aspects of the preschool from staff to the children.

The lack of mention within the low climate preschools of a sense of community may be a further indicator of the differences in their levels of teamwork when compared to the high climate group, where there was a sense of a connection and understanding between the different elements of the workplace. This suggestion can only be supposition from the findings as presented here, although it supports the questionnaire comments made by staff in the high climate presented in section 8.3 (p191 - 192). In these responses, middle managers described their satisfaction gained from their wider workplace overview, as they referred to the environment, staff, children and parents. This wider perspective was absent from middle manager questionnaire comments from the low climate settings.

8.10. Two Preschools in Context

In order to add a final dimension of detail to the analysis of the differing characteristics of preschools in the high and low climate categories, which to this point have been reported collectively, a specific analysis of the data from 2 individual preschools, will now be reported. The 2 preschools selected were that with the highest, and that with the lowest, composite climate score (90.4 and 64 respectively). As the research had progressed, this addition to the research design was seen as fulfilling the final layer of data required to create a fuller picture of everyday preschool life associated with two preschools with very different climates. The aim was to investigate the 'real-world' of these two settings, to build upon the breadth of information collated for the high and low climate groups as a whole and put the

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pieces of the jigsaw together within a natural and unitary context. This aim was achieved by returning to the respective data sets of the 2 preschools using data from the first and second questionnaires, in addition to the interview data. The school prospectus was also referred to in order to gain additional structural information related to the setting.

Preschool 1

Preschool 1 was the setting with the most positive organisational climate.

Classroom Organisation

The preschool prospectus reported the children as split into 2 groups, (rising three and rising four, i.e. the term before the child's 3rd or 4th birthday). The children each had a group teacher who monitored their development. The adult to child ratio was 1:5. The structural characteristics of Preschool 1, including size, type of setting, staff age and length of employment, were in keeping with the earlier quantitative and descriptive analyses of the high climate preschools as reported in Chapter 7, sections 7.7 to 7.10. It was a discrete setting, teaching children of only early years age. Although its curriculum was described in its website prospectus as based around the mandatory Early Years Foundation stage, as compiled by the Department for Education, it also had the stated aim of using the 'best of both traditional and Montessori methods'. Staff employment histories matched the high climate model of this study, with a balance between the number of staff employed in the setting between 1-5 years, and those who had been at the setting for over 10 years. There was also a balance of ages, as shown in Table 8.2 on the following page which was

found by Iutcovich et al (2001) to be associated with a more positive work environment. The preschool was small in size with small staff numbers (n=6).

Table 8.2: Preschool 1 Staff Characteristics

Staff positions with varying levels of responsibility	Age	Retention
Staff 1	36	18yrs
Staff 2	56	19yrs, 7 months
Staff 3	63	3yrs
Staff 4	52	2½yrs
Staff 5	30	1½months
Staff 6	26	2 months

In preschool 1, and in direct contrast to preschool 2, there were no distinct roles of teachers and teaching assistants, with the latter in a support role. Only the principal of the setting held a first degree at the time of the first questionnaire. As a privately-owned establishment, which was not part of a franchised group of nurseries, the success or otherwise of the setting, in terms of its continued existence, was the direct responsibility of the principal.

The manager of the preschool held what was referred to, at the time of the first questionnaire, as a Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Level 5 qualification (the work of the CWDC later passed to the Department for Education's Teaching Agency in March 2012). Their role was described by them as 'manager and teacher', although they did not hold a recognised teaching qualification. One member of staff at the time of completion of the first questionnaire had previous registered healthcare experience and described her role as a learning support assistant, supporting children with specific needs. From the remaining 4 staff who

completed the first questionnaire, 2 described their role as teacher and 2 as teaching assistant/nursery nurse. None held recognised teacher qualifications. Data from the second questionnaire expanded that from the initial data, where the activity of 'teaching' was referred to as a daily duty by 4 of the 6 staff. The 2 teaching assistants did not include the term 'teaching' as a descriptor of their roles, although both had been employed at the nursery for only a few months. Their duties were more general and were focused around preparation for activities, snack time with the children, playground supervision, in addition to some reference made to initial morning work with the children and Art activities.

Five of the six staff, at the time of the second questionnaire, held NVQ Level 3 qualifications with a senior member of staff holding a BA Honours in Childcare and Education. As such, staff roles in preschool 1, with the exception of the nursery Head were defined and allocated by requisite experience and skills.

Second Questionnaire and Interview comments: Overview of Preschool 1 (High Climate)

In terms of practice and ethos, staff teamwork was strong, with 5 of the 6 questionnaire respondents making reference to good professional relationships. Examples of these were the Head's comment of staff sharing duties with each other; the nursery teacher's statement that staff camaraderie was good; and an assistant's comment that she felt part of the group, included in informal and formal conversations.

Further extending the evidence of shared understandings across the team, facilitated by strong levels of communication, an interviewee spoke of staff meetings where

everyone sat around the table and discussed problems concerning either the staff or the children:

> *'We are just discussing and listening to each other's ideas and what each other thinks. Sometimes we are not thinking the same, but other times we are. The Head will go around everyone for their views.'*

Staff questionnaire comments from 4 of the 5 remaining staff supported the presence of a cohesive connected team, facilitated by strong operational aspects of the workplace. This was, in terms of '*the sharing of roles'*, '*the clarity of roles with specific duties'* and of a school which was '*very well organised'*. There were no negative questionnaire comments relating to the organisation of the setting in operational terms.

At interview a member of staff commented that:

> *'If they were 'really desperate' due to staff absence in the room, the administrator, would come out of the office to help. If the manager of the nursery is there on a Monday, they can also call on her to help.'*

The implication from the 2 sets of interview comments was of an atmosphere of inclusion and openness, where understanding between staff was strong. Their comments referred to the support which staff gave to one another. The leadership was 'open', strong and effective, and appreciated by staff. They commented that matters were addressed quickly, and the organisation of duties shared equitably. Where one member of staff had spoken to the Head about interpersonal friction, she felt that:

> *'the matter was soon going to be addressed formally'.*

The concept of strong leadership at the setting was mentioned by both interviewees. The senior member of staff reported that the Head took a lot of the responsibility and supported the staff well. If the interviewee was looking at an area of 'literacy', for example, and she was unsure of the activity to plan, she would always go to the Head and ask them to '*help her out*'. This view was corroborated by the second interviewee who said that the Head made sure that the job roles were '*shared nicely*' and that all staff were supported regardless of their length of time at the setting. She had only been in post for a month and a half and as a result felt that she:

> '*could easily be put out of the equation…But the Head has always made sure that they are all included in the meetings*'. They get all the sheets like all the teachers; they are told everything.'

Within this 'open environment' there appeared to be a consensus between staff, at all levels, for the discussion of ideas in an atmosphere of respect for one another's views. The comment was made at interview that:

> '*Staff will talk together about what is happening at particular tables and why. They will join together, probably at the beginning of each half-term, to discuss things such as display boards, so that everyone knows what needs doing.*'

The frequency of comments at interview, and in questionnaire responses, highlighted these interpersonal aspects of the preschool, rather than more structural aspects of conditions of service and physical setting. Thus, from the ten dimensions of the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES), initially used to determine the level of climate within the preschool sample, the three dimensions of professional growth, reward system and physical setting were not referred to by staff in giving their view of their workplace. Instead, the dimensions with a greater

interpersonal connection; collegiality, supervisor support, clarity, decision making, goal consensus, innovativeness, and to a certain extent, task orientation (i.e. the degree of emphasis placed on good planning), were highlighted by staff to encapsulate the positive aspects of their workplace.

Comments regarding possible improvements to the workplace as a whole were reported in questionnaire comments by the 4 most experienced staff at the preschool and referred to a lack of time regarding the completion of paperwork. This reflected the high climate responses as a whole, where 42% of staff responses to the question of areas of dissatisfaction within the workplace referred to time constraints. Additional references by the 4 more experienced staff in preschool 1 however, also reflected the motivation of staff, seen within some high climate preschools as a whole, to try and address these problems. This was through the suggestion of various ways of creating non-contact time from the children in order that staff had time within the week to complete administrative duties.

Preschool 2

Preschool 2 was the setting with the least positive organisational climate.

<u>Classroom Organisation</u>

The early years department of 4 classes was set within an independent school. The preschool's structural characteristics of size and type of setting were in keeping with the earlier quantitative and descriptive analyses of the low climate group, as discussed in the previous chapter, sections 7.7 to 7.10. It was not a discrete setting and taught children beyond the early years stage. As such, it had a high number of

staff overall. These characteristics matched the stage 1 analyses, where classes within independent schools had the largest proportion of their schools in the lowest climate category (46%) and the lowest number of preschools in the highest climate category (18%).

At the time of the final questionnaire completion in December 2013, there were 11 staff in total, which included teachers and teaching assistants. This number excluded specialist teachers of PE, French and Music. All staff held a relevant early years qualification. Staff characteristics relating to age and retention are shown in Table 8.3 below.

Table 8.3: Preschool 2 Staff Characteristics

Staff positions with varying levels of responsibility	Age	Retention
Staff 1	41	11 yrs
Staff 2	41	2½yrs
Staff 3	41	1yr
Staff 4	46	3yrs
Staff 5	55	11yrs
Staff 6	61	14yrs
Staff 7	54	10yrs
Below are indicated staff still on role in the EY department, but who were unable to complete the final questionnaire due to after school commitments. Their approximate ages were therefore taken from the initial questionnaire		
Staff 8	25-34 age group	13yrs
Staff 9	25-34 age group	11yrs
Staff 10	25-34 age group	13yrs
Staff 11	35-44 age group	10yrs

The staff of 11, excluding the Headteacher, matched the model found in this study's earlier analysis of the characteristics of the initial sample of 26 preschools where there was a greater number of staff employed beyond 5 years in the low climate preschools (58%), than in the high climate preschools (12.5%). Within preschool 2, there were 73% of its early years staff employed in the setting for a period longer than 5 years. Unlike the high climate preschool however, and contrary to prior research (Iutcovich et al, 2001), the large number of mature employees did not appear to have a positive impact upon the organisational climate of the setting, or, if they did, this was not sufficient to mitigate against other variables impacting upon the climate.

Perceptions of climate dimensions

The initial stage 1 finding of statistically significant differences between teacher and support staff perceptions of climate in the low climate preschools, as reported in Chapter 7, section 7.13, was re-examined in terms of the specific perception of staff within preschool 2. This analysis had not been possible for preschool 1, where there was no such clear delineation of hierarchical roles. The statistical data analysis of staff responses to the ECWES dimensions used the Fisher Exact test. The separate responses of the 4 teachers and 6 teaching assistants however revealed no statistically significant difference between them to any of the climate dimensions.

When investigating the rank order of climate dimensions which gained the highest mean scores from staff in their separate roles of teacher and teaching assistant, similarities and differences between them are reported in the following 2 pages. The

mean value for each climate dimension of organisational climate on a scale of 0 = low to 10 = high, can be found in Table 8.4 below.

Table 8.4: Preschool Two: Staff Ratings of Climate Dimensions

Teachers	Teaching Assistants
Physical Setting (8.75)	Supervisor Support (6.8)
Innovativeness (8.6)	Clarity (6.8)
Reward System (8.6)	Goal Consensus (6.66)
Supervisor Support (8)	Physical Setting (6.33)
Decision Making (7.75)	Innovativeness (5)
Task Orientation (7.75)	Decision Making (6)
Collegiality (7.62)	Collegiality (5.5)
Clarity (7.5)	Task Orientation (5.16)
Goal Consensus (7.5)	Professional Development (4)
Professional Development (5.87)	Reward System (3.66)

Teachers in preschool 2 viewed every climate dimension more positively than their teaching assistant colleagues. This suggested that in this setting there was an impact upon climate associated with the organisation of hierarchical staff roles beyond the impact of personal background characteristics, supporting the earlier hypothesis made in chapter 7, section 7.13 (p184 – 185) and highlighting the topic of differing early years roles as an area of interest for future investigation. In terms of the ranked order of the dimensions, taken from the mean scores of each staff group, the dimension of collegiality showed the closest level of agreement between the teachers and teaching assistants. Neither group regarded the collegiality of preschool 2 as a strength compared with other climate dimensions, with both staff groups perceiving 6 other climate dimensions as stronger. Collegiality within the ECWES rating scale is defined as the extent to which staff are friendly, supportive, and trusting of one another, promoting peer cohesion within the group.

