

**Managing Behaviour in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings:**  
**the experiences of practitioners**

Georgia Harriet Ann Martin

Institute of Education

## **Abstract**

A review of the literature suggests there is a gap in the research on the experiences of staff working in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years settings in relation to their experiences of children demonstrating difficult and concerning behaviour. Previous research has predominantly focused on practitioner experiences of behaviour in mainstream settings (Merrett and Taylor, 1994; Stephenson, Linfoot and Martin, 2010). Consideration of practitioner experiences of training and support in relation to behaviour were also important given the potential impact of the staff group on a child's socio-emotional development (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004). A two stage mixed methods design was adopted to address three research questions: 1. What are the behaviours that early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings find difficult to manage and how concerning do they perceive these behaviours to be? 2. What do early years practitioners think are the factors influencing children's behaviour and what do they find helpful when managing behaviour in their setting? 3. What training and support are available to early years practitioners in these settings to help them manage difficult behaviour?

Questionnaire data was gathered from 63 practitioners working in PVI settings in one local authority. Semi-structured interviews, analysed using thematic analysis were conducted with a sample of the practitioners (n=11). The findings from the two stages of the data collection were combined during the data analysis under thematic headings. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews were then discussed in relation to the previously introduced literature and relevant psychological frameworks, e.g. Bronfrenbrenner's ecological systems model (Bronfrenbrenner, 1974;1994) and Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Limitations of the study were critiqued and future research areas and implications for the role of Educational Psychologists discussed.

I hereby declare that except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of appendices and list of references): 34, 071

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all the tutors and staff at the Institute of Education who have supported us and shared their knowledge and expertise throughout the last three years. With particular thanks to Dr Sarah Crafter, Karen Majors and Frances Lee for their supervision and support throughout the ups and downs of this research project.

Thank you to the Early Years team who were an enormous help throughout the research. I don't think I could have got through the data collection process without you and I really hope you enjoy reading it.

To all the participants who gave up their time to talk to me or complete a questionnaire- thank you!

Thank you to all the other 'TEPs', especially my fellow TEPs in Hertfordshire for all the support over the last three years.

Thank you to my family and friends, especially

## Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1 Background to the Research  | 1         |
| 1.2 Introduction  | 1         |
| 1.3 Context and background to the research  | 3         |
| 1.3.1 <i>The Early Years: the importance of early experiences</i>   | 3         |
| 1.4 Early years settings and the early years workforce  | 5         |
| 1.5 Understanding children's behaviour  | 7         |
| 1.6 Research rationale  | 9         |
| 1.7 Aims of the research and research questions   | 10        |
| 1.8 Summary   | 11        |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>   | <b>13</b> |
| 2.1 The impact of early years settings on children's development  | 13        |
| 2.2 What is considered difficult or concerning behaviour and why should this be addressed at an early stage?              | 19        |
| 2.3 Difficult and concerning behaviour; the importance of early intervention  | 26        |
| 2.4 Teacher and practitioner experiences of behaviour and support for managing behaviour                                  | 29        |
| 2.5 Theoretical frameworks for understanding difficult and concerning behaviour and approaches to managing behaviour      | 35        |
| 2.6 The role of the educational psychologist in the early years and in relation to working with early years practitioners | 44        |
| 2.7 Summary   | 46        |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>   | <b>47</b> |
| 3.1 Epistemological considerations  | 48        |
| 3.2 Mixed methods approach  | 49        |
| 3.3 Research design   | 51        |
| 3.4 The setting and participants  | 52        |
| 3.5 Procedure   | 53        |
| 3.5.1 <i>Questionnaire procedure (Stage 1)</i>  | 53        |
| 3.5.2 <i>Interview procedure (Stage 2)</i>  | 55        |
| 3.6 Materials   | 58        |
| 3.6.1 <i>Questionnaire</i>  | 58        |
| 3.7 Interviews  | 60        |
| 3.7.1 <i>Semi-structured interviews</i>   | 60        |
| 3.8 Constructing the interview schedule   | 60        |
| 3.9 Pilots  | 60        |

|   |  |            |
|---|--|------------|
| 3.10  | Data analysis  | 61         |
| 3.11  | Thematic analysis  | 61         |
| 3.12  | Stages of thematic analysis  | 62         |
| 3.13  | Ethical considerations   | 64         |
| 3.14  | Summary  | 65         |
| <b>Chapter 4: Practitioners' views, perceptions and experiences of managing difficult behaviour</b> |  | <b>68</b>  |
| 4.1   | Children's behaviour in early years settings   | 69         |
| 4.2   | Theme 1: Impact of the setting   | 80         |
| 4.2.1   | <i>Subordinate theme 1a: The impact of the staff group</i>   | 81         |
| 4.2.2   | <i>Subordinate theme 1b: Opportunities to share information and evaluate</i>                               | 83         |
| 4.2.3   | <i>Subordinate theme 1c: Impact of the physical environment</i>  | 85         |
| 4.3   | Theme 2: Knowledge and Expertise   | 86         |
| 4.3.1   | <i>Subordinate theme 2a: Perceptions of relevance and the effectiveness of qualifications and training</i> | 86         |
| 4.3.2   | <i>Subordinate theme 2b: Accessing support of advice within the setting</i>                                | 91         |
| 4.3.3   | <i>Subordinate theme 2c: Individual staff characteristics</i>  | 94         |
| 4.4   | Summary  | 96         |
| <b>Chapter 5: Relating managing behaviour to other contexts</b>                                     |  | <b>97</b>  |
| 5.1   | Theme 3: Impact of wider cultural changes  | 97         |
| 5.1.1   | <i>Subordinate theme 3a: Deterioration of behaviour</i>  | 97         |
| 5.1.2   | <i>Subordinate theme 3b: Implications of policy for behaviour</i>  | 98         |
| 5.1.3   | <i>Subordinate theme 3c: Impact of a range of socio-cultural influences</i>                                | 100        |
| 5.2   | Theme 4: The role of parents and families  | 102        |
| 5.2.1   | <i>Subordinate theme 4a: Working together with parents; challenges in the working relationship</i>         | 102        |
| 5.2.2   | <i>Subordinate theme 4b: Perception of parents as a barrier to change</i>                                  | 105        |
| 5.2.3   | <i>Subordinate theme 4c: Perceived characteristics of parents and families</i>                             | 107        |
| 5.3   | Summary  | 109        |
| <b>Chapter 6: Discussion</b>  |  | <b>110</b> |
| 6.1   | Practitioners' views, perceptions and experiences of managing difficult behaviour                          | 111        |
| 6.1.1   | <i>Children's behaviour in early years settings</i>  | 111        |
| 6.1.2   | Impact of the setting  | 116        |

|                   |   |            |
|-------------------|---|------------|
| 6.1.3             | <i>Knowledge and Expertise</i>                | 118        |
| 6.2               | Relating managing behaviour to other contexts | 120        |
| 6.2.1             | <i>Impact of wider cultural changes</i>       | 120        |
| 6.2.2             | <i>The role of parents and families</i>       | 122        |
| 6.3               | Summary of thoughts on the findings           | 125        |
| 6.4               | Limitations                                   | 126        |
| 6.5               | Implications                                  | 129        |
| 6.5.1             | <i>Further research</i>                       | 129        |
| 6.5.2             | <i>Educational Psychology (EP) practice</i>   | 130        |
| 6.5.3             | <i>Implications for settings</i>              | 132        |
| 6.6               | Conclusion to the research                    | 133        |
| <b>References</b> |   | <b>135</b> |

### **List of Figures**

|       |  |    |
|-------|--|----|
| 4.1   | Thematic Map   | 67 |
| 4.1.2 | Comparison of the frequency of behaviour categories rated difficult and difficult and concerning | 75 |

### **List of Tables**

|       |   |    |
|-------|---|----|
| 3.5.1 | Questionnaire settings  | 54 |
| 3.5.2 | Questionnaire participants  | 55 |
| 3.5.3 | Interview participants and settings   | 57 |
| 4.1.1 | Frequency of all behaviour categories listed and numbers of people listing them   | 71 |
| 4.1.2 | Frequency of behaviour categories being listed as the most difficult to manage  | 72 |
| 4.1.3 | Numbers and percentages of people rating their most difficult to manage behaviour category as concerning or very concerning | 74 |
| 4.1.4 | Key findings: participants' views on frequency of difficult behaviour and confidence in managing difficult behaviour        | 77 |



## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Questionnaire
- Appendix 2: Participant information sheet
- Appendix 3: Interview schedule
- Appendix 4: Example interview transcript
- Appendix 5: Examples of coding

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background to the research**

This piece of research was influenced by the researcher's own previous experience of working in a number of private, voluntary and independent nursery settings, particularly the challenging experiences of attempting to manage children's behaviour with limited prior knowledge or expertise and with minimal support from the setting.

Additionally, the researcher was motivated to chose this particular topic after experiencing limited opportunities as a trainee Educational Psychologist to work within early years settings, despite being aware of recent pieces of research demonstrating the potential significant impact of these settings on children's development, for example, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004).

#### **1.2 Introduction**

*“A policy which gives priority to investment in children would give practical recognition to the fact that they are the seed-corn of the future. Their development determines the fabric of tomorrow's society...”*

MIA KELMER-PRINGLE, *Investment in Children*, 1982

Some young children entering school and early years settings display 'difficult' or behaviour that staff working within the setting find challenging to manage (Merrett and Taylor, 1994). Existing research provides little evidence for understanding the types of difficult behaviour currently experienced by practitioners in early years settings and how problematic or concerning they deem these behaviours to be.

The literature is also sparse in relation to considering how they are supported to manage this behaviour; this is particularly true with reference to private, voluntary and independent nursery settings. Mathers, Eisentadt, Sylva, Soukakou and Ereky-Stevens (2014) in a recent review of the relevant literature highlighted the lack of research on the provision of good quality care in early years settings, particularly in relation to children under the age of 3. Behaviour that is a concern or difficult to manage is a significant issue to be addressed, as early behavioural difficulties are one of the key predictors of later poor developmental outcomes (Scott, Knapp, Henderson and Maughan, 2001). Additionally, behaviour difficulties that begin early in life are more likely to persist into adulthood compared to those that appear to originate in adolescence (Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva and Stanton, 1996).

The aim of this research is to explore the types of behaviours that early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nursery settings find difficult to manage and how concerning they perceive these behaviours to be.

The research will also consider what early years practitioners consider difficult behaviour to be, how they perceive their role in relation to supporting and managing behaviour and their experiences of training and accessing additional support. Understanding the experience of practitioners will help to identify what support educational psychologists could be providing to early years PVI settings.

This introduction begins by outlining the background and context of the relevant topics providing a rationale for the importance of undertaking the research. The chapter concludes by presenting the aims of the research and the research questions.

## **1.3 Context and background to the research**

### **1.3.1 The Early Years: The importance of early experiences**

There is increasing recognition of the importance of a child's early experiences and the impact they can have upon all areas of development; including personal, social and emotional development (David, Gooch, Powell and Abbott, 2003). This is reflected in both the current and previous governments' increasing emphasis within legislation on the early years (children aged 0-5). For example, the current government has increased the numbers of 2 year olds eligible for funded early learning places (DfE, 2013a) and the SEN Green Paper 2012 (now the Children and Families Act 2014) emphasises the importance of early assessment and intervention for children with additional needs as well as the importance of all children having access to high quality childcare. This appears to be borne out of the research suggesting that high quality pre-school provision can have a significant impact on a child's development (Sylva et al, 2004).

The new Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE and DoH, 2014) puts particular emphasis on early intervention. All providers of early years education are required to have regard to this code. The code suggests that early years practitioners should continually be monitoring and reviewing the development of children. It draws particular attention to a child's progress in communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. The code also suggests that support for children with difficulties should happen as soon as possible and settings must work in partnership with parents. In order to comply with the code settings will need to ensure that staff are competent at identification and assessment of need and are able to put in the relevant support as soon as possible.

Significant legislation, guidance and policy in the past ten years in relation to the 'early years' age group (children aged 0-5) includes: The Children's Act (2004), Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2004), the Sure Start initiative (intended to provide community based support for parents and children in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods), the establishment of Children's Centres to facilitate the delivery of multi-agency support for families and the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008) (revised in March 2012). A child's personal, social and emotional development is one of the prime areas of learning within the EYFS. Specific early learning goals are: developing self-confidence and self-awareness, managing feelings and behaviour and making relationships. Children are expected to be able to talk about their own and others' behaviour and its consequences, and to know that some behaviour is unacceptable, understand and follow rules and adjust their behaviour appropriately according to the situation.

The current government has made a commitment to increase the number of children who are eligible to access free early education. This could mean around 20% of two year olds from the least advantaged families being entitled to between 10 and 15 hours of free weekly education. This builds on the free weekly entitlement already available to families of three and four year olds of 15 hours per week. Children's eligibility for a place will initially be based on the 'free school meals' criteria and also those children who are looked after by the state. This 'free entitlement' will be provided by a diverse number of settings: registered childminders, nurseries and pre-schools in the maintained, voluntary, private and independent sectors (DfE, 2011a).

There is evidence to suggest that poverty and social deprivation are linked to an increase in behavioural problems and poor social and emotional development in young children (Kiernan and Mensah, 2009) so it is likely that there will be a higher than average incidence of difficult and concerning behaviour in those very young children accessing free education.

## **1.4 Early years settings and the early years workforce**

The majority of the settings providing childcare and early years care and education in England are private, voluntary and independent settings. The early years workforce is vast, with individuals employed in a variety of roles.

The Childcare and Early Years Providers survey (DfE, 2011b) indicated there were 107,900 settings providing childcare and early years care in England; 15,700 of these settings were maintained settings (funded by a local authority), 92,200 were other types of childcare settings, i.e. care being provided in private or voluntary settings or by registered childminders.

The early years workforce includes around 165,200 individuals employed in full day care, 58,300 workers in sessional day care and an estimated 111,184 nannies, The Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey (DfE, 2011b). Individuals are employed in a variety of roles within early years settings including: nursery assistants, teaching assistants, nursery nurses and teachers. Current research (Simon, Owen and Hollingworth, 2013) is examining the use of childcare provision in relation to characteristics of families as well as characteristics of the childcare workforce. Some of the roles undertaken by the workforce may not require any formal academic qualifications or training. In 2011, 8% of paid staff working within non-maintained childcare settings held no formal qualifications. 56% of staff working in these settings held a NVQ Level 3 qualification but in comparison to the maintained sector, a smaller proportion held a qualification above NVQ Level 3 (Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey, DfE, 2011b). The Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (DfE, 2014) section 3.23 states that:

*“In group settings the manager must hold at least a full and relevant level 3 qualification and at least half of all other staff must hold at least a full and relevant level 2 qualification. The manager should have at least two years’ experience of working in an early years setting, or have at least two years’ other suitable experience.”*

*(DfE, 2014, p. 20)*

The Framework also states that providers must ensure that their staff receive suitable induction training and appropriate supervision. The framework also indicates that settings must ensure that their staff have an appropriate understanding and ability to use English.

It is not within the scope of this review to examine in detail the content of all qualifications that may be undertaken by early years practitioners. However, as an example the Level 3 Diploma in Childcare, which is undertaken by nursery nurses, does include components related to children’s social and emotional development and supporting development in this area as well as encouraging positive behaviour. There appears to be less content related to managing behaviour in the setting or to building positive relationships and communicating with parents and other professionals who may be working with the child.

There will, of course, be a number of staff working within settings who have not undertaken any relevant qualifications (as demonstrated through the above data from The Childcare and Early Years Provider Survey, DfE, 2011b). The disparity in terms of qualifications, quality and expertise across both the early years workforce and types of setting is reflected in the Nutbrown Review (2012), which has called for more consistency in terms of the standards and contents of qualifications.

Taggart, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Melhuish, Sammons and Walker-Hall (2000) summarised the hierarchy in staff qualifications across the various range of settings:

*“Nursery classes and nursery schools...could be viewed as the most highly qualified, followed by combined centres, then private day nurseries and local authority centres together, and finally, playgroups that have the lowest proportion of qualified staff.”*

*(Taggart et al, 2000, p. 27)*

The evidence above suggests that educational provision for children under five is fragmented and variable and that there is a wide range of knowledge and understanding among staff working in early years settings.

It is, therefore, important to gain further insight and knowledge into the functioning of and the variability in the different types of settings, not just those within the mainstream, given the impact they can have on a child’s personal, social and emotional development and behaviour.

### **1.5 Understanding children’s behaviour**

A proportion of children attending early years settings will display behaviour that teachers or staff will find difficult to manage and/or that is concerning to them (DfE, 2012). However clearly delineating this population is not easy as there is debate in the literature over the types of behaviour that constitute a particular label or definition. Examples of terms used within the literature to describe children with difficult behaviour include: ‘challenging behaviour’, ‘behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). There are also close similarities between definitions used to describe the terms above and those used to diagnose mental disorders, such as, ‘conduct disorder’ or ‘oppositional defiant disorder’, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (1994).



The challenges associated with defining this population and the continued evolution of the terms are discussed in more depth in Chapter 2. This thesis draws on previous work that addresses behaviours that might be considered difficult to manage or concerning (Merrett and Taylor, 1994; Stephenson et al, 2010) without focusing on a defined population.

The differences in language and rhetoric used in relation to behaviour are significant, however, as a child's behaviour and how it is perceived will be strongly influenced by the context they are in and the explanations for the behaviour that the staff espouse. There is little in the literature at present to indicate whether practitioner experiences of behaviour in early years settings that is 'difficult' are linked to those encompassed by the definitions; this is particularly true in relation to private, voluntary and independent settings. In any case simply coming to an agreement about a label does not, in itself, necessarily lead to understanding and successful intervention (Carr, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner (1974) suggested that children's development is highly influenced by context and the multiple systems within which children operate. Unravelling this complexity includes trying to understand the processes of interactions, the characteristics and beliefs of the people involved and the influence of different contexts (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Miller (1995, 2003) stresses the importance of teachers' views of the explanation for difficult behaviour in schools. Weiner (2000) and Miller (1995, 2003) argue that understanding how people attribute the causes of difficult behaviour is essential, particularly in deciding on the interventions that are likely to have most success. Miller (2008) acknowledges that there are only a relatively small number of UK studies into teachers' views of the causes of challenging behaviour, but that these generally indicate that teachers tend to attribute difficult behaviour in schools mostly to factors related to home and parents. Miller writes:

*“... the real question becomes ‘how might the act of blaming become an obstacle to effective home-school strategies?’ And consequent to that, even more important for practitioners such as educational psychologists, ‘how can we work productively in an emotionally- charged climate of mutual blaming between school and home?’”*

*(Miller, 2008, p. 161-162.)*

Miller’s research was entirely conducted within schools. There is little research providing information on the beliefs and attributions of early years practitioners particularly those in private, voluntary and independent settings.

Of importance in terms of understanding difficult behaviour is knowledge of attachment theory. Attachment may be seen as the way in which an individual develops a relationship with another so that they provide comfort and safety (Bowlby, 1969). It has been suggested that early parental relationships and attachment style can influence a child’s later behaviour patterns (Stroufe, Fox and Pancake, 1983). The development of a close attachment to a member of staff in an early years setting may help in modifying difficult behaviour. An understanding of attachment theory could support work with parents (Van Zeijl et al 2006). It is important to ensure that where behaviour may be deemed concerning there are appropriate interventions in place, including supporting parents, given the evidence suggesting links between early onset behavioural difficulties and later poor developmental outcomes (Scott et al, 2012). This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

## **1.6 Research rationale**

The ‘early years’ are highly significant in relation to all aspects of a child’s development; early years settings and childcare can have a significant impact. One area in which children may experience difficulties is in managing and regulating their behaviour.

It has been noticeable that within the literature at present there appears to be a gap in information on the experiences of staff working in the early years and in certain specific types of early years setting, namely, private, voluntary and independent settings.

The rationale for this study takes into account the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) in working in the early years and what this research could contribute to their practice and the potential expansion of the EP role. It appears that early intervention for difficult behaviour is important and early years practitioners can influence this.

However, the EP role in early years currently appears to be largely limited to the assessment of individual children rather than working at the level of the system or organisation and providing support for staff, (Shannon and Posada, 2007; Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004).

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

The following aims were proposed as a framework for the research questions:

- To explore the types of behaviours that are being experienced by early years practitioners in PVI settings and how concerning they perceive these difficult behaviours to be
- To explore the type of training and support that is accessible to them to help manage this behaviour
- To explore practitioners' perceptions of the factors that influence children's behaviour in and the impact they believe they can have on changing behaviour

- To consider the implications for the training and support that is given to PVI settings in light of what they are currently experiencing as difficult behaviour and their understanding of, and attitudes towards, supporting it

The following are the three research questions to be addressed through both stages of the analysis:

*Research Question 1:*

What are the behaviours that early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings find difficult to manage and how concerning do they perceive these behaviours to be?

*Research Question 2:*

What do early years practitioners think are the factors influencing children's behaviour and what do they find helpful when managing behaviour in their setting?

*Research Question 3:*

What training and support are available to early years practitioners in these settings to help them manage difficult behaviour?

## **1.8 Summary**

This chapter has introduced the primary aims of the research, which focuses on exploring behaviour within the context of early years settings. The context and background to the research has been presented in terms of the current emphasis on the early years and the different types of provision available, as well as ongoing concerns about the possible fragmented nature of the expertise and effectiveness of the early years workforce.

A brief introduction was also given to the changing literature in relation to behaviour difficulties and the possible long-term outcomes for children who are not provided with effective intervention and support.

The psychological theory and framework underpinning the research was also described. The chapter concluded with a statement of the aims and research questions.

Chapter 2 will introduce and critique relevant literature in order to provide the context for the research. Chapter 2 will consider the research relevant to the key areas in order to explain why the research aims and stated primary research questions should be addressed.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter introduces and critiques relevant literature as a context for the present research. The literature review explains why the research aims and stated research questions should be addressed and considers the research that is relevant to the key areas:

- the impact of early years settings on children's development
- what is considered to be difficult or concerning behaviour and why this should be addressed at an early stage
- teacher and practitioner experiences of behaviour and support for managing behaviour
- practitioners' influence on behaviour

#### **2.1 The impact of early years settings on children's development**

One of the most significant studies on the impact of early years settings on children's development is The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al, 2004). It was the first major longitudinal study of a national sample of children's development between the ages of 3 and 7. The study investigated the effects of pre-school education, using data collected from the parents, home environment and pre-school settings. The study encompassed a range of different providers: local authority day nurseries, integrated centres, playgroups, private day nurseries, nursery schools and nursery classes. The sample also included a group of children who had no or minimal pre-school experience. As well as looking at the effects of pre-school provision the study explored the characteristics of effective practice.

The study found that high quality provision could have beneficial effects on children's intellectual and social/behavioural development when measured at school entry as well as at the end of Years 1 and 2 (Sylva et al, 2004). Generally some pre-school experience, compared to none, was found to enhance all-round development, and the beneficial effects of pre-school remained evident throughout Key Stage 1, although some outcomes were not as strong as they had been on school entry. Integrated centres (those that fully combine education with care and have a higher proportion of trained teachers) and nursery schools were found to promote the strongest intellectual outcomes for children and also tended to promote better social development even after accounting for other variables such as a child's prior social behaviour. Playgroups, private day nurseries and local authority day nurseries achieved lower scores on measures of these outcomes.

While attending pre-school at all had some impact on children's development, the effect was greater if the provision was of high quality. One of the key factors that influenced the 'quality' of a pre-school setting was the qualifications and quality of staff. Settings that had staff with higher qualifications had higher quality scores and their children made more progress. Slightly higher levels of anti-social behaviour were demonstrated by a small group of children starting pre-school before the age of 3. However, attending high quality pre-school provision between the ages of 3-5 was shown to reduce these levels. In relation to 'anti-social' behaviour, effective settings adopted discipline and behaviour policies in which staff supported children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts; less effective settings demonstrated no follow-up to misbehaviour, used distraction techniques or only told children to 'stop' the behaviour.

The EPPE Project (Sylva et al, 2004) looked beyond the pre-school settings for factors that influenced children's development and also considered some aspects of the wider context. In particular the study provided evidence that it is not only high quality pre-school provision that has a significant impact on a child's emotional and social development in the early years.

The study demonstrated that the home learning environment is also important. The research showed that there is a relationship between a child's home learning environment (HLE) and later positive social and behavioural outcomes. Indicators of a good quality HLE are parents who actively engage their child in a range of activities, for example reading, painting and drawing, and parents who provide regular opportunities to play with friends. There was a stronger association between a child's social development and the HLE than between the HLE and parents' educational or occupational level. This implies that some parents, who are less educated themselves, can, and do, provide a good home learning environment. The EPPE Project looked very closely at the environment of the pre-school. Although it did not explore the link between home and pre-school in depth the findings do shed light on the importance of the home environment (Melhuish, 2010). The Project could have explored the interaction between the two systems (home and pre-school) further. Additionally, a primary aim of the study was to look at the effects of the amount and type of pre-school provision on a range of factors whilst taking into account a child's personal, social and family characteristics. The study combined a variety of quantitative and qualitative data, including case studies, observation and standardised cognitive assessments, however, there was greater emphasis on the quantitative data and a lack of qualitative data in relation to participant experience and individual participant voice. Also when speaking with practitioners the study focused on pedagogy and practice and exploring aspects of teaching and learning. Interviews conducted and qualitative data gathered did not have a specific focus on practitioner experiences in relation to children's personal, social and emotional development. Nevertheless the evidence from this research and elsewhere (e.g. Woodhead, 1985; Anthony, Anthony, Glanville, Naiman, Waanders and Shaffer, 2005) strongly supports the view that:

*“Involving parents actively in their child's experience and helping them understand how they can support their children's learning and development will be critical.”*

*(Supporting Families in Foundation Years, DfE, 2011e, p. 29).*



The EPPE Project is the only large scale study of its kind in the UK. However the National Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI) study (Mathers and Sylva, 2007) also provided information on the relationship between the quality of care, aspects of provision and children's social behaviour. This study indicated that fully maintained local authority provision offered the highest quality physical environment and the most stimulating environment for the development of children's language and cognitive skills.

However, the NNI study (Mathers and Sylva, 2007) did not find a relationship between the type of sector and children's social and behavioural development. The authors suggest that the differential impact on cognitive development seen between sectors may not only be due to differences in qualifications of staff but also that maintained provisions have easier access to support from specialist staff, such as, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists.

The NNI evaluation (Mathers and Sylva, 2007), like other studies, indicated that the qualifications of staff were related to children's social and behavioural development. The study indicated that children with access to a qualified teacher were significantly more co-operative and sociable than those without. It also found that children in rooms where the average staff qualification levels were high were more co-operative and appeared less worried and upset than children in rooms with less well qualified staff teams.

As we have seen the evidence suggests that the qualifications and expertise of the workforce within a setting affect its quality. The government has recognised this and emphasised that there needs to be a focus on "continuing to improve the skills and qualifications of the workforce" (Supporting Families in Foundation Years, DfE, 2011e, p. 13).

This emphasis on the importance of skilled early years practitioners is also reflected in the introduction of the new 'Early Years Teacher' status, which aims to recruit specialist, higher quality professionals to early years settings (DfE, 2013a).

Nevertheless, there still appears to be a wide variation in the quality of children's early childcare experiences. This is significant, given that the evidence suggests it is likely to have an impact on children's future attainment, particularly in relation to their personal, social and emotional development.