Perceptions of decision making between the two groups were also similar. There was only one ranked place difference between teacher and teaching assistant perceptions of decision making, which sat within the mid-range of the ranked continuum. Both staff groups perceived at least 4 other climate dimensions as stronger than decision making in their setting, and both groups perceived at least 4 dimensions as weaker. The one dimension where there was also close agreement between teachers and teaching assistants was in terms of the degree of emphasis which preschool 2 placed on staff professional growth, and the availability of opportunities to increase professional competence. Both staff groups perceived professional development as a weakness within the school. The mean score given by teaching assistants was 4, with only one dimension, that of rewards system viewed less favourably by them. The mean score given by teachers was 5.87, which was the lowest score accorded by them to any of the ten climate dimensions.

Where there was the greatest difference between the ranked order of mean climate dimension scores of the teachers and the teaching assistants, was in terms of their perception of the dimension of reward system. The teachers perceived only 2 climate dimensions as stronger than the reward system within their preschool. The teaching assistants however had a markedly different view. Their perception of the degree and fairness and equity in the distribution of pay, fringe benefits and opportunities for advancement, was that it was weak compared with other dimensions of climate. Teaching assistants accorded the dimension of reward system the lowest mean score of all ten climate dimensions at 3.66. This difference in perception between the 2 staff groups may have been as a result of their different national pay scales. The most

recent available data from the Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey (DFE; 2013) highlighted the low pay of support staff within the early years sector compared with their teacher colleagues. Staff working in schools as opposed to full day care providers such as private day nurseries, commanded an hourly salary of £9.20 per hour for support staff. This compared with £22.60 for qualified early years teachers and £29.50 for Head teachers. To put these figures into context, the national average hourly salary for UK employees in 2013 was £15.19 per hour (DFE, 2013).

<u>Second Questionnaire and Interview Comments</u>

From the responses of the 6 members of staff (4 teachers and 2 teaching assistants) to the second questionnaire, all made reference to enjoying their teaching commitments in terms of their interaction with the children and watching them progress.

Supporting the analysis of the ECWES data, one of the two teaching assistants commented on conditions of pay. She was unhappy with the 'unpaid overtime', where she was asked to work after school hours. No comments were made in relation to remuneration by any of the four teachers.

Within the remainder of the second questionnaire comments there was no reference to professional development made by any of the staff. There was thus no additional evidence to support the ECWES survey responses from the first questionnaire, where this dimension was viewed as a weak aspect of the environment by both groups of staff. Instead, additional comments related to the operational and social aspects of the workplace, reinforcing the earlier findings of the importance of shared understandings and support within an organisation for a positive climate to be

established. Comments relating to operational processes within preschool 2 were predominantly negative in nature and related to problems with day to day duties and the lack of time to complete tasks, as well as to the social aspects of the environment, including poor levels of communication and contact between staff. Many of these comments served to highlight the different roles of teachers and teaching assistants within the setting, and on occasion suggested an accompanying lack of understanding between staff in different roles. This again raised the importance of positive hierarchical aspects of the workplace for a strong climate to be established.

Both teaching assistants made negative questionnaire comments referring to their level of duties in terms of after-school care for the children, and playtime and lunchtime duties. Only one of the four teachers mentioned dissatisfaction with duties, most likely as a result of the fewer duties which teachers had in comparison with the teaching assistants. None of the teachers had responsibility for delivering after school care, which was purely the prerogative of the teaching assistants. Reference was made by two teachers to issues of time management and the lack of time to prepare for classroom activities. These comments corroborated the questionnaire responses from the low climate preschools as a whole, as reported in section 8.3 of this chapter where time constraints was the area of dissatisfaction which held the greatest priority for teachers, whereas dissatisfaction with duties was the most frequent area of dissatisfaction for teaching assistants.

Analysis of the frequency and content of comments from the second questionnaire supported the ECWES data, as indicating a level of collegiality that was perceived as weaker than several other climate dimensions. Questionnaire comments from the 4

staff across teaching assistants and teacher roles implied a lack of cohesion between staff, where the level of communication, support and trust amongst them was weak. Staff reported that:

> '*All members of staff should be treated with equal respect.*'

> '*Sometimes certain members of staff have too much to say, while others have none.*'

> '*Teaching assistants should be line-managed by a member of the senior management team, not the class teachers. This creates problems in the working environment.*'

> '*More open communication and dialogue between staff, (is needed) especially between teaching assistants and teachers.*'

Several interview comments relating to staff cooperation and teamwork were also negative. A new arrangement of after-school staff meetings, for example, had impacted negatively upon teaching assistants due to the fact that they were no longer allowed to attend. The negativity of this new arrangement had been exacerbated by the lack of dialogue between management and the teaching assistants. It was mentioned that the majority of staff across roles did not feel that their voice was valued; nor did all staff feel '*heard*'. Comments from the second interviewee supported those of the first, in indicating weak social and operational processes within the setting. The lack of inclusivity extended to weekly planning activities, where teaching assistants were not involved in planning activities. Lack of clarity pertaining to staff roles was also evident where sometimes staff felt that they were '*doing someone else's job*'.

A lack of collegiality, communication and teamwork was reported, with one member of staff experiencing a lack in confidence as result of interpersonal problems with her classroom colleague. This was a situation which also highlighted potential difficulties experienced by teachers, where they may be insecure or unsure of their lead role in the classroom and the delineation of tasks with their teaching assistant colleagues.

Within setting 2 there was no positive reference to leadership in any questionnaire or interview comments. There appeared to be a lack of unity and understanding, between staff in different roles, and also across departments, exemplified by a comment that one section of the early years department worked particularly well, where staff:

> *'appreciate one another's strengths, but that isn't across the whole of Early Years'*.

Overall, the level of teamwork, communication and professional relationships was markedly different from preschool 1.

8.11. Summary

A summary of the variables associated with a high and a low preschool climate, reported in this chapter, and drawn stepwise from the elements of the research process, are identified in Figure 8.5 on the following page.

Figure 8.5: Questionnaire and Interview Summary
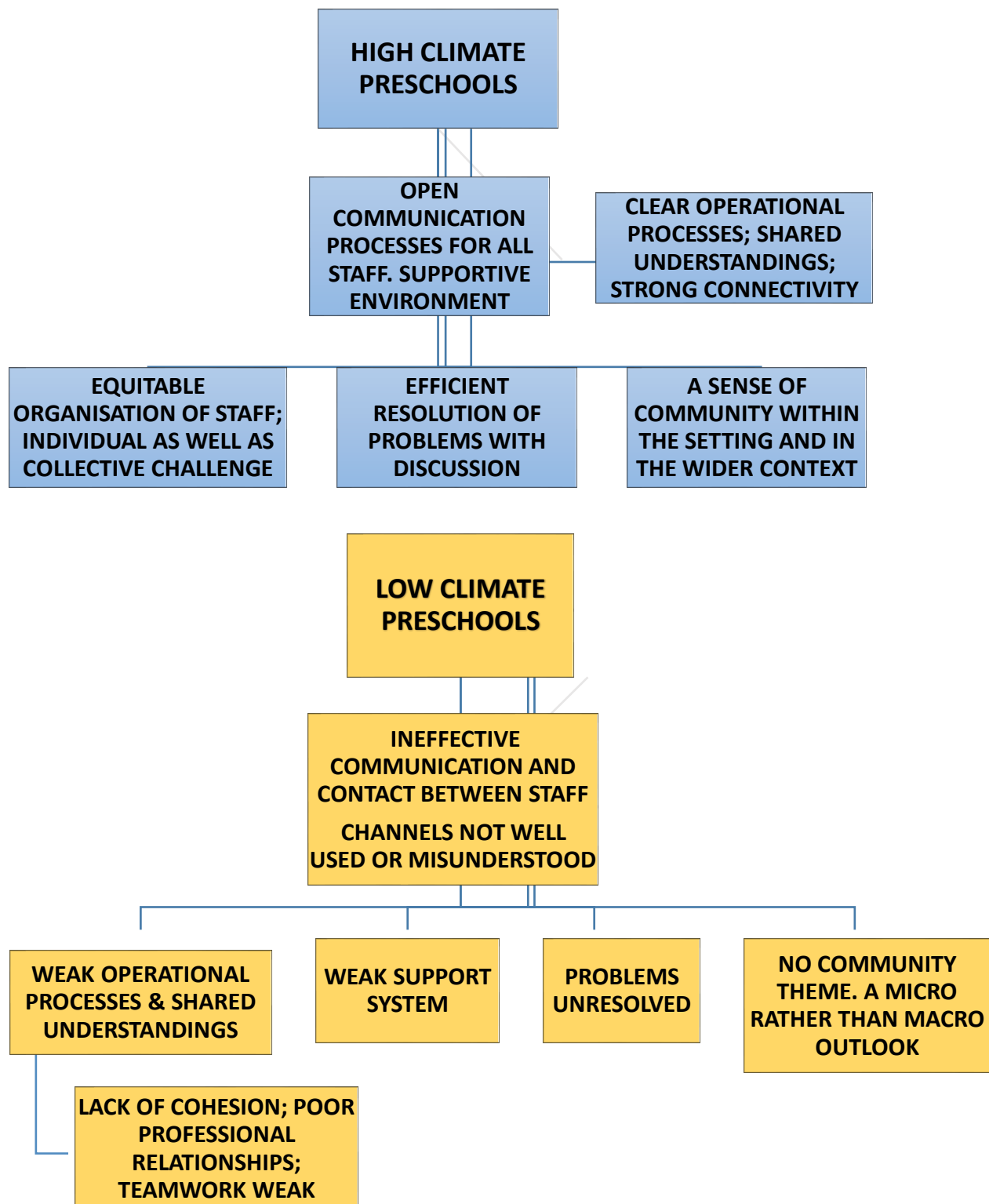
From the constructivist grounded theory analysis, several characteristics had been

revealed as associated with the development of a positive climate. These were the

presence of strong operational/ organisational systems which impacted equitably upon all staff roles, alongside supportive operational processes which provided the opportunity for a broad overview of the workplace. This was a model which enabled a connectivity and the development of shared understandings between staff, where they had a visible individual, as well as a collective purpose and presence. Emerging as a central facilitator to these elements was the concept of effective and open communication. These findings reflected the open systems perspective of organisational theory as discussed in Chapter 2, which emphasises the importance of communication and shared decision making between an organisation's interdependent parts for a healthy organisation to develop and be sustained.

From a practical perspective the findings were that where strong communication and operational processes were embedded, the organisational climate of individual preschools was strong and seemed to over-ride structural difficulties, including that of low pay. Where these processes were lacking, the climate was weak, and morale and team cohesion low, with staff appearing not to have either the means or the motivation to resolve perceived problems. The larger the staff group, the more difficult it was to achieve a strong sense of teamwork and an associated strong climate. This was particularly evidenced in early years departments within schools, where teachers and support staff across departments worked within clearly defined and formally set hierarchical roles, with differing duties and levels of remuneration. In such environments, the level of understanding and empathy between staff in teacher and support roles was crucial for a positive climate to be established.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

The four research questions of this thesis were:

- What are the differences in the nature of the organisational climates of a sample of preschools from which children transfer to a fee-paying independent school?

- Is there any association between a range of staff and specific preschool characteristics and organisational climate?

- What are the organisational characteristics that differentiate between individual preschools with strong or weak organisational climates?

- What are the most effective workplace characteristics in promoting a positive preschool organisational climate?

As reported in Chapter 7, sections 7.5 onwards, the quality of the characteristics of 26 preschools in terms of their association with levels of preschool climate, were explored across 4 different types of preschool. These were: nursery classes within maintained school; nursery classes within fee-paying independent schools; private day nurseries and Montessori nurseries.

Within the investigation of preschool characteristics, and their association with climate, the mixed methods approach enabled two complimentary lines of enquiry. The first was the investigation of the association of a range of preschool characteristics with preschool climate, as discussed in Chapter 7. The data collection relating to staff perceptions of preschool climate used the Early Childhood Work

Environment Survey; ECWES, (Bloom, 2010). The second part of the investigation, reported in detail in Chapter 8, was in terms of the day-to-day experiences of staff, providing them with a voice to highlight and explain the aspects which were important to them in promoting a positive workplace climate.

Within these two perspectives there were similarities in the findings which corroborated and supported lines of enquiry and related conclusions. However, there were also areas where findings were conflicted in their emphases, which suggested a layering of characteristics in their impact upon climate. These differences are discussed in sections 9.4 and 9.6 of this chapter.

9.2. Structural Characteristics and Climate

The investigation of the preschool structural characteristics of preschool type, number of staff, preschool structure, duration of employment, staff age and staff qualifications, revealed no significant statistical association with overall organisational climate. The same data set however used in a descriptive analysis highlighted differences between preschools in the high and low climate groups in terms of their size and structure. Preschools with small numbers of staff (3-6 staff) had 40% of their preschools (n = 4) in the high climate category, 60% in the mid climate category (n = 6) and no preschools in the low climate category. By contrast, preschools with the highest staff numbers of 11 – 20+ staff had 25% of their preschools in the highest climate category, (n = 2), 25% in the mid climate category, and their largest proportion of preschools (50%, n = 4) in the lowest climate category. These findings supported those of previous works, which had found that smaller staff numbers promoted greater group cohesion, collegiality and a more positive

perception of the workplace (Bloom, 1988; Goodlad, 1983; McGinty et al, 2008; Mullen & Cooper, 1994).

The investigation of differences in terms of preschool structure did not follow the lines of enquiry of previous studies between for-profit and not-for profit structures (Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Whitebrook et al 1982). This was due to the lack of settings in the sample functioning on a not-for profit basis, which numbered only two. Instead, and new to the climate debate, the characteristic of age ranges taught was investigated. This was in terms of whether the structure of the preschool was part of a larger department teaching children beyond age 5, or whether it was a discrete early years setting, teaching only children within the early years age range.

Preschool structure was found to differentiate between preschools in the high and low climate preschool groups and accounted for a difference of 50% between the percentage of discrete and non-discrete settings in the high climate group. Where 75% of the high climate settings (n = 6) taught children of only preschool age, 25% of preschools (n = 2) were early years departments teaching children beyond preschool age. Conversely, preschools within the low climate group consisted of 37.5% of settings which taught children of preschool age only (n = 3), compared with 62.5%, (n = 5) of early years departments within schools which taught children beyond preschool age (age 5).

The structure of a preschool with a smaller age range of children to educate, may have had fewer overlapping groups of subsystems, seen as an important component in the development of the theoretical open systems concept of organisations

(Buckley, 1967; Lawrence, 1993; Scott & Davis, 2015; Weik, 1969). Within the open systems concept, strong and interdependent social processes across subsystems are seen as crucial in order for an organisation to achieve a positive workplace environment. The larger the organisation in which a preschool is placed, the more embedded its social systems need to be in order to transcend all its departments and achieve cohesion between its staff. These are issues which are discussed further in sections 9.4 and 9.5 of this chapter, and which are supported by the work of McGinty et al (2008), in their finding of an association between structure and levels of staff collegiality. In their research, teachers were found to have a stronger feeling of workplace collegiality when there were a greater number of early years classes in a school, and fewer classes from departments teaching older age groups.

9.3. Reward System

The findings from prior research studies, that early years staff feel underpaid (Barkham, 2008; Butt & Lance, 2005; Cassidy et al, 2016; Hossain et al, 2012; King et al, 2016; Nutbrown, 2012; Phillips et al, 1991; Pope & Stremmel, 1992) was further supported in this study. The data analysis of the ten climate dimensions of the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey, reported in Chapter 7, section 7.12, showed the highest statistically significant difference between staff perceptions in the high and low climate groups, to be related to the dimension of reward system. The importance of this finding is evident in the relation which it has upon preschool climate and the well-being of staff, but also incorporates from previous works the finding of an impact which it has upon children in settings. Thus, while this study did not investigate the teaching and learning environment provided by staff, it is

important to note that prior studies have shown an association between staff perception of the fairness of their salary, with the level of quality of care and classroom emotional support provided to the children, as well as children's emotional behaviours in the classroom (Cassidy et al, 2016; Iutcovich et al, 2001; King et al, 2016).

Where this study was able to add a new perspective to the debate surrounding staff remuneration, which has not been focused upon in prior works, was in relation to the differences between staff perception in the role of teacher and teaching assistant/support staff. Within the low climate settings, the dimension of reward system revealed a statistically significant difference in staff perceptions between those in teacher and teaching assistant, or other support roles, in terms of their satisfaction with their pay, and was one variable in the lack of cohesion between them. This difference in perception to the reward system was not detected between staff in different hierarchical roles within the high climate preschools, where teamwork and staff relations were strong.

9.4. Social Processes

When investigating the day-to-day processes within the preschools, staff comments, across all climate groups supported prior research (Cottle, 2011; Pope & Stremmel, 1992; Wagner and French; 2010) that it was interaction with the children which created most satisfaction for them. Outside this immediate contact, staff comments focused upon a range of social processes where communication between staff was central, facilitating a strong connection and level of understanding between staff and a recognition and purpose for the individual as well as the collective group. The

associated processes which impacted upon climate related to supportive mechanisms designed to ease workload, to the level of clear and transparent organisational processes for the sharing of ideas, and the ability of the setting to resolve problems. This is not to argue that structural issues such as low wages did not hold importance for staff within the workplace, as highlighted in section 9.3 of this chapter, but rather that within the day-to-day demands of the early years environment, such considerations were minimised by the impact of the immediate environment. In practical terms, there is little that individual staff can do about the low salaries accorded to them as early years professionals, which is recognised as an on-going problem by researchers and educationalists alike (Barkham, 2008; Butt & Lance, 2005; Cassidy et al, 2011; Hossain et al, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012; Pope & Stremmel, 1992).

Processes with the potential of aiding staff in their everyday duties, as reported in the discussion on teamwork in Chapter 8, section 8.4, were typical comments raised by staff as associated with positive perceptions of climate. Thus, where time was managed effectively to create opportunities for non-contact time from the children, staff were able to complete the administrative tasks which respondents from all climate groups had highlighted as a heavy burden for them. This avoided the necessity of staff completing such tasks out of work hours in their own time. Similarly, where staff roles were perceived as shared fairly, especially across hierarchical levels and where experienced members of the team took greater responsibility for tasks such as weekly planning, supporting their colleagues in practical terms, the collective staff perceptions of the workplace were stronger. In these circumstances teamwork

was positive, centred around empathy, mutual respect and understanding between staff.

These practical considerations, in terms of the effectiveness of operational processes designed to ease workload demands, had their greatest impact when designed to recognise and address the expectations of the workplace for all staff, creating a 'connectedness' between them.

9.5. Innovativeness within the Workplace

Where staff reported the effective development of strategies to ease the demands of the workplace for them, recognition was given not only to addressing the needs of individuals within the workplace, but also to the needs of the organisation as a whole. As such, there was a direct link between the two. Strategies designed to resolve operational issues were not only associated with stronger teamwork within the workplace, but also with the ability to embrace innovation to move the organisation forward. Within the open systems theory of organisations, the ability to change is a crucial component, and is reliant upon interdependent connections across subsystems (Buckley, 1967; Galbreith, 1973; Lawrence, 1993; Scott & Davis 2015; Weik, 1969).

Miles' (1969) early suggestion of an important link between planned change and organisational health gives a pragmatic argument for this premise where:

> *'the state of health of an educational organisation can tell us more than anything else about the probable success of any particular change effort'.*
>
> *(Miles, 1969, p376)*

Miles' statement resonates with the findings from this study, where the emphasis on a problem-solving approach, highlighted by respondents in the high climate preschools (as discussed in chapter 8, section 8.7), suggested a dependency upon strong social and organisational processes. The lack of such structures was particularly striking in the negative perceptions of teachers and support staff in the low climate preschools, where problems were either not recognised, or not addressed. Figure 9.1 below illustrates the components found by this study to be associated with the climate dimension of 'innovativeness', which describes the extent to which settings adapt to change and encourage staff to find creative ways to solve problems. This is a relationship/association not specifically highlighted in previous preschool climate works.

Figure 9.1: Social Processes Facilitating Innovativeness

- Collegiality
- Clarity
- Decision Making
- Task Orientation
- Supervisor Support

Social System Climate Dimensions

Strong Sense of Teamwork

- Wide Satisfaction base and overview of the workplace
- Good communication and consensus between hierarchical levels
- Climate Dimension of Goal Consensus

- Vibrant context
- Ability to adapt to and to plan change
- Maintenance and growth

Climate Dimension of Innovativeness

The high climate preschools, from their strong social processes and good lines of communication, were able to use information provided from discussions with staff

to adapt to change and to solve problems, maintaining the equilibrium of the organisation. This is particularly important in the current early years environment in England, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3, where the rapid pace of change has resulted in negative reactions from some preschool workers and educationalists, concerning differences of ideology towards the aim of preschool education. The practical aspects of the momentum of change, as evidenced in this research as well as in prior studies, has created concerns relating to the increased workload for staff from the additional administrative demands, and the perceived undermining of their professional autonomy (Anning, 1998; Coughlan, 2016; Hillman & Williams, 2015; Keating et al, 2002; Kwon, 2003; Lipsett, 2008; Osgood, 2009; Paton, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford, 1993; Urban, 2008).

9.6. Different Perspectives

Staff in the early years workplace as evidenced in their responses to the first questionnaire and ECWES survey, compared with their responses to the open questions of the second questionnaire, were shown to view their environment from two different perspectives. The first can be described as the theoretical ideal, which incorporates and responds to questions related to all dimensions of preschool climate, including structural as well as process variables. The second is in terms of the issues which appeared in the forefront of the minds of staff, as evidenced in their more spontaneous responses to the open questions of the second questionnaire. The latter were the immediate social issues which impacted upon staff perceptions on a daily basis.

In identifying this difference in impact between structural and process dimensions upon climate, this research through its mixed methods approach has added an additional outlook to the climate debate. It has contributed to the discussion, by incorporating a practical perspective to the research and highlighted the importance of the everyday operational processes which underpin aspects of a strong climate. In this sense, it corroborated the work of Cassidy et al (2011), where the investigation of staff turnover similarly highlighted a dual perspective in problem resolution. The Cassidy et al (2011) study found challenges for departing, new and remaining teachers in terms of increased workload due to the time taken to assimilate new people into the work routines. However, although directors suggested the structural aspect of increased salaries as the main strategy for reducing the problem of staff turnover in the long term, the strategies over which managers had control, and which did ameliorate the impact of turnover in the short and immediate term, were the operational strategies which they introduced. These included allowing staff time from their current workplace to visit the setting which they were transferring to, in order to make the transition as smooth as possible. The similarities between the Cassidy et al study and the findings of my research, were in the strong and wide impact which the resolution of day-to-day 'real' problems can have upon the workplace environment for staff. Where problems were recognised by those in positions to confront and resolve such issues, staff appreciation was strong and levels of teamwork high.

9.7. Guidelines for Fostering a Positive Climate

The analysis of the collective questionnaire and interview comments from this study, as reported in chapter 8, highlighted the interconnectivity of several characteristics, which were important in enabling a strong connection between staff across the workplace and an associated positive climate. Many of these characteristics were supported by prior research, as critically reviewed in chapter 4, from section 4.4 onwards. These characteristics included the need for: positive relationships (Barkham, 2008; Cassidy et al, 2016; Groom, 2006; Simpson, 2011), clear lines of responsibility and clarity of roles (Barkham, 2008; Lavian, 2012), opportunities for sharing and reflecting on practice (Cassidy et al, 2016; Groom, 2006; Hur et al, 2016; Simpson, 2011; Urban et al, 2012) and high quality leadership (Aubrey et al, 2012; Zinsser et al, 2014). The need for good communication (Katz and Kahn, 1966) was highlighted as a facilitator of these characteristics.

Within the practical focus of this research study, it was seen as an important contribution to the climate research, to create a usable checklist for preschools to reflect upon in their pursuit of a positive workplace climate for their staff. The following list provides the aspects highlighted from this research as essential components to that end.

The six most effective characteristics in promoting a positive preschool organisational were shown from the data to be:

1. **Good channels of communication, creating efficiency and encouraging cohesiveness and 'openness'.**

- There should be formal, and regular procedures for communication across departments and between different staff groups within the hierarchical system. Staff should be aware of all communication systems.

- There should be opportunities for supervisor feedback to staff regarding teaching practices and classroom activities.

2. **Clear, efficient and consistent organisational processes, including clarity of staff roles.**

- There must be clarity regarding job specifications and expectations.

- Clear organisational processes should be in place and known to all staff.

- Roles should be organised to incorporate non-teaching duties and to accommodate flexibility where circumstances require it.

3. **Valuing the work of all staff and recognising their contributions.**

- All staff, regardless of their role should have some area of responsibility, however small, appropriate to their experience and job description.

4. **Transparent and equitable deployment of staff expertise and experience**

- Job descriptions and person specifications should be transparent and incorporate individual strengths, aptitudes and preferences wherever possible, as well as addressing the needs of the organisation.

- Effective leadership and management by experienced line-managers should be in place to organise the deployment of support staff.

5. **Opportunities for collaborative work and sharing of good practice**

- Experiences between established staff and new employees should be shared in an open forum of discussions.

- Experienced staff should provide mentoring for new appointees in order to develop their skills and confidence.

- Teaching assistants and support staff should be involved as much as possible in planning and review.

6. **Effective support and opportunities for inclusion in decision making.**

- Management should offer effective support to all staff and endeavour to listen to and resolve problems in the short term wherever possible.