As Sylva and Pugh (2005) argue:

*"... there are nettles to be grasped and adequate resources to be found if the quality of early education is to be central to all early years services, and if care and education are to be truly integrated."*

*(Sylva and Pugh, 2005, p. 24).*

This is echoed by the NNI Evaluation (Mathers and Sylva, 2007) which argued that support should be given to maintained providers, deemed to be particularly effective at providing high quality early years education, to enable them to continue to develop. The NNI Evaluation (Mathers and Sylva, 2007) also pointed out that additional support should be provided to nurseries in other sectors in order to raise the quality of the provision they offer.

The National Education Trust's report, 'Securing Standards, Sustaining Success' (Jackson, 2012) examined the types of early intervention work that was being done by professionals in Children's Centres. The report highlighted the importance of professionals having the ability to build good relationships when working with vulnerable families. It recommended that there needed to be a "co-ordinated programme of training, early identification (standard/universal assessments) and intervention (evidence based programmes) across the early years sector..." (Jackson, 2012, p. 3).

It also acknowledged that, in order for early intervention work to be timely and effective, any professional involved should have knowledge of early attachment, attunement and interaction, as well as an understanding of child development, all of which are areas where Educational Psychologists (EPs) possess skills and knowledge. This again highlights the significance of staff having an awareness of their role in influencing a child's socio-emotional development, and what that role might look like, as well as other factors that will make a significant contribution. This includes an awareness of the importance of their own views and attributes as part of the explanation for, and understanding of, children's behaviour (e.g. Miller, 1995) and, as has been mentioned, an understanding of the concepts of attachment and attunement. While awareness and knowledge can be acquired through training, the development of the necessary skills and practice may need to be supported by supervision and high quality management.

It is unclear from the available research how many practitioners working within early years settings possess the necessary knowledge and skills to work successfully with children demonstrating behaviour difficulties, or how many understand possible effective interventions and why they may be able to play a significant role in supporting and managing a child's behaviour. It is also unclear whether they feel confident and competent in being able to operationalise aspects of their training, whether they feel they are being supported effectively within their settings and whether aspects of their training are meaningful to them when they are working. This has been echoed in a recent review (Nutbrown, 2012). Nutbrown (2012) based her review on the premise that the quality of early education and childcare is key to its impact on children's later learning and development. Nutbrown (2012) also highlighted concern about the current early years qualification system. The Nutbrown (2012) review was intended to inform the development of a new strategy for the early years workforce, which would include reforming the system of qualifications. The review concluded that too many qualifications existed within the early years workforce and they were not equipping the workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills (Nutbrown, 2012).

Nutbrown (2012) made a number of recommendations to address this including that by September 2022 all staff must be qualified at level 3 and that there should be a new early years specialist route to qualified teacher status; newly qualified practitioners should also have mentoring for at least the first six months. Throughout, the review emphasises the importance of continuous professional development for staff. By speaking with practitioners about their concerns and professional development needs this research will contribute to an understanding of the support practitioners may require. This is in line with the recommendations of the review (Nutbrown, 2012).

While evidence suggests that good quality early years provision can have a positive effect on intellectual, social and behavioural development, there is still a wide variation, particularly in the private and voluntary sector, in staff expertise. Without a good understanding of child development and knowledge of interventions that are known to work, and why they may play a significant role, early years practitioners are likely to have reduced competence and confidence. Parents and carers are, of course, also central to a child's healthy social and emotional development. The home environment has a major influence on all aspects of development. Early years practitioners need a good understanding not only of their own role in terms of a child's socio-emotional development but also other factors that may contribute to this. Any support, therefore, that early years practitioners can provide to parents and carers is, therefore, likely to yield high dividends (Taylor, 1994; Miedel and Reynolds, 1999; Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2004).

## **2.2 What is considered to be difficult or concerning behaviour and why should this be addressed at an early stage?**

The section above introduced the idea that good quality early years settings with skilled, knowledgeable staff can have a significant impact on a child's socio-emotional development.

This section will consider what children who are having difficulties in this area 'look like' and how the conceptualisation of difficult behaviour has continued to change, and why it is important that practitioners are supported to intervene effectively. This is important given the possible long-term outcomes for children whose behaviour difficulties persist. It will be argued that, over time, there has been a degree of shift from a quest for an 'objective' definition of difficult behaviour to a recognition, as context and environment have considerable influence on children's behaviour, that the perception of staff about what they think of as difficult behaviour is important. However staff may consider behaviour difficult to manage but not be very concerned about it because, for example, they regularly see it in their setting.

It is hard to point to a single definition or agreed set of behaviours in the literature that defines a behaviour difficulty. This makes it challenging to accurately gauge the type and prevalence of the behaviour being experienced by practitioners in early years settings; perception of what constitutes 'poor' or 'difficult' or 'concerning' behaviour will be influenced by context and expectations (Ofsted, 2005). The research indicates that about 5% of children will demonstrate 'challenging behaviour' at some point in their schooling (Ofsted, 2005). However, little of the research looking at the extent of behaviour problems has focused specifically on the pre-school or early years population so prevalence in this population is less clear.

The definitions that have been used within the literature in relation to 'difficult behaviour' in schools have encompassed numerous terms.

It appears the language used has evolved over time in relation to government policy and societal views and attitudes. Terms that have been used in government publications since 1944 to describe this area have included: maladjustment, emotional or behavioural disorders, emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) (Frederickson and Cline, 2009).

Most early definitions appear to view behavioural difficulties as being attributable to something 'within child', such as neurodevelopmental problems with growth or development of the brain whereas later definitions take more account of environmental factors.

In 1994 the government attempted to distinguish between children displaying behaviour that is 'disruptive or naughty', emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and those with mental illness. Children with EBD were judged to be on a continuum and judgements as to whether a child had EBD were based on:

*"the nature, frequency, persistence, severity or abnormality and cumulative effect of the behaviour, in context, compared to normal expectations for a child of the age concerned."*

*(DfES, 1994, p. 4)*

Later on the Department for Education introduced the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2001) that stated children and young people with BESD are individuals who:

*"demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those who are presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex social needs."*

*(DfES, 2001, p 87).*

Over time the terminology has become increasingly extended and begins to acknowledge the influence and importance of external factors on a child's behaviour. It is also interesting that by 2001 any reference to 'normal' behaviour or expectations has been removed from the definition.

This again highlights an increasing recognition of the importance of context as judgements in relation to what is perceived as acceptable behaviour will be influenced by the expectations of the individual making them.

A range of other terms began to be used to describe children with BESD:

*“including social emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)<sup>1</sup>, antisocial, delinquent, maladjusted, deviant, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional and defiant disorder, conduct disorder (CD), aggressive, affective disorders, personality disorder and psychopathology...”*

*(Bennett, 2005, p. 11).*

The recent SEN Green Paper (DfE, 2011d) questions whether the category BESD is helpful in being able to identify underlying needs that may be contributing to the child’s behaviour. There is recognition of a range of causal factors that could be contributing to difficult behaviour, for example, underlying communication difficulties or difficulties in children’s home lives. Therefore any response should ensure that:

*“teachers are well equipped to identify whether children have SEN, or other barriers to engaging with learning and school life, and to provide appropriate early support...”*

*(DfE, 2011, p. 69)*

‘Barriers to learning’ may clearly be ‘within’ the child, for example epilepsy, but more recent government literature (DCSF, 2004; DfE 2011d; Humphrey and Squires, 2011) recognizes that many ‘barriers’ are environmental and contextual and interactive. This shift in definition, and understanding, leads to the conclusion that practitioners can potentially be agents of change for children with perceived difficult behaviour. To do this practitioners must be aware of their own influence and role in relation to the child’s behaviour, other possible contributory factors and what they need to change to make a difference.

---

<sup>1</sup> Over time behaviour difficulties have been given various descriptions with different concomitant abbreviations, for example, BESD, SEBD and EBD, along with other related conditions, for example, ADD, ADHD and CD. This is evident within the literature.

Even when a child has received a medical diagnosis in relation to their behaviour, there is recognition that effective support and intervention are likely to be multi-faceted. NICE guidelines in relation to children diagnosed with conduct disorders/oppositional defiant disorder (NICE, 2013a) state the three themes common to the interventions for this group of children are:

*“...a strong focus on working with parents and families, recognition of the importance of the wider social system in enabling effective interventions and a focus on preventing or reducing the escalation of existing problems.”*

*(NICE, 2013a, p 6.)*

This indicates that a child’s difficult behaviour, however it is labelled, is increasingly being recognised as the child’s response to their environment and the connections between the home, the school and the child, rather than a ‘within child’ orientation.

Children who have not received a formal label of BESD can still be extremely challenging for teachers’ to manage successfully within the school environment. Ofsted (2005) looked at definitions used by both academics and practitioners and concluded there were two types of ‘challenging behaviour’ predominantly experienced in schools:

*“The first is overtly aggressive behaviour: physical acts such as biting and pinching, throwing furniture and assaulting people. The second is aggression that is mainly verbal, for example, streams of abuse, temper tantrums, and invasion of personal space intended to be threatening. The second type includes behaviour which defies teachers’ authority in refusing to follow instructions.”*

*(OfSted, 2005, p. 7)*

A recent survey of teachers working across a variety of settings with the whole range of school age children indicated that teachers perceived that pupils’ behaviour had become more ‘challenging’ and that this deterioration may be linked to social factors like poorer parenting and a general deterioration of behaviour within society (Ellis, Tod and Graham-Matheson, 2012).



Teachers' view that poor behaviour is largely caused by external factors may mean that teachers do not believe they are able to change or influence the behaviour. Only 34% of the teachers surveyed working within mainstream settings felt well supported to manage behavioural difficulties. Many also expressed interest in training, believing that this would improve their understanding of the behaviour problems, i.e. the psychological factors that may contribute (Ellis et al, 2012).

The problem in defining what constitutes a behaviour difficulty is also complicated by the fact that some children who display behaviours like those described above may have other complex needs and diagnoses, for example, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and learning difficulties. This may be important, as altering the environment to be more comfortable for a child with, for example, ASD, may have more of an effect on difficult behaviour than a direct behavioural intervention.

The inherent difficulties in agreeing an accurate definition are illustrated by the apparent similarities between definitions of 'challenging behaviour' and difficult behaviour and those that have been used to diagnose mental disorders such as 'conduct disorder, and associated anti-social behaviour' and 'oppositional defiant disorder.' For example, the NICE guidelines (2013b) contain a description of the disorders as defined in the *International Classification of Diseases, 10<sup>th</sup> Revision* (ICD 10) (World Health Organisation, 1992) and DSM IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The guidelines state that in younger children (aged 3-7) the types of presenting behaviours may be:

*“Younger children aged 3 to 7 years usually present with general defiance of adults' wishes, disobedience of instructions, angry outbursts with temper tantrums, physical aggression to other people especially siblings and peers, destruction of property, arguing, blaming others for things that have gone wrong, and a tendency to annoy and provoke others.”*

*(NICE, 2013b, p.16)*

Conduct disorders and the associated anti-social behaviours are the most common mental health and behavioural problem in children and young people, with a reported prevalence of around 5% in children and young people aged between 5 and 16 years (Office for National Statistics, 2004). Lavigne, Gibbons, Christoffel, Arend, Rosenbaum, Binns, Dawson, Sobel and Isaacs, (1996) report that about 20% of pre-school children suffer from early emotional or behavioural disorders, with oppositional defiance disorder being the most prevalent in 16.8% of children. It appears there is still no consensus as to the distinctions between disruptive and challenging behaviour, emotional and behavioural disorders and mental illness.

As we can see considerable energy has gone into attempting to define difficult behaviour and to label the child. Much research in this area also appears to focus on groups of children who have been given a diagnosis or label rather than considering children whose *behaviour practitioners experience* as difficult or concerning (Stevens and Quittner, 1998; Sciutto, Terjesen and Frank, 2000; Vereb and DiPenna, 2004). In particular there is a lack of evidence about the beliefs and understanding of early years practitioners in relation to this issue. Given that there is increasing recognition that context and environment have a significant influence on behavioural development and difficult behaviour, understanding teachers' and other practitioners' perspective is important. If they are concerned by particular behaviour that will indicate that it is likely to be significant in terms of the management of the children and their progress.

Merrett and Taylor (1994) did provide another way to frame the study of behaviour in an educational setting by looking at the teacher perspective of 'trying' or 'disturbing' behaviour, rather than using a diagnostic label. This study will be discussed further later on in the chapter. While all of the above research is important, this thesis, like Merrett and Taylor (1994) is focused on behaviours that don't fit within the remit of diagnosable disorders.

The demands of the early years curriculum are obviously tailored to meet the developmental stage of young children from a cognitive perspective but this also needs to be matched to an understanding of social and emotional development and the way in which context can influence behaviour. Early years practitioners need a clear and consistent view of what constitutes difficult (or unusual) behaviour from a developmental perspective before seeking to intervene with targeted children. However, before developing interventions, early years staff and professionals working with them also need to develop an understanding of behaviours that the staff themselves see as concerning and those they feel less confident to deal with. For example Dobbs and Arnold (2009) found a relationship between preschool teachers' reports of children's behaviour and their behaviour towards those children. The beliefs and attributions of staff about behaviour are an important influence in the success of a setting in improving children's social and emotional development.

### **2.3 Difficult and concerning behaviour; the importance of early intervention**

There is evidence to suggest that behaviour difficulties in young children are an important area to address, as the types of behaviours that may then occur in adulthood, will have an impact on society as a whole (Scott et al, 2001). Such behavioural difficulties can be indicators for problems later on in life including: low academic achievement, school dropout, drug abuse and over a third become juvenile offenders.

Rutter (1989) considers the factors that influence life pathways and the importance of trying to disentangle significant factors in determining a person's life-time journey. While Rutter's approach could be criticised for being over deterministic there is recognition that experiential factors are relevant.

A distinction has been made in the literature between children who demonstrate 'early onset' anti-social behaviour and those who only begin to demonstrate this type of behaviour during adolescence. It has been suggested that when anti-social behaviour problems begin in childhood they are more likely to persist into adulthood. Whilst anti-social behaviour is not the focus in this thesis the links between behaviour and later developmental issues are worth some attention. For example, Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz and Fletcher (1991) suggest that if children with aggressive behaviour problems are not identified and receive some form of intervention by age 8 they become less responsive to future interventions and the problems are likely to become chronic. In comparison, anti-social behaviour problems that occur during adolescence are less likely to persist into young adulthood, (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt et al, 1996). There appears to be less research looking at the links between milder forms of behaviour that is difficult to manage, but nevertheless concerning, for example behaviour that causes low levels of disruption in settings, and later outcomes.

Although, there appears to be some consensus within the literature that two distinct groups of children can be identified; those where the anti-social behaviour is 'life-course persistent' and those where it is 'adolescence limited', there is not yet agreement on what contributes towards an individual becoming part of either group or the links between these groups and experiences at pre-school age. Individuals may be born with subtle 'neuro-psychological dysfunctions', for example, undercontrolled temperaments, cognitive delays and difficulties with language.

These may contribute to the development and persistence of anti-social behaviour through the individual's interactions with their social environment, for example, being more likely to experience peer rejection and social isolation from their classmates (Hartman, Scott and Webster-Stratton, 2003) or poor parenting, (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt et al, 1996).

Others reject the notion of neuropsychological deficits and argue a stronger association between early onset 'anti-social' behaviour and experiences of psychosocial adversity and negative environmental factors, for example, experiencing a negative parenting style or being from a single parent home (Aguilar, Sroufe and Egeland, 2000). These longitudinal studies are only able to demonstrate a correlation and not causality between certain characteristics and children demonstrating either 'early onset' or 'adolescence limited' anti-social behaviour. Arguably, they also 'downplay' relevant contextual issues and the influence they may have on an individual's life course. There appears to be little consensus on which factors are the most significant in influencing the development of a child's anti-social behaviour. However, researchers agree that in order for interventions to be effective they need to begin early and they need to encompass the family, child and school (Moffitt et al, 1996).

Fergusson et al (2005) report findings that suggest significant associations between childhood conduct problems between the ages of 7-9 and risk of adverse outcomes across a range of psychosocial domains: violent offending, heavy drug use, being a teenage parent, leaving school with no qualifications and being unemployed/on benefits, even after controlling for other possible confounding factors.

The study suggests that the top 5% most antisocial children aged 7 are 50-100% more likely to have had serious negative life outcomes at age 25. An association has also been found between perceived problematic behaviours in the early years in relation to peer interactions, hyperactivity and conduct problems and reduced learning, anti-social behaviour and mental health problems in later life (Tremblay, 2000).

The literature is clear that most adult difficulties, particularly in terms of anti-social behaviour have their origins in childhood.

However, as Maughan and Rutter (1998) point out many children with difficult and challenging behaviour in childhood do not grow up to be dysfunctional, anti-social adults so this life course is, in no way, inevitable. Developing an understanding of the early interventions that can disrupt an individual's pathway to such an anti-social adulthood is important. Staff working in early years settings will have opportunities to intervene to this end but, in order to do so, will need to have an understanding of development and their potential role in effecting change and to have evidence of what might work to help change outcomes.

## **2.4 Teacher and practitioner experiences of behaviour and support for managing behaviour**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the early years workforce in the UK is large, with individuals deployed in a number of roles in various types of setting. Individuals are employed in a variety of roles within early years settings, including nursery assistants, teaching assistants, nursery nurses and teachers (Skills for Care and Development, 2014). Around 65% of full day care provision is provided in privately run settings and 22% of settings are run by a voluntary organisation. This means that the majority (87%) of sessional care settings are run by voluntary organisations or are privately run.

Professionals working within these types of settings, and also individuals working within integrated care and education settings (nursery schools or nursery classes attached to mainstream provision), will be required to provide support to children within the setting displaying behaviour difficulties, including work to support the parents of these children. As we can see from the discussion in the previous section children who are regarded as demonstrating 'difficult' or 'concerning' behaviour will present in a variety of ways.

Practitioner experiences of behaviour will vary from setting to setting and in relation to the individual children that they are working with.

Wider cultural and social influences have an impact on this (Deater-Deckard and Dodge, 1997; Keenan and Shaw, 1997; Chen and French, 2008).

There is a range of literature that considers the impact of teachers' (and parents') experiences and beliefs on the management of behaviour in schools (see Miller, 2003). There are also reviews of possible frameworks for how an understanding of teachers' beliefs and/or emotions can be conceptualised to aid the development of a useful research base for considering the management of behaviour in schools (e.g. Panjares, 1992; Sutton and Wheatley, 2003). However, there is currently little research focused on pre-school and, in particular, PVI settings with regard to the behaviour of children in these settings, staff perceptions of the type and extent of the behaviour, and what strategies and support may be helpful for staff.

What studies there are in this area appear to show a disparity between suggested prevalence rates of behaviour problems within settings. Merrett and Taylor (1994) undertook a piece of research based within one local authority in the UK. The aim of the study was to examine the types of behaviour problems experienced by early years staff working within maintained early years settings. The study was a follow up of research undertaken by Wheldall and Merrett (1988) in primary schools. The researchers used a significantly modified version of the questionnaire that had been used in schools. Categories in the questionnaire were adjusted based on whether the researchers felt they were appropriate for use with a younger age group. Although all 60 maintained nursery provisions within the local authority received the questionnaire, there was a relatively low response rate of 41.4%. Respondents were asked to describe the behaviours they found most 'trying' or 'disturbing', and which of these behaviours occurred most frequently within their setting. The authors then categorized the behaviours based on perceived similarities of the descriptions.

'Spitefulness and aggression', 'not listening' and 'shouting' were the categories identified by respondents as the most trying behaviours experienced. 'Not listening' and 'aggression' were the two categories of behaviour teachers believed to be the most frequently occurring. 48% of respondents in the study believed they were spending more time on matters of order and control than they ought to be. The authors conclude that there are similarities between primary settings and the nursery settings in relation to behaviours such as 'not listening' and 'shouting', which disrupt the learning, as being of concern to all practitioners, however they suggest that 'aggression' may have been cited more frequently as:

*"The distinction between aggression and hindering others may be difficult to define, especially at the nursery stage..."*

*(Merrett and Taylor, 1994, p. 293.)*

The study indicates a prevalence rate of around 15% for behaviour that is of concern to staff; this is similar to the 16% prevalence found by Wheldall and Merrett (1988) in their primary school study. However, the researchers did attempt to categorise behaviours in order to increase the levels of similarity so it is not surprising that prevalence levels in primary schools and pre-schools were found to be similar. Additionally, Merrett and Taylor (1994) only conducted their study with nursery school teachers, choosing to omit nursery nurses and other practitioners. Arguably, as discussed in relation to other similar studies the role of the nursery teacher in terms of managing behaviour and their perspective on behaviour may be different in comparison to other early years practitioners given teachers may have more of a focus on learning and the delivery of the curriculum. Participants in the study were given a free response in terms of listing the behaviours they found 'trying' or 'disturbing' which did elicit a range of responses as opposed to participants being asked to choose from pre-defined categories of behaviour. However, the questionnaire was the only method of data collection used in the study meaning the study did not explore in depth participant responses or experiences and the findings were not supported by any other form of data.



A similar study in Australia (Stephenson et al, 2010) looked at behaviours that were of concern to Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 class teachers in Australian schools. The study constituted a large sample; 130 respondents participated in the study and all were qualified teachers. The researchers generated a questionnaire listing types of behaviours; descriptions were taken from commonly used behaviour ratings scales, e.g. the Connors rating scale. Teachers were asked to rate on a 4-point scale their level of concern about that behaviour in the class and the level of support they needed to manage that behaviour. Participants were able to indicate if the behaviour did not occur in their classroom.

Respondents were also asked about other related issues: their level of confidence in managing classroom behaviour, their use of support for dealing with behaviour that concerned them, their strategies for behaviour management and their need for information and support for dealing with problem behaviour. The highest mean area of concern reported by the Australian teachers were items related to 'distractibility' and 'not listening; and these were also areas where teachers believed they needed additional support. There were high reported mean levels of concern about: physical aggression, demands for teacher attention, inability to remain on task, and disrupting the activity of others. 20% of teachers in the study did not agree they were confident in managing their students' behaviour. Teachers who rated themselves as less confident about managing behaviour had higher levels of concern in relation to aggression, distractibility and disobedience, and wanted more support for dealing with distractibility and disobedience.

Arguably, the Stephenson et al (2010) study is less helpful as it does not address the issue of the frequency of occurrence of types of behaviour. For example, teachers expressed high levels of concern about 'aggression', yet the study provides no indication of how often this is experienced. Additionally, the study only looked at qualified teachers not additional support staff; teachers may be more focused on students learning and may not undertake such a big role in managing student behaviour.

If teachers are more focused on learning and delivering the curriculum then they may be more inclined to be more negative in terms of their judgements about the severity of challenging behaviour and less willing to engage in its management. The study may also have limited cross-cultural validity due to it being undertaken in Australia, because, as has already been noted, the social-cultural climate may be of importance.

Similar limitations apply to a study by Bibou-Nakou et al (2000) who looked at the experiences of 200 elementary school teachers in Northern Greece in relation to their beliefs concerning problem behaviour and their preferred strategies for managing behaviour. In this study, disobedience/off task behaviour was rated as the most frequent problem within the classroom setting. However, respondents were only able to select from the questionnaire "*four minor examples of misbehaviour in school,*" which meant that no information was gathered on the frequency of other types of more serious problem behaviour. Neutral actions, for example, ignoring misbehaviour were indicated as the preferred strategy to be used by teachers. Punitive strategies were the least used. However, the authors acknowledge that this evidence would have been stronger had it been supported by some form of observational data, as it is likely in some instances that teachers may not actually practice the strategies they report using to manage behaviour.

Hackett et al (2012) looked at the mental health needs of children under 5 in one inner city local authority in the UK. Parents of 176 children (aged 2-4) returned questionnaires. 11.9% of the children scored in the abnormal range on the EYBC (Early Years Behaviour Checklist) indicating the possibility of behavioural problems. Teachers working with the children also completed the questionnaire; 11% of the sample received abnormal summative scores on the EYBC when completed by teachers. Education staff identified 10.2% of the sample as needing professional help, with behavioural support identified most commonly as the type of support needed. Parents identified 7.4% of the sample as needing professional help.

Parents identified educational psychologists most frequently as the professional needed to provide help. However, the proportion of the sample reporting they had actually received help was lower than the percentage reported as requiring additional support. This indicates that there is an unmet need amongst this population for additional support to be provided to both parents and teachers. The authors conclude:

*“Staff in children’s centres and nurseries are key in the early screening and identification of both developmental disorders and families with complex unmet needs. It is important they are offered both support and training.”*

*(Hackett et al, 2012, p. 1406)*

It is important to consider the attitudes and beliefs of staff in PVI settings in relation to working with children with behaviour difficulties. Beliefs are important as they affect the way in which practitioners choose to manage difficult behaviour. The Hackett et al (2012) study does provide information on the level of need identified by professionals and parents but does not explore on what basis professionals and parents have made this judgement.

A study by Bennett (2006) gathered perceptions of helpful and unhelpful practices in relation to supporting EBD in one local authority through the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire attempted to gather responses from all educational settings within the local authority. In relation to primary schools, it was found that additional staffing, input from outside agencies and training on behaviour management strategies were deemed to be helpful. Strategies that were identified as being successful when working with EBD were: a whole school commitment to behaviour policy; reward systems; consistency between staff; individual help and working in small groups; having time to work with children and positive relationships between staff and pupils. However, the scope of this study may be considered limited given that it was only conducted within one local authority.

Support provided and attitudes towards behaviour may vary from local authority to local authority depending, for example, on the demography of the area and support provided to schools.

## **2.5 Theoretical frameworks for understanding difficult and concerning behaviour and approaches to managing the behaviour**

High quality pre-school provision, including qualified and knowledgeable professionals and engaged and informed parents, appear to have a significant impact on a child's emotional and social development and behaviour. The pre-school setting influences a child's socio-emotional development and behaviour however various other factors are also relevant. The eco-systemic approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1974;1994) provides a helpful framework from which to investigate this. Bronfenbrenner argues that in order to understand children's development we must look at their growth within the context of the entire ecological system. This system can be divided up into five subsystems. The microsystem contains the immediate close relationships the child has, for example with their family or teachers in their school. The mesosystem is made up of the links between two or more settings within which the child operates, for example home and school. The exosystem is similar but at least one of the settings is not a context for the child, for example home and the parents' place of work. The macrosystem encompasses all of these and includes the culture and beliefs of the broader society within which the child lives. Finally the chronosystem describes the changes that take place for a person during their life both individually and in the wider environment. A child's development occurs in the context of complex interactions between them and significant others and environments.

Interactions that go on in the child's immediate environment are referred to as 'proximal processes' and Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggests that the 'proximal processes' are then influenced by the individual characteristics of the child and also by the wider environment.

Bronfenbrenner's framework emphasises the importance of always considering the child in context and of taking into account that children are active within their particular context. There is a constant dynamic, interactive and changing relationship between the developing child, their environment and people in it.

Bronfenbrenner's framework has been used in other studies conducted within early years settings. For example Rim-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) considered transition to kindergarten and Odom et al (2004) reviewed inclusion in pre-schools in the United States using this perspective. Rim-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) developed a model that looked at the links between child, home, school, peer and neighbourhood factors. These links created a network of relationships that influenced children's transition between pre-school and kindergarten. These relationships and interactions were seen as dynamic and changing over time. Odom et al (2004) used the ecological systems conceptual framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) to review the literature in relation to the inclusion of children with special needs in American pre-schools, examining possible influences at each system level. For example, at the level of the microsystem (the classroom) factors such as the children's relationship with their peers and teacher beliefs were influential. At the level of the exosystem, which influences the child's microsystems, factors such as social policy are acknowledged. This study also considered the importance of the relationships and interactions between the systems and how these are dynamic and variable. These studies suggest some of the wider influences on children's development. Staff in early years settings need to be aware of the range of factors that are likely to be significant, for example, home, peers, the community and changes to relevant policy.