- Opportunities should be provided for staff to 'have a voice' in the decision-making process wherever appropriate and possible.

9.8. Reflecting on the Study

The decision to focus upon this small scale mixed methods study gave a new emphasis to preschool climate research, away from the preoccupation with quantitative analyses of associations with classroom quality, to a focus on the importance of school climate per se. It was my aim as the research developed, that the early work of Halpin (1966), in assessing climate with a view to providing an aid to school improvement, should not be lost. The exploration of the practical characteristics associated with the dimensions of school climate enabled the creation of guidelines which may help to achieve this end.

Due to the investigation of the perceptions of different staff groups within the study's sample, this thesis added to the limited amount of research which has been undertaken to capture the opinions of support staff. This limitation has perhaps been due to the low status of the early years workforce, particularly in settings outside schools, such as private day nurseries. These employees are often subject to low salaries compared with the national average and are usually far less well qualified than their teacher colleagues. Their voices however are pertinent to all in the preschool educational sector who have an interest in the climate of the workplace. As a subgroup within the hierarchical structures of many settings, this study has shown, as reported in Chapter 7, section 7.13 and in Chapter 8, section 8.10, that their perceptions are important for staff cohesion to be achieved and for an associated high level of climate to prevail.

9.9. Implications for Practice

The implications of the findings for the early years workplace are two-fold. They include improvements within preschools in levels of understanding between staff groups, aided by effective operational processes as discussed in sections 9.4 to 9.7 of this chapter. In addition, and as a broader issue, there is a need for government initiatives to improve the level of workload and remuneration for staff working within a sector where low wages are the norm for many, and where there continues to be a constant pace of change to the early years environment.

The findings of a lack of teamwork and 'connectedness' within the low climate preschools of this study, exacerbated by low levels of problem solving where staff felt their voices were not heard, highlights this an as area where improvement is

required. Within the immediate environment of the workplace, there needs to be good levels of communication, particularly where early years departments are set within large schools, which also cater for the primary and secondary sectors. Early years staff, as evidenced in this study (section 8.6), as well as in prior research (McGinty et al, 2008), can feel isolated within these larger settings and feel that their work is not fully understood by their colleagues.

With communication and cohesion/teamwork shown to be a central tenet to the development of a strong climate, the findings of this study have several implications which rest upon the need for all departments within a school to recognise and respect the work of one another. As such, these considerations I would suggest should be embedded within the development plans of schools, bringing all staff, or groups of staff, together for discussions on relevant issues to their particular setting. Processes of inclusivity in decision making should be in place wherever possible. Managers/Headteachers should be central in the implementation of such practice, where a hierarchical system at the strategic level has been shown in the work of Aubrey et al (2012), as well as evidenced in the high climate preschools of this study, to function in high quality preschools alongside a collaborative culture at the operational level. This process was evident in the preschool with the strongest climate of this study, where job descriptions and staff roles were not demarcated into tightly set teacher or teaching assistant roles.

Further developing the need for shared understandings and cohesion between staff for a strong climate to be achieved, is the requirement for quality relationships between teachers and teaching assistants within preschool settings and departments, which from the evidence of this study was not in place in the low

climate preschools. Prior research (Barkham, 2008; Ratcliffe, 2011) has shown that not all class teachers have the ability or interpersonal attributes to make the best use of the skills of their support staff, or to 'manage' the inter-connection between the differing hierarchical roles sensitively. Ways of resolving this issue, link with the initiatives mentioned in the previous paragraph, and as evidenced in the comments regarding strong leadership within the high climate preschools, made in sections 8.3 and 8.7. Managers in these settings were referred to as people who would listen and take responsibility, within an environment where there was an inter-dependence between teamwork and effective organisational processes. This relied on managers overseeing the implementation of operational systems which were regarded as fair, and which allowed the voices of all to be heard within the working environment. Pockets of evidence threaded throughout the data suggested that for all to feel respected within the workplace there should be opportunities for challenge, for professional growth, and for good levels of feedback on one's practice. Adherence to formal annual reviews for staff by management, could be a contributory element to this process. This was an activity mentioned as lacking by one member of staff in her low climate preschool.

In addition, this study's findings have revealed the need to raise the profile of the early years workplace for staff, where a large proportion of them are finding the increasing level of workload difficult to meet within their normal working hours. Government proposals from September 2017 to increase the free childcare hours available for 3 and 4-year-old children in England from 15 hours to 30 hours per week (DFE, 2015), demonstrates that early years education continues to take a prominent place within the political agenda. The workload pressures which a constantly

changing environment has had upon practitioners however, needs to be addressed. From the comments made within this study, these included typical references to high levels of administrative tasks, as well as a small number of statements which referred to a sense of a profession under-valued. Such issues need to be considered by the government in their drive for expansion of the early years sector.

9.10. Suggestions for Further Research

This research study employed a mixed methods design with a narrow socio-economic and geographical sample. It was undertaken with an acknowledgement of the necessary parameters of the study, adopted as a consequence of the finite scope of the project. Set within the study's constraints, the research design was effective in finding answers to the questions posed, as well as providing material for further lines of enquiry.

As it is likely that a wider sample would incorporate a greater diversity of preschool type, with a larger representation of classes in maintained schools in particular, a more comprehensive study would be valuable in extending the findings, providing corroboration, or otherwise, and permitting wider generalisation where associations were found.

Further use of the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (Bloom 2010) in English settings would also provide comparative information regarding its suitability for this context. This would extend the specific study of preschool organisational climate research, which has been lacking in England. A continued focus upon the separate dimensions of climate, in particular those associated with aspects of hierarchical staff group differences in the workplace and the ability to recognise problems and to

manage change, could be extremely valuable in further illuminating ways of facilitating a positive climate.

A central finding of this study of a dual perspective towards staff perceptions of climate, should include future investigations of staff perceptions of their daily 'lived experience', compared with their responses to theoretical dimensions of climate assessment scales. This is an approach supported by Bloom (2010). It is one which could be useful in highlighting any difference in emphasis between these complementary investigative approaches and serve to deepen our understanding of the complexity of the findings from climate investigation through the broadening of its scope. While the mixed methods approach was effective in providing evidence from which the research questions could be answered, a greater emphasis towards the qualitative aspect could allow greater opportunity for staff to use their own voices to explain the workplace variables which hold most relevance for them on a day-to-day basis. Such an approach could facilitate a stronger connection between the theory and assessment of school climate dimensions, with the real characteristics in the workplace as experienced by its staff. The practical aspects of such research could provide stakeholders with ways to enhance the early years workplace and to secure the vision, where a positive school climate could become the norm.

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Appendix 1: Summary of the four different types of preschool provision within this sample

NB: All types of preschool in this study had a mandatory obligation to provide an early years education in keeping with the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

1. **Private Day Nurseries** that care for children aged from birth to five years and usually offer day care from 8am to 6pm, for most of the year. Most day nurseries are privately run and can be stand-alone businesses, part of a small chain of two or three settings or part of a much larger chain or franchise of 50 or more settings. Day nurseries may run from modern purpose-built buildings or in converted spaces. Settings vary in size from 20 to over 180 places and will often be split into rooms for different aged children. Although open all week, most offer the option of a range of half and full days that can be mixed and matched to meet the needs of the family. Many day nurseries will provide breakfast, lunch and tea, the cost of which is normally included in their fees. All day nurseries must be registered with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in England and are inspected by them.

2. **Montessori Nurseries** are a form of private day nursery. They can be run by private individuals, community groups, Montessori organisations, commercial businesses or by employers. Montessori nurseries charge for their services but have greater variety in their opening times than the category of private day nurseries. The Montessori ethos derives from the work of Maria Montessori (1870-1952) who developed the Montessori method of educating young children that stresses development of a child's own initiative and natural abilities at their own pace, especially through practical play. The method promotes the premise that happy self-motivated and independent learners form positive images of themselves as confident, successful people. Montessori nurseries use specially designed resources, although individual preschools use these resources to varying degrees. This variance also includes a nursery's definition of the term 'Montessori', which although inferring some connection with the Montessori ethos, can vary considerably in a nursery's adherence and implementation of Maria Montessori's methods. All Montessori nurseries must be registered with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in England and are inspected by them.

3. **Nursery classes in maintained schools.** Nursery classes are open during school hours in term time – and many are attached to primary schools. They offer the same play and learning opportunities as other nurseries.

Children can attend all day, or just on a sessional basis (for example, three hours in the morning or afternoon) depending on the nursery policy. Maintained schools must have someone with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) leading the learning in their nursery class. The schools are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

4. **Nursery classes in independent schools.** Independent schools charge fees to attend instead of being funded by the government. The schools are registered with Ofsted or the ISI (Independent Schools' Inspectorate). Schools deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, although there is a process to apply for exemption. Nursery classes are open during school hours in term time and children can usually attend all day, or on a sessional basis.

__NB__ Independent Schools and all other Private and Voluntary Providers, such as private day nurseries and Montessori nurseries, are not required to have a teacher with QTS. There is, however, an expectation and aspiration from the Department for Education for a graduate led early years workforce, although this does not mean that all provision will be led by QTS teachers. Many independent schools employ QTS teachers, although this is less common within the private and voluntary sector.

Appendix 2: Early Childhood Work Environment Survey – 10 Dimensions (Bloom, 2010)

Dimension	Definition
Collegiality	The extent to which staff are friendly, supportive, and trusting of one another. The peer cohesion and esprit de corps of the group.
Professional Growth	The degree of emphasis placed on staff's professional growth. The availability of opportunities to increase professional competence.
Supervisor Support	The degree of facilitative leadership providing encouragement, support, and clear expectations.
Clarity	The extent to which policies, procedures, and responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated.
Reward System	The degree of fairness and equity in the distribution of pay, fringe benefits, and opportunities for advancement.
Decision Making	The degree of autonomy given to staff and the extent to which they are involved in making centre-wide decisions.
Goal consensus	The extent to which staff agree on the philosophy, goals, and educational objectives of the centre.
Task Orientation	The emphasis placed on organisational effectiveness and efficiency, including productive meetings, programme outcomes and accountability.
Physical Setting	The extent to which the spatial arrangement of the centre helps or hinders staff in carrying out their responsibilities. The availability of supplies and materials.
Innovativeness	The extent to which the centre adapts to change and encourages staff to find creative ways to solve problems.

Appendix 3: Pilot Process of the Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (Halpin & Croft; 1966)

The pilot study sampled 71 different schools, with descriptions from 1151 respondents in order to create a classification of organisational behaviours into separate dimensions. Starting from a bank of approximately 1000 items, which were screened by constructing and testing three preliminary forms of the OCDQ, the final version consisted of 64 statements, such as:

1. The principal ensures that the teachers work to their full capacity.

2. The principal is in the building before teachers arrive.

3. The principal looks out for the personal welfare of teachers.

4. Teachers help select which courses will be taught

5. Teachers ask nonsensical questions in faculty meetings.

6. Most of the teachers here accept the faults of their colleagues.

By factor analysis, eight dimensions of organisational climate were identified which were assigned to eight corresponding subsets. Four of the subsets were associated with the behaviour of the teacher; and four with that of the leader. The 8 subsets collectively created a profile of the climate in terms of the 8 dimensions. The scores of all subsets and schools were standardised with a mean score of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 (Wright, 1988, p18).

The principal and teacher behaviours to be tapped by each subset were as follows:

Subsets of Principal Behaviours:

Aloofness: Behaviour by the principal which is characterised as formal and impersonal. He 'goes by the book' and prefers to be guided by rules and policies rather than to deal with the teachers in an informal, face-to-face situation.

Production Emphasis: Behaviour by the principal which is characterised by close supervision of staff. He is highly directive and task-orientated.

Thrust: Behaviour marked not by close supervision of the teacher, but by the principal's attempt to motivate the teachers through the example which he personally sets. He does not ask the teachers to give of themselves anything more than he willingly gives of himself; his behaviour, though starkly task-orientated, is nonetheless viewed favourably by the teachers.

Consideration: Behaviour by the principal which is characterised by an inclination to treat the teachers' humanly' i.e. to try to do a little something extra for them in human terms.

Subsets of Teacher Behaviours:

Disengagement: Indicates that the teachers do not work well together. They pull in different directions with respect to the task; they gripe and bicker among themselves.

Hindrance: Refers to the teachers' feeling that the principal burdens them with routine duties, committee demands, and other requirements which the teachers construe as unnecessary busy-work.

Esprit: Refers to 'morale'. The teachers feel that their social needs are being satisfied, and that they are, <u>at the same time</u>, enjoying a sense of accomplishment in their job

Intimacy: Refers to the teachers' enjoyment of friendly social relations with each other.