The presence of these factors suggests that there could be a role for educational psychologists in supporting staff in developing their knowledge and understanding of children's development.

As we have seen children's behaviour, particularly in the early years will be influenced by a variety of factors; biological, environmental and familial and so successful assessment and interventions for these children will have to acknowledge them all. However, practitioners themselves can also have a role in influencing behaviour not least in terms of their beliefs and attributions (Poulou and Norwich, 2000; Ho, 2004). These are some of the dynamic interpersonal relations and interactions that occur at Bronfenbrenner's microsystemic level (the proximal processes). Bronfenbrenner (1994) himself suggested that there have been relatively few studies using this framework focusing on schools or educational settings.

MacClure et al (2012) point out that there is an increasing tendency for professionals to seek to categorise children and generate 'deficit' views of some children, parents and families very early (MacClure et al, 2012). They suggest that

*"...professionals might consider trying not to intervene too early with explanations and 'solutions' for children who are beginning to emerge as a problem."*

*(MacClure et al, 2012, p. 466).*

They go on to argue that educators should seek to free themselves from the received notions of the child they have been given and to open their minds to see things differently (MacClure et al, 2012). This is where we may begin to consider different ways in which educational psychologists can work with early years practitioners, particularly in relation to any preconceived notions they may have of the impact of parenting and the influence they could have on this.

Attachment theory is one theoretical framework that helps to understand the relationship between children and staff in their setting and is important for children who display behaviour difficulties and/or concerning behaviours. It is important to understand practitioners' views in relation to attachment theory as their beliefs and attitudes will have an impact on their practice.

There continues to be ongoing debate in relation to the implications of attachment theory for the provision of non-family based early years child-care. Areas of research, discussed in further detail later include whether significant time spent in early years settings can have a potential long term negative impact on areas of development and the factors that may influence whether a child forms a bond with non-maternal caregivers in the setting.

Research, e.g. (Sylva et al, 2008; NICHD, 2007) does appear to indicate that emotional aspects of an early years setting can contribute to the overall quality, for example, the nature of the adult-child relationships. Government policy has reflected this with a need for children to have a named member of staff in the setting with whom an attachment relationship is encouraged (DfE, 2014) or the 'key person' approach. The guidance for early years settings in relation to this emphasises not only the importance of the adult-child relationship but also the importance of the key person in terms of developing positive relationships with parents and care-givers (DfE, 2008).

Although, policy does appear to recognise the potential implications of nursery attachments for a child's socio-emotional development, questions have been asked in relation to whether there is successful application of the approach in all settings and practitioner feelings of confidence and competency in terms of its application and level of theoretical understanding. For example, practitioners may become overly focused on their own key children or problems may arise if a child's key person leaves a setting (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003), this may be particularly exacerbated by problems of high staff turn over in settings. Elfer (2013) has also argued that early years practitioners may need more support in relation to the implementation of the theory of nursery attachments in their practice and that part of the reason for policy not being implemented effectively may be:

*“... that the ‘permitting circumstances’ of training, good enough ratios and management support are missing...”*

*(Elfer, 2013, p. 8)*

Further consideration is now given to the theory of Attachment in relation to adult-child relationships within early years settings.

It has been suggested that a child’s ability to learn through their interactions with their learning environment and their behaviour can be influenced by the quality of the early infant-mother relationship (Pianta et al, 1997; Estrada et al, 1987). Infants seek to make strong emotional bonds with their carer and seek safety from them. The quality of the child’s primary attachment relationship reflects the capacity of the primary caregiver to respond to signals of a need for close contact or proximity at a time when the infant is feeling anxious or fearful. Children will develop an ‘Attachment style’ which can manifest in their behaviour. Children with an ‘insecure attachment style’ may be ‘avoidant, these children may be, difficult to connect to emotionally, don’t like to ask adults for help, like to be control but this stress can lead to aggression appearing to come out of the blue. Children with an ‘ambivalent’ style may present as clingy and rejecting of adults, suffer from separation anxiety, blame others easily and hold grudges. Children with a ‘disorganised’ attachment style may demonstrate extreme and/or bizarre behaviour, be hyper-vigilant due to a pre-occupation with needing to survive and have poor self-awareness (Bomber, 2007). For children who develop a ‘secure attachment’ to their caregiver this will be good enough to allow them to cope with uncertainties. Securely attached children are more easily able to regulate their emotions and their responses towards others and their peers (Bowlby, 1969; Geddes, 2006). Children’s later relationships, such as with practitioners in their early years settings, are influenced by the pattern of their attachment to their early caregiver.



*“The quality of the attachment relationship has implications for how the child learns about him/herself and others. It acts as an organiser of behaviour towards others in ways that persist into adult life, affecting later relationships and choices... “*

*(Geddes, 2006, p. 40)*

Children who have developed an insecure attachment relationship with their primary care-giver they may develop defence mechanisms in order to try to cope with uncontained anxieties (Pasco et al, 2010). This could have negative effects on the child’s learning and behaviour as the child may display difficult behaviour when trying to cope with uncontained fears and unmet needs. The quality of the early parent-child relationship does have a significant impact on a child’s socio-emotional development. A child who has an insecure attachment relationship with their primary caregiver is more likely to develop behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), have poor impulse control and have difficulties with developing social relationships with adults and peers (Greenberg et al, 1993; Verschueren and Koomen, 2012).

Other studies have suggested that children who experience anxious or disorganised attachment relationships with their primary caregivers may demonstrate non-compliance in the pre-school environment, an increased incidence of aggressive behaviour towards peers, higher levels of peer rejection and higher teacher ratings of internalising and externalising behaviours (Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland, 1985; Lyons, 1996; Laible and Thomspson, 1998).

Commodari (2013) describes the role teachers may be able to play in relation to this:

*“With younger or more vulnerable children, the role of the teacher as an attachment figure (secure base and safe haven) is expected to be of greater importance. These children’s attachment system gets activated more easily and their capacity for self-regulation is relatively limited, making adult-caregiving support, very likely including help provided by teachers, crucial for their survival and growth...”*

*(Commodari, 2013, p. 130)*

Arguably, the child’s early learning environment could provide an alternative secure base and secure attachment figures (Frederickson and Cline, 2009). It is suggested in the literature that young children are able to develop attachment relationships with adults other than their primary caregiver, provided it is the same adults over an extended period of time and these adults are available to them when they are distressed or facing difficult or challenging circumstances (Rutter and O’Connor, 1996). This idea has given a theoretical grounding to the ‘key-person’ approach that is employed in early years settings.

The quality of these attachment relationships with other significant adults may have a positive impact on the child’s learning and emotional and social development. For example, Howes and Ritchie (1999) demonstrated that young children who developed secure attachment relationships with their teachers were more successful in their learning, using the teacher as a ‘secure, safe base’ made them more confident in then going and exploring the learning environment.

Good ‘quality’ childcare settings can have a significant impact on a child’s behavioural, emotional and academic outcomes (Sylva et al, 2004). For example, children aged between 2 and 4 years old were shown to have less behavioural problems the higher the quality of daycare that was provided with particular benefit for children from more deprived backgrounds (Votruba-Drzal, 2004). One of the key factors cited as influencing the ‘quality’ of a setting is having a well-trained and knowledgeable staff group (Sylva et al 2004; NNI Evaluation, 2007).

Relationships with key adults within a pre-school setting will have an effect on the children's development. For example, Cugmas (2003) found a positive relationship between secure teacher-child attachment relationships and child competencies and positive adjustment to the kindergarten environment. It appears that the detrimental effect of low quality child-care may also be compounded by the length of time spent in daycare, for example, Belsky (2007) found longer time spent in daycare might lead to more externalising behaviours and poorer peer relationships. Egeland and Heister (1995) found that children who had spent the longest periods of time in childcare were more hostile in structured interactions with their mothers at 42 months and rated as more aggressive by their teachers. Although the study did not factor in the quality of the day care setting.

The NICHD study (1997) of early child care looked at whether there were links between experiences of early child care and elevated rates of insecure attachment in particular, rates of insecure-avoidant attachment relationships as a result of experiencing daily separations from the parent, which may be experienced as maternal rejection. The study found no overall main effect of childcare experience on attachment security. However, the study did find that for children with the highest rates of insecurity in their attachment relationships, the relationships can be affected by a combination of maternal and child care factors. For this group of children there was a stronger affect of mother behaviour where mothers were less sensitive and responsive to needs, if the child was also receiving low quality childcare.

The authors suggest that this demonstrates that high quality child-care can perform a compensatory function for those children whose maternal care is lacking.

Attachment theory suggests that a child's emotional well-being is facilitated when adults in their environment are supportive, consistent and responsive in their interactions; the adult is said to be 'attuned' to the child's needs (Field, 1994).

However, there is a suggestion in the literature that practitioners may not be aware of their role in this or may not feel it is appropriate for them to form this type of emotional relationship. For example, Elfer and Dearnley (2007) suggested that the 'key-person' approach may not be effective because:

- Staff working within private early years settings are not able to access CPD opportunities easily and therefore may not have a good understanding of the rationale
- Staff may have concerns about child protection issues and do not want close, physical relationships with the children; Elfer (2006) argues that staff will actively want to defend themselves from children becoming dependent on them; Lamb (1996) argues that children may actively not seek comfort from adults in the setting at times of distress because they realise that the primary goal is to provide learning opportunities and minimise incidences of misbehaviour
- It is also argued that within private daycare settings direct work with the children may be viewed as being of lower status.

Arguably these studies are based on conjecture or are weak because they were small scale in their scope. There are good reasons for thinking carefully with practitioners about how they view relationships with children in the setting, particularly if a key person approach exists, and what their beliefs are in relation to the impact this can have on a child's behaviour.

It is also important to consider whether practitioners perceive themselves to have had adequate training and support in order to be able to understand the key factors, such as attachment relationships, which may impact on a child's social and emotional development.

## **2.6 The role of the educational psychologist in the early years and in relation to working with early years practitioners**

Staff in early years settings play a crucial role in supporting children with difficult behaviour and have the means of accessing parents and supporting them via communication and information sharing. However, staff in these settings need to feel confident and empowered to do so. Allen (2011), in his report *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*, identified the development of the early years workforce as being critical. They:

*“need adequate training in order to improve the social/emotional capabilities of 3-4 year olds...”*

*(Allen, 2011, p. 57)*

Wolfendale and Robinson (2004) argue that early years providers may want access to this type of support from educational psychologists:

*“Research carried out by Kelly and Gray (DfEE, 2000) indicates that providers of early years education want access to educational psychologist advice and training and to ensure that educational psychologists are part of multi-agency teams. This fits well with the core aims of educational psychology services which are keen to apply psychology, to become more involved in preventative work...”*

*(Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004, p. 18)*

Currently, much of the work that educational psychologists do within the early years is focused on work with individual children.

However there is still little information on the nature of EPs' assessment in the early years or the frameworks and psychological theories that underlie their decisions about assessment and intervention, in comparison to the range of literature that considers EPs' approaches towards working with older children (Robinson and Dunsmuir, 2010).

There is even less information on EP work in the early years at a group or systemic level. Shannon and Posada (2007) conducted a more in depth exploration of the EP role within early years and the types of work and assessment they may choose to use. Through a combination of fixed-choice questionnaires and in-depth interviews with EPs, Shannon and Posada (2007) found that most EP practice in early years was based on a within child model of difficulty and led to interventions involving the individual child. However, those involved primarily in this type of individual work expressed more dissatisfaction than those undertaking work at the level of the organisation. It may be interesting to consider whether this is because EPs believe that the context is more influential on difficult behaviour in early years than later school age and so would consider working at an organisational level more rewarding. The authors conclude that EPs lack the time and are burdened with too much additional casework to carry out assessments in early years settings which are detailed enough to lead to planned intervention work with the family and which allow for opportunities to do more interactive or dynamic type assessment. They conclude that EPs should be given the opportunity to develop "...psychologically based interventions for parents and carers" (Shannon and Rosada, 2007, p. 272).

Others have also looked at the developing role of the EP working in early years settings (Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004). They argue that there is an increasing need for EPs when working with this age group to be involved in a wide range of work, including: multi-disciplinary work, using a problem solving approach and working at a systems level.

*"Only recently has it become apparent that for the EP the unique role may be that of understanding the working of the various systems and ensuring that they work in a logical, coherent and productive way. The many and diverse activities associated with educational psychologists working in early years attests to and impressive repertoire of skills and a legitimate claim to a distinctive contribution..."*

*(Wolfendale and Robinson, 2001, p. 21).*

The authors conclude that for EPs to be effective in the early years they should move away from a “what’s wrong” perspective of the child to the “how to access?” preoccupation that is the inclusive focus of current social and educational thought...” (Wolfendale and Robinson, 2001, p. 25). There is scope for increasing the range and quality of the work done in relation to individual assessment but also for increasing the range and quality of group and systemic work.

## **2.7 Summary**

The purpose of this research is to explore what behaviours early years practitioners in PVI settings consider difficult to manage and how concerning they judge these behaviours to be. The study aims to explore what training and support is available to them in order to be able to manage this group of children and help them make progress. The study has been developed reflecting the usefulness of an eco-systemic view, the significant influence that beliefs and attributions can play, and an assumption that the relationships (attachment) that early years staff develop with their children have an impact on their behaviour in the setting.

The implications from the literature review are that staff in early years settings can have a significant impact on a child’s socio-emotional development and that high quality early years child care is important, particularly for those who are experiencing difficulties. Intervention at an early stage is important given the possible negative long term outcomes for children displaying difficult behaviour. It appears at present there is little known about the perceptions and experiences of staff in PVI settings in relation to this and whether more support is needed. Research studies provide relatively little information on the role of the EP within early years settings compared to schools. However there is an indication that staff in early years settings would welcome greater access to EPs and that there is scope for EPs to widen their role.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodological framework of this research and states the research questions. An explanation to the mixed methods approach is provided and the design of the research is described, including an explanation of the methods used in both stages of the research. It also describes the sample used and gives a brief description of the data analysis. It concludes with consideration of the ethical issues that arose during the research.

The following questions have formed the research:

#### *Research Question 1:*

What are the behaviours that early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings find difficult to manage and how concerning do they perceive these behaviours?

#### *Research Question 2:*

What do early years practitioners think are the factors influencing children's behaviour and what do they find helpful when managing behaviour in their setting?

#### *Research Question 3:*

What training and support are available to early years practitioners in these settings to help them manage difficult behaviour?



### **3.1 Epistemological considerations**

Epistemological considerations are related to a philosophical debate about knowledge, and what researchers think they can know about the world (Willig, 2001). The research paradigm followed by an individual is linked to their worldview and the assumptions and views that come with that (Mertens, 2010).

The pragmatic approach emphasises the importance of the aims of the research being flexible and avoiding rigid positions within the epistemological debates. Pragmatism focuses on the piece of research itself, finding out what questions have to be asked and what the best way of answering those questions is (Robson, 2011). Pragmatists acknowledge that research takes place within a social, historical and political context and that the consequences of research should be considered an important element of the research process. These views are conducive to the researcher's world view and beliefs about research and therefore a pragmatic position was adopted.

A pragmatic approach seeks to use the methods that will work best to explore the research questions without being fixed to specific methodologies. This allows different methods to be used according to their efficacy in different circumstances (Burke, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) have summarized the advantages for 'pragmatic researchers' who choose to adopt both qualitative and quantitative methods within their research:

- Allows the researcher to have flexibility in their investigative techniques
- Allows a wide range of research questions to be addressed
- Can help to promote collaboration amongst researchers of different philosophical orientations

- The researcher has a positive attitude towards both qualitative and quantitative techniques and so is likely to use qualitative techniques to inform quantitative information and vice versa

As long as there is a pragmatic acceptance of the strengths and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative methods in the data collection and analysis, a research design combining the two provides a way to validate findings as well as optimizing the strengths of each method (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007).

### **3.2 Mixed methods approach**

The most common purposes of research are to describe, explore and explain (Robson, 2011). This research gathered data for both descriptive and exploratory purposes. Descriptive research aims to describe a phenomenon. This research aimed to access descriptions of the types of behaviours that early years practitioners working in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings are finding difficult to manage and how concerning they consider these behaviours to be.

Exploratory research aims to explore a phenomenon and is preferred for use in a relatively poorly understood area. Exploratory research also allows the researcher to pose questions and hypotheses that may be useful in future research (Robson, 2011; Martin and Bateson, 2007). In this research, the researcher explored the type of support early years practitioners received for managing difficult behaviour and how they sought to manage it themselves, with particular interest in the type of support and training they found helpful. The research also sought to explore what early years practitioners believe are the factors influencing children's difficult behaviour and what they find helpful when managing behaviour in their setting.

Research can combine the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, known as a 'mixed methods' design.

Mixed method designs acknowledge that both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are important and useful. The defining characteristics of a mixed methods design are summarized as follows by Robson (2011) and Cresswell (2009):

- Use of quantitative and qualitative methods within the same research project
- A research design that specifies the sequence and priority given to the quantitative and qualitative elements within the data collection and analysis
- An explanation of how the qualitative and quantitative elements of the research relate to one another; either sequentially, one building on the other, or embedding one within the other
- Having a philosophical underpinning for the research
- The procedures are contained within a specific research design that directs the plan of the study

Given the exploratory nature of this research and the absence of previous research in this specific area, a mixed methods approach seemed most appropriate. Some of the proposed benefits of mixed methods research are described as follows by

Robson (2011) and Cresswell (2009):

- Combining quantitative and qualitative methods gives a more comprehensive picture of the research topic
- Mixed method designs help to minimize the impact of the limitations of each approach and build on their strengths
- One research approach can be used to explain the data generated from using the other approach. For example, findings from a quantitative survey can be followed up by interviewing a sample of those surveyed, which will help to gain a better understanding of the findings.

- This is a valuable approach when used in ‘real world’ settings because of the complex nature of the phenomena that are being explored and the range of perspectives needed to understand them
- Qualitative data can be used to illustrate the findings from the quantitative data

It has been argued that using mixed methods within research is not appropriate because qualitative and quantitative research represent two distinct paradigms that are incompatible with each other. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘incompatibility thesis’ (Robson, 2011). However, as previously discussed, this researcher takes a pragmatic approach to the study.

### **3.3 Research design**

In this study, the research aims led to three research questions being posed. A two stage mixed methods design was selected as the most appropriate way to answer these research questions.

In the first stage, questionnaires were distributed to gather information, which informed Research Questions 1, 2 and 3.

The questionnaires enquired into; the behaviours that early years practitioners experience within their settings; the behaviours that they find the most difficult to manage; how concerning they perceive these behaviours to be; and how frequently they occur. The questionnaires also sought to explore the types of support and training that practitioners have received in relation to managing difficult behaviour in their setting, and the types of experiences they perceive have been useful to them when managing difficult behaviour. This was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis.

Stage 2 explored all three Research Questions in more depth. It explored practitioner perceptions of the factors they believe influence children's behaviour, what they find helpful when attempting to manage children's behaviour in their setting and their experiences of training and support in this area. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather this data and were analysed through thematic analysis, a qualitative methodology.

The two sets of data were connected as the information from the questionnaire informed the interviews. Moreover, the participants included in Stage 2 had already taken part in Stage 1. This allowed aspects of the research questions to be explored in more depth in the interviews with the early years practitioners. The interviews looked more closely at their experiences of supporting and managing difficult and concerning behaviour in their settings and what had been helpful and useful to them in relation to this.

### **3.4 The setting and participants**

The reason for focusing on early years practitioners working in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings has been discussed previously within Chapters 1 and 2.

In summary, the main reasons for choosing these participants were a) this appeared to be a gap in the literature: previously practitioner experiences of difficult and concerning behaviour had largely been explored only within mainstream settings, for example, Merrett and Taylor (1994) and b) the published research suggests that the majority of young children now receive their early childcare in PVI settings and therefore having a skilled and knowledgeable staff group will affect the quality of the setting and the children's personal, social and emotional development.

All private, voluntary and independent nursery settings in one Local Authority (LA) where the research took place were contacted and invited to take part. There were 66 settings in total.

### **3.5 Procedure**

The LA was chosen for the research because it is a small authority and so all PVI settings within it could be easily contacted to ask to take part. The authority represents a diverse and interesting community. The researcher was familiar to the authority, having previously worked there and consequently arranging access to the settings was less challenging. Additionally, the authority was interested in this area of work as socio-emotional development in the early years is a current focus.

#### **3.5.1 Questionnaire procedure (Stage 1)**

The Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) in the target LA contacted all the private, voluntary and independent nursery settings within the LA via e-mail or post to inform them about the researcher and the piece of research being undertaken.

The researcher then sent the PVI settings an information sheet (Appendix 2) along with the questionnaire and asked if they would distribute copies of the questionnaire to all members of staff within their setting. This was done in order to try and gather data, which represented a range of skill sets within the same setting. Settings were then invited to return completed questionnaires to the researcher via email, post or by handing completed questionnaires to a member of the early years team who pay frequent visits to these types of settings. The researcher also collected some questionnaires by hand from a number of settings who contacted the researcher directly.

In order to encourage a higher response rate and to ensure that questionnaires were distributed to all settings, questionnaires were also distributed via members of the local authority early years team during their visits to the settings.

In total 23 settings returned completed questionnaires, representing a total of 63 individual participants. This comprised 34.8% of all possible settings and an estimated 46% of potential participants from the settings that participated (based on the estimated average number of staff in each setting). The numbers of participants completing the questionnaire per setting varied from 1 to 6, with an average of 3 per setting. Although this is not a very high response rate, it can be considered adequate given the scope of the study and considering that most of the participants (and settings) were unknown to the researcher.

The tables below give further information on the 23 settings and 63 participants who completed the questionnaires:

*Table 3.5.1 Questionnaire settings*

| <u>Type of Setting</u>        | <u>Number</u> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Private                       | 10            |
| Voluntary                     | 5             |
| Independent                   | 3             |
| Not declared on questionnaire | 5             |

*Table 3.5.2 Questionnaire participants*

| <u>Age</u>   | <u>Number</u> | <u>Highest level of Qualification</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Role</u>  | <u>Number</u> |
|--------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|--|---------------|
|              | 3             | > Level 3                             | 4             | Nursery assistant  | 5             |
| 21-30        | 33            | Level 3                               | 42            | Nursery nurse/early years practitioner                     | 30            |
| 31-40        | 12            | Level 4                               | 3             | Deputy leader/room leader (some management responsibility) | 18            |
| 41-50        | 9             | Level 5                               | 2             | Manager  | 10            |
| 50+          | 3             | Level 6                               | 1             |  |               |
| Not declared | 3             | Degree                                | 9             |  |               |
|              |               | Masters                               | 1             |  |               |
|              |               | NNEB                                  | 1             |  |               |

### **3.5.2 Interview procedure (Stage 2)**

Stage 2 of the research (the interviews) were conducted after the completion of Stage 1 (the questionnaires) data collection but prior to the data from Stage 1 being analysed.

Participants invited to take part in Stage 2 interviews were selected from Stage 1 respondents, an example of nested sampling (Mertens, 2010). Participants gave their consent to be contacted about taking part in the semi-structured interviews by indicating their interest on the returned questionnaire. The researcher contacted settings as and when they had returned responses to Stage 1 and had indicated they were willing to take part in Stage 2. The researcher sought to include participants who fulfilled a range of different roles within the setting. A total of 11 participants were interviewed in five different settings.



Participants were interviewed within their own settings within a quiet, confidential area. 7 of the participants were interviewed individually; in 2 of the settings the interviews were conducted in a pair and a group of three. This was at the request of the settings, due to time constraints and the availability of staff.

The expectation was that participants would represent a reasonable cross-section of early years practitioners with varying levels of qualifications and experience. The table below indicates details of the participants interviewed within each setting. All settings where the interviews were conducted described themselves as 'private' early years settings.

*Table 3.5.3 Interview participants and settings*

| <b><u>Setting</u></b> | <b><u>Name of participant (pseudonyms)</u></b> | <b><u>Highest level of qualification</u></b> | <b><u>Current role in setting and number of years in role</u></b> |
|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| Setting 1             | Liz  | BA Hons in Early Years                       | Staff co-ordinator and Inclusion co-ordinator (10+ years)         |
| Setting 1             | Mel  | BA Hons in Early Years                       | Manager (20+ years)   |
| Setting 2             | Alex   | BTEC Diploma in Nursery Nursing              | Senior play leader /SENCo(10+ years)                              |
| Setting 2             | Natalie  | BTEC Diploma Level 3 Nursery Nursing         | Deputy Manager (5 years)  |
| Setting 2             | Rachel   | BTEC Level 3 Nursery Nursing                 | Nursery Nurse (3 years)   |
| Setting 3             | Sam  | NNEB/Level 3 Diploma                         | Nursery practioner/INCO (25 years/ 2.5 in INCO role)              |
| Setting 3             | Lucy   | NVQ Level 3                                  | Room leader (6 years)   |
| Setting 4             | Kim  | PhD  | Manager/Owner (12 years)  |
| Setting 4             | Beth   | Level 3 NVQ                                  | Nursery Nurse (4 years)   |
| Setting 5             | Amanda   | Level 3 Childcare                            | Team Leader (7 years)   |
| Setting 5             | Emma   | BA Hons in Educational Studies               | Senior Team Leader and Inclusion co-ordinator (10 years)          |

## **3.6 Materials**

### **3.6.1 Questionnaire**

The initial part of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) was based on one used by Merrett and Taylor (1994), which they had used to explore 'trying' and 'concerning' behaviour in mainstream early years settings. Some questions were changed in order to meet the specific aims of this research, in particular the use of the term 'difficult' rather than 'trying' and the use of the term 'concerning' rather than 'disturbing.'

When devising the questionnaire, information from the literature review, in relation to the importance of understanding practitioners' knowledge skills and training was drawn on, along with information about designing questionnaires. Throughout the design the researcher was guided by the research aims and the three primary research questions.

The following gives a more detailed rationale behind each question on the questionnaire.

Questions 1-5 were based on the questionnaire used by Merrett and Taylor (1994). Question 1 asked participants to list the four types of behaviour they found most difficult to manage within their settings. Unlike Merrett and Taylor (1994) Questions 2 and 3 then asked participants to rate their level of concern in relation to the difficult behaviours and how frequently these behaviours occurred within their settings. Question 4, which was not included in Merrett and Taylor (1994) was an additional question, which asked practitioners how confident they felt about managing behaviour. Participants responded to questions 2, 3 and 4 using a 5-scale Likert response format. For participant level of concern (Question 2) the

participants responded using a 5-point scale from 'very concerning' to 'very unconcerning.'

For frequency of the behaviours (Question 3) the participants responded using a 5-point scale from 'very frequently' to 'very infrequently.' For practitioner confidence in managing behaviour, participants responded using a 5-point scale from 'very confident' to 'very unconfident.'

Question 6 explored practitioner beliefs in relation to possible factors that may contribute towards a child in the setting displaying behaviour that is of concern. Again, participants responded using a 5-point Likert format, which asked how important they believed each given factor to be ('very important' to 'very unimportant.')

Questions 7, 8 and 9 focused on practitioner relationships with the children in their setting. Question 7 asked whether the setting had a key worker system. Questions 8 and 9 asked about the importance of the relationship with both their key worker children and all children within the setting. For both Questions 8 and 9 participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ('very important to 'very unimportant.')

Question 10 asked participants whether or not they had attended training in relation to managing behaviour and how helpful they felt that training was. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ('very helpful' to 'very unhelpful.')

Question 11 asked participants to describe other experiences that they perceived had been helpful to them when having to manage children's difficult behaviour.

Questions 12 and 13 asked participants to describe the type of support and advice they had already received in relation to managing difficult behaviour (Q.12) and what type of training and support they perceived would be useful to them (Q.13.)

## **3.7 Interviews**

### **3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Following the analysis of the questionnaires, the research then sought to explore in more depth the types of support and training that early years practitioners have received in relation to managing children's difficult and concerning behaviour, the factors that early years practitioners believed influence children's behaviour and what they find helpful when managing behaviour in their setting. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings and further information on the analysis of the interview data is presented in Chapters 4 and 5. A description of the thematic analysis is given in section 3.9.

### **3.8 Constructing the interview schedule**

The interview schedule (Appendix 3) was developed out of findings from previous research, e.g. Merrett and Taylor (1994) and the items on the questionnaire. Both the questionnaire and the interview schedule were developed simultaneously to enable the research questions to be explored through two methods. The interview schedule aimed to explore questionnaire items with participants in more depth through the use of additional probe questions to encourage participants to share more of their own experiences. This was designed to encourage participants to reflect on their own beliefs and practices.

### **3.9 Pilots**

The questionnaire was piloted on peer researchers, one early years practitioner, Educational Psychologist colleagues and colleagues working within the LA's early years team.

Pilot studies are important to ensure that participants are able to understand and answer the questions, and that the responses are gauging the area explored (Czaja and Blair, 2005). This pilot was therefore used for this purpose.

After the questionnaire had been piloted and discussed with colleagues changes were made to the format. Likert scales were added as a means of response to more questions to ensure a greater range of specific answers. These either replaced or were in addition to free text boxes. All other wording was retained as it appeared understandable and elicited appropriate responses.

A pilot interview was carried out with one early years practitioner working within a private day nursery. The pilot interview confirmed that the questions were picking up on the pertinent issues and areas of study. However, as a consequence of the pilot interview additional 'probe' questions were added in order to encourage participants to reflect in adequate detail.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

Initially all the data was entered into Excel. For the first part of the questionnaire regarding behaviours considered 'difficult to manage,' the responses were classified into 14 distinct categories of behaviour by the researcher. The frequency tables and graph used to present the data in Chapters 4 and 5 were created in Excel. The qualitative responses given on the questionnaire were also classified by the researcher under common themes.

### **3.11 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing

and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

As well as allowing the data to be described in terms of themes it allows for an interpretation and analysis of the meaning of themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is a methodology that is not tied to any specific epistemological position.

The aim of the interviews was to explore: whether shared themes emerged from the perceptions and experiences of early years practitioners in relation to their experiences of managing difficult and concerning behaviour; the support they had received for this; and their perceptions of the possible factors that may contribute towards a child displaying difficult and concerning behaviour.

### **3.12 Stages of thematic analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a guide for the six stages of analysis.

They emphasize that these are guidelines the researcher should follow rather than a set of rules, and that the guidelines will need to be applied flexibly according to the research questions and the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the analysis is a *recursive* process, during which the researcher moves back and forth through the phases as necessary.

Themes within the data can be identified in two ways. An inductive approach means that the identification of themes is led by the data. A deductive or ‘theoretical’ thematic analysis means that the analysis will be led by existing research. In this analysis the inductive approach was the predominant method used. However the completion of the literature review meant that some theoretical ideas were present.

The six stages of the analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), and how they were undertaken in this piece of research, are outlined below:

### *Stage 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data*

The first stage of the analysis involved the researcher familiarising themselves with the data. The first stage of this was for the researcher to undertake the transcription of all the audio data. Following this, the transcripts were read several times and some initial annotated notes, reflecting the researcher's initial thoughts and ideas for codes, were made on a printed version of the transcripts, whilst reading and re-reading the transcripts (see Appendix 4 for example of an annotated transcript).

### *Stage 2: generating initial codes*

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestion, the second stage involved generating the initial codes. The researcher coded the data as single lines or blocks of data.

The researcher then discussed ideas for initial codes with peers and supervisors. Further coding and revision then took place, including, for example, the amalgamation of codes that represented similar ideas (see Appendix 5 for example of coding).

### *Stage 3: Searching for themes*

Once all the data had been coded the codes were then explored by the researcher to see how different codes may combine to form a theme. Codes were combined into possible overarching themes and sub-themes. This led to the formulation by the researcher of an initial thematic map, representing the possible main themes and sub-themes within.



#### *Stage 4: Reviewing themes*

The suggested thematic map was then discussed with supervisors. This involved looking at examples of extracts for each code and discussing relationships to the identified possible themes, as well as considering how the identified themes related to one another. The themes were then refined and reviewed, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

#### *Stage 5: Defining and naming themes*

The final overarching themes were generated and named. The resulting themes were then discussed with supervisors and a final thematic map was generated (Appendix 6).

#### *Stage 6: Producing the report*

The findings of the analysis are presented in the following chapters.

Following the analysis of both the questionnaire and interview data the presentation of the results was integrated as both explored similar areas of interest. Questionnaires provided the descriptive data and interviews provided the qualitative aspect that elaborated on this. Data from the questionnaires was generally consistent with the themes that emerged from the interviews. This structure is described further in Chapter 4.

### **3.13 Ethical considerations**

The British Psychology Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009) was adhered to throughout the research.

*Informed consent:* All participants received an information sheet prior to completing the questionnaire and being interviewed, outlining the purpose of the research and what would happen to their contribution and data. Participants were asked to consent by ticking a box on the questionnaire that they would be happy to take part in the interview stage. Participants were then asked again by the researcher prior to start of the interview that they gave their consent to take part.

*Debriefing of participants after research:* At the end of the interviews, a debrief time was included and the contact information of the researcher provided.

*Subject's right to withdraw from the research at any point:* Participants made a voluntary decision to complete the questionnaire. During the interview phase, participants were informed verbally, prior to the start of the interview, and in writing on the information sheet, that it was their right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also told at the start of the interview that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to, and they were free to leave at any point during the interview.

*Confidentiality and anonymity of the data:* There were no identifying features within the data in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants. All names were anonymised on interview transcripts and all participants have been given pseudonyms in the reporting of the findings. All interview recordings and questionnaires were kept in a locked drawer in a secure office and will be destroyed after the completion of the research.

### **3.14 Summary**

This chapter presents an outline of the pragmatic approach to the methodology by the researcher who adopted a sequential mixed methods design.

The two stage design was outlined before describing the sample of participants who engaged in the research.

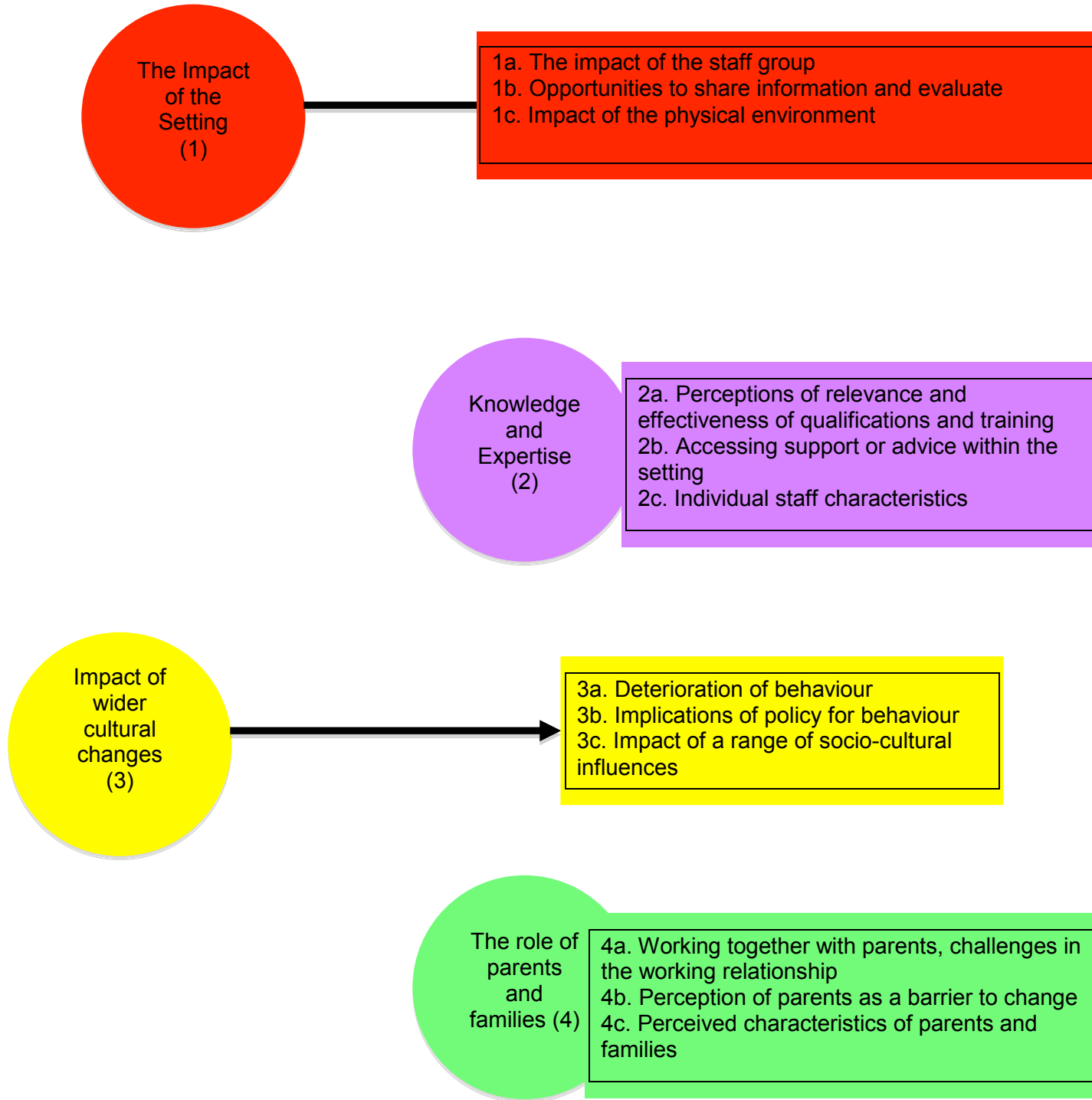
The procedure for Stage 1 was discussed, including the questionnaire, piloting and data analysis. The procedures followed for Stage 2 were then discussed, including the justification for the use of thematic analysis, the interview schedule and the data analysis process. Ethical considerations were then outlined.

The following Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of Stage 1 (questionnaires) and Stage 2 (interviews) and illustrates the links that can be made between the findings of the two stages of the research.

## 4.1 Thematic Map

### OVERARCHING THEMES

### SUBORDINATE THEMES



**Chapter 4**  
**Practitioners' views, perceptions and experiences of managing difficult**  
**behaviour**

Chapters 4 will present the findings of stage 1 (questionnaires) and stage 2 (interviews) of the data collection in an integrated way. Both sets of findings are used to answer all three of the research questions.

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, as described in the previous chapter. The analysis revealed four main themes.

1. Impact of the setting
2. Knowledge and expertise
3. Impact of wider cultural changes
4. The role of parents and families

Findings from the questionnaires were generally consistent with these themes and also added to the information provided by participants during their interview. The results from both interviews and questionnaires are, therefore, presented together as each theme is explored. Chapter 4 will consider the first two themes that involve the microsystem of the setting. Chapter 5 will consider the second two themes that involve the wider context and the interaction between systems.

There is one exception to this structure. Most of the findings used to answer research question 1 (*What are the behaviours that early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings find difficult to manage and how concerning do they perceive these behaviours?*) are drawn from questionnaire data. This data is descriptive and does not obviously fit within any of the four

themes. These findings will, therefore, be presented separately under the heading of 'Children's behaviour in early years settings'.

#### **4.1 Children's behaviour in early years settings**

The participants were invited to raise issues around describing and defining behaviour through both the questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires specifically ask practitioners about the types of difficult behaviour being experienced in early years settings, how concerning they perceive these behaviours to be and the frequency of these behaviours. The section also introduces some interview data relating to practitioner perceptions of what they consider to be other important aspects of their role. The two types of data provide complimentary information.

The questionnaires asked practitioners to record the four types of behaviour that they find 'most difficult' to manage in their setting. Practitioners were asked to describe the behaviour in terms of what the child actually does, for example, 'throws things' or 'shouts.' All participants provided at least two responses, so all participants indicated some behaviour that they perceived to be 'most difficult' to manage within their setting.

Fourteen categories of difficult behaviour emerged from the data: biting, aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff, shouting/bad language/screaming, tantrums, being sick, throwing items, disruptive or distracting behaviour, not listening/arguing/lying, spitting, pushing, running, use of language, refusing to respond/ignoring and snatching/not sharing.

Categories where a number of behaviours were included are listed below. These categories were used to categorise related behaviours where practitioners had been very specific in their definition of the behaviour and/or were mentioned by only one or two participants. Behaviours were categorised together where it

appeared that they could be interpreted as having a similar effect by practitioners e.g. not listening, arguing and lying could all be seen as forms of uncooperative behaviour.

*Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff:* kicking, aggression towards adults, fighting, aggression towards children, hurting other children, children hurting each other

*Disruptive or distracting behaviour:* children throwing themselves on the floor, calling out, climbing on furniture, refusing to join in with routine activities, being rude, denying they have done something, taking toys home from the setting

*Not listening/arguing/lying:* ignoring, not following instructions, not responding

*Use of language:* swearing, limited understanding, attitude, no language

The table below (Table 4.1.1) shows how many people listed each behaviour category as one of their 'most difficult' to manage behaviours and what percentage of people (out of 63) this was. For example 29% of people mentioned 'biting' as one of their 'most difficult' to manage behaviours. The table also shows, for each of the 14 behaviour categories, the percentage of the total number of behaviour categories mentioned (out of 233 as not everyone recorded four behaviours; some only provided two or three, hence the total number of responses is less than the theoretical maximum of 252. Additionally, a behaviour is only counted once here, even if the respondent mentioned it twice (in slightly different wording). For example out of the total number of behaviour categories listed by all people 'biting' appeared 8% of the time.

*"Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff"* is the most commonly mentioned behaviour category (68% of people; 18% of listed behaviour categories) followed closely by *'Throwing items'* (65% of people; 18% of listed behaviour categories) and *'Shouting/bad language/screaming'* (56% of people;

15% of listed behaviour categories). *'Being sick'* and *'Use of Language'* are only mentioned by 1 and 2 people respectively.

It is unclear whether these behaviours (*'Being sick'* and *'Use of language'*) were seen as being under the immediate control of the child or not, and, therefore, not being amenable to change in the same way as the other behaviour categories. Their listing may be a reflection of a very small number of practitioners' personal feelings.

Table 4.1.1 Frequency of all behaviour categories listed and numbers of people listing them

| <b>ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT BEHAVIOURS TO MANAGE</b>              | <b>NO. OF PEOPLE</b> | <b>% OF PEOPLE</b> | <b>% OF BEHAVIOURS</b> |
|--|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Biting  | 18                   | 29                 | 8                      |
| 2. Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff | 43                   | 68                 | 18                     |
| 3. Shouting/bad language/screaming                                 | 35                   | 56                 | 15                     |
| 4. Tantrums  | 11                   | 17                 | 5                      |
| 5. Being sick  | 1                    | 2                  | 0                      |
| 6. Throwing items  | 41                   | 65                 | 18                     |
| 7. Disruptive and distractive behaviour                            | 11                   | 17                 | 5                      |
| 8. Not listening/arguing/lying                                     | 21                   | 33                 | 9                      |
| 9. Spitting  | 7                    | 11                 | 3                      |
| 10. Pushing  | 7                    | 11                 | 3                      |
| 11. Running  | 6                    | 10                 | 3                      |
| 12. Use of language  | 2                    | 3                  | 1                      |
| 13. Refuses to respond/ignoring                                    | 11                   | 17                 | 5                      |



|                           |    |    |   |
|---------------------------|----|----|---|
| 14. Snatching/not sharing | 19 | 30 | 8 |
|---------------------------|----|----|---|

Table 4.1.2 shows which behaviour categories people recorded as the one they found most difficult to manage. ‘Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff’ was mentioned by 30% of the participants as being the most difficult behaviour to manage, followed by ‘Biting’ which was reported as being the most difficult to manage by 17% of the participants. Nobody listed ‘Pushing’, ‘Snatching/not sharing’ and ‘Being sick’ as being the most difficult to manage.

Table 4.1.2 Frequency of behaviour categories being listed as the most difficult to manage

| <b>MOST DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR TO MANAGE</b>                          | <b>NO. OF PEOPLE</b> | <b>% OF TOTAL</b> |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Biting  | 11                   | 17                |
| 2. Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff | 19                   | 30                |
| 3. Shouting/bad language/screaming                                 | 4                    | 6                 |
| 4. Tantrums  | 1                    | 2                 |
| 5. Being sick  | 0                    | 0                 |
| 6. Throwing items  | 5                    | 8                 |
| 7. Disruptive and distractive behaviour                            | 4                    | 6                 |
| 8. Not listening/arguing/lying                                     | 9                    | 14                |
| 9. Spitting  | 3                    | 5                 |
| 10. Pushing  | 0                    | 0                 |
| 11. Running  | 2                    | 3                 |
| 12. Use of language  | 1                    | 2                 |

|                                 |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 13. Refuses to respond/ignoring | 4 | 6 |
| 14. Snatching/not sharing       | 0 | 0 |

Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which the behaviours they had listed would be of 'concern.'

The table below (Table 4.1.3) shows the numbers and percentage of the 53 respondents who rated a category of behaviour as being the 'most difficult' to manage who also considered this type of behaviour to be 'concerning' or 'very concerning'. 10 participants were neutral or unconcerned about the behaviour they considered most difficult to manage. '*Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff*' was most frequently recorded as the most difficult behaviour and of most concern followed by '*Biting*'.

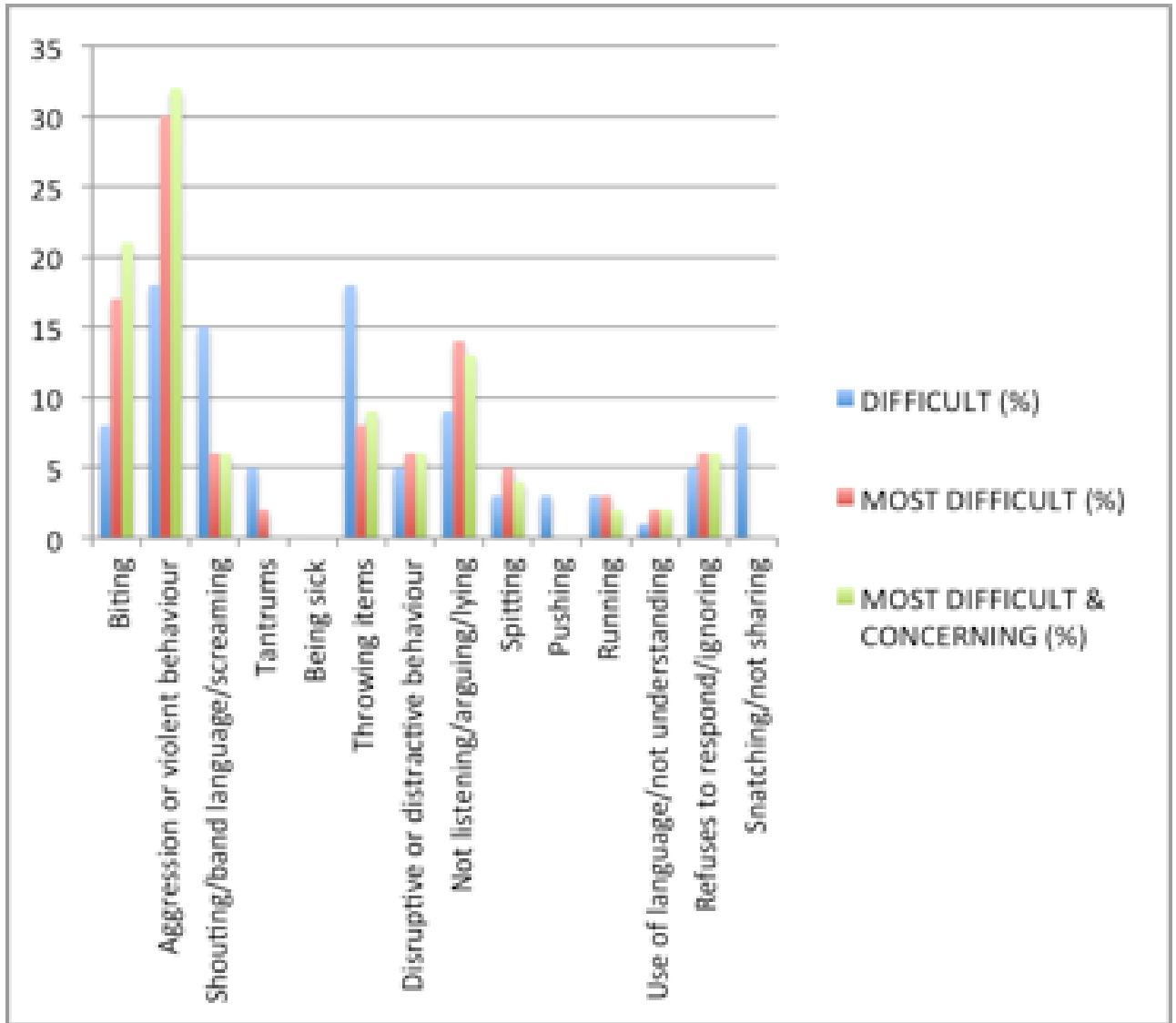
However, while all those who recorded '*Biting*' as their most difficult to manage behaviour also considered this to be concerning or very concerning, two people recorded '*Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff*' as their most difficult to manage behaviour but were not concerned or very concerned about it.

Table 4.1.3 Numbers and percentages of people rating their most difficult to manage behaviour category as concerning or very concerning

| <b>MOST DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR AND CONCERNING OR V. CONCERNING</b>    | <b>NO. OF PEOPLE</b> | <b>% OF TOTAL</b> |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Biting  | 11                   | 21                |
| 2. Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff | 17                   | 32                |
| 3. Shouting/bad language/screaming                                 | 3                    | 6                 |
| 4. Tantrums  | 0                    | 0                 |
| 5. Being sick  | 0                    | 0                 |
| 6. Throwing items  | 5                    | 9                 |
| 7. Disruptive and distractive behaviour                            | 3                    | 6                 |
| 8. Not listening/arguing/lying                                     | 7                    | 13                |
| 9. Spitting  | 2                    | 4                 |
| 10. Pushing  | 0                    | 0                 |
| 11. Running  | 1                    | 2                 |
| 12. Use of language  | 1                    | 2                 |
| 13. Refuses to respond/ignoring                                    | 3                    | 6                 |
| 14. Snatching/not sharing  | 0                    | 0                 |

The chart (Figure 4.1.1) below combines data from the three tables shown above. This compares the frequency of the recording of behaviour categories looked at in different ways (mentioned at all; listed as the most difficult; considered the most difficult and concerning).

Figure 4.1.2 Comparison of the frequency of behaviour categories rated difficult and, difficult and concerning



For example, we can see that *'Pushing'* and *'Snatching/not sharing'* were included in some people's overall list of difficult to manage behaviours but were never regarded as the most difficult. *'Aggression or violent behaviour towards children or staff'* was the most likely to be considered the most difficult behaviour to manage and highly likely to be regarded as concerning. Although *'Biting'* was not amongst the most frequently mentioned behaviour, when it was mentioned it was always considered to be concerning. *'Throwing things'* was the second most often mentioned difficult behaviour overall but less likely to be named as the most difficult to manage behaviour.

Participants were also asked to rate how frequently they believed these difficult behaviours occurred within their settings; how they felt about the time they spent managing behaviour and how confident they were doing so.

These key findings are summarised in the table below.

Table 4.1.4 Key findings: participants' views on frequency of difficult behaviour and confidence in managing difficult behaviour

| CATEGORY  | % OF ALL PARTICIPANTS |
|---|-----------------------|
| Participant spend more time on managing difficult behaviour than they feel they ought to            | 48                    |
| One or more of the difficult behaviours listed occurred frequently or very frequently               | 69                    |
| The most difficult behaviour occurred frequently or very frequently                                 | 35                    |
| The participant was confident or very confident about being able to manage the difficult behaviours | 85                    |

For the behaviour rated by the participants as the 'most difficult' to manage 35% (out of 63) indicated this behaviour occurred 'frequently' or 'very frequently.' 69% of the participants indicated that at least one of the four behaviours they listed occurred 'frequently' or 'very frequently.' 48% of participants believed they were spending more time on managing difficult behaviour than they ought to be. Participants were generally confident about managing the difficult behaviour of which they gave examples.

Interesting ideas emerged from the interviews that were relevant to the practitioners' perception that they spent too much time managing difficult behaviour (nearly half of those completing questionnaires thought that they spent too much time managing behaviour, see Table 4.1.4). Practitioners' beliefs that their role in the setting goes beyond 'managing' difficult behaviour were reflected in the interview data. Two of the participants saw themselves as responsible for ensuring that children are able to respond appropriately to boundaries imposed on them in relation to their behaviour so they are adequately prepared for the more formal and structured learning environment of the school setting:

*We get them prepared so going from nursery there won't be as much of an impact on behaviour because we've already set the boundaries but then coming from the home environment we've had to work quite hard with the children so... so they're all well trained by September...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 246)*

Emma and Amanda (see quote below) both worked within the same setting. They were the only practitioners to explore this idea. This may be because preparation for school is recognised as more of a priority within this setting. As well as trying to prepare children for school Emma and Amanda also viewed developing the child's independence, particularly in relation to their self-care skills as another important aspect of their role:

*When we have the settling in procedure we ask the children to be independent and to get their cup and the plate but there will be parents around who will just get the cup and the plate and we're saying if you don't mind is it okay if the child gets their own cup and plate because this is just building up their life skills and things...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 301)*

Amanda also recognised the effect managing behaviour can have on the amount of time practitioners are able to spend on aspects of other children's development, such as self-care skills:

*It does take a lot out of the staff [managing behaviour] and it's not good learning for the other children as well so obviously it affects them in the sense that we like to spend that quality time with the children and interacting and developing all the other things...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 183)*

Taking a different perspective, one practitioner, Kim, discussed how time spent managing behaviour within the setting may have an impact on children with other forms of special educational needs (SEN):

*A lot of the help that children get depends on how disruptive they are and yet children that are say Autistic but quiet and just stay in the background they don't get as much attention as those that are disruptive and I always think that's wrong...*

*(Interview 7, Kim, line 103)*

Kim recognises there is an imbalance in relation to the amount of attention children receive depending on how difficult their behaviour is. This imbalance may occur because, if the behaviour was not managed, these children would be the most disruptive to the functioning of the setting. Kim's use of the word 'wrong' in this context suggests she feels strongly about it. It would appear important, therefore, to try and ensure that practitioners do not become resentful about working with this group of children and remain focused on having a long term impact on the child and their behaviour, not just containing and managing the behaviour through the use of one to one support whilst the child is in the setting.

These ideas were not strong within the interview data. Only three practitioners raised them. However, they provide some insight into why a proportion of



practitioners perceive themselves as spending too much time on managing difficult behaviour given the other competing responsibilities of their role.

The comments also reflect awareness, from the practitioners interviewed, that an imbalance may exist in relation to the time and attention children with difficult behaviour receive which could have a negative impact on the development of others.

For the participants who did not perceive themselves to be spending too much time on managing difficult behaviour it would be interesting to explore in depth the proportion of their time that is spent on this and what they perceive 'managing behaviour' to look like.