Appendix 4: Introductory letter to EY Settings

<div align="right">6.9.11</div>

Dear ………………. I am writing to ask for your help with an early years' project which I am undertaking as a PhD student, at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff. My research project is focusing on the preschool workplace for staff and the differing characteristics which help to create a positive environment.

As an early years practitioner, I am very aware of the busy timetable which underpins all pre-school settings and I will ensure that only minimal requests are made of your time. The most time consuming exercise which I propose is asking your staff to complete a short questionnaire. The questionnaire will be as user-friendly as possible and will have been validated as a research tool before I use it to obtain data. No part of my work will intrude on the day to day running of your establishment.

All input which you give on behalf of your pre-school, will be given complete anonymity. No children, or schools, will be named within my work. All input will be completely confidential, with analysis of on-going data discussed with my University supervisors only. At no point will any information be discussed within any school and all data will be stored securely.

Please would you complete the attached form giving your consent for participation and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided or contact me should you have any queries or concerns. I am more than happy to come and see you to discuss any questions you may have.

In the meantime, I would like to thank you in anticipation of your support, without which such projects would not be able to take place.

Yours sincerely

Sue Saunders

Tel: 020 86933465 or 020 86900958

Appendix 4 (cont'd)

<div style="border: 2px solid black; background-color: #6f9fd8; text-align: center; padding: 10px;">

Participant Consent Form

</div>

Project: Early Years PhD
Institution: University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
Student: Sue Saunders
Supervisors: Professor Tony Crocker and Dr Bill Davies

Please tick the boxes, sign and return this form in the stamped-addressed envelope provided

1. ☐   I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2. ☐   I understand that this is a personal research project and that no school will be mentioned by name during the course of the project, or within the final research thesis.

3. ☐   I understand that any data collected during the study will be confidential and viewed in draft form by the research team only (student and supervisors).

4. ☐   I give my permission for questionnaires to be used anonymously, without staff or the pre-school being named.

5. ☐   I agree to take part in the study with the understanding that all information will be confidential and that data will be stored securely.

Name of setting/pre-school _____

Date_____

Name of Manager (Please Print) _____

Signature of manager_____

Appendix 5A: First questionnaire for general staff

A Unique Environment

For staff

This questionnaire is designed to focus upon individual aspects of your Early Years environment and characteristics of your workplace. The questions are set out below. Please work through each section.

Thank you for your participation.

Background information about your setting

1. **Does your setting follow the Early Years' Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS)?**
   Please tick one of the boxes

   Yes, Fully   ☐

   No, not at all   ☐

   Yes, in part   ☐

2. **Does your early years setting, <u>as a whole</u>, use any specific educational philosophy, such as Montessori, or any other unique practice which has been developed in your setting?**

   Yes ☐   Please go to question 3

   No ☐   Please go to question 4

3. **Please name the philosophy/practice which you identified in question 2.**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Background information about your current position:

4. **Please tick the box below to identify your age group.**

   ☐ **24 or under**

   ☐ **25-34**

   ☐ **35-44**

   ☐ **45-54**

   ☐ **55-64**

   ☐ **65+**

5. **Please tick the box which states the highest educational level you have completed. If you are unsure which category your qualification falls within please describe it in the 'other' section at the bottom of this list.**

   ☐ GCE/GCSE

   ☐ AS Level

   ☐ A Level

   ☐ Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Level 2 Qualification

   ☐ CWDC Level 3 Qualification

   ☐ CWDC Level 4 Qualification

   ☐ CWDC Level 5 Qualification, including Foundation Degree

   ☐ CWDC Level 6 Qualification, including Early Years Professional Status

   ☐ Certificate of Education (Cert' Ed)

   ☐ First Degree

   ☐ MPhil/PhD

   ☐ Other (please state) _____

6. **How long have you worked in the field of early years?**

   Please add a numeral to all the boxes related to this employment question

   ☐ Years ☐ Months

   How long have you worked for your current employer?

   ☐ Years ☐ Months

   How long have you worked in your current position?

   ☐ Years ☐ Months

7. Please tick the job description which best describes your role.

Volunteer ☐

Teaching assistant or Nursery Nurse ☐

Teacher ☐

Other (Please Specify) ☐ _____

An overview of your opinion of the climate of your setting

Please complete this section without discussing it with anyone else, as it is your own current beliefs which are important at this stage of this research project.

Please complete this general overview by ticking one box for each of the 8 factors

To what extent are the following a strength or weakness of your nursery/school?	Very Strong	Somewhat Strong	Somewhat Weak	Very Weak
Respect				
Trust				
High Morale				
Opportunities for Input				
Continuous Academic and Social Growth				
Cohesiveness/A Sense of Belonging				
School Renewal/Reviewing, and developing the environment				
Caring				

Please complete the final section on the next page
This final section deals specifically with the work environment of your setting

This section is designed to find out how you feel about your early years setting, or department, as a place to work. Your answers are completely confidential, and you are not asked to add your name to the form. Tick in the space provided the numeral (0-5) that most accurately describes how you feel about each statement. **Please respond to all statements.**

	Never 0	Seldom 1	Sometimes 2	Somewhat regularly 3	Frequently 4	Always 5
Staff are friendly and trust one another						
Morale is high. There is good team spirit.						
Staff are encouraged to learn new skills and competencies						
The setting provides guidance for professional advancement						
Your supervisors are knowledgeable and competent						
Your supervisors provide helpful feedback						
Communication regarding policies and procedures is clear						
Job responsibilities are well-defined						
Salaries and benefits are distributed fairly						
Promotions are handled fairly						
Teachers help make decisions about things that directly affect them						
People feel free to express their opinions						
Staff agree on the philosophy of the setting and its educational objectives						
Staff share a common vision of what the setting should be like						
The programme is well-planned and efficiently run						
Meetings are productive						
The work environment is attractive and well-organised						
There are sufficient resources and equipment for staff to do their jobs						
Staff are encouraged to be creative and innovative in their work						
Your setting implements changes as needed						

A Unique Environment

For managers, directors and/or headteachers

This questionnaire is designed to focus upon individual aspects of your Early Years environment and characteristics of your workplace. The questions are set out below. Please work through each section. Thank you for your participation.

Background information about your setting

1. **Please tick one of the boxes which best describes your nursery setting.**

   ☐ Independent, fee-paying, Nursery school.

   ☐ Nursery class within an independent, fee-paying, primary school.

   ☐ Nursery class within an independent, fee-paying, senior school.

   ☐ Nursery class within a state-maintained primary school.

   ☐ Nursery class within a maintained Nursery School

   ☐ Private Day nursery

   ☐ Local authority Day Nursery

   ☐ Playgroup

   ☐ Childminder

   ☐ Other (Please state) _____

2. **Please state the normal opening and closing times of your setting, during which the children are on site.**

   Opens ☐   **Closes** ☐

3. **Do the opening dates of your setting follow local authority school term dates?**

   Yes ☐   **No** ☐

   If you ticked NO, please state the number of weeks in the year that your setting is open.

   ☐ **Weeks per year**

4. Does your setting follow the Early Years' Foundation Stage Curriculum?

Yes, Fully ☐

No, not at all ☐

Yes, in part ☐

5. Does your early years setting, <u>as a whole</u>, use any specific educational philosophy, such as Montessori, or any other unique practice which has been developed in your setting?

Yes ☐   Please complete question 6, 7 and 8

No ☐   Please go to question 9

6. Is this educational philosophy in addition to the ideas/practice of the EYFS, or in place of the ideas/practice of the EYFS?

In addition to the ideas and practice of the EYFS ☐

In place of the ideas and practice of the EYFS ☐

7. Please name the philosophy/practice which you identified in question 6.

_____

_____

8. If known, please give the reasons below why this philosophy/practice (other than the EYFS) was adopted at your setting.

_____

_____

_____

9. Is your nursery setting single-sex or co-ed?

Single-Sex ☐   Please tick the relevant box   Girls ☐   Boys ☐

Co-Educational ☐

10. Is your nursery setting academically selective or non-selective?

Selective ☐ Non-selective ☐

11. Please state the number of staff employed in your nursery setting /department who work in some teaching capacity with the children aged 3-4 years.

Please write the number in the box provided. ☐

12. Please state the total number of children aged 3-4 years attending your setting.

Morning Session ☐ Afternoon session ☐

13. Please state the number of children who attend both the morning and afternoon sessions.

☐

Background information about your current position:

14. Please tick the box below to identify your age group.

☐ 24 or under

☐ 25-34

☐ 35-44

☐ 45-54

☐ 55-64

☐ 65+

15. Please tick the box which states the highest educational level you have completed. If you are unsure which category your qualification falls within please describe it in the 'other' section at the bottom of this list.

☐	GCE/GCSE
☐	AS Level
☐	A Level
☐	Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Level 2 Qualification
☐	CWDC Level 3 Qualification
☐	CWDC Level 4 Qualification
☐	CWDC Level 5 Qualification, including Foundation Degree
☐	CWDC Level 6 Qualification, including Early Years Professional Status
☐	Certificate of Education (Cert' Ed)
☐	First Degree
☐	MPhil/PhD
☐	Other (please state) _____

_____

16. How long have you worked in the field of early years?

Please add a numeral to all the boxes related to this employment question.

☐ Years ☐ Months

How long have you worked for your current employer?

☐ Years ☐ Months

How long have you worked in your current position?

☐ Years ☐ Months

17. What is your current job title?

_____

An overview of your opinion of the climate of your setting

Please complete this section without discussing it with anyone else, as it is your own current beliefs which are important at this stage of this research project.

Please complete this general overview by ticking one box for each of the 8 factors

To what extent are the following a strength or weakness of your nursery/school?	Very Strong	Somewhat Strong	Somewhat Weak	Very Weak
Respect				
Trust				
High Morale				
Opportunities for Input				
Continuous Academic and Social Growth				
Cohesiveness/A Sense of Belonging				
School Renewal/Reviewing, and developing the environment				
Caring				

Please complete the final section on the next page

This final section deals specifically with the work environment of your setting

This section is designed to find out how you feel about your early years setting, or department, as a place to work. Your answers are completely confidential, and you are not asked to add your name to the form. Tick in the space provided the numeral (0-5) that most accurately describes how you feel about each statement. **Please respond to all statements.**

	Never 0	Seldom 1	Sometimes 2	Somewhat regularly 3	Frequently 4	Always 5
Staff are friendly and trust one another						
Morale is high. There is good team spirit.						
Staff are encouraged to learn new skills and competencies						
The setting provides guidance for professional advancement						
Your supervisors are knowledgeable and competent						
Your supervisors provide helpful feedback						
Communication regarding policies and procedures is clear						
Job responsibilities are well-defined						
Salaries and benefits are distributed fairly						
Promotions are handled fairly						
Teachers help make decisions about things that directly affect them						
People feel free to express their opinions						
Staff agree on the philosophy of the setting and its educational objectives						
Staff share a common vision of what the setting should be like						
The programme is well-planned and efficiently run						
Meetings are productive						
The work environment is attractive and well-organised						
There are sufficient resources and equipment for staff to do their jobs						
Staff are encouraged to be creative and innovative in their work						
Your setting implements changes as needed						

Appendix 6: Second questionnaire

STAFF ROLES AT YOUR SETTING

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. It is designed to add further detail to that already completed by staff in your early years setting and focuses upon the different roles of the staff. Please answer all questions as fully as you can. If you are unsure of the meaning of any questions do come and ask. All information is confidential. DO NOT add your name, or your school's name, to the form.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU AND YOUR ROLE

Tick one of the boxes below to indicate if you completed the initial questionnaire for this study. This would have been during the months from September to December of last academic year (2012-2013) or during the months from September to December of the previous academic year (2011-2012).

Yes, I did complete the initial questionnaire	No, I did not complete the initial questionnaire

Please complete **all** sections below

Age: Date of Birth:
<u>Total length of time</u> in current setting:
Current job title:
Highest qualification currently held (please include a professional qualification):
Number of days per week that you work in this job:
Specified start time of your normal work day:
Specified end time of your normal work day:

Please give the length of your break times during a normal working day:

	Start and end times of your daily breaks *e.g. Break 1: 10.10-10.20 am*
Break 1.	
Break 2.	
Break 3.	
Break 4.	

Tick one of the boxes for each statement to identify whether your hours of working and staff break times allow you sufficient time and opportunities to do the following:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Attend those staff meetings that you would like to attend.	☐	☐	☐
2. Attend all staff meetings.	☐	☐	☐
3. Liaise with staff/colleagues informally.	☐	☐	☐
4. Attend planning meetings with colleagues.	☐	☐	☐
5. Complete the requirements of your job to your satisfaction.	☐	☐	☐

Describe your normal daily duties in the form of a list below and tick any of those duties that you particularly do or do not enjoy.