Data presented in this section demonstrates that early years practitioners experience various types of behaviour that they find difficult to manage in their settings. The majority of participants were also concerned about the difficult behaviour although they did feel confident managing it. Almost half the participants felt they were spending too much time on managing behaviour. Arguably, practitioners may perceive that this does not allow sufficient time for other key issues, for example, preparation for school and the development of self care skills. Ideas started to emerge from the interview data, which suggest why they think this and what other aspects of their role practitioners perceive to be important.

#### **4.2 Theme 1: Impact of the setting**

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed four main themes (see the beginning of the chapter for a list). Theme 1 (Impact of the setting) reflects the perception of practitioners that the setting can have a significant impact on a child's behaviour and how effective they are in being able to manage it. The three subordinate themes within this are: 'the staff group' (this incorporates the composition of the staff group as well as the dynamics of the relationships within it); 'opportunities to share information and evaluate practice' (opportunities

provided through interactions with others within the setting and those external to the setting); and 'the physical environment and layout of the setting.'

#### 4.2.1 Subordinate theme 1a: The impact of the staff group

Practitioners viewed working within a supportive peer group as important. They spoke about valuing opportunities for joint thinking and problem solving with their peers in relation to behaviour management as well as providing emotional support for one another. Practitioners described being able to 'share the burden' and take over from one another if anyone is finding certain behaviour too difficult to manage.

*I think it's all about working as a team so if all the team are on board it's easier to manage I suppose... and you're best together as a team so you always help each other out so it's easier...*

*(Interview 4, Lucy, line 119)*

Seven of the participants reflected on the importance of having a supportive peer group available to them in the setting, for example, Lucy (a room leader), spoke about behaviour management being 'easier' if it is something that is done by the staff group as a whole not by an individual.

Staff meetings were mentioned by many as an important forum for discussions in relation to behaviour and as a place where practitioners may seek advice or support from others in the group:

*If we have staff meetings we talk about the progress of the child if the child's made any progress as well... we kind of discuss okay well this hasn't worked and maybe try a different route...*

*(Interview 3, Natalie, line 113)*

The majority of interviewees were more experienced or senior members of staff, some of whom had a specific role in relation to behaviour. Natalie talked about the staff meeting as an opportunity for sharing and evaluating. She frequently referred

to the group as 'we'. This may suggest she views the staff meeting as an open forum for discussion to take place.

It is not clear, however, whether all staff members, particularly the less experienced, or those who find behaviour management challenging, would feel confident enough or be willing to share any difficulties in front of the whole group.

Staff meetings are also an opportunity for practitioners to discuss what is working well in terms of their practice and what is not. Amanda saw this as being a mechanism to try and ensure that there is a consistency and continuity of approach in relation to behaviour management amongst the staff group:

*It has to be that staff are saying the same thing and if the staff are doing something else or staff are thinking oh I'll ignore this then... it's just everybody doing the same thing...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 54)*

Amanda reflected on the importance of communication and the sharing of information amongst the staff group. Amanda's role within the setting was senior team leader and inclusion co-ordinator meaning that the dissemination of information in relation to behaviour is likely to be a priority for her.

One interviewee, Kim, the manager of the setting, provided supervision sessions for individual staff members in which they could discuss children. This would appear to be a good framework for practice but it was not found to be occurring regularly in any other setting participating in this research.

The composition of the staff group and changes within it may also have an impact on children's behaviour. In some settings the staff group is one that is evolving and changing, as discussed by Emma:

*We have a lot of staff that come and go... like we have a lot of maternity cover and young staff and staff with not as much experience...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 216)*

Emma also refers to the characteristics of the staff that are coming into the setting, stating that as a consequence of these staff changes, staff are brought in who are less experienced. Potentially this could have implications for how consistently the behaviour policy is applied within the setting. It also appears likely that regular changes to the group would have an impact on the group's feeling of unity and the dynamics of the relationships within it although this is not explicitly stated.

#### 4.2.2 Subordinate theme 1b: Opportunities to share information and evaluate

The previous sub-ordinate theme demonstrated that practitioners value having frequent opportunities to discuss children and their behaviour with staff members. The sub-ordinate theme 1b reflects the importance of opportunities for practitioners to talk about, share and evaluate their practice with professionals from outside the setting, as well as being given time to reflect on practice individually.

A minority of practitioners sampled, and only those who held positions of responsibility, stated they valued having frequent, informal opportunities for discussion and supervision with professionals from outside agencies:

*Because training there's a lot of information and you have to take it all in and then 6 months down the line you sort of think... you look back in the literature and it's like mmmmm... so yeah just having someone on the other end of the phone is quite handy really...*

*(Interview 2, Sam, line 312)*

Sam (a SENCo) had developed a close working relationship with the area SENCo from within the local authority. Here Sam talked about how she values this relationship, as it allows her to seek advice and clarification on issues from another professional outside of the setting's allocated time:

*I've managed to get quite a good relationship with outside agencies so if I'm stuck with something for example like a speech problem I know I could phone up the SALT team and say right this is the situation... her mobile is on my mobile...*

*(Interview 2, Sam, line 302)*

However, the majority of participants did not discuss having these types of opportunities suggesting they have limited access to other professionals. This reflects a pattern seen in the questionnaire data that is explored further on in the chapter in the context of theme 2: knowledge and expertise in relation to the hierarchical structure of a setting. Practitioners who do not have a specific role related to behaviour are more likely to draw upon their peers or senior staff members for support (the evidence for this is also presented within theme 2). Senior staff members with additional responsibilities will then discuss concerns with professionals from outside agencies with the information then being disseminated to the rest of the staff group.

As well as opportunities to seek advice in relation to specific children three of the practitioners discussed the merits of being provided with time or 'space' to reflect and think about their practice:

*I think when you're in a job you're so busy dealing with so many children, so many messages, so many... our days are so busy we just go home and don't have time to process all the information and I think for the girls they're in the room all the time...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 137)*

Here Liz wondered whether staff always have the capacity to apply their knowledge and training to their practice given the other competing demands of the setting. Liz refers to the 'girls' being 'in the room all the time...'

The use of the word 'girls' may suggest that Liz believes the younger and more inexperienced members of staff are the ones who have the fewest opportunities for this type of information sharing, reflection and evaluation although it appears they are spending the most time directly working with the children.

#### 4.2.3 Subordinate theme 1c: Impact of the physical environment

This subordinate theme represents practitioners' perceptions about the effect of the physical environment on children's behaviour and the influence this has on how they try to manage behaviour in the setting.

Two of the practitioners (Emma and Amanda) who both worked in the same setting expressed the view that the physical layout of the setting could make managing difficult behaviour more challenging:

*There's so many staff here but there's so many children at the same time... it's kind of hard to... we've got two rooms and like I said we've got the blind spots as well like the toilet areas and stuff so we can miss something... but when there's one big open room with staff everywhere you're less likely to miss something aren't you...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 257)*

Here Amanda talked about the layout of the setting contributing to difficult behaviour as children could identify areas within the setting to go to which were not clearly visible to staff, in order to misbehave. Although not illustrated in the quote Amanda also considered whether having a large number of children contributed towards children becoming more excitable and led to increased numbers of incidents where it was difficult for staff to determine whether the incident was an accident or deliberate misbehaviour.

Overall, this theme (*Impact of the Setting*) demonstrates that practitioners believe that the characteristics of an individual setting have an effect on children's behaviour and on how practitioners manage difficult behaviour.

It shows that practitioners value and rely on a supportive staff group in order to facilitate problem solving if they are feeling 'stuck' in relation to a child's behaviour. Practitioners also rely on one another to recognise when they are finding a situation challenging or difficult. Changes to the composition of the staff group may also have an impact. Opportunities for information sharing and discussion with external professionals were highly valued; this is also reflected within the questionnaire data and is discussed further in the section on theme 2: knowledge and expertise. However, practitioners reported these occurring less frequently and primarily for more senior members of staff.

### **4.3 Theme 2: Knowledge and Expertise**

This theme reflects practitioners' perceptions of what has contributed towards their knowledge and expertise in relation to behaviour management. It also explores their experiences of training and support. The two subordinate themes within this theme are: 'perceptions of relevance and effectiveness of qualifications and training' (which involves the comparison between the perceived importance of qualifications and job experience, as well as the relevance to practice of training) and 'individual staff characteristics' (which explores aspects of individual difference and experience that contribute to practice). The interview data is again supported by evidence from the questionnaires.

#### **4.3.1 Subordinate theme 2a: Perceptions of relevance and effectiveness of qualifications and training**

This sub-ordinate theme demonstrates the types of training and support received by practitioners and reflects their perceptions of the relevance of qualifications and

training and how helpful or effective they believe them to be in relation to developing their practice.

The training and support practitioners had received to help them manage behaviour was also explored through the questionnaires.

71% of the participants sampled through the questionnaire had received specific training in relation to behaviour or managing difficult behaviour. Of this group 93% believed their training had been 'very helpful' or 'helpful.' Participants were asked to provide a description of the training they had received. The majority of participants, who had received training and provided detail of this on their questionnaire, described it as: '*Behaviour management*' or '*Basic managing behaviour*'. Where more detail had been provided, the majority indicated that this training had been delivered in the setting by the early years team from the local authority. One participant described the training received from this team:

*My setting have received some behaviour training through the local AIO [Area Inclusion Officer]. The training covered understanding and responding to children's behaviour, the use of STAR charts to track behaviour, good practice when dealing with difficult behaviour, for example, praise the good and pick the battle.*

Six participants indicated that they had not received any specific training but stated they had advice and input from the inclusion co-ordinator or manager of the setting or they had referred to the setting's behaviour policy for guidance.

Participants who held a specific role within the setting, for example, managers or SENCo's were likely to have attended training related to that role. The majority described this as '*Inclusion training*' or '*SENCo training*' which then included an element related to behaviour management.



Four participants included '*Portage training*'<sup>2</sup> and one participant mentioned training related to children with speech and language difficulties. One participant described the Portage training:

*Portage had a section based on behaviour and different ways to deal with it or how to notice patterns to avoid triggers...*

Participants were asked what other experiences, for example, educational or personal experiences had helped them with managing children's behaviour. The responses indicated six primary categories of experiences they perceived to have been helpful:

- Training or advice received from the area inclusion officer (AIO)
- Advice or support from the setting's SENCo and/or peer support from within the setting
- Personal experiences (including having their own children, having family members or friends with special educational needs or relating back to their own upbringing)
- Experience gained through their practice, qualifications obtained and specific training courses or the setting's behaviour policy.

The two categories referred to by the majority of participants as being helpful were: personal experiences and job experience. This is reflected in some of the quotes below:

*My own children and 23 years working in a child oriented environment spanning 15 years...*

*Experiences that I have come across in the setting seeing how it should and can be dealt with, confident to manage if it occurs again...*

---

<sup>2</sup> Portage is a service that is normally delivered by a 'Portage worker' in the family home to support parents of children with special educational needs. Developmental checklists and profiles may be used to help identify strengths and needs and help plan towards future goals.

*My mum has been a child minder for years and has seen different kinds of behaviour. Seen what works and what doesn't. She had a very challenging child...*

Very few of the participants stated that qualifications or educational experiences had been helpful to them in relation to managing behaviour. However, it was apparent from information provided earlier on in the questionnaire that all had undertaken or were currently undertaking a qualification related to their role. It is interesting that practitioners feel personal experiences are more 'powerful' in relation to developing their practice than education or qualifications. These perceptions were explored in more depth within the interview data.

Several of the participants reflected on whether they thought qualifications and training were the most helpful in terms of managing behaviour or whether their experience was more useful. Here Liz talked about job experience contributing more towards being an effective practitioner than having a high level of qualification:

*I think it's definitely about learning on the job... I don't think you can learn from a book about dealing with behaviour or from doing a few hours at college or... I think it has to be on the job...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 116)*

Liz refers to 'a few hours at college' in a somewhat derogatory tone. This comment could highlight the potential for younger practitioners entering the workforce to be viewed as less effective by older, more experienced members of staff, if they do not perceive qualifications and training to be relevant.

Emma and Sam discussed their different views in relation to the importance of personal experience. Emma believed that there were similarities between the way in which she managed the behaviour of children in the setting and how she chose to manage the behaviour of her children at home:

*I've taught my girls how to respect others and... I wouldn't like it if they were... they're not allowed to but if they were ever to shout or raise their*

*hand or those kind of behaviours we do actually discipline them at home so it's just the same doing that here...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 183)*

Here Emma referred to feeling that managing the behaviour of children in the setting is just the same as doing it at home and she refers to her personal beliefs and values in relation to parenting and acceptable behaviour. Emma's comment is interesting as it leads us to consider what the potential advantages and disadvantages of this way of thinking are, particularly if practitioners are from a cultural background with strong views on parenting.

However, Sam, a SENCo, shared the belief that she did not feel she would apply her own parenting approach to children in the setting:

*But what you do with your own children is something completely different to what you do with children in the setting so...*

*(Interview 4, Sam, line 262)*

Although this issue was not discussed specifically by other participants, it highlights the existence of opposing views and, as also indicated in the questionnaire data, is likely to be influenced by the life experiences of the individual practitioner.

Several of the participants felt they needed more regular training to reflect their current needs:

*I think we should have... I think they should review training... I don't know yearly or at least once every two years for all staff because I think like M said with the two year olds we're taking on we are noticing more and more behaviour issues...*

*(Interview 1, Mel, line 132)*

Mel's comments are also relevant in relation to a later theme (Theme 4), which considers the impact on behaviour of wider cultural changes. Here Mel talked about a specific issue she is experiencing in her setting at present, an increase in

the number of 2 year olds as a consequence of changes to government policy and a need to review training in relation to these changes.

Participants completing the questionnaire were also asked to comment on any other types of training or support that they would find useful. All the participants who answered this question wanted further input and training on 'behaviour management.' However, for participants who had written a more thorough description of what this might look like, they described behaviour management training that was: regular and updated to reflect the difficulties they were currently experiencing; practical; and that encompassed the whole staff group in order to ensure consistency of approach.

Overall this theme shows that the majority of practitioners sampled have received training in relation to behaviour and managing behaviour and they perceived this specific training to be helpful. However there are inconsistencies in how practitioners define 'training' and the amount received. This depends on their role. The majority of practitioners did not perceive their qualifications or educational experiences to have been helpful to them but were divided in their views as to how much emphasis they placed on the importance of job experience and personal experience as a contribution to their practice. One of the reasons why practitioners may draw on personal experiences is because they think that the training is not always regular enough nor updated sufficiently to reflect the challenges they are experiencing in the setting at that time.

#### 4.3.2 Subordinate theme 2b: Accessing support or advice within the setting

As explored in Theme 1 (Impact of the Setting) practitioners value and appreciate opportunities to reflect on and discuss their practice with their peers. Practitioners also really valued opportunities to do this with other professionals from outside the setting. This sub-ordinate theme reflects practitioner perceptions of the hierarchical nature of access to this additional source of knowledge and expertise. The questionnaire also asked participants who (either from within or outside) the setting

provided them with advice on managing children's behaviour and to describe how this support or advice was given.

There appeared to be a link between who the participant identified as providing them with support and advice was and the participant's position within the setting. Participants who did not hold a managerial position, or a position related to behaviour, (for example, SENCOs or inclusion co-ordinators), primarily identified senior members of staff or their peer group as providing them with support or advice, as illustrated in the quotes below taken from the questionnaires:

*Team leader... showing you how to manage children's behaviour, reading through policies and giving advice on how to manage behaviour...  
Room leader and SEN co-ordinator... explain procedures in place when experiencing difficulty able to talk through concerns and they discuss methods and alternate methods...*

*We deal with it as a team and trouble shoot it at meetings...*

Senior members or staff with a specific role in relation to behaviour management primarily identified the area inclusion officer (AIO) and family workers from the local Children's Centre as providing them with support and advice:

*From outside agency our AIO gives us good advice... when we are dealing with behaviour we are told how to deal with behaviour as well as how we can improve...*

*AIO... if we have any concerns we speak to the AIO who will always support us in what we do and how to deal with it...*

*Outside agencies such as Building Blocks provide support to the parents of the child...*

Participants also re-iterated the value they place on opportunities to talk through concerns with professionals not directly linked to the setting:

*I would enjoy talking to someone about specific children's behavioural issues or specific issues we have and how I can deal with them. I have never done this or had the opportunity with someone trained outside the setting...*

*I would just like any concerns talked through and looked into...*

This pattern of advice and support being disseminated downwards through the setting is not surprising, as the provision of advice and support is a significant part of a senior member of staff's role. Good communication would need to exist throughout the staff group to ensure all relevant information is being passed on.

Staff need to feel able to raise queries and concerns and be confident that the appropriate children are identified as needing additional support or input from outside agencies. However it appears some practitioners would like greater access to other professionals and they do not feel they are given these opportunities. During the interviews, one participant Kim gave an example of why, as a senior member of staff, she values this additional support and advice from other professionals. Kim was the manager and owner of the setting. Here Kim expressed concerns about the challenges of making judgements in relation to a child's behaviour, particularly given the age of the children:

*It's very difficult to know what you're seeing because the children are so young and obviously they develop at different stages and then you also have children... where they're two... where it is normal for them to be having tantrums and it's normal for them to be not able to express their emotions and it's normal that they're just learning to speak and some might be a little behind and some of them are quite forward... so it's kind of a very blurry age where you're kind of not quite sure is this just a little bit slow or something...*

*(Interview 7, Kim, line 149)*

Making decisions about level of concern in relation to a child's behaviour was seen as a bigger responsibility for interviewees who held a position of authority within

the setting, for example, the SENCo or manager, as they were the ones likely to make a referral to outside agencies and communicate the concerns to parents.

Kim discussed the inherent difficulties in raising concerns with parents if, as a setting, they still felt unsure as to what the problem might be:

*It's quite difficult to even give them advice or projections about what it might be like... or what you're working towards... should you just be saying don't worry... all children develop at different times or is it like yes we're going to look at this...*

*(Interview 7, Kim, line 164)*

This sub-ordinate theme supports the findings of Theme 1 (Impact of the Setting) in that it re-iterates the importance of the staff group, as this is where the majority of practitioners would go to seek advice or support. Theme 1 also indicated that practitioners value opportunities to access other professionals. This data indicates that access to other professionals is largely governed by the hierarchical nature of the setting, with information then disseminated down. This may be related to the nature of certain job roles, for example, the SENCo, as they are likely to have the responsibility of raising concerns about a child's behaviour to people outside the setting.

#### 4.3.3 Subordinate theme 2c: Individual staff characteristics

This sub-ordinate theme reflects practitioner perceptions that the relevance and effectiveness of their qualifications and training may be influenced by its delivery, if they have preference in relation to the way they learn, and also how motivated they are to develop their practice. Three participants felt that training did not always meet the learning needs of every individual:

*I think sometimes being told by another member of staff is good but they won't... you won't feel... depending on how you learn because the way I learn... I need to see it and I need to hear it for myself and everything before I could say to somebody else this is how it's done or whatever...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 224)*

Here Amanda discussed her own way of learning, a preference for first hand experience rather than being told by a colleague, which often happens, given the previously discussed hierarchical nature of settings. This preference for practical training, where staff could experience using behaviour management techniques and a perception that this would be a better learning tool than only hearing or reading information, is also reflected within the questionnaire data, as described before.

The motivation of an individual to learn and develop areas of their practice is also important:

*When I was doing my study at uni it wasn't much of a focus but I still used to read up on interesting bits... that used to get me going... especially on behaviour... it was quite interesting and I used to look into it so I think that's where I probably learnt...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 27)*

Here Emma talked about the interest she has in learning about behaviour. Emma appeared very motivated to learn about different ways of approaching behaviour and understanding children's development. Emma's expressed preference for self-learning and exploring issues for herself, through reading about the topic is also noticeably different to the preference expressed by Amanda in the quote above for learning in action.

Overall, this theme (knowledge and expertise) reflects practitioner views that they do not necessarily believe that their training and qualifications are always relevant and help them in their practice. Practitioners appear to place greater emphasis on the importance of having job experience and see this as more helpful. This may be because training received does not always address the changing needs of the settings or reflect the behaviour issues they are currently experiencing. Individual staff characteristics in relation to learning style and motivation to learn are also



considered important in influencing the relevance of training. Practitioners also draw on personal experiences in their practice although there was a difference in opinion over whether this is always appropriate. There appears to be an emerging hierarchy in relation to who practitioners seek support and advice from. The majority of practitioners seek this within their peer group. Senior members of staff appear to have greater access to other professionals. One suggestion for why this may be necessary, and has therefore emerged, is that one of the major challenges for senior practitioners is making decisions about whether concerns related to a child's behaviour need to be raised beyond the setting.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Chapter 4 has described categories of behaviour that are regarded as difficult to manage in early years settings. It has also considered which behaviours are concerning and whether practitioners feel confident to deal with such behaviours. Two of the themes from the thematic analysis, which mostly related to the single system of the setting, were also discussed. This discussion was augmented by evidence from the questionnaires. Chapter 5 will continue the description and analysis of the remaining two themes that relate mainly to the wider context and interaction between systems

## **Chapter 5**

### **Relating managing behaviour to other contexts**

Chapters 5 will again present the findings of stage 1 (questionnaires) and stage 2 (interviews) of the data collection in an integrated way. Chapter 5 will discuss the remaining two themes: 'Impact of wider cultural changes' and 'The role of parents and families.'

#### **5.1 Theme 3: Impact of wider cultural changes**

This theme reflects the perception of practitioners of the impact of wider cultural, social and historical changes on children's behaviour in their setting. The three subordinate themes within this theme are: 'deterioration of behaviour'; 'implications of new government policy' (which includes how policy has influenced the dynamics of the setting and created new challenges) and cultural influences (which involves practitioners perceptions of cultural influences that have impacted upon their practice). The theme represents practitioner perceptions of wider contextual issues that have had an impact on and influenced the types of behaviour practitioners experience in their settings and how they seek to manage it.

##### **5.1.1 Subordinate theme 3a: Deterioration of behaviour**

This sub-ordinate theme reflects practitioners' perceptions that they have seen a deterioration in children's behaviour within their settings. Three of the practitioners explicitly stated they believed that this deterioration was occurring. For example, Liz:

*I feel the behaviour is getting worse in nurseries I don't think it's just us that's experiencing that, I think a lot of nurseries do have... I think it's just the background that the children are coming from and you know if they're witnessing something they can just come to nursery and lash out at the other children...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 55)*

Here Liz talked about the perceived deterioration of behaviour in the setting being related to other changes within society, for example, increased migration and changes to family dynamics. Liz stated the belief that a strong relationship exists between difficult behaviour and a child's home circumstances and family; this is discussed further in a later theme (the role of parents and families). Other practitioners perceived deterioration of behaviour to be related to changes in government policy (to be discussed further in the following theme). Although a perceived deterioration in behaviour was not a strong theme for a majority of the practitioners experiencing some form of difficult behaviour is a frequent occurrence.

#### 5.1.2 Subordinate theme 3b: Implications of policy for behaviour

This sub-ordinate theme represents practitioner beliefs that changes in government policy has an impact on children's behaviour they experience in the setting. Recently, there has been a significant piece of legislation, increasing the numbers of free places in early years settings available for two year olds, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Several of the participants believed that the types of behaviour demonstrated by the younger children in the setting were more challenging for them to manage:

*What I'm finding quite difficult at the moment I would say would be the younger children... especially now they're starting the two year old funding we've had... they're starting much earlier and we're getting more behaviour problems...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 50)*

Emma also expressed the view that the younger children were particularly difficult to manage within the setting because she did not feel that staff had yet acquired adequate strategies and ways of managing their behaviour. This relates to Theme 2 (knowledge and expertise) and practitioner perceptions of the relevance of training.

Here Emma recognised that she did not always have a clear understanding of what motivated the difficult behaviour of the younger children and that her setting was still experimenting with ways to improve their capacity to managing the behaviour:

*They're still young... they have the attachment with their parents... you've just been left with a stranger and you don't know the reason why you've been left and it's just hard to... maybe if they're abit older... maybe 3... the parents told them I'm going I'll be coming back... they have more of an understanding... whereas if you've told a younger... especially if they don't have the language... you're telling them I'm going I'll be back later... they don't understand...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 257)*

Emma commented that her nursery setting were attempting to use sign language with younger children as a way of addressing their perceived lack of understanding and more limited communication. This strategy was devised within the setting but Emma acknowledged it was challenging to think of new ways of working with this age group. Emma's quote illustrates a different perspective from other practitioners who raised this issue. Emma's reference to breaking the attachment with their parents as a possible cause for a child's upset and distress demonstrates an understanding that the emotional needs of a child also need to be responded to as part of managing their behaviour. However, it is unclear from the quote whether Emma's use of the word attachment is because she uses it as a common part of

her language or she does have an understanding and awareness of how relevant theoretical perspectives link to her practice.

Here Kim commented upon implications of changes to budgets in relation to managing behaviour:

*Because it's a private setting it's also difficult money wise because in truth you need an extra person who just deals with that child and it becomes... that's quite expensive... and a private nursery actually... people might not realise but it's actually quite tight on money so I think that's when it becomes a problem trying to manage that kind of thing...*

*(Interview 7, Kim, line 89)*

Kim was the manager and owner of the setting and so had clear oversight of the setting's finances. Financial constraints may not have been apparent to other participants, as it is not something that would have been directly related to their role. This quote is also interesting as Kim refers to needing 'an extra person' to manage a child's behaviour indicating that she believes managing difficult behaviour requires that child have one to one attention from an adult.

It is interesting to consider Kim's perspective that others, for example, parents may have a different perception to practitioners of the financial capacity of the setting. This could have a negative impact on relationships if parents believed their child was not receiving some form of additional support even though the setting was in a position to provide it.

### 5.1.3 Subordinate theme 3c: Impact of a range of socio-cultural influences

This sub-ordinate theme reflects practitioners' perceptions that various socio-cultural influences can have an impact on their practice and how they seek to develop their skills and knowledge. Practitioners can be influenced by and seek ideas for practice from sources in the media:

*I remember watching that American... the nanny... like Supernanny... the naughty step and things like that and you'd think okay maybe a naughty chair...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 205)*

Emma later acknowledged that this type of technique, that she refers to, 'the naughty chair' was difficult to implement within her setting as they preferred to focus on behaviour management techniques that reinforced positive behaviour. This highlights how the influence of the media could potentially be positive and negative. The media is a source of new ideas for practitioners but it may just focus on particular 'trends' in behaviour management without due regard to outcomes or effectiveness.

Emma's reference to 'Supernanny' also demonstrates how ideas, like the example above when sourced from the media may be more prominent and feel more 'accessible' to practitioners than opportunities to access support from outside agencies or other external professionals.

The areas of focus for practitioners when choosing where to develop their knowledge and skills will also be influenced by changes in the demographic and culture of the community:

*Well it could be a language barrier as well... for example... if it was a Polish child who couldn't speak the language and he was playing up then we would need some words in their language obviously...*

*(Interview 3, Alex, line 145)*

Alex recognised that changing demographics within the population means that as a setting they need to focus on developing their skills in relation to children with English as an additional language. This again relates to Theme 2 (knowledge and expertise). Practitioners recognise that wider socio-cultural changes will impact on their practice but this is not necessarily reflected in the content of their training or qualifications. Therefore, practitioners themselves have to recognise the gaps in

their knowledge as result of these changes and try and be creative in devising new strategies and ways of working. This is illustrated by Emma's example of using sign language and Alex's example of acquiring the skills in order to speak to the child in their own language.

Overall, this theme demonstrates the influence of wider cultural, social and historical changes have on the types of behaviour which practitioners are experiencing within their settings and how they seek to manage it. There is a perception amongst some of the practitioners that recent policy changes in relation to two year old funding that has resulted in an increase in two year olds attending early years settings has presented challenges for them.