Normal daily duties *(For example: teaching duties, playground supervision, completion of EYFS profiles, planning etc.)*	Those I particularly do enjoy (tick)	Those I particularly do not enjoy (tick)

Use the back of this page if you require more space

List any additional job responsibilities that you have. Again indicate if you particularly do or do not enjoy any of these additional responsibilities.

Additional Job responsibilities *(For example: curriculum leader, resource responsibilities, mentoring role etc.)*	Those I particularly do enjoy (tick)	Those I particularly do not enjoy (tick)

Use the back of this page if you require more space

This section of the questionnaire is designed to assess your satisfaction with your job/role and any changes which you think would improve it.

Are you satisfied with your day to day duties and responsibilities?

YES ☐　　　　　　**NO** ☐　　　　　　**DON'T KNOW** ☐

_____

In the box below identify any areas of you job/role which you are <u>very satisfied</u> with. If there are no areas, please write 'none'.

> *(For example, you may want to refer to any specific duties you have, to the way in which jobs are shared, to the cover you provide for absent staff or to issues such as the time available to complete duties etc.)*

In the box below please identify any areas of you job which you are <u>not satisfied with</u>. If there are no areas, please write 'none'.

> *(For example, you may want to refer to any specific duties you have, to the way in which jobs are shared, to the cover you provide for absent staff or to issues such as the time available to complete duties etc.)*

In the box below please describe any manageable changes you think would improve your day to day duties and responsibilities to create greater satisfaction for you.

> *(For example, you may want to refer to any specific duties you have, to the way in which jobs are shared, to the cover you provide for absent staff or to issues such as the time available to complete duties etc.)*

STAFF ROLES/JOBS IN YOUR PRESCHOOL SETTING OR DEPARTMENT

These final questions are designed to give as full a picture as possible of <u>all the staff roles</u> in your early years setting or department. The questions aim to assess the way in which the different roles are organised and how you think this organisation impacts upon your workplace as a whole.

Please list the different staff jobs/roles below of all staff who work in an educational capacity with the 3 to 5-year-old children in your setting. Include your own job/role.

Tick the left hand-side column if any of these jobs have management duties/responsibilities or lead roles within the setting.

Tick in this column if the job has a lead role or management duties or responsibilities	Different job titles of staff working with or responsible for the 3-5-year-old children in your setting: *e.g. teacher, nursery nurse, room leader, deputy manager, headteacher etc.*

If you require any additional space, please use the space below and/or the back of this page.

Please indicate in the box below if you think staff roles are organised in a way which promotes a positive workplace for staff <u>as a whole?</u>

YES ☐   NO ☐   DON'T KNOW ☐

In the box below identify any ways in which staff roles are organised which have a <u>positive effect</u> for staff in your early years' workplace. If there are no areas which you can identify, please write 'none'.

> *(For example, you may want to refer to clarity of roles, to the matching of staff strengths and skills to the roles they are given, to the overlapping and sharing of roles or to the value attached to different roles etc.)*

In the box below identify any ways in which the organisation of staff roles could be changed to improve your early years' workplace for staff. If there are no areas which you can identify, please write 'none' in the first box.

(For example, you may want to refer to ways to improve clarity of roles, to the matching of staff strengths and skills to the roles they are given, to the overlapping and sharing of roles or to the value attached to different roles etc.)
1.
2.
3.
4.
If you require any additional space, please use the space on the back of this page.

<u>THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE</u>

Appendix 7: Correlations between ECWES Subscales – Long and Short Versions

Climate Subscale	Correlation coefficient (r)
Collegiality	.56
Professional Growth	.56
Supervisor Support	.58
Clarity	.60
Reward System	.77
Decision Making	.60
Goal Consensus	.59
Task Orientation	.68
Physical Setting	.74
Innovativeness	.65
Total Climate	.82

Appendix 8: Interview Probes and Prompts

Open-ended Questionnaire	Probes	Prompts
Frequency of staff and planning meetings	Listen for evidence of perceived usefulness of meetings. How inclusive or otherwise they are perceived. Are meetings held at a time when all staff can attend? If not, how are outcomes communicated?	Can staff provide examples? Do they feel that their perceptions are commonly held? What gives them this impression?
Area of job/role which staff were satisfied with Area of job/role which staff were not satisfied with Any changes they would make to improve their role	Listen for evidence of communication, teamwork and original or unusual operational processes. Explore as appropriate.	Can staff provide examples of any statements? What makes you feel this way?
Any way in which staff roles are organised overall which has a positive effect on staff Any changes to staff roles overall which would improve the workplace for staff	Ask how responsibilities are shared. Listen for evidence of inclusive practice and use of staff talents/skills. Explore if appropriate. Try to establish core reasons for responses. Does the interviewee feel that other colleagues share their views regarding staff roles? What gives the interviewee this impression (formal/informal discussions)?	Can you tell me why ………?

Appendix 9: Statistical Analysis of Association between preschool and staff variables with the global construct of organisational Climate

Dependent variable	Association with organisation climate
Preschool Structure	Fisher's Exact Test p value is not significant at <. 33
Number of staff	Chi Square test of independence χ^2 = 7.41 p value is not significant at <.11
Duration of employment	Chi Square test of independence χ^2 = 3.10 p value is not significant at <.79
Staff Qualifications	Chi Square test of independence χ^2 = 7.9 p value is not significant at <.44
Age of staff	Chi Square test of independence $\chi^2 = 6.43$ p value is not significant at <.59.

Appendix 10: High Climate Preschool – Comments regarding areas of satisfaction

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	TEACHERS/MANAGERS N = 13 staff 16 comments made	SUPPORT STAFF N =17 staff 13 comments made	Total number of staff comments 29 comments
Enjoys contact with the children	3 staff comments (19%)	5 staff comments (38.5%)	8/29 (28%)
Organisation of setting- e.g. rota system, allocation of duties.	3 staff comments (19%)	2 staff comments (15%)	5/29 (17%)
Teamwork	3 staff comments (19%)	5 staff comments (38.5%)	8/29 (28%)
All aspects of the job	1 staff comments (6%)	0 staff comments	1/29 (3%)
None or no response	0 staff	3 staff	
Other comments	6 staff comments (37%)	1 comment (8%)	7/29 (24%)

Appendix 10 (Cont'd): High Climate Preschool – Comments regarding areas of satisfaction

Preschool 1	Nursery Head and Nursery Deputy	Nursery assistants
6 staff	1. overall very pleased with the direction and his role in overseeing the nursery and staff team 2. SENCO role Observing and monitoring children Meeting with professionals to devise the best way to help with their needs	1. Very happy with the way the nursery is run. Feels part of the group, always included in informal and formal conversations. Have an amazing manager 2. Likes most of all the work with the children – but as a young assistant says there isn't time to teach the children as have to do everything else – e.g. tidy area. 3. The rota system is particularly helpful as you know your focus area. Staff cooperation and camaraderie is good and enjoys working at the nursery 4. The work environment: staff and being with the children
Preschool 2	Assistant manager	Nursery nurses
1 manager plus 3 staff = 4	1. Organisation of environment Parents Evenings Play and education	1. None 2. Spending time with the children and teaching 3. None
Preschool 3	Senior practitioner (ex-manager) and Deputy manager	Preschool practitioner
2 managers plus 1 staff = 3	1.Enjoys responsibilities towards children, parents and colleagues 2. SENCO role, meeting with parents to review IEPs	1. Supporting colleagues and being a very good part of a team
Preschool 4	Deputy manager plus 2 room leaders	3 nursery practitioners plus 1 nursery assistant
3 managers plus 4 staff = 7	1.Safeguarding and developing children's learning Opportunity to work one half day due to extended hours 2. All areas 3. Bring able to explore and share ideas with the team.	1. General supervision and day to day running 2. Rota is set so all jobs are shared equally, spread between each member of staff so it's fair – e.g. making beds, setting up the garden, tidying up, supervising the eating room etc. 3. Satisfied with all duties that involve the children 4. Having a half day gives time out from the workplace to do stuff that needs doing.
Preschool 5	Assistant manager	Nursery nurses
2 managers plus 4 staff = 6	1. Respondent likes all aspects of her job 2. Meeting and greeting children & parents and sharing the planning	1. Flexibility in planning activities Rotation of duties 2. Plan activities 3. No comment made 4. As a whole we work together, all staff making the transition from class to class and school easier for the children. Though in different classes, the children and staff behave like a big family with lots of nursery carers
Preschool 6	Teachers	Teaching assistant
3 teachers plus 1 support staff = 4	1. Teaching – I enjoy teaching and we have good class sizes that allow us to spend adequate time with the children. 2. working with a strong EYFS team 3. Feels that the allocation of duties amongst teachers is done fairly and doesn't ask too much of her time	1. Help in the classroom with supporting children to complete their tasks Feeling part in the process of planning (taking note of my ideas). Not present in meetings, but the teacher asks about what I think.

Appendix 11: Low Climate staff responses to areas of satisfaction

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	Teachers/room leaders N= 15 staff 15 comments made.	Support staff N = 24 staff 29 comments	Combined staff comments 44 comments
Enjoys contact with the children	**8 staff comments (53%)**	**13 staff comments (44%)**	**21 responses (47%)**
Organisation of setting- e.g. rota system, duties.	**0 staff comments**	**6 staff comments (21%)**	**6 responses (14%)**
Teamwork	**2 staff comments (13%)**	**8 staff comments (27.5%)**	**10 responses (23%)**
All areas	**3 staff comments (20%)**	**0 staff comments**	**3 responses (7%)**
Other comments	**2 comments (13%)**	**2 comments (7%)**	**4 responses (9%)**
None or no COMMENT	**3 staff did not comment**	**4 staff did not comment**	**7 staff**

Appendix 11 (cont'd): Low Climate staff responses to areas of satisfaction

Preschool 1	Teachers	Teaching assistants and Support staff
12 staff	1.Teaching 2. All of it 3. Teaching and learning with the children 4. All areas	1.None 2. My artwork with the children 3. Helping the children in their learning and development 4. None 5. Seeing the children develop and parents comments 6. sharing of jobs equally 7. Enjoy seeing children's positive progression 8. Support from other staff
Preschool 2	Room leader/Senior practitioner	Nursery assistants
5 staff	1. None 2. None	1. Each member of staff within the room takes turns in rotating roles and responsibilities Strong staff team within the room. 2. Enjoys going to other rooms when duty staff are absent. Gives a chance to do something different. 3. Relating with the children/teaching them Updating profiles Listening to what the children have to say Learning from other staff
Preschool 3	Teachers	6 Teaching assistants
9 staff	1 teaching/working with children. 2..enjoy teaching; interactions with children 3.making role play areas in classroom	1. Great relationship with colleagues. 1. Share duties well with colleagues 2.Mentioned most areas of curriculum i.e. teaching 2. Three colleagues 3.Lots of support btw 3 other staff members 3. Enjoys time given (1 afternoon) to carry out tasks/profiles etc. 4.Involvement in planning/responsibility 5.Working alongside children 6.None mentioned
Preschool 4	Acting deputy manager and room leader	4 nursery practitioners/nursery assistants
6 staff	1. None 2. Spending time with the children 2.Working as a team to improve good practice	1. No response 2.Playing with the children 3. Supervised 'sleep time' as it gives me the opportunity to do my weekly paperwork 4. the opportunity to implement my ideas to encourage learning and development Seeing the children try new things and eventually become confident at the new things
Preschool 5	Teachers	TAs and Support staff
7 staff	1.Teaching Senior management involvement Involvement in Christmas plays 2.All areas 3. teaching 4. children's progress	1. Work with children and parents Sharing ideas and working within the team 2. working with children teaching and interaction with the children 3. working with the children

Appendix 12: High Climate Preschools – Staff responses regarding areas of dissatisfaction

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	Teachers/room leader N = 13 12 comments	Support staff N = 17 18 comments	Staff = 30 Total number of comments = 30
Lack of time	**5 comments (42%)**	**6 comments (33%)**	**11 comments (36%)**
Staffing issues: staff absences and cover, poor quality of staff	**2 comments (16.5%)**	**2 comments (11%)**	**4 comments (13%)**
Lack of teamwork/Support	**0 comments**	**1 comment (5.5%)**	**1 comment (3%)**
Dissatisfaction with duties outside the classroom	**0 comments**	**2 comments (11%)**	**2 comments (7%)**
Pay and conditions	**0 comments**	**2 comments (11%)**	**2 comments (7%)**
Excessive workload	**2 comments (16.5%)**	**1 comment (5.5%)**	**3 comments (10%)**
Other comments	**3 comments (25%)**	**4 comments (22%)**	**7 comments (23%)**
None or no comment	**5 staff**	**5 staff**	**10 staff**