They perceive this group of children to be more demanding in terms of their behaviour and they feel they have less understanding and knowledge of how to work with them effectively. These changes in policy do not always appear to be mirrored by changes to the content of available training, as per the findings discussed within Theme 2 (knowledge and expertise). Practitioners also acknowledged that their approaches to behaviour management are influenced by wider cultural factors, for example, the media.

## **5.2 Theme 4: The role of parents and families**

This was the strongest theme to emerge from the interview data, as elements of the theme were perceived to be significant by all the participants. Again the interview data is supported by data obtained from the questionnaires.

This theme reflects the perception of practitioners of the role that parents and families play in influencing children's behaviour. It also demonstrates the positive and negative aspects of working jointly with parents to manage and effect change on a child's behaviour. The three subordinate themes within this theme are: 'working together with parents' which is seen as a priority and includes the inherent

challenges that exist within the relationship between parents and setting; 'perception of parents as a barrier to change'; and 'characteristics of parents and families'.

5.2.1 Subordinate theme 4a: Working together with parents; challenges in the working relationship

This sub-ordinate theme reflects practitioners' perceptions of themselves attempting to work together with parents to try and manage difficult behaviour but facing challenges in developing this working relationship with parents when parents are disengaged.

The sub-ordinate theme highlights how practitioners may not always recognise how they themselves could have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the relationship.

Practitioners view parental engagement as having a significant effect on whether or not they are successful in their role:

*Just speaking to the parents... working with them... getting them to understand what the child is doing at home maybe... how the home situation affects them in a larger setting... in the nursery setting... and I think the first port of call is working with the parents on that...*

*(Interview 6, Emma, line 74)*

Here Emma referred to 'working with them' (parents). Emma seemed to believe that it is important for parents to develop an understanding of the relationship between a child's behaviour in the home setting and the nursery setting and how they affect one another.

The majority of the participants discussed using what they perceived to be effective communication skills to try and build these positive working relationships with



parents. In this quote, Amanda, a team leader, described a particular incident with a parent:

*Mum bless her she comes in and she's very... "I hope he's okay" and we're telling her "he's just done this today"... "he's just done this" and it's not nice for her to hear but at the same time she's kind of helping but you also know she doesn't take it well either so... it's kind of like we're doing our role in telling her and making her aware this is what he's done today...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 243)*

Amanda appeared to believe that communicating with parents about a child's behaviour is part of her role but with this particular parent she is unsure what the parent's reaction will be. The tone of the language could also suggest that Amanda doesn't necessarily believe that the parent's enquiry about her child's behaviour is a genuine one.

The use of the phrase '*Mum bless her*' could be viewed as condescending and actually does not demonstrate effective communication. Amanda viewed herself as fulfilling her responsibilities as a practitioner by having this conversation with the parent but does not necessarily recognise how her approach could be interpreted negatively.

Practitioners also believed that forming and developing relationships with parents was challenging when they felt parents gave an appearance of wanting to work together but the practitioner suspected they were not:

*I think the only thing I do find difficult is when the parents seem that they are on board but they're not really... but you can't say you're not doing it... you just have to say let's try this way shall we...*

*(Interview 2, Sam, line 96)*

Sam, a SENCo, highlighted the way in which she has to communicate with parents so that it will be perceived as positive and supportive rather than directly challenging in order to try and maintain a working relationship. This demonstrates a practitioner who is very aware of the importance of communication. Although Sam

may have a negative view of the parents she is talking about, and she seems suspicious as to whether they are actually fulfilling her expectations of their role, she is trying to be careful that they do not become aware of this.

Here, Liz is also reflecting on the difficulties of parents appearing to be an active part of the process but not necessarily really being so.

*And then you have the ones who are like yes, yes, yes at the beginning and then towards the end they don't want it or don't want to do anything about it...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 176)*

Sam and Liz both view parental apathy or disengagement as being a challenge when trying to build a working relationship with them. Sam does appear aware of the need to express this view directly when communicating with parents. However, neither Sam nor Liz really seem to question why these parents might be disengaged or why they may be finding it difficult. When there are challenges in the relationship between practitioners and parents, practitioners do not always seem to acknowledge or recognise their role in this. For example, Amanda's perceived use of effective communication, which could be interpreted negatively by the parent.

Participants completing the questionnaires were asked to rate how important they believed certain factors to be in influencing a child's 'difficult and/or concerning behaviour.' 98.4% of the respondents rated parents/family as being a very important or important influence on behaviour. 83% of the respondents rated the nursery setting as being a very important or important influence on behaviour. This reinforces the argument that practitioners do not always recognise the potential impact of the setting on a child's behaviour. Practitioners believe they need co-operation and engagement from parents in order to achieve success and appear to get frustrated when they do not perceive parents are working with them.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that only Lucy (a room leader) commented that she did not feel she had any negative experiences of working with parents in relation to behaviour, although her comment still bears reference to parents 'appearing' or 'seeming' that they are engaged with the setting:

*'No I don't think we've ever come across parents that don't... that are not really on board... they all seem on board so...'*

*(Interview 5, Lucy, line 89)*

#### 5.2.2 Subordinate theme 4b: Perception of parents as a barrier to change

In the previous sub-ordinate theme participants did talk about wanting to build a working relationship with parents. However, most described how this was beset with challenges, often leading to negative descriptions of the parents' involvement. There appears to be a dichotomy in practitioner thinking; knowing there needs to be a good working relationship with parents but simultaneously practitioners regarding parents as the main barrier to success. This is explored further within this sub-ordinate theme.

This negative perception of parents was strong within the interview data and was discussed explicitly by six of the participants. For example, Liz referred to it often taking time and effort by the setting in order for parents to take positive action in relation to their child's behaviour:

*Sometimes we spend months just trying to coach the parents to have parenting classes or to have a home visit...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 170)*

The majority of the participants expressed the belief that if parents were not motivated or engaged in the process then changes in behaviour were not likely to occur.

Six of the participants discussed feelings of frustration in relation to the limitations of their role and the power and influence they are able to exercise:

*It's because of boundaries so if we've set the boundaries here but they're not doing it at home it's really difficult and just as we're making progress Friday then the weekend Monday we're starting right back again so...*

*(Interview 2, Sam, line 91)*

*Sometimes what happens is we do something here and it's not really done at home and obviously that's going to have a knock on effect in the sense that well... okay well 3 hours here and I'll do... and I'll try and be good and then you're home and then the next day... and it's not going to make a difference to the child is it...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 83)*

Sam and Amanda both referred to feeling their efforts are futile if 'they're not doing it at home' or 'it's not really done at home' in relation to setting boundaries for children's behaviour. They both find this difficult and frustrating. However, again there appears to be no recognition as to why changes may not be happening in the home environment and that parents too may find the situation challenging. Additionally, Amanda's quote acknowledges the limited amount of time the children spend in her care as a barrier to change.

*They know what's expected at the setting but as soon as they're going home they're still...parents are still coming in saying what were they doing yesterday...or were they doing this...or they're still jumping or they're still doing this... and they don't know where the boundary is of what's too firm and what's too soft...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 187)*

Here Liz referred to viewing some parents as lacking the skills to manage behaviour appropriately and that there can often be a major disparity between the expectations of the setting in relation to behaviour and the home environment. Parenting styles and differences in relation to setting boundaries, as a reason why

parents were viewed as the primary barrier to change were discussed by five of the practitioners.

### 5.2.3 Subordinate theme 4c: Perceived characteristics of parents and families

This sub-ordinate theme reflects practitioner perceptions of the characteristics of parents and families that could influence children's behaviour.

Participants discussed characteristics of parents and families that they perceive may contribute towards a child's difficult behaviour:

*There's a lot more younger mums as well which I think is just lack of life experience they don't really know kind of what to do and even you know the simple things...children going to bed... they wouldn't have a clue how to put a strategy in place to support that...*

*(Interview 1, Mel, line 162)*

*I think the family breakdowns, haven't got the grandparents on the scene, you know everyone's having to move away from home to work, to find a job...*

*(Interview 1, Liz, line 153)*

Here Mel referred to the challenges faced by certain groups in society: younger parents and families that have experienced breakdown leading to the isolation of parents from their usual support network. Although Mel recognised that these groups of parents may need additional support the first quote illustrates a degree of stereotyping and criticism in the use of her phrases 'younger mums' and 'they wouldn't have a clue.' It is also interesting to note that Mel and Liz work within the same setting; their views are therefore more likely to have similarities given their shared experiences. However, they are both in positions of seniority within that setting and there may, therefore, be potential for these opinions to be communicated to other staff members.

Amanda was alone in considering the influence a child's position in the family and the effect that their relationship and interactions with their siblings may have on their behaviour:

*There's so many other things as well I suppose... like the siblings in the house... what's their language like... do they see fighting... even if they're joking around if they see brothers and sisters fighting at home all day...*

*(Interview 5, Amanda, line 311)*

This is a significant issue that was not addressed by all the participants. Participants focused on parents and their relationships rather than the make up of the family as a whole. This, however, was not entirely reflected in the questionnaire data. When asked to consider how important certain factors were in influencing behaviour, 84% of the respondents indicated siblings were 'important' or 'very important.'

Overall, this theme demonstrates the conflict that exists for practitioners in relation to the role of parents and families.

Practitioners say they recognise that working with parents in a partnership is extremely important for success and that they recognise effective communication is one of the key factors to building and maintaining relationships. However, practitioners demonstrate dichotomous thinking in relation to this as parents can also be viewed in a very negative way and as a primary barrier to change in relation to a child's behaviour, over and above the influence they can have as a setting. Practitioners could fail to recognise how they may be causing or creating difficulties within their relationships with parents and do not question the reasons for parental disengagement. Practitioners also perceive that parents who lack certain knowledge or skills or who belong to a certain societal groups, are the ones most likely to experience difficulties in relation managing behaviour.

### **5.3 Summary**

Chapter 5 analysed and explored the final two themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. Practitioners were aware of the wider context in influencing the behaviour of children in their settings. In particular they acknowledged the importance of the child's parents. Chapter 6 will discuss these results further in

relation to the research questions and the literature review, and the relevance to educational psychology practice.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion**

This chapter assesses the findings from Stage 1 (questionnaires completed by early years practitioners) and Stage 2 (interviews with a sample of the practitioners) in light of the literature review and the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 1 and 2. The discussion considers the key research findings for both stages. The overarching headings from Chapters 4 and 5 are used as headings in the discussion. Chapter 4 considered issues that involve the microsystem of the setting; what is occurring within the microsystem in relation to behaviour and practitioners' views on their role in relation to managing behaviour. Chapter 5 focused on issues that involve the wider context and interactions between the systems. The limitations of the research and the possible implications for Educational Psychology (EP) practice are also considered.

The aim of this thesis was to explore the types of difficult behaviours experienced by early years practitioners in PVI settings; how concerning they perceive these behaviours to be; explore the training and support available to practitioners in

relation to behaviour; consider the implications for training in light of practitioner experiences; and explore practitioner perceptions of the factors that influence children's behaviour.

The research sought to answer three research questions:

*Research Question 1:*

What are the behaviours that early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings find difficult to manage and how concerning do they perceive these behaviours to be?

*Research Question 2:*

What do early years practitioners think are the factors influencing children's behaviour and what do they find helpful when managing behaviour in their setting?

*Research Question 3:*

What training and support are available to early years practitioners in these settings to help them manage difficult behaviour?

## **6.1 Practitioners' views, perceptions and experiences of managing difficult behaviour**

### **6.1.1 Children's behaviour in early years settings**

The findings from the questionnaire data provided evidence about the types of behaviour that early years practitioners were finding most difficult to manage in their settings, how concerning they perceived these behaviours to be and how frequently these behaviours occurred in their setting.



Fourteen categories of behaviours were identified by participants as being 'difficult to manage' within their settings. The two categories of behaviour identified most frequently as being 'most difficult to manage' were: *'Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children and staff'* (30% of participants) and *'biting'* (17% of participants). Arguably, *'biting'* could have been included within the category of *'Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff.'* However, the majority of participants differentiated *'biting'* as being a distinct type of behaviour in their responses which is why it was not felt appropriate to include it within the *'Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff'* category.

When asking a broader question, what are the four behaviours you find most difficult to manage participants gave a broader spread of response i.e. the percentage of participants who listed the behaviour as being one of their four 'most difficult' to manage: *'Aggressive or violent behaviour towards other children or staff'* was the most common (68% of participants), followed by *'Throwing items'* (65% of participants), *'Shouting/bad language/screaming'* (56% of participants) and *'Not listening/arguing/lying'* (33% of participants).

The present research mirrors some of the findings of Merrett and Taylor (1994). Their study, conducted within mainstream early years settings, found the 'most trying' categories of behaviour experienced by early years teachers to be: *'spitefulness and aggression and 'not listening' and 'shouting.'*

The present research is also consistent with some of the findings of Stephenson et al (2010). Their study similarly reported high mean levels of teacher concern about children displaying physical aggression. The areas of highest concern reported by teachers in their study were items related to 'distractibility' and 'not listening.' Although *'Not listening/arguing/lying'* and *'Disruptive and distractive'* behaviour did occur as categories of behaviour in the present study they were mentioned by

fewer participants than behaviours perceived to be violent or aggressive. The present research is also consistent with Stephenson et al (2010) in relation to teacher and practitioner confidence in managing behaviour. 15% of practitioners in the present research did not feel 'confident' or 'very confident' about being able to manage difficult behaviours, compared to 20% in Stephenson et al (2010) of practitioners who did not agree they were confident in managing their students' behaviour.

It is not surprising that aggressive and violent behaviours are a common theme in previous studies as behaviours that are considered difficult to manage and concerning. It is perhaps reassuring that the majority of the early years practitioners in the present study did not regard such behaviour as being acceptable or 'normal,' given the links between early aggressive behaviour and later poor developmental outcomes (Francis et al, 1991).

Where this study did differ from others, could be explained by early years practitioners in PVI settings having different perspectives and priorities in comparison to early years teachers in mainstream settings. Merrett and Taylor (1994) and Stephenson et al (2010) found that their participants considered behaviour such as '*not listening*' to be difficult and concerning because it disrupted the learning of others. Additionally, as these studies were conducted within schools, teachers may have different perceptions of what constitutes 'disruptive' behaviour, as there is likely to be more onus on children to follow classroom rules such as sitting and listening in comparison to early years settings. Early years practitioners working within PVI settings may see their role differently and not be so focused on pedagogy and teaching and learning within the setting but rather whole child development (DfCSF, 2008) or perhaps they are generally less motivated to

manage these types of behaviour if they are frequently dealing with more difficult and concerning behaviour.

Another key finding from the present research was that 48% of the participants believed they were spending more time on managing difficult behaviour than they felt they ought to. This was the same proportion as found by Merrett and Taylor (1994). 69% of the participants in the present study indicated that one or more of the four difficult behaviours they had listed occurred 'frequently' or 'very frequently' within their setting. Although the majority of participants indicated they did feel confident in managing behaviour, the above findings suggest a significant proportion of their time is being spent on this issue.

Exploring practitioner's general perceptions of their role was not the main focus of the present research. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the interview data indicated that practitioners see themselves as fulfilling a multi-faceted role, which is relevant to their perception that they spend too much time managing difficult behaviour. Two practitioners gave an example, Emma and Amanda who worked within the same setting. They both considered an important part of their role to be making sure that children are prepared for the school environment and developing their independence. They commented on the importance of children being able to respond appropriately to the boundaries imposed on them by the setting and beginning to learn the fundamentals of self-help and self-care skills.

This issue in relation to possible differences in how early years practitioners perceive their role has been raised in Ofsted's recent annual inspection report of Early Years Settings (Ofsted, 2013). The Ofsted (2013) report argues that early years child care providers should do more to prepare young children for school, both in relation to their behaviour and their learning. In a recent 2014 speech summarizing the report, Sir Michael Wilshaw (the Chief Inspector of Education) said:

*“A child who is ready for school must have the physical, social and emotional tools to deal with classroom, as well as the basic groundwork to begin to develop academically...”*

*(Sir Michael Wilshaw, 2014, p. 9)*

The concern expressed by OfSted (2013) is that some early years settings are not doing enough to facilitate and stimulate young children’s early learning and development and that the primary focus for staff is on supervision. As indicated above, practitioner awareness of other important elements of their role did not emerge strongly in this study. However, it was not the primary focus of the research and therefore participants may not have deemed it to be relevant to the discussion.

Time spent managing behaviour in the setting could be a factor that has an impact on the capacity of practitioners to fulfil other important aspects of their role. If social and emotional development is seen as key to school readiness, as argued by OfSted (2013) then early years staff may need to be reassured that the time they spend dealing with difficult behaviour is time well spent. They would also need to feel confident that what they are doing is the most effective intervention to help children make progress (e.g. Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2004). Early years practitioner perceptions of their general role would be an interesting topic to explore further. It also appears there may be differences in the perceptions of what constitutes ‘school readiness.’ OfSted view this as a child being academically prepared for school, whereas the comments from the practitioners in the present research suggest a focus on the child having developed practical self-care skills.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bronfenbrenner’s eco-systemic approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; 1994) provides a useful framework for understanding a child’s development. Chapter 2 gave examples of studies that have applied the framework in relation to specific issues occurring in early years settings, for example, transition from pre-school to kindergarten (Odom et al, 2004) and inclusion in pre-schools (Rim-Kaufman et al, 2000). For example, a child’s

successful inclusion within the pre-school environment will be effected by the nature of the interactions they have with their peers within the microsystem of the pre-school setting (Rim-Kaufman et al, 2000). Themes identified within the present research, relating to practitioner perceptions of factors they believe influence children's behaviour and their role in managing the behaviour, can also be discussed with reference to the eco-systemic approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; 1994).

### **6.1.2 Impact of the setting**

One theme to emerge was in relation to the impact of the setting. This theme reflected practitioner perceptions that characteristics of the setting (a microsystem) and interactions (proximal processes) within the setting can have an impact on a child's behaviour and how effective practitioners are in managing it. Seven of the practitioners interviewed valued having a supportive peer group around them. They commented that the peer group provided them with opportunities for joint thinking and problem solving and acted as a source of emotional support.

Practitioners recognized that managing difficult behaviour is challenging and that everyone within the staff group should be mindful of the needs of others. For example, in Chapter 4, Lucy (a room leader) discussed how managing difficult behaviour was made easier by working together as a team.

The majority of the participants identified staff meetings as the primary opportunity for interactions with the rest of the group in relation to behaviour, particularly the strategies and approaches to be used with a specific child. Practitioners also valued opportunities to have these types of discussion with professionals from

outside the setting. However, a majority of the practitioners interviewed held positions of seniority within their settings. Therefore, it was not clear from the data whether for other practitioners staff meetings are a truly honest and open opportunity for sharing, or whether the focus is more on the dissemination of information from more senior staff members.

The nature of the interactions that go on within a child's immediate environment will be influential and Bronfenbrenner argues that "proximal processes are more powerful than those of the environmental contexts in which they occur..." (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, p. 39). Practitioners also recognize the importance and value of the interactions that occur within the setting between them and how these can have a positive impact on their practice.

Practitioners could benefit from having discussions facilitated or supported to ensure that individual needs are met, for example, through the use of Work Discussion Groups (Jackson, 2002).

Other characteristics of the setting that were highlighted by practitioners as being important were the composition of the staff group and the potential effects of the physical environment. The composition of the staff group and changes within the group may be a factor that affects the group's feeling of unity and the dynamics of the relationships within it. Frequent changes to the group could also have implications for how consistently the behaviour policy is applied within the setting. Although not discussed by the majority of the participants, a frequently changing staff group was mentioned by some of the practitioners; practitioner perceptions that this will have an impact on children's behaviour is reflected in the literature. Mathers et al (2014), in a review of the research evidence related to the quality of early childhood education, identified stability and continuity in staffing as a factor that affects the quality of a setting. This is because frequent changes within the staff group do not enable the development of secure relationships between the staff and children, and do not allow staff to develop a good knowledge of individual

children. Arguably, this increases the need, especially for new staff, to receive ongoing support.

Although the social interactions that occur between the staff group within a child's environment are extremely important, practitioners are also justified in recognizing the potential impact of the physical environment on a child's behaviour. Two of the practitioners (Emma and Amanda) experienced difficulties within their setting due to the size of the setting and numbers of children. Mathers and Sylva (2007) in the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, found that children in centres with higher quality physical environments displayed fewer worries and upset behaviours.

It is also likely that characteristics of the environment will influence the types of interactions that occur between adults and children in the setting (Melhuish, 2004) and also the interactions the individual child has with the physical environment itself, for example, having access to developmentally appropriate toys and learning opportunities. Practitioners may need to be supported in recognizing the potential impact of this wider context on a child's development.

### **6.1.3 Knowledge and Expertise**

This theme reflected practitioner perceptions of what has contributed to their knowledge and expertise in relation to behaviour management and their experiences of training and support. The majority of the participants indicated that they had received some form of specific training; the format for the delivery of this training and who delivered it was influenced by the practitioner role within the setting. The majority of practitioners perceived a hierarchy existed within their setting in relation to being able to access additional support or advice from other professionals.

If information is being disseminated in this way within the setting, this again highlights the importance of the nature of the interactions that are occurring. The importance of peer support for promoting professional development within the early years workforce has been highlighted (Whitebrook et al, 2009). Senior practitioners themselves could potentially benefit from input in relation to possible models of supervision and how they can effectively support the learning and development of the staff group. Only one setting in the present research appeared to be using individual supervision as a mechanism for facilitating interactions in relation to children's behaviour between senior staff and other individual staff members.

The majority of practitioners perceived that their personal experiences and the experience that they had gained whilst in their setting were the most helpful in terms of influencing their practice rather than qualifications or educational experiences. However, the interview data did highlight differing views between practitioners in relation to whether personal beliefs and values, influenced by experience should have an impact on the way in which they seek to manage behaviour. Practitioner relationships with their own family could be seen as an example, of how relationships that exist within systems outside of the child's context could still be influential.

All practitioners wanted more regular training in relation to behaviour. A proportion of the practitioners indicated the ways in which they felt training could be improved, such as training that was updated and reflected the difficulties they were currently experiencing, training that was practical and suited to their individual needs as learners. This finding may also strengthen the suggestion that consideration should be given to the current efficacy of the staff meeting as a forum where practitioners are adequately supported in the development of their practice.



Previous research indicates that staff qualifications and training are important for the quality of the setting and do have an impact on good practice and the ability of staff to enhance children's learning and development (Sylva et al, 2004). So it may be considered concerning that in the present research the majority of practitioners did not recognize this and they relied more on personal experiences such as being a parent (as discussed above) and influences in the wider context, such as the media, to enhance their practice.

Factors that have been identified as having a positive impact on the quality of practice are general educational level, specialized early years training, both formal and informal training, continuing professional development after initial training and on the job supervision (Fukkink and Lont, 2007; Hunstman, 2008).

It appears from the present research that the majority of practitioners have not accessed or do not have access to all these types of learning opportunities even though they identified for themselves that they could potentially be helpful in terms of developing their practice. Practitioners also recognized another important aspect of effective training; it should provide practitioners with an understanding of child development alongside an understanding of how this can be applied pedagogically (Whitebrook et al, 2009) not just one or the other.

## **6.2 Relating managing behaviour to other contexts**

This section of the discussion demonstrates the themes that reflect the impact of wider contextual factors (the macrosystem) and the relationships between microsystems, i.e. the home and the setting, on a child's behaviour and the way in which practitioners seek to manage that behaviour.

### **6.2.1 Impact of wider cultural changes**

This theme reflected practitioner perceptions of the impact of wider cultural, social and historical changes that they believe have had an effect upon children's behaviour. A key element within this theme was the perception of some practitioners, particularly from those with more experience that they had seen a deterioration in the behaviour of children in their setting. The present research indicated practitioner beliefs that this could be related to changes in government policy, specifically, increased numbers of free childcare places for 2 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. It has been indicated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience behaviour difficulties as, for example, the stress associated with a life in poverty can reduce parental responsiveness and increase inconsistencies around routines and discipline, (Bornstein and Bradley, 2003).

Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) also emphasized the importance of practitioners being more adequately prepared in relation to being able to meet the needs of and cope with children from families in poverty.

Some practitioners did perceive that a connection between children's difficult behaviour, their age and their background existed, for example, in Chapter 5, Liz gave an example of children who had witnessed violence in the home. Several of the practitioners recognized there was a need to develop their practice in relation to the impact of these wider contextual changes, for example, not only changes in relation to the age group of the children but also cultural demographics. Only one practitioner, Emma, discussed in depth what she felt might underlie the 'difficult' behaviour of 2 year old children in her setting. Emma considered whether it could be related to the breaking of the 'attachment' with their parents.

As discussed further within Chapter 5 it is not possible to know whether the language Emma used is indicative of a deeper understanding and awareness of how theory links to her practice. However, for this younger age group it would be very important that practitioners have a good understanding of the stages of

children's early development and learning and the potential effects of the quality of children's attachment relationships on their behaviour in the setting (Geddes, 2006). It is not clear from the present research whether this level of understanding exists for all practitioners as only Emma identified the potential links between attachment and some children's behaviour. Practitioners also need an understanding of how this knowledge could be applied pedagogically in the setting and the potential impact they could have. For example, seeking to try and build a secure relationship with that child by being consistent and responsive in their interactions (Field, 1994).

As Bronfenbrenner (1974; 1994) suggests changes occur within the entire ecological system frequently and they will impact on other parts differentially, for example, changes to government legislation.

Arguably, practitioners need to have a secure knowledge of theoretical frameworks, such as attachment theory, and how this can be applied to their practice in order that they have a better understanding of how to respond to changes in behaviour in their setting that may occur as a result of wider contextual influences.

### **6.2.2 The role of parents and families**

This theme reflected practitioner perceptions of the role that parents and families play in influencing a child's behaviour and highlighted possible causes for the difficulties in the practitioner-parent relationship. Within Bronfenbrenner's (1994) framework this could be considered looking at the influence of the mesosystem on the child's behaviour... "the linkages and processes taking place within two or more settings containing the developing person..." (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40).

Mathers et al (2014) also recognized that the links and relationships that exist between these two systems (the family and the setting) are an important indicator

in relation to the quality of the setting. In summarizing the literature they identified three dimensions indicative of effective engagement with families: considering the family's preferences, priorities and cultural differences in all aspects of planning and implementation of the curriculum; implementing procedures for regular two-way communication between family and caregivers; and recognizing and responding to signs of family stress or other difficulties in supporting children's development. Practitioners may need to be supported in order to be able to effectively integrate some of these principles into their practice.

Practitioners recognized that there was a need to work jointly with parents but also that there were inherent challenges in trying to build a positive working relationship with some parents.

There was evidence of practitioners dichotomous thinking in relation to this issue; they are aware that they need to work with parents in order to affect change but they also appear to place 'blame' on parents when not successful and view them as being the primary cause for the difficult behaviour.

As previously discussed, Miller (2003), highlighted the importance of understanding teacher's attributions for difficult or challenging behaviour when trying to plan and implement effective interventions. Miller (1995) argued that teacher views of behaviour may in themselves become an obstacle if teachers' are attributing the primary cause of the behaviour to the parents this is something that is beyond their control and there is less motivation for them to try and effect change. This present research, as seen in both the results from the questionnaire and interview data appears to mirror some of the findings from the small numbers of studies done in schools, that teachers primarily attribute the responsibility for challenging behaviour to home and parent factors (Miller, 2008) and place less emphasis on themselves as individuals or the setting as being facilitators of change. Practitioners should be supported to develop their feelings of self-efficacy given the

evidence suggests that high quality provision can have beneficial effects on children's development and the quality of the staff group is key to this (Sylva, 2004).