Appendix 12 (Cont'd): High Climate Preschools – Staff responses regarding areas of dissatisfaction

Preschool 1	**Nursery Head and Nursery Deputy**	**Nursery assistants: 4**
6 staff	1. A difficult question, as the only real factor is time for: profiles, planning, evaluation, and other management/key worker responsibilities – i.e. can see the things that need doing but finding time is a huge divide. 2. None	1. None. 2. Would like to be a teacher so is waiting until she can improve her English 3. Cover when staff are away is almost non-existent as they always manage BUT something has to give and respondent feels rather stressed these days. 4. Lack of time for learning journeys, observations and paperwork, lunch breaks and generally time out from class/classroom duties.
Preschool 2	**Assistant manager**	**3 Nursery nurses**
3 staff	1. Arranging time for all Pre-Prep teachers to discuss planning, curriculum, individual children's needs and new projects	1. Support and being recognised – that he works as an individual and that he is male in a so-called female-based role 2. Attending staff meetings after working hrs and room meetings Not having a role in the nursery, e.g. being a SENCO Not enough time to finish paperwork Not happy with salary. Works so hard and it doesn't seem to be recognised 3. None
Preschool 3	**Senior practitioner and Deputy manager**	**1 Preschool practitioner**
3 staff	1. Lack of 'working hours' necessitates working from home Lack of funding for SEND requirements 2. H&S issues, covering for absent staff	1. Time to write reports
Preschool 4	**Deputy manager plus 2 room leaders**	**3 nursery practitioners, 1nursery assistant**
7 staff	1. None 2. None 3. None	1. None 2. No response 3. Work overload when qualified staff are absent or when it is a busier week, e.g. settling in 3. There is no time form paperwork. 4. None
Preschool 5	**Assistant manager and 1 Room Leader**	**Nursery nurses = 4**
6 staff	1. None, but sometimes there is too much work to do and we do not have the time to do it in the working hours. AS a consequence I cut my lunch break time and try to do it then. Doesn't like taking work home but doesn't have a choice. 2. Not having time to do relevant paperwork	1. Lack of staff meetings Little time to plan or complete children's files during work hours 2. Time they have to do paperwork 3. Lunch cover. She feels they should have lunch cover staff 4. Too much paperwork outside classroom duties
Preschool 6	**3 Teachers**	**1 Teaching assistant**
4 staff	1. Filing and EYFS profiles which must be done after school usually in our own time 2. None 3. Sometimes there is extra pressure placed on teachers to cover absences	1. In her opinion TAs have too many duties in the playground, supervising children. That doesn't give them enough time to do profiles or sometimes not tidy up the equipment used or get the class ready for the next lesson.

Appendix 13: Low Climate Preschools – Staff responses regarding areas of dissatisfaction

	Teachers/room leaders N= 15 staff 20 comments	Support staff N = 24 staff 33 comments	Combined staff responses N = 39 staff 53 responses
Lack of time	**4 comments (20%)**	**6 comments (18%)**	**10 comments (19%)**
Staffing issues: staff absences and cover, poor quality of staff	**3 comments (15%)**	**3 comments (9%)**	**6 comments (11%)**
Lack of teamwork	**3 comments (15%)**	**2 comments (6%)**	**5 comments (9%)**
Dissatisfaction with duties/work outside the classroom	**2 comments (10%)**	**9 comments (27%)**	**11 comments (21%)**
Pay and conditions	**2 comments (10%)**	**5 comments (15%)**	**7 comments (13%)**
Excessive workload	**0 comments**	**1 comment (3%)**	**1 comment (2%)**
Other comments	**5 comments (25%)**	**4 comments (12%)**	**9 comments (17%)**
Leadership management issues	**1 comment (5%)**	**3 comments (9%)**	**4 comments (7.5%)**
'None' or no comment	**5 staff**	**8 staff**	**13 staff**

Appendix 13 (Cont'd): Low Climate Preschools – Staff responses regarding areas of dissatisfaction

Preschool 1	4 Teachers	8 TAs and Support staff
12 staff	1. Dealing with ICT 2. None 3.Top-heavy assessment in Early Years 4. None	1. None; 2. None 3. None; 4. None; 5. None 6. Paper work; not enough hours in a day 7. Would rather not be a lunchtime supervisor. Feel that this time would be better used in the classroom 8. Time available for Nursery team to get together
Preschool 2	**Room leader/Senior practitioner**	**3 Nursery assistants**
5 staff	1. None 2. The nursery is always short staffed on a Friday Not enough time given to complete paper work No more sick pay for staff Lack of communication between staff Management having favourite staff and friends.	1. Weekly observations for children and not having any time within the day to complete them Staffing being moved around very frequently due to other staff absences Lack of resources 2. None 3. Not satisfied with the quality of staff being employed within the setting Resources
Preschool 3	**3 Teachers**	**6 Teaching assistants**
9 staff	1.Inadequate time to complete duties 1.Inadequate cover for staff 1. **Little praise from manager & parents** 2. frustration with EY not really given a high status 2. After school club – a big demand on top of other responsibilities 2. Completing order forms – should be secretarial duty 3. Lack of supply cover 3. Late duty – lack of financial reward for this 3. Time available to meet with staff to complete coordinator paperwork	1.Staff meetings are long and not necessary for everyone to attend 1.No time to complete planning/learning profiles 1.Attending training/celebration days/fairs on weekend. 2.Lunch duty 2. Not had a proper pay rise for many years 2. Asked to come in over weekend and not get paid **or even valued.** 3. expected to stay late even though many staff in school 'way before' start time NEVER THANKED 3. Moaning from EY leader 3. Amount of paperwork piled on top of staff each day. 4.Inadequate provision for staff absence 4. Non-contact time for learning profiles (have to do at home on weekends as not enough time. 5.Salary does not reflect responsibility of role as room leader 5.Resources – frustrated at time takes to ask and receive resources for improvements to surroundings 5.**No professional dev' or reviews** 5.Negative EYFS coordinator 6.Do not like late evening e.g. parent socials also parent consultations 6.Working on Saturdays e.g. Summer/Xmas fairs, assessments
Preschool 4	**2 managers**	**4 nursery practitioners/ assistants**
6 staff	1. None 2. No support from management regarding staff performance	1. Would like a 10min break in morning or evening Better teamwork needed 2.None; 3. None 4. Not enough jobs to do as I like to be occupied
Preschool 5	**4 Teachers**	**3 TAs and Support staff**
7 staff	1.Volume of emails 2.None 3. would like PPA time 4. Insufficient time to complete admin tasks	1. Lunch duties; before and after school care 2. Before and after school care Unpaid over-time i.e. attending twilight meetings, fairs, openings etc. 3. Before and after school care More time for preparation of resources

Appendix 14: High Climate staff responses to manageable changes

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	Teachers/room leader N = 13 15 comments	Support staff N = 17 16 comments	Total staff = 30 31 comments
Time management improvements	**8 comments (53%)**	**8 comments (50%)**	**16 comments (52%)**
Staffing issues: supply and improvements to organisation	**3 comments (20%)**	**2 comments (12.5%)**	**5 comments (16%)**
Improvement to duties	**2 comments (13%)**	**1 comment (6.25%)**	**3 comments (10%)**
More resources	**0 comments**	**1 comment (6.25%)**	**1 comment (3%)**
Other comments	**2 comments (13%)**	**4 comments (25%)**	**6 comments (19%)**
None or no comment	**2 staff**	**3 staff**	

Appendix 14 (Cont'd): High Climate staff responses to manageable changes

Preschool 1	**Nursery Head and Nursery Deputy**	**4 Nursery assistants:**
6 staff	1. Nursery has a split session (am/pm) so consolidating part-time children into certain days could free up work time for profiles & observations. 2. As always extra hrs in the day Cover staff when professionals visit to enable time for a complete chat.	1. Feels that the other young assistant isn't as helpful as she could be, and the respondent ends up doing twice as much. Hopes this will be addressed soon. 2. Would like to do more teaching, making observations and going on courses. 3. Competent cover would be helpful and an assistant to monitor shelves at focus time would be excellent so that respondent could concentrate on the children. 4. Would be ideal to have a day a week to catch up on paperwork, prep work and books.
Preschool 2	**Assistant manager**	**3 Nursery nurses**
4 staff	1. Paid 1 hr for staff to stay after work and complete discussions, planning etc.	1. No comment made 2. Maybe having 1hr shorter day or, if not, at least another shorter break to recharge batteries, for example a cup of coffee To have a level of responsibility e.g. SENCO More resources: reading materials, videos 3. None
Preschool 3	**Senior practitioner and Deputy manager**	**Preschool practitioner**
3 staff	1.Recognition that current government funding does not allow suitable remuneration for the work which has to be taken outside working hours 2. More time for paperwork and then keeping that time set aside	1. Streamlining paperwork, as there is too much
Preschool 4	**Deputy manager and 2 room leaders**	**3 nursery practitioners, 1nursery assistant**
7 staff	1. Additional time given to complete children's files when they need it. 2. None 3. None	1. New nappy bins 2.More time to complete paperwork 3. Would be very helpful to have one hour per week just to do paperwork, sorting pictures etc. 4.None
Preschool 5	**Assistant manager and 1 Room Leader**	**4 Nursery nurses**
6 staff	1. More breaks would be useful Time off to do files/observations/children's tracking Time for classroom meetings Time for doing planning at work/ long/medium/short Time for doing newsletters 2. Having cover to be able to complete relevant paperwork	1. Time during work hrs to complete children's files and planning 2.Designate a time to do the paperwork in the Nursery 3. Would like to have some time set aside each week so doesn't have to take work home – printing' planning etc. 4. It would be helpful to do some shadowing with other nurseries to compare their day routine.
Preschool 6	**3 Teachers**	**1 Teaching assistant**
4 staff	1. Not doing lunch duty every day would give us more time to do admin' work. 2. Eliminate the need for so much paperwork 3. More frequent use of supply staff if and when usual members of staff are absent	1. More time for completion of profiles Lack of resources to create role play areas

Appendix 15: Low Climate staff responses to manageable changes

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	Teachers/room leader = N= 15 staff 19 comments	Support staff N= 24 staff 25 comments	Combined staff responses N = 39 staff 44 comments
Time management improvements	**4 comments (21%)**	**6 comments (24%)**	**10 comments (23%)**
Staffing issues: supply and improvements to organisation	**7 comments (37%)**	**4 comments (16%)**	**11 comments (25%)**
Teamwork and/or communication	**4 comments (21%)**	**4 comments (16%)**	**8 comments (18%)**
Improvement to duties	**1 comment (5%)**	**4 comments (16%)**	**5 comments (11%)**
More resources	**0 comments**	**1 comment (4%)**	**1 comment (2%)**
Leadership/Management issues	**0 comments**	**3 comments (13%)**	**3 comments (7%)**
Other comments	**3 comments (16%)**	**3 comments (12%)**	**6 comments (14%)**
'none' or no comment	**2 staff**	**9 staff**	**11 staff**

Appendix 15 (Cont'd): Low Climate staff responses to manageable changes

Preschool 1	4 Teachers	8 Teaching Assistants and Support staff
12 staff	1.Reconsider PPA 2. A cover supervisor ion school would be helpful 3. Less emphasis on paperwork & assessment procedures which aren't child centres 4. N/A	1, 2, 3 and 4: No comment 5. Time to manage all the paperwork. Cut down on the amount of paperwork and changes in the setting – i.e. profiles/tracking etc. 6, 7 and 8: No comment made
Preschool 2	**Room leader and Senior practitioner**	**3 Nursery assistants**
5 staff	1. For her room to have cover at all time because of the safety of the children and for their needs to be met. 2. Change of manager Team building activities for staff to improve team work More supply staff to cover absent staff, who are qualified.	1. Staff given time out weekly to complete key children's folders 2. No response 3. Staff being more dedicated to their job Staff putting the children first before their own needs Provision of more materials
Preschool 3	3 Teachers	**6 Teaching Assistants**
9 staff	1.More time 2.To see Headteacher more in EY so that he can appreciate demands of job 2. Proper non-contact time so that there is adequate cover in classroom 3. Cover for absent staff 3. More time for planning 3. Letting staff go on courses	1.More time in school to complete profiles and planning 1.Help within class – extra assistant 2. More professional dev'. No time to go on courses. Never been offered courses 2. Hardly ever complimented on our work 3. Cover when someone is absent instead of having to make do. 3. When we are off sick not to get a text expecting us to be in the next day and feeing we are letting the team down. 4.Specialist playtime supervisors 4.Non-contact afternoon for profile work 5.A morning break and more non-contact time 5.Feeling valued 5. Less Saturdays a year required to work 6.No comments made
Preschool 4	**2 managers**	**4 nursery practitioners/ assistants**
6 staff	1. None 2. More open communication from staff who have concerns or issues Staff need to stick to agreed plan with regards to the running of the room	1. Teamwork 2.Need more teamwork and support from management 3. Do more key group activity 4.Allocate more jobs to me
Preschool 5	**4 Teachers**	**3 Teaching Assistants and Support staff**
7 staff	1.Emails to arrive via school office 2. TAs should be line managed by a member of SMT – not class teacher. Creates problems in working environment 3.Would prefer not to have lunchtime duties 4. Less meetings; some PPA time; better time management	1. Additional staff to cover duties More time for prep and planning 2. Not having to do breakfast and after school clubs or out of hours duties 3. Less duties