The present research also indicated that practitioners may not always be aware of the potential for their communications with parents to be interpreted negatively and that the attributions they are making in relation to the influence of parents on behaviour may be apparent in their communications. Practitioners discussed examples of where they perceived themselves to be working and communicating effectively with parents, however, arguably the language used and apparent tone of the language could be interpreted as a view of the parent as ineffective or unmotivated to change. For example, Amanda's quote, discussed in Chapter 5 where Amanda used the term '*bless her*' in relation to a parent.

Additionally none of the practitioners interviewed sought to question why parents may be disengaged or find it challenging to work with them.

It may also be useful to have a further understanding of parental attributions in relation to behaviour in early years settings, looking at their attributions for the behaviour both inside and outside of the setting. Miller (2008) argues that having a better understanding of the causal attributions being made by both the home and school may lead to "*interventions that move beyond blaming and mutual scapegoating...*" (Miller, 2008, p. 167). Some practitioners did appear to reflect a sense that feelings of mutual blame in relation to difficult behaviour existed between themselves and parents.

If parents of younger children did have a tendency to view teachers' as having a significant impact on their child's behaviour and hold them primarily responsible for effecting change this could have possible implications for parental motivation to be involved in interventions such as parenting programmes. Miller (2008) suggests that educational psychologists could be involved in supporting a process of change

and addressing the possible implications of parent and teacher attributions through the use of approaches such as eco-systemic consultation or joint systems consultation (Dowling and Osbourne, 1994). Eco-systemic consultation used in this way would bring teachers' and parents together to try and reframe causal attributions and to help them to try and re-attribute in relation to the locus, stability and controllability of the attribution, (Miller, 2003).

Strengthening practitioner understanding of how they could seek to support parents may address some of the potential negative attributions practitioners are making in relation to parents. Developing practitioner understanding of the quality of a child's early attachment relationships and the impact this can have on behaviour (Pianta et al, 1997; Estrada et al, 1987) may help them to modify the type of support and advice they provide to parents in relation to managing the behaviour at home.

### **6.3 Summary of thoughts on the findings**

The discussion and thoughts above are possible ways to make sense of some of the key findings, which are outlined in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

The interpretation of the findings offered above also helps to make sense of the possible implications for the practice of Educational Psychologists as a consequence of the research. In summary, the following ideas emerged from the research:

- Early years settings and early years practitioners are experiencing a range of behaviours in their settings, which are 'difficult to manage' and that they find concerning. Behaviour that is perceived as violent or aggressive is a common cause for concern for practitioners in both PVI settings and mainstream settings.
- A significant proportion of the early years practitioners in the study see themselves as spending too much time on managing difficult behaviour in

their settings and they experience difficult behaviours on a frequent basis. This may be detracting from other elements of their role, which they perceive to be important.

- Early years practitioners value feeling supported by their peers and appreciate opportunities for discussion both within their settings and with other professionals. The forum in which they take place and the continuity of the staff group may affect the value of discussion.
- There was a hierarchy in relation to being able to access support and advice from external professionals. Practitioners' in a role of responsibility, for example, SENCo's or managers had the most frequent opportunities for discussion from other professionals.
- Practitioners valued experience gained whilst working and personal experiences over and above qualifications and educational experiences when considering what was most helpful to them in relation to managing difficult behaviour. The majority did not feel that training reflected their current needs and did not always address the challenges they were experiencing in the setting at that time. Practitioners valued training that was specific to their learning needs and was linked to their practice.
- Early years practitioners recognized the importance of developing relationships with parents and trying to work together with them in partnership in order to try and affect change. However, challenges within the working relationship may emerge, as practitioners also appeared to attribute blame to parents as being the primary cause for children's difficult behaviour. This may make them less motivated to develop new ideas and strategies for managing the behaviour as they view the ability to change the behaviour as being beyond their control. Practitioners may also underestimate the impact they as individuals and as a setting can have on behaviour,

- Discussions relating to attachment or the role of the relationship between the child and the practitioner as a means of behaviour management were largely absent within the interview data.

#### **6.4 Limitations**

This research was carried out within a sample of private, voluntary and independent nursery settings in one local authority in England. Therefore, it is not necessarily generalisable across all settings and all nursery practitioners. It was a small-scale study and the findings need to be read and considered with this in mind.

The sample for Stage 1 comprised questionnaire responses gathered from nursery practitioners working within private, voluntary or independent nursery settings in the local authority. 34.8% of the settings contacted provided responses. This response rate is an indication of the inherent challenges of collecting questionnaire data. The response rate also then varied within the setting with settings providing between one and six questionnaires. Where a setting only provided one response this had been completed by a senior member of staff and so did not provide a reflection of the views of other practitioners working in the setting. Senior members of staff or those with a specialist role in relation to managing behaviour in the setting may have a different perspective and experience the role differently in comparison to other practitioners. Although, very few of the participants did not provide a response to every question, the questionnaire was fairly long and it was apparent that participant responses became less detailed as the questionnaire progressed. Participants were given freedom in the questionnaire to write their own descriptions of types of difficult behaviour experienced rather than choosing from specified categories of behaviour. Consequently there was differentiation in how specific participants were when describing the behaviour. It may have been useful to reduce the number of questions included in order to try and elicit full and



comprehensive answers throughout, given it is likely that practitioners had limited time to complete the questionnaire. All the questionnaires were completed by female practitioners and the researcher was unable to ascertain whether there were any male members of staff in every setting. Although this represents the main demographic of the staff working within these settings, this could be considered a limitation of the study.

The sample for Stage 2, the interviews, was again all female participants. Additionally, although the researcher made a strong attempt to try and ensure that the participants represented a diverse range of roles within the setting, the majority of the participants interviewed were those who held a position of seniority in the setting, for example, SENCo/Inclusion co-ordinator or manager.

This may reflect more of a willingness or confidence from these individuals to talk about behaviour. During the interviews, questions attempted to draw the participant back to their role as a nursery practitioner working with the children and considering the perspective of others. The researcher may not have provided clear enough instructions in relation to wanting a range of participants when approaching settings or other practitioners did not wish to consent to take part. In two settings participants asked to be interviewed together or as a group. Participants might have felt they were unable to give certain responses in front of their colleagues, particularly in one setting where one a senior member of staff was present.

Although participants were reassured that all information would be kept confidential, one participant did not wish the interview to be recorded. Therefore, it was more difficult to fully represent this participant's views during the data analysis, as there was not a full interview transcript available only the researcher's handwritten notes.

Also, the research did not ask participants to distinguish between the types of difficult behaviour shown by different age groups in the setting.

This means there is no way of knowing from this research whether there are differences in the prevalence of different behaviours in the different age groups or whether the level of concern in relation to a particular behaviour differs according to the age of the child displaying it. This is of particular relevance given the current rapid increase in 2 year olds accessing early years settings as, for example, the language development at 2 is considerably less than at 4 which will have an impact on how behaviour can be managed. The research also focused on asking early years practitioners how 'concerned' they were about the identified 'difficult behaviours.' The scope of the study could have been wider if these had been addressed as 2 separate issues. These could be areas for future research.

## **6.5 Implications**

### **6.5.1 Further research**

The study has raised further questions that would be useful and would be explored through future research. The following are some of the key areas for future research that have arisen from this study:

- The specific features of practitioner qualifications, additional training, supervision and support that are most effective in promoting 'best practice'
- An exploration of the views of parent's experiences of managing difficult behaviour and how they seek to manage it within the home environment
- An exploration into the prevalence of difficult behaviour and level of practitioner concern in relation to the age group of the children
- An exploration of parental attributions in relation to difficult behaviour both within and outside the home environment

- Further exploration of how PVI early years settings can most effectively engage and support parents and the most appropriate mechanisms for doing so
- An exploration of effective leadership practices for senior staff in early years settings, particularly in relation to providing effective professional development opportunities for their staff
- An exploration into approaches that could be used to elicit the views of young children attending early years settings, in order to try and gain an understanding of their experiences and perceptions of the setting
- An exploration into what early years practitioners perceive to be the key aspects and priorities of their role
- An exploration from the perspective of early years practitioners of the role that attachment relationships play in behaviour management

### **6.5.2 Educational Psychology (EP) practice**

One aim of this research was to take into account the current role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) in the early years. It was hoped that the research could contribute information to support the expansion of the EP role in early years settings beyond assessment of individual children which research suggests is currently the focus of their practice with this age group (Shannon and Posada, 2007). The present research aimed to highlight challenges early years practitioners may be facing and their thinking in relation to managing difficult behaviour and the implications this may have for the type of training and support that they receive.

The present research indicated that early years settings do not have regular access to EP support and practitioners do not view professionals as always being accessible although experiences are likely to differ depending on the local authority. This supports the findings of previous research that the EP role in early

years settings can be limited to providing advice in relation to individual children (Shannon and Posada, 2007; Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004).

As Miller (2008) found in his study into teachers' views of the causes of challenging behaviour, teachers tend to attribute difficult behaviour in schools mostly to factors related to home and parents. The present research also indicated that the majority of the participants believed parents had the most significant impact on a child displaying difficult or concerning behaviour. This was also the strongest theme to arise from the interview data; participants acknowledged that working in partnership with parents was important for success. However, they simultaneously appeared to blame parents for difficult behaviour and perceived them to be a significant barrier to possible change. EPs appear to want to be more involved in working at the level of the system or the organization within early years settings (Shannon and Posada, 2007; Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004).

EPs could use their knowledge and skills in relation to consultation in order to help early years practitioners work more effectively with parents, as practitioners may not always recognize the potential impact on a child's behaviour of the interactions that occur between the home and school setting.

The research also highlights how the support and training that EPs deliver to early years settings could be developed. The present research indicated that participants perceived job experience and personal experiences were more helpful to them in terms of developing their practice and effectively managing behaviour than qualifications or training. Whitebrook et al, (2009) argue that effective training should give practitioners an understanding of child development alongside awareness of how this can be applied pedagogically. There could be an opportunity for EPs to deliver training that develops practitioner understanding of the possible causes of difficult behaviour, for example, their understanding of Attachment theory.

Developing practitioner understanding of the links between theory and practice may help to develop their sense of self-efficacy in relation to managing difficult behaviour, as they will become more aware of the potential impact they can have as an individual. This type of training could also help to strengthen interactions with parents, as they will have a better understanding of how they can support parents to manage behaviour at home.

The research demonstrated that some participants perceived there had been deterioration in the behaviour experienced in their settings. Participants discussed facing new challenges in terms of behaviour as a result of the increased numbers of funded places for two-year-old children, many of who will come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Practitioners may benefit from receiving additional training focused on understanding the development of children from this age group and also focusing on supporting children and families from different backgrounds and with diverse needs.

The research also highlighted two other important factors that could be relevant to EP practice in this area. Participants indicated that they valued having opportunities to share information and evaluate their practice, with individuals from both within and outside the setting. It was apparent from both the questionnaire and interview data that opportunities to discuss concerns with other professionals were limited for those practitioners without a position of specific responsibility within the setting; information and advice obtained from outside agencies is then disseminated throughout the setting, via the SENCo, manager or Inclusion co-ordinator. These senior practitioners play a key role in providing support to all members of staff for managing difficult behaviour and addressing any concerns they may be having.

EPs could play a crucial role in providing supervision for certain members of staff or helping to facilitate discussion and problem solving within the whole staff group, for example, via the use of Work Discussion Groups (Jackson, 2010). This reflects

the findings of Whitebrook et al (2009) who highlighted a need in early years settings for staff to receive support from skilled mentors and peer support in order to promote their professional development and that practitioners should have frequent opportunities to reflect on their experiences. It was not apparent from the data that these opportunities currently exist in every setting. The primary forum that currently exists for joint discussion is the staff meeting, however, the data gathered in this research suggests the primary focus of these meetings is the 'giving' of information.

### **6.5.3 Implications for settings**

The present research highlighted some areas that are important for early years private, voluntary and independent nursery settings to be aware of and that could be relevant in relation to supporting the development of practice in these settings.

The present research indicates that early years practitioners value feeling supported by their peers and appreciate having opportunities for discussion both within their settings and with other professionals in order to reflect on and evaluate their practice in relation to managing behaviour. It is important that managers and senior practitioners within settings are aware of this and provide staff with adequate opportunities for supervision, discussion and access to peer support. Early years practitioners in positions, which provide more frequent opportunities for discussions with other external professionals, may be able to work with these professionals to consider how wider access to them could be facilitated and supported.

The present research also indicated that practitioners did not always feel training received reflected their current needs and address the challenges being experienced in their setting at that time. Senior practitioners and managers of settings should be aware of the views of the staff group in relation to this when accessing or delivering training within the setting.

There also appeared to be challenges that existed in the working relationship between early years practitioners and parents, particularly in relation to practitioner attributions for behaviour. Settings need to be aware of the potential impact of negative attributions on behaviour, both in relation to the motivation of practitioners to try and affect meaningful change on behaviour and their capacity to develop positive working relationships with parents.

## **6.6 Conclusion to the research**

This research met a gap in the literature on the behaviour of children in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings, by exploring the types of behaviour that early years practitioners are finding difficult to manage, how concerning they perceive these behaviours to be and how frequently they are occurring within their settings.

The research explored what factors early years practitioners saw as significant in influencing children's difficult behaviour and what was helpful to them in managing the behaviour effectively as well as considering practitioner's experiences of training and support received in relation to difficult behaviour. Themes from the interviews with early years practitioners demonstrated an awareness from practitioners that collaboration with parents in relation to behaviour was desirable, however they can find this challenging and highlighted the potential for practitioners to hold a negative view of parents.

Practitioners valued feeling supported by their peers within the setting and effective communication and information sharing was important in order to ensure a consistent approach in responses to behaviour. Practitioners valued the experiences they had gained whilst working within their settings and other personal experiences over and above relevant qualifications when managing behaviour. This emphasized the importance of ongoing opportunities for professional development and space for practitioners to discuss and reflect on their practice.

To conclude, EPs have a potentially important role to play in helping to support PVI nursery practitioners with behaviour management for difficult or concerning behaviour, particularly in relation to helping practitioners effectively engage and work with parents and developing practitioner understanding of the links between relevant theory, such as attachment and their practice. This thesis has focused on the 'everyday' behaviours that practitioners regularly encounter but that clearly have an impact on their capacity to develop and perform other aspects of their role.

### **References**

Aguilar, B., Sroufe, L. A. and Egeland, B. (2000). 'Distinguishing the early-onset/persistent and adolescence-onset antisocial behaviour types: from birth to sixteen years.' *Development and Psychopathology*, 12, 109 -132.

Allen, G. (2011). *Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government*. London: HSMO.

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th Ed)*. Washington DC: Author.

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th Ed, text rev.)*. Washington DC: Author.

Anthony, L.G., Anthony, B.J., Glanville, D.N., Naiman, D.Q., Waanders, C. and Shaffer, S. (2005). 'The Relationships between parenting stress, parenting behaviour and pre-schoolers' social competence and behavioural problems in the classroom.' *Infant and Child Development*, 14 (2), 133-154.

Belsky, J., Vandell, D., Burchinal, M., Clarke-Stewart, K.A., McCartney, K. and Owen, M. (2007). 'Are there long term effects of early child care?' *Child Development*, 78 (2), 681-701.



- Bennett, P. (2005). 'A broad conceptual framework for the development and management of young people's behavioural difficulties.' *Educational and Child Psychology*, 22 (3), 3-11.
- Bennett, P. (2006). 'Helpful and unhelpful practices in meeting the needs of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties: a pilot survey of staff views in one local authority.' *British Journal of Special Education*, 33 (34), 188-195
- Bibou-Nakou, I., Kiosseoglou, G. and Stogiannidou, A. (2000). 'Elementary teachers' perceptions regarding school behaviour problems: Implications for school psychological services.' *Psychology in Schools*, 37 (2), 123- 134.
- Bomber, L. (2007). *Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in Schools*. London: Worth Publishing.
- Bornstein, M.H. and Bradley, R.H. (2003). *Socioeconomic status, parenting and child development. Monographs in Parenting.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss: Volume 1 Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Boyatzis, R.E. (1998). *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. Thousand Oaks, London, India: Sage.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). 'Using thematic analysis in psychology.' *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.
- British Psychological Society (BPS). (2009). *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. Leicester: Guidance published by the Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). 'Developmental research, public policy and the ecology of childhood.' *Child Development*, 45, 1-5.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). 'Ecological models of human development.' In *International Encyclopedia of Education, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed) Vol 3*. Oxford: Elsevier. Reprinted in M. Gauvain and M. Cole (Eds.) *Readings on the development of children (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)*.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. and Morris, P.A. (2006). 'The bio-ecological model of human development.' In R.M. Learner and W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology (6<sup>th</sup> Ed) Vol 1: Theoretical Models of Human Development*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Burke Johnson, R. and Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2004). 'Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come.' *Educational Researcher*. 33 (7), 14-26.

Carr, A. (Ed). (2000). *What works with Children and Adolescents? A Critical Review of Psychological Interventions with Children, Adolescents and their Families*. London: Routledge.

Chen, X. and French, D.C. (2008). 'Children's Social Competence in Cultural Context.' *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59, 591-616.

Commodari, E. (2013). 'Pre school teacher attachment, school readiness and risk of learning difficulties.' *Early Childhood Research Quarterly 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter*, 28 (1), 123-133.

Cresswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed). London: Sage.

Cugmas, Z. (2011). 'Relation between children's attachment to kindergarten teachers, personality characteristics and play activities.' *Early Child Development and Care*, 181 (9), 1271-1289.

Czaja, R. and Blair, J. (2005). *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press.

David, T., Gooch, K., Powell, S. and Abbott, L. (2003). *Birth to three matters: a review of the literature*. London: DfES.

Deater-Deckard, K. and Dodge, K.A. (1997). 'Externalizing Behaviour: Problems and Discipline revisited: Nonlinear Effects and Variation by Culture, context and gender.' *Psychological Inquiry*, 8 (3), 161-175.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2004). *Excellence and Enjoyment: Social and emotional aspects of learning*. London: DCSF.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). *The Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the standards for Learning, Development and Care for children from birth to five*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills. (1994). *The Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2001). *Special Educational Needs; Code of Practice*. (Government Document). London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2004). *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. London: HMSO.

- Department for Education (2011a). *Rolling out free early education for disadvantaged two year olds: an implementation study for local authorities and providers*. London: DfE
- Department for Education (2011b). *Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey: 2011*. London: DfE.
- Department for Education. (2011c). *Provider Influence on the Early Home Learning Environment (EHLE)*. London: DfE.
- Department for Education (2011d). *Support & Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs*. London: DfE.
- Department for Education (2011e). *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years*. London: DfE.
- Department for Education (2012). *Pupil Behaviour in Schools in England: Education Standards Analysis and Research Division*. London: DfE.
- Department for Education (2013a). *Early Education and Childcare: Statutory guidance for local authorities*. (Government document). London: DfE.
- Department for Education (2014). *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage: Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*. London: DfE.
- Department for Education and Department of Health (2014). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. London: DfE
- Dobbs, J. and Arnold, D.H. (2009). 'Relationship between pre-school teachers' reports of children's behaviour and their behaviour towards these children.' *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24 (2), 95-105.
- Dowling, E. and Osbourne, E. (1994). *The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)*. London: Routledge.
- Egeland, B. and Hiester, M. (1995). 'The long term consequences of infant-day care and mother-infant attachment.' *Child Development*, 66 (2), 474-485.
- Elfer, P., Goldschmied, E. and Selleck, D. (2003). *Key persons in the nursery*. London: David Fulton.
- Elfer, P. (2006). 'Exploring children's expressions of attachment in nursery.' *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 14 (2), 81-95.

- Elfer, P. (2013). 'Emotional aspects of nursery policy and practice- progress and prospect.' *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* (online).
- Elfer, P. and Dearnley, K. (2007). 'Nurseries and emotional well-being: evaluating an emotionally containing model of professional development.' *Early Years*, 27 (3), 267-279.
- Ellis, S., Tod, J. and Graham-Matheson, L. (2012). *Reflection, renewal and reality: teachers' experience of special needs and inclusion*. Birmingham: NASUWT The Teachers' Union.
- Erickson, M.F., Sroufe, L.A. and Egeland, B. (1985). 'The Relationship between quality of Attachment and Behaviour Problems in Preschool in a High Risk sample.' *Monographs for the Society for Research in Child Development*, 50 (1/2), p. 147-166.
- Estrada, P., Arsenio, W.F., Hess, R.D. and Holloway, S.D. (1987). 'Affective quality of the mother-child relationship: Longitudinal consequences for children's school-relevant cognitive functioning.' *Developmental Psychology*, 32 (2), 210-215.
- Fergusson, D., Horwood, J. and Ridder, E. (2005). 'Show me the child at seven II: childhood intelligence and later outcomes in adolescence and young adulthood.' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 46 (8), 850-858.
- Field, T. (1994). 'The Effects of Mother's physical and emotional unavailability on emotion regulation.' *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 59 (2/3), 208-227.
- Fox, M., Martin, P. and Green, G. (2007). *Doing Practitioner Research*. London: Sage.
- Francis, D.J., Shaywitz, S., Stuebing, K.K., Shaywitz, B. and Fletcher, J.M. (1991). 'Analysis of change: Modelling individual growth.' *Journal of Consulting and Clinical psychology*, 59, 27-37.
- Frederickson, N. and Cline, T. (2009). *Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and Diversity: A Textbook*. London: 2nd edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Fukkink, R.G. and Lont, A. (2007). 'Does training matter? A meta-analysis and review of caregiver training studies.' *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22 (3), 294-311.
- Geddes, H. (2006). *Attachment in the Classroom: The links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school*. London: Worth Publishing.

- Greenberg, M.T, Speltz, M.L. and Deklyen, M. (1993). 'The Role of Attachment in the early development of disruptive behaviour problems.' *Development and Psychopathology*, 5 (1-2), 191-213.
- Hackett, L., Theodosiou, L., Bond, C., Blackburn, C. and Lever, R. (2012). 'Understanding the mental health needs of children under 5 in one inner city local authority.' *Early Child Development and Care*, 182 (11), 1399-1409.
- Hartman, R.R., Scott, S.A. and Webster-Stratton, C. (2003). 'A growth curve analysis of parent training outcomes: Examining the influence of child risk factors (inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity problems), parental and family risk factors.' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 44 (3), 388–398.
- Ho, T.H. (2004). 'A comparison of Australian and Chinese teachers' attributions for student problem behaviours.' *Educational Psychology*, 24 (3), 375-391.
- Howes, C. and Ritchie, S. (1999). 'Attachment organizations in children with difficult life circumstances.' *Development and Psychopathology*, 11 (2), 251-268.
- Humphrey, N. and Squires, G. (2011). *Achievement for all national evaluation*. London: DfE.
- Huntsman, L. (2008). *'Determinants of quality in child care: A review of the research evidence.'* New South Wales Government: Centre for Parenting and Research.
- Jackson, E. (2002). 'Mental health in schools: what about the staff?' *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 28 (2), 129-146.
- Jackson, L. (2012). *Securing Standards, Sustaining Success: Report on Early Intervention*. National Education Trust.
- Keenan, K. and Shaw, D. (1997). 'Developmental and social influences on young girls' early problem behaviour.' *Psychological Bulletin*, 121 (1), 95-113.
- Kelmer-Pringle, M. (1982). *Investment in Children*. University of Exeter Press.
- Kiernan, K.E. and Mensah, F.K. (2009). 'Poverty, Maternal Depression, Family Status and Children's Cognitive and Behavioural Development in Early Childhood: A Longitudinal Study.' *Journal of Social Policy*, 38 (4), 569-588.
- Laible, D.J. and Thompson, R.A. (1998). 'Attachment and emotional understanding in pre-school children.' *Developmental Psychology*, 34 (5), 1038-1045.
- Lamb, M. E. (1996). 'Effects of nonparental child care on child development. An update.' *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 41 (6), 330-342.

Lavigne, J., Gibbons, R., Christoffel, K., Arend, R., Rosenbaum, D., Binns, H., Dawson, N., Sobel, H. and Isaacs, C. (1996). 'Prevalence Rates and Correlates of Psychiatric Disorders among Preschool Children.' *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 35 (2), 204-214.

Lyons, R.K. (1996). 'Attachment Relationships among Children with Aggressive Behaviour Problems: The Role of Disorganized Early Attachment Patterns.' *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64 (1), 64-75.

MacClure, M., Jones, L., Holmes, R. and MacRae, C. (2012). 'Becoming a problem: behaviour and reputation in the early years classroom.' *British Education Research Journal*, 38 (3), 447-471.

Martin, P. and Bateson, P. 'Measuring Behaviour: An Introductory Guide.' (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mathers, S. and Sylva, K. (2007). *National evaluation of the neighbourhood nurseries initiative: The relationship between quality and children's behavioural development*. London: DfES.

Mathers, S., Eisentadt, N., Sylva, K., Soukakou, E. and Ereky-Stevens, K. (2014). *Sound Foundations: A Review of the Research Evidence on Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care for Children under Three*. London: Sutton Trust.

Maughan, B. and Rutter, M. (1998). 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Anti-Social Behaviour from Childhood to Adult Life.' *Advances in Clinical Child Psychology*, 20, 1-47.

Melhuish, E. (2004). 'Child benefits: The importance of investing in quality childcare.' UK: Bright Horizons Family Solutions and Daycare Trust.

Melhuish, E. (2010). In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Siraj-Blatchford and B. Taggart (Eds.), *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project*. New York and London: Routledge.

Merrett, F. and Taylor, B. (1994). 'Behaviour Problems in the Nursery.' *Educational Review*, 46 (3), 287- 295.

Mertens, D.M. (2010). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.

Miedel, W.T. and Reynolds, A.J. (1999). 'Parent involvement in Early Intervention for Disadvantaged children: Does it matter?' *Journal of School Psychology*, 37 (4), 379-402.

Miller, A. (1995). 'Teachers' attributions of causality, control and responsibility in respect of difficult pupil behaviour and its successful management.' *Educational Psychology*, 15, 457-471.

Miller, A. (2003). *Teachers, Parents and Classroom Behaviour: A Psychosocial Approach*. England: Open University Press; McGraw-Hill Education.

Miller, A. (2008). 'Challenging behaviour in schools.' In N. Frederickson, A. Miller and T. Cline (Eds.), *Educational Psychology*. UK: Hodder Education.

Moffitt, T. (1993). 'Adolescence limited and life course persistent anti-social behaviour; a developmental taxonomy.' *Psychological Review*, 100 (4), 674-701.

Moffitt, T., Caspi, A., Dickson, N., Silva, PA and Stanton, W. (1996). 'Childhood onset versus adolescent onset antisocial conduct problems in males: Natural history from ages 3 to 18 years, *Development and Psychopathology*, 8, 399-424.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence. (2013a). *Anti-social behaviour and conduct disorders in children and young people: recognition, intervention and management*. Retrieved, April 20, 2014 from <http://publications.nice.org.uk/antisocial-behaviour-and-conduct-disorders-in-children-and-young-people-recognition-intervention-cg158>

National Institute for Clinical Excellence. (2013b). 'Conduct disorders in children and young people: full guideline.' Retrieved, April 20 2014, from <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/14116/63308/63308.pdf>

NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2007). 'The Effects of Infant child care on Infant-mother attachment security: Results of the NICHD study of Early Child-Care.' *Child Development*, 68 (5), 860-879.

Nutbrown, C. (2012). *Foundations for quality: the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications: Final Report*. Runcorn: DfE.

Odom, S.L., Vitztun, J., Wolery, R., Lieber, J., Sandall, S., Hanson, M.J., Beckman, P., Schawartz, I. and Horn, E. (2004). 'Pre-school inclusion in the United States: A review of research from an ecological systems perspective.' *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 4 (1), 17-49.

OfSted (2005). *Managing Challenging Behaviour*. London: OfSted.

OfSted (2013). 'OfSted Early Years Annual Reprt 2012/13.' Retrieved, May 5, 2014 from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/earlyyearsannualreport1213>

OfSted (2014). 'Early Years Annual Report 2012/13- Unsure Start-HCMI Speech.' Retrieved, May 5 2014, from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-early-years-annual-report-201213-unsure-start-hmci-speech>

Office for National Statistics (2004). *Mental Health of children and young people in Great Britain: Summary report*. London: ONS.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J. and Leech, N. L. (2005). 'On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.' *International Journal of Social research Methodology*, 8 (5), 375-387.

Panjares, M.F. (1992). 'Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct.' *Review of Educational Research*, 62 (3), 307-332.

Pasco Fearon, R., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J., Van Ijzendoorn, M.H., Lapsley, A. and Roisman G.I. (2010). 'The Significance of Insecure Attachment and Disorganization in the Development of Children's Externalising Behaviour: A Meta-Analytic Study.' *Child Development*, 81 (2), 438-456.

Pianta, R.C., Nimetz, S.L. and Bennett, E. (1997). 'Mother-child relationships, teacher-child relationships and school outcomes in pre-school and kindergarten.' *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12 (3), 263-280.

Poulou, M. and Norwich, B. (2000). 'Teachers' causal attributions, cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to students with emotional and behavioural difficulties.' *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70 (4), 559-581.

Rim-Kaufman, S.E. and Pianta, R.C. (2000). 'An Ecological Perspective on the Transition to Kindergarten: A Theoretical Framework to guide Empirical Research.' *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21 (5), 491-511.

Robinson, M. and Dunsmuir, S. (2010). 'Multi-professional assessment and intervention of children with Special Educational Needs in their early years: The contribution of educational psychology.' *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27 (4),

Robson, C. (2011). *Real World Research*. West Sussex: Wiley.

Rutter, M. (1989). 'Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life.' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30 (1), 23-51.

Rutter, M. and O'Connor, T.G. (1999). 'Implication of attachment theory for childcare policies.' In J.Cassidy and P. Shaver (Eds.) *Handbook of attachment theory and research*. New York: Guilford.



Scott, S., Knapp, M., Henderson, J. and Maughan, B. (2001). 'Financial cost of social exclusion: follow up study of anti-social children into adulthood.' *British Medical Journal*, 323 (7306), 191.

Scott, S., Doolan, M., Beckett, C., Harry, S. and Cartwright, C. (2012). *How is Parenting Style related to child antisocial behaviour? Preliminary findings from the Helping Children Achieve Study*. London: DfE.

Sciutto, M.J., Terjesen, M.D. and Frank, A.S.B. (2000). 'Teachers' knowledge and misperceptions of Attention-Deficit/hyperactivity disorder.' *Psychology in the Schools*, 37 (2), 115-122.

Shannon, D. and Posada, S. (2007). 'The Educational Psychologist in the Early Years: Current practice and future directions.' *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23 (3), 257-272.

Simon, A., Owen, C. and Hollingworth, K. (2013). *Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain*. Paper presented at Family Resources Survey User Group, London, United Kingdom.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2010). *Improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning*. London: Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.

Skills for Care and Development. (2014). 'Careers in Care.' Retrieved from [http://www.skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/Careersincare/what\\_kind\\_of\\_careers\\_are\\_there.aspx](http://www.skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/Careersincare/what_kind_of_careers_are_there.aspx)

Stephenson, J., Linfoot, K. and Martin, A. (2010). 'Behaviours of Concern to Teachers in the Early Years of School.' *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 47 (3), 225-235.

Stevens, J. and Quittner, A.L. (1998). 'Factors influencing elementary school teachers' ratings of ADHD and ODD behaviours.' *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 27 (4), 406-414.

Stroufe, L.A., Fox, N.E. and Pancake, V.R. (1983). 'Attachment and Dependency in Developmental Perspective.' *Child Development*, 54 (6), 1615-1627.

Sutton, R.E. and Wheatley, K.F. (2003). 'Teachers' Emotions and Teaching: A Review of the Literature and Directions for Future Research.' *Educational Psychology Review*, 15 (4), 327-358.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*. London: IOE.

Sylva, K. and Pugh, G. (2005). 'Transforming the early years in England'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 31 (1), 11-27.

Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., and Walker-Hall, J. (2000) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 5 – Characteristics of the Centres in the EPPE Study: Interviews*. London: IOE.

Taylor, A.R. (1994). 'The contribution of parent and peer support to head start children's early school adjustment.' *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 9 (3), 387-405.

Tremblay, R. (2000). 'The development of aggressive behaviour during childhood: what have we learned in the past century?' *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 24 (2), 129–141.

Van Zeijl, J., Mesman, J., Van IJzendoorn, M.H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J., Juffer, F., Stolk, M.N., Koot, H.M. and Alink, L.R. (2006). 'Attachment-based intervention for enhancing sensitive discipline in mothers of 1- to 3-year-old children at risk for externalizing behavior problems: A randomized controlled trial.' *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74 (6), 994-1005.

Vereb, R.L. and Dipenna, J.C. (2004). 'Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD, Treatments for ADHD and Treatment Acceptability: An Initial Investigation.' *School Psychology Review*, 33 (3), 421-428.

Verschueren, K. and Koomen, H. (2012). 'Teacher-child relationships from an attachment perspective.' *Attachment & Human Development*, 14 (3), 205-211.

Votruba-Drzal, E. (2004). 'Child care and low-income children's development: Direct and moderated effects.' *Child Development*, 75 (1), 296-312.

Webster-Stratton, C. and Reid, M.J. (2004). 'Strengthening Social and Emotional Competences in Young Children- The Foundation for Early School Readiness and Success: Incredible Years Classroom Social Skills and Problem-Solving Curriculum.' *Infants and Young Children*, 17 (2), 96-113.

Weiner, B. (2000). 'Intrapersonal and interpersonal theories of motivation for an attributional perspective.' *Educational Psychology Review*, 12, 1-14.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method*. Bucks: Open University Press.

Wheldall, K. and Merrett, F. (1988). 'Which Classroom Behaviours do Primary School Teachers say they find most troublesome?' *Educational Review*, 40 (1), 13-27.

Whitebrook, M., Gomby, D., Bellm, D., Sakai, L. and Kipnis, F. (2009). '*Preparing teachers of young children: The current state of knowledge, and a blueprint for the future. Part 2: Effective teacher preparations in early care and education: Toward a comprehensive research agenda.*' University of California, Berkeley: Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labour and Employment.

Wolfendale, S. and Robinson, M. (2001). *Educational psychologists working with the early years: A framework for practice*. London: University of East London.

Wolfendale, S. and Robinson, M. (2004). 'The developing role and influence of the educational psychologist working within early years.' *Educational and Child Psychology*, 21 (2), 1-25.

World Health Organization. (2008). *ICD-10: International statistical classification of diseases and related health problems (10th Rev. ed.)* New York, NY: Author.

Woodhead, M. (1985). 'Pre-school Education has Long Term Effects: but can they be generalized?' *Oxford Review of Education*, 11 (2), 133-135.

## Appendix 1

### Exploring Behaviour

#### Participant Information

Name of setting (for information only) .....

Please circle appropriately:   **Male**   **Female**

Age: .....

What is your job title? .....

How many years have you been working in this role? .....

What type of setting do you currently work in? (Please circle)

**Private**       **Voluntary**       **Independent**

How many years have you been working in your current setting? .....

What is your highest level of education? .....

1) Please could you list the four examples of behaviour you find most **difficult to manage** in your setting. Please describe the behaviour in terms of what the child actually does, e.g. 'throws things' or 'shouts'

a) (Most difficult)

b) (Next most difficult)

c)

d)

2) For the four behaviours you have listed please could you indicate, based on your experiences, the extent to which these behaviours would be of '**concern.**' (Please circle)

a) Very concerning    Concerning    Neutral    Unconcerning    Very unconcerning    Don't know

- b) Very concerning   Concerning   Neutral   Unconcerning   Very unconcerning   Don't know
- c) Very concerning   Concerning   Neutral   Unconcerning   Very unconcerning   Don't know
- d) Very concerning   Concerning   Neutral   Unconcerning   Very unconcerning   Don't know

3) How frequently do these behaviours occur within your setting? (Please circle)

- a) Very frequently   Frequently   Sometimes   Infrequently   Very infrequently   Don't know
- b) Very frequently   Frequently   Sometimes   Infrequently   Very infrequently   Don't know
- c) Very frequently   Frequently   Sometimes   Infrequently   Very infrequently   Don't know
- d) Very frequently   Frequently   Sometimes   Infrequently   Very infrequently   Don't know

4) How confident do you feel about being able to manage difficult behaviours like the examples you gave above? (Please circle)

Very confident   Confident   Neutral   Unconfident   Very unconfident   Don't know

5) In general terms do you think that you spend more time on managing difficult behaviour than you feel you ought to? (Please circle)

**YES      NO**

Further comments:

6) Below are some factors that could contribute to a child displaying 'difficult' or 'concerning' behaviour. Please rate how important you think they may be in influencing 'difficult' or 'concerning' behaviour. (Please circle)

### Special Educational Needs

Very important   Important   Neutral   Unimportant   Very Unimportant   Don't know

### Parents/Family

Very important   Important   Neutral   Unimportant   Very Unimportant   Don't know

### Siblings

Very important   Important   Neutral   Unimportant   Very Unimportant   Don't know

### Peers/Other children

Very important   Important   Neutral   Unimportant   Very Unimportant   Don't know

### Nursery setting

Very important   Important   Neutral   Unimportant   Very Unimportant   Don't know

Please comment on anything else you believe to be important:

7) Does your setting have a key worker system? (Please circle)

**YES      NO**

If **YES**, please could you describe how this works:

8) How important is it that you develop a close emotional relationship with your **key** worker children? (Please circle)

Very Important   Important   Neutral   Unimportant   Very Unimportant   Don't know

Further Comments:

9) How important is it that you develop a close emotional relationship with **all** the children in the setting? (Please circle)

Very Important   Important   Neutral   Not Important   Very Unimportant   Don't know

Further Comments:

10) Have you received any specific training in relation to behaviour or managing difficult behaviour? (Please circle)

**YES      NO**

Please describe the training:

How helpful was this training? (Please circle)

Very Helpful    Helpful    Neutral    Unhelpful    Very Unhelpful    Don't know

11) What other experiences, e.g. education or personal experiences have helped you to manage children's behaviour?

12) Who (either from within or outside the setting) provides you with support or advice on managing children's behaviour?

Please could you describe the type of support/advice and how this was given:

13) What type of training or support would be useful that you have not already received?



## Appendix 2



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London

Managing behaviour in private, voluntary and independent nursery settings:  
the experiences of practitioners

A research project  
September 2013- May 2014

Information for Early years practitioners  
Please will you help with my research?

My name is Georgia Martin

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently studying for the  
Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at  
the Institute of Education.

This leaflet tells you about my research.  
I hope the leaflet will also be useful, and I  
would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of the research is to explore early years practitioners current understanding of the issues that can influence difficult behaviour in young children. In particular early years practitioners views on behaviour and the availability of training and support. The study aims to consider what support early practitioners, with varying levels of qualifications and experience, working in a range of settings would find helpful. Educational psychologists are currently supporting early years practitioners in this area and are considering how they could further develop their role in relation to this.

**Who will be in the project?**

The project will include people who work in a variety of early years settings.

**What will happen during the research?**

You will be asked to consent to participate in one interview session. This will take place in a private setting, jointly agreed by the researcher and the participant. The interview is anticipated to last between 30-45 minutes.

**What questions will be asked?**

You will be asked questions related to the role you play in working with children who display difficult behaviour. You may be asked to recall specific examples of working with these children.

**What will happen to you if you take part?**

If you agree, I will tape record the interview session and type it up later. I am not looking for right or wrong answers, only for what everyone really thinks.

**Could there be problems for you if you take part?**

I hope you will enjoy talking to me. Some people may feel upset when talking about some topics. If they want to stop talking, we will stop.

If you have any problems with the project, please tell me. I can be contacted by email: gmartin@ioe.ac.uk

**Will doing the research help you?**

I hope you will enjoy helping me. The research will mainly collect ideas to help Educational Psychologists working in early years settings in the future.

The project also helps me learn to be a researcher so that I may do more research in the future, which will help other people.

**Who will know that you have been in the research?**

Only I and your manager will know that you have taken part in the research. When your interview is transcribed it will be anonymised. But we will not tell them or anyone else what you tell me unless I think someone might be hurt. If so, I will talk to you first about the best thing to do.

I will keep audio files and notes in a safe place, and will change all the names in my reports – and the name of the setting/local authority in which you work – so that no one knows who said what.

**Do you have to take part?**

You decide if you want to take part and, even if you say 'yes', you can ask to withdraw your interview for up to two weeks after we have spoken at any time or say that you don't want to answer some questions.

You can tell me that you will take part by signing the consent form.

**Will you know about the research results?**

I can send you a short report at the completion of the research project in May 2014 if you would contact me and let me know that you would like me to do so.

**The project** has been reviewed by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

**Thank you for reading this leaflet.**

Georgia Martin

[gmartin@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:gmartin@ioe.ac.uk)

[Georgia.Martin@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Georgia.Martin@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

07812770123

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview Schedule (Early Years practitioners)**

- Explain who I am and why I am there.
- Ask whether the participant has read the interview sheet that was sent to the setting. Go over the key points- confidentiality, recording and transcription of interviews (*ask if it is okay to record*), right to withdraw (*including the option to pass on any questions they do not want to answer*). Check whether they have any questions and confirm that they consent to be interviewed.
- Before interview starts explain that questions will focus on their experiences of managing behaviour and working with children in the setting- no right or wrong answers.

### **Participant Information**

- Name?
- Age?
- What is your job title?
- Can you give a brief description of your role?
  - What does the role involve?
  - Anything specific in relation to SEN/behaviour?
- How many years have you been working in this role?
- What type of setting do you currently work in?
  - Age range of the children?
- How many years have you been working in your current setting/role?
- What is your highest level of education?

### **'Behaviour'/Support training**

1. Which of these behaviours do you think you experience most frequently in the setting?
  - How regularly do you have to deal with these types of behaviours? Unusual?
  - How do you deal with it?
  - Who supports you in the setting to deal with/manage behaviour? E.g. peers/manager
2. Which of these behaviours would you find most concerning?
  - Can you give an example/ describe what that behaviour looks like?
  - How would you deal with/manage those behaviours?
  - How regularly do you have to deal with those types of behaviour?
  - Is that unusual?
  - Who supports you in the setting to deal with/manage that behaviour? E.g. peers/manager. (if parents)
  - Do parents normally work with you/support you? Is that difficult? Please can I have an example- worked well/hasn't worked well?
3. Do you spend more time managing behaviour in the setting than you would like to? Do you think the behaviour of the children in the setting has got worse/seen a deterioration?
  - Why (yes/no)?
4. Talked about skills you use to manage behaviour. What other experiences have you helped you to manage behaviour/develop your skills?
  - Specific training (please describe) (who/what/where/when)
  - Education
  - Personal experiences (e.g. child/sibling)

- Setting guidelines/behaviour policy (Helpful?)

**5.** Does anyone from inside/outside the setting provide you with support or advice on managing behaviour?

- How did they help? What did it look like?
- Is there anything that would be helpful to you? What would training look like if it was really helpful?
- Any specific types of behaviours/situations that you don't feel confident in managing?
- Anything else you are finding challenging in your setting?
- Anything else that would help you as a setting/staff group/individual with managing behaviour?

Thought about types of behaviour what it looks like and how you might manage it in the setting now...

**6.** Why do you think children show difficult behaviour? What sorts factors do you think might contribute or are important?

- SEN, Parents/Family, Siblings, other children, Nursery setting
- Can you tell me abit more about that? Why is that important?
- Can you give me an example of a child you've worked with where you think that has been significant?
- Do you think the nursery setting is important?
- Do you think the nursery setting can have an impact on behaviour?
- Can you give me an example of a child with where the setting has had an impact on behaviour? What did you do?/How did you work with that child?

**7.** Just going to think about relationships and working with children in the setting. Some settings have key worker systems- do you?

- Can you describe how that works?
- Are you a key worker?
- How important is it that you develop a close relationship with your key worker children?
- How do you do that? Please describe/tell me more/give some examples.
- How important are your relationships with other children in the setting?
- How do you do that? Please describe/tell me more/give some examples

**Appendix 4**

(Example pages)

Interview 6 (BH 2)

1. Please could you start by telling me what your role is in the nursery and what  
2. your responsibilities are?

3. Okay... I'm a senior team leader here so I'm in charge of getting the team  
4. together and working together... on top of that I'm the inclusion co-ordinator  
5. that's where the behaviour aspect does come in... I give feedback to the girls  
6. regarding behaviour strategies and things like that...

7. Okay... so they could come to you for support or if they had an issue with  
8. behaviour they could come and ask you?

9. Yeah they'd come and ask me and I'd try and give them lots of different ways  
10. how they can... how we can work around something...

11. Yeah... anything they've been finding difficult... and how many years have  
12. you been doing that role?

13. I've been here... 10 years and about 8 years I've been inclusion co-  
14. ordinator...

15. Yeah...

16. What kind of qualifications have you done? What's your highest level of  
17. qualification?

18. When I newly started it was just... a normal diploma in childcare so that got  
19. me into the nursery nursing route... and while I've been here I've done team  
20. leading level 2 and then went to team leading level 3... then I did  
21. management level 3 and then went to management level 5 and then while  
22. working I did a BA Honours in Educational Studies... so I've just completed  
23. that... so I've had a lot...

24. And did you have to do something specific in order to be able to do the  
25. inclusion role?

26. No... not for the inclusion... the only training I got was via the inclusion team  
27. that we get... that's the only behaviour approach that I've had but when I was  
28. doing my study at uni it wasn't much of a focus but I still used to read up on  
29. interesting bits... that used to get me going... especially on behaviour... it was  
30. quite interesting and I used to look into it so I think that's where I probably  
31. learnt...

32. Yeah... so you were looking into it...

over a cumulative  
of qualifications  
made time  
experience  
important

\* the one person in  
the setting that  
on role  
as adviser  
given

key figure  
as source  
of support  
staff  
give  
the  
supp

inclusion support → source

→ personal motivation → for the role  
in order to learn

about behaviour.  
/ autonomous  
self-directed  
learning  
→ personal motivation



## Appendix 5

### OVERARCHING THEME 1: THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND FAMILIES

| Subordinate Theme                                   | Code   | Example from Transcript   |
|---|--|---|
| 1a: The impact of the staff group                   | Peer support   | <p><i>We'd all sit down and go through the plan together... so we'd all know what's going on and what the issue is... so everyone knows where the child is so if they were the ones to deal with it they'd know where to go...</i><br/>(Natalie, Interview 2, line 53)</p> <p><i>it's about the staff making sure the keyworker can cope and if the keyworker is getting stressed then someone needs to step in and say I'll have 15 minutes here...</i><br/>(Sam, Interview 3, line 202)</p>         |
|   | Communication and joint thinking and problem solving | <p><i>Once you've done it a few times you're thinking okay that works really well and we see the positive impact so that's done again and then passed onto other staff members as well so they can have a try...</i><br/>(Emma, Interview 6, line 37)</p>   |
|   | Composition of the staff group                       | <p><i>We all work quite closely with T and she's part of the team as well but... if there's a concern we know to go to her...</i><br/>(Lucy, Interview 4, line 82)</p> <p><i>The thing is when we have new people I notice... the more experienced they know that when a child is having a tantrum or whatever... that they should just leave that child and ignore it... I still see some of them sometimes that they still go there and want to sort it...</i><br/>(Kim, Interview 7, line 140)</p> |
| 1b: Opportunities to share information and evaluate | Supervision and support                              | <p><i>I do supervision so I will ask in the supervision if they have any children that they are concerned about...</i><br/>(Kim, Interview 7, line 53)</p>  |

|  |                         |  |
|--|-------------------------|--|
|  | Time for reflection     | <i>For us... we have to sort of reflect on it as well... and think are we all coping is everybody fine...<br/>(Amanda, Interview 5, line 394)</i>  |
| 1c: Impact of the physical environment | Impact of working hours | <i>It's quite hard to stay cool sometimes...<br/>(Kim, Interview 7, line 145)<br/>I think when you're in a job you're so busy dealing with so many children, so many messages, so many... our days are so busy...<br/>(Liz, Interview 1, line 137)</i>   |
|  | Layout of the setting   | <i>If a child decides to quickly go like that... and that member of staff has looked around and that child's gone that way... you're thinking did that child go in that room or that room and you're abit stuck so that could be one of the barriers that we have...<br/>(Amanda, Interview 5, line 266)</i> |
|  |                         | <i>As we're all open plan... everyone gets involved... so they all see the children... they're constantly working in different areas at different times... so we all get more or less the same contact with the children...<br/>(Natalie, Interview 2, line 192)</i>   |

## OVERARCHING THEME 2: KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Subordinate theme<br>2a: Perceptions of relevance and effectiveness of qualifications and training | Code<br>Qualifications vs job experience | Example from Transcript<br><i>I think it is just through dealing with it day in... day out...<br/>(Liz, Interview 1, line 99)</i><br><br><i>I think also years of experience because we work with so many different children... some things work with one and then maybe not another...<br/>(Emma, Interview 6, line 33)</i> |
|--|--|--|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Personal experience                                    | <p><i>But also like you say working in the nursery for this many years and as a parent myself there's certain things I would know... and that's something I say when there's a member of staff who hasn't got that... (Amanda, Interview 5, line 196)</i></p>  |
| Views on opportunities for improvement and development | <p><i>Yeah... we haven't had an in house... maybe that would be a good idea to be honest... to have a whole day in house training and just get everybody on board and they know exactly what they're doing... (Amanda, Interview 5, line 222)</i></p> <p><i>We would be up for any help or training... anything just to help us work with these children... (Rachel, Interview 2, line 127)</i></p>  |
| 2b: Accessing support or advice within the setting     | <p data-bbox="716 894 1057 961">Making decisions about level of concern</p> <p><i>If there's a lot of anger in the child... you know the child we know how they work... a little push and it's obvious they want a toy or something... if there was something on another level then it's worrying... (Rachel, Interview 2, line 65)</i></p> <p><i>It could just be they've got English as an additional language... we've got a lot of those here... and that actually makes it hard sometimes to pinpoint... that makes it quite difficult... (Kim, Interview 7, line 63)</i></p> |
| Mechanisms of support                                  | <p><i>I also get lots of support from the SENCo in the setting because we work in the room together... (Beth, Interview 8)</i></p> <p><i>We've asked L to come in and support us one to one as well if we've had behavioural issues... (Liz, Interview 1, line 98)</i></p>   |
| 2c: Individual staff characteristics                   | <p data-bbox="773 1808 997 1843">Learning Styles</p> <p><i>You could probably read something and take it on quite quickly or you might be</i></p>  |

*someone who wants to see something and take it on board...*  
(Emma, Interview 6, line 224)

Motivation and Skills

*Everybody I think in their own way has got something to put into the setting and they've got an asset... some will deal with children better some will have great writing skills or do great observations so everybody's got something*  
(Amanda, Interview 5, line 137)

OVERARCHING THEME 3: IMPACT OF WIDER CULTURAL CHANGES

| Subordinate theme                        | Code                       | Example from Transcript  |
|--|----------------------------|--|
| 3a: Deterioration of behaviour           | Deterioration of behaviour | <p><i>You just have behaviour which is out of control, we don't know why it happens but we think it comes in sets... you just think why?</i><br/>(Mel, Interview 1, line 82)</p> <p><i>Yeah... I think it has got worse throughout the time I've been here but it's all different depending on the child... some have boundaries at home and others don't so...</i><br/>(Natalie, Interview 2, line 210)</p> <p><i>I think there's good days and there's bad days... some days it's constant and other days it's a bit less but it's always something...</i><br/>(Interview 8, Beth)</p> |
| 3b: Implications of policy for behaviour | Implications of policy     | <p><i>I think like M said with the two year olds we're taking on we are noticing more and more behaviour issues...</i><br/>(Liz, Interview 1, line 133)</p> <p><i>recently we've had a lot of biting... again that might be because of the younger children who've just started...</i><br/>(Emma, Interview 6, line 149)</p>   |
|  | Implications of budget     | <p><i>I think it is hard but I don't think you can really do a lot about it because you can't really... it doesn't really meet the SEN criteria to get one to one support...</i><br/>(Lucy, Interview 4, line 113)</p>   |
| 3c: Impact of a range                    | Cultural influences        | <p><i>I suppose English as an additional</i></p>   |

of socio-cultural influences

*language is something else we're dealing with... I suppose if a child... if the staff are finding it difficult to understand the child... (Lucy, Interview 4, line 177)*

*I would say like television...advertisements...anything...you could be out going shopping and you could just see something happen... (Emma, Interview 6, line 283)*

#### OVERARCHING THEME 4: THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Subordinate theme  
4a: Working together with parents; challenges in the working relationship

Code  
Working together with parents as a priority

Example from transcript  
*We can arrange parent consultations and they can discuss if they've got any concerns at home... what the concerns we've got here and together we come up with strategies... (Lucy, Interview 4, 84)*

*Obviously we work together with the parents, get the parents in see what their behaviour is like at home... (Mel, Interview 1, line 32)*

Parental engagement

*And we're advising them on strategies so there's consistency... and the children kind of know about what they expect at nursery is what they expect at home... so yeah I do think it's important to get the parents involved... (Lucy, Interview 4, line 95)*

Communication with parents and maintaining relationships

*Some parents we have to tread very carefully... (Sam, Interview 3, line 70)*

*the parent will be like yeah,*

4b: Perception of parents  
as a barrier to change

Parents as a barrier to  
success

*yeah, yeah that's fine and 2  
seconds later they'll still go to  
get it and you're thinking do I  
be rude or do I be polite...  
(Amanda, Interview 5, line 306)*

*We try to get parents into  
parenting programmes... so  
maybe to help them with  
strategies because it's no good  
we're trying to set a routine for  
them and then when they're at  
home or out the doors it's  
whatever they like...  
(Rachel, Interview 2, line 82)*

*At times it can be difficult but  
then some parents are just  
used to the way they have  
done things and they don't see  
why they should change...  
(Emma, Interview 6, line 106)*

*And at home they probably get  
away with everything... and not  
to criticise the parents but they  
have to learn to share which  
they may not be used to doing  
these things...  
(Natalie, Interview 2, line 160)*

*You always have that one  
parent where you think they  
want to help or maybe just  
because it's a mother love they  
have or a father love they have  
just that bond it makes it harder  
for them to...*

*(Amanda, Interview 5, line 91)  
Also it depends on the routine  
and consistency that is put in  
place at home as well...  
(Natalie, Interview 2, line 158)*

4c: Perceived  
characteristics of parents  
and families

Parental characteristics  
and the home  
environment

*I think what we've realised is  
that lots of parents lack  
parenting skills...  
(Liz, Interview 1, line 153)*

*It just depends on the  
behaviour and the background  
of the parents... so I think it  
depends on the child and the  
family, it has to be done  
individually...  
(Mel, Interview 1, line 36)*

Position in the  
family/siblings

*If it's the only child it depends if  
it's the youngest sibling...  
(Amanda, Interview 5, line 94)*