Appendix 16: High Climate Preschool staff responses regarding ways in which staff roles are organised which have a positive effect for staff

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	Teachers/room leader N = 13 14 comments	Support staff N = 17 14 comments	Total staff = 30 Total comments = 28 comments
Staffing e.g. roles delegated with care - shared between levels of experience, or strengths etc., clarity	**6 comments (43%)**	**8 comments (57%)**	**14 comments (50%)**
Teamwork	**5 comments (36%)**	**3 comments (21%)**	**8 comments (28%)**
Organisational aspects – rotas, clarity	**1 comment (7%)**	**2 comments (14%)**	**3 comments (11%)**
Other comments	**2 comments (14%)**	**1 comment (7%)**	**3 comments (11%)**
'None' or no response	**4 staff**	**5 staff**	**9 staff**

Preschool 1	Nursery Head and Nursery Deputy	Nursery assistants: 4
6 staff	1. The clarity of roles and specific duties; also sharing the duties with each other 2. All individual roles are given out in line with personal interests in specific areas as much as possible	1. Roles shared very well as have older and younger people. The difference in age means that the diversity in the setting is great; the younger people are more active, but the older will give wise advice. 2. The setting is very well organised; always trying to do everything on time. 3. Rota system makes life easier 4. None
Preschool 2	Assistant manager	3 Nursery nurses
4 staff	1. In her Pre-Prep room all of the staff have some management responsibilities, with herself (assistant manager) being the overall decision maker. All of the staff can and know how to run a room if needed.	1. None 2. Clarity of roles. Sharing a role with other member of staff in charge when room leader is absent 3. The staff roles are organised with a daily routine but can be adapted with change if necessary. This then helps the flow of the room and the ratio for safety. The role we have, and our characters brings us all able to work together to make a good team
Preschool 3	Senior practitioner and Deputy manager	Preschool practitioner
3 staff	1 Job/Person descriptions/specifications matched to individual strengths & preferences 2. New situation and unsure of new manager's role	1. New leader taken over so changes being brought in which need to be adjusted/tweaked.
Preschool 4	Deputy manager plus 2 room leaders	3 nursery practitioners, 1nursery assistant
7 staff	1. Management are well experienced room leaders. They are qualified level 3s and therefore able to develop practitioners where development is needed which enables us to communicate well. 2. No response 3. No response	1. Role sharing 2.No response 3. All staff have own duties and share duties. More experienced staff have extra duties e.g. helping students 4.None
Preschool 5	Assistant manager and 1 Room Leader	Nursery nurses = 4
6 staff	1. None 2. Good to have a manager for extra support. Feel deputy manager not always fulfilling responsibilities Communication not always good between management and staff	1. Every few years teachers may have a choice in working with a different age group 2. None 3. Getting together in their own time to plan the term's projects etc. 4. Staff roles organised according to individual preferences and aptitude and discussed by all
Preschool 6	3 Teachers	1 Teaching assistant
4 staff	1. None 2. Regular meetings throughout the school keeps all informed. Excellent support staff in the office. All staff always have time for each other 3. Staff roles organised in a way which promotes a positive workplace for teachers, but some TAs are very loaded with duties. Acknowledges this is the case for all TAs	1. Reception teachers: One of them has experience in teaching Reception, the second one it is her first year in reception. They can share experience and the new and fresh ideas. 1. Sharing knowledge to help the development of the children.

Appendix 17: Low Climate Preschool staff responses regarding ways in which staff roles are organised which have a positive effect for staff

RESPONSES CATEGORISED

	Teachers/room leaders N= 15 staff 6 comments	Support staff N = 24 staff 19 comments	Combined staff responses N = 39 staff 25 comments
Staffing e.g. roles delegated with care -shared between levels of experience, or strengths etc. (positive and negative comments made)	**2 comments (positive) (33%)**	**2 comments (partly negative) (10.5%)**	**4 comments (16%)**
Teamwork (positive and negative comments made)	**2 comments Both positive (33%)**	**7 comments (5 positive; 2 negative) (37%)**	**9 comments (36%)**
Organisational aspects – rotas, clarity of roles (positive and negative comments made)	**1 comment (positive) (17%)**	**8 comments (1 negative) (42%)**	**9 comments (36%)**
Other comments	**1 comment (17%)**	**2 comments (10.5%)**	**3 comments (12%)**
'None' or no comment	**9 staff**	**13 staff**	**22 staff**

Appendix 17 (Cont'd): Low Climate responses: positive effects of organisation of staff roles

Preschool 1	3 Teachers	8 Teaching Assistants and Support staff
12 staff	1. Supportive team ethos 2; 3. None 4. Excellent idea to share ideas, problems, strengths and issues with management	1; 2; 3. None 4; 5 No comment made 6. None 7. No comment made 8. All work as a team across year groups
Preschool 2	Room leader/Senior practitioner	3 Nursery assistants
5 staff	1. None 2. None	1. In the specific area where the respondent works staff roles are fully organised which has a positive effect. 2. Staff teams work well within rooms- value each other. 2.Each person is aware of their role 2. and has a positive attitude (Good role models) From the morning there is a structured routine, so each staff member knows what they are doing. 3. In some rooms – the staff strengths and skills work well. In other rooms this structure is very weak.
Preschool 3	3 Teachers	6 Teaching Assistants
9 staff	1.None 2.Re-iterated need for pro-active input from Head of Pre Prep i.e. not positive 3.Responsibilities are evenly distributed	1; 2. None 3. Nice that staff get moved around into different classes as years go on 3. Most members have a good working/social relationship and will support each other when needed 4.None 5.Friendly environment 5.Enrichment very good 6.No comments made
Preschool 4	Acting deputy manager and room leader	4 nursery practitioners/nursery assistants
6 staff	1. None 2. Management team are great at organising events to include staff, parents and children e.g. Mother's Day arts and craft day.	1. A feeling some roles are overlapped or trying to take over some people's responsibilities 2. No support from management and no team work 3. deploy staff in different areas of the room to ensure safety Teamwork – all working together to create a good atmosphere 4. Chain of command works well as a preschool practitioner I would speak to my room leader 4. All permanent staff are involved in their key children's planning. They solely decide what to put on planning based on their observations
Preschool 5	4 Teachers	Teaching Assistants and Support staff
7 staff	1; 2; 3; None 4. Staff who have certain strengths and skills will be put with a teacher who would benefit from these. Staff who have expertise with a certain age group will also be placed there	1. None; 2. None 3. In the past staff talents and strengths have not been used to the best advantage Sometimes certain members of staff have too much say, while others have none

Appendix 18: High Climate Interviewee comments relating to operational issues

Preschool 1 **2 staff**	• Everyone attends staff meetings and open forum • Daily staff discussion about rationale for activities at each child's table • Collective discussions at start of each half-term – e.g. re' boards • Staff have own designated areas that they are responsible for – 'really does work!' • Job roles shared by Head • Challenge given to new appointees as and when ready • Clear roles
Preschool 2 **2 staff**	• Everyone knows their role • Have daily routine and rota which can be amended if staff are absent
Preschool 3 **2 staff**	• They plan together • Inset day at beginning of each term • Weekly planning is shared between staff; they are all flexible • Formal planning meeting once a term but as things change review: a reactive/innovative process • Everyone can give input at staff meetings • Small cohort of people and good systems are already in place • Roles matched to individual strengths • Roles when someone moves- reviewed Longevity of staff; not much turnover
Preschool 4 **2 staff**	• Whole group meetings are productive • Room leader does planning and asks for input from the girls • Rotas for the structure of the day and planning • Flexibility in changing year groups which felt positive about • Have a lot of choice re' the planning and what they do
Preschool 5 **2 staff**	• Staff meetings once a month. Before have an agenda which is passed around for items to be added • Plan on a day when there are fewer children – can then 'get together' • New system introduced of 4 full days and 1 half day – good as able to pick up own children from school one day a week. **This change was made after discussion with staff** • Already have additional time in which to complete children's files • Some staff have additional responsibilities • All give input to planning completed by room leader – everyone has an aspect to cover • Some staff have been at the nursery for 20yrs; she hasn't yet been here 1 year • Clear hierarchy of roles
Preschool 6 **1 staff**	• Weekly staff meeting for all staff and bi-weekly EY meetings • Staff meetings are led by the Head and most staff feel they can make comments • Staff ratios very good and give the workplace a positive feel • Staff know who their line manager is, and all roads lead back to the Headteacher

Appendix 19: Low Climate Interviewee comments relating to operational issues

Preschool 1 **2 staff**	• Whole school staff meetings once a week. EY meeting every other week • Staff meetings usually discuss paperwork – trying to make things clear to staff • Monday staff meeting with the Head is mostly aimed at teachers but teaching assistants have never been told that they cannot attend. • Within KS1 Department TAs do attend meetings. Planning completed in own year groups
Preschool 2 **2 staff**	• Expected to attend staff meetings as often as they are called about once every month. • Staff meetings every 3 months. Will have at least 2-3 weeks' notice. Some are useful, but some could be given out by letter. Sometimes people want to rush home as the meetings are after work at 6.30 and people have been working since 7.30. It's a VERY LONG TIME. • Staff meetings can be 'rowdy, if there is no agenda, so it's not very productive for someone who has worked from 8.00 – 6.00. • No specific time for planning as everyone works different shifts. Planning has to be done quickly in the room; each person will plan separately. Paperwork is checked by room leaders regularly and by management every 2-3 months. If staff 'get behind' with their paperwork they get into trouble.
Preschool 3 **1 staff**	• Once a week have a whole school staff meeting, either the Pre-Prep, or the Junior School. Time is not used effectively at some whole staff meetings where all 5 of the TAs have to attend. Individual children are discussed, or training provided. Minutes taken. • On Thursday they are required to stay for planning. Every 2-3 weeks they have a EYFS meeting, which involves the reception classes and the nursery. These are organised by the EYFS coordinator. Sometimes the Head of the PP will attend.
Preschool 4 **2 staff**	• Have staff meetings once a month after school from 6pm • Room Leader has organised an Action Plan and given staff tasks and responsibilities for an area of the room. This had worked okay. • Style of planning involves observing the children and relating planning to this. • Everyone is involved in planning • Manager and deputy will come into the rooms to help if something is chaotic. They will delegate specific tasks to staff. They will not remain to see that things have been done. • There have been additional staff meeting recently as Ofsted was visiting • There recently have been 'loads of new staff'. • They don't have planning meetings –use observations on board to which add activities. Every key worker is responsible for their key children
Preschool 5 **2 staff**	• Whole school staff meetings twice a week. The one after school is only for teachers. Thinks reason is that it was 'hit and miss' as to how many TAs could attend as they were doing after school care. Now they have their own weekly TA meeting, which in theory goes over the key issues, perhaps they have separate issues as well. • SLT attend both staff meetings – i.e. Teachers and TAS meetings • Have planning meetings once a week and that's with the two parallel teachers; TAs don't attend. The teacher believes that TAs were involved several years ago and are looking to re-introduce this. Learning objectives are currently planned by the teachers but use of the resources is usually done daily by negotiation with the TA; so the TAs do have a lot of autonomy and are involved in the planning indirectly. • TAS don't attend official staff meetings, they have a separate TA meeting. The TA didn't know the reason for this. She had started separate TA meetings years ago for them to discuss their own issues. However, they have now been 'taken over' and they no longer chair them themselves. The Headteacher comes in and sets the agenda. It's the same agenda as the staff meetings which they are not allowed to attend, and they have to talk about those things set out for them. TAs not included in planning

Appendix 20: Second Questionnaire and Interviewee Characteristics

Length of Employment in Current Setting	Characteristics of overall Questionnaire group	Characteristics of Interviewee Group
Less than 1 year	18%	22%
1 – 5 years	42.4%	33%
6 – 10 years	15%	17%
Over 10 years	24%	28%

Age	Characteristics of overall Questionnaire group	Characteristics of Interviewee Group
24 and under	10.4%	10%
25 - 34	29.8%	25%
35 - 44	22.3%	25%
45 - 54	17.9%	25%
55 - 64	19.4%	15%