

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

**An Ethnographic Study
Examining Food and
Drink Practices in Four
Early Childhood Settings**

PhD

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Abstract

This thesis asserts the importance of pleasure and playfulness in relation to 'food events' (Douglas and Nicod, 1974) in early childhood settings and posits that at the current time in the English context, the *socio-cultural* significance of food and eating is an often silent perspective in relation to food policy and practices, which increasingly elevate its nutritional importance alone.

Adopting a social constructionist approach, this study draws on ethnographic data from four early childhood settings, including participant observations of practitioners and children engaged in the habitual activities of their settings over time (children aged six months – four years) as well as semi-structured interviews with 28 practitioners. The key themes of this study are as follows:

- Food events are occasions when children's bodies are *especially* subject to civilizing processes in terms of space; time; focusing on the task not the child; 'body rules'; and future-centredness. I develop the idea that practitioners' bodies are also 'disciplined', not least in the notion that they should act as role models of 'healthy' eating and be the physical embodiment of 'health' for young children.
- Food events in early childhood practice are increasingly constructed as a 'risky' business, with children as a group constructed as 'dangerous' as well as 'in danger'. Moreover, some working class families' food practices are similarly constructed. I contend that an over-concern with risk avoidance may be antithetical to other long-held ideas about early childhood practice, notably the importance of playfulness and spontaneity.
- In discussing the importance of *playfulness* in relation to food events, I develop a representation that conceptualizes food events in early childhood practice in terms of real/pretend and serious/playful in order to position practices relating to food events in terms of their 'fit' into the general activity of the early childhood settings.

- Throughout the study I draw upon the perspectives of practitioners and young children and emphasise that both groups engage in the joint construction of 'rules' relating to food events as well as practices that subvert the civilizing and risk-avoidance practices of the settings and the policies that inform them.

I conclude by suggesting that the implications of this study go beyond a consideration of food events. I argue that early childhood practice is increasingly centred on a project of taming children's *futures* at the expense of their immediate and embodied experiences; something that highlighting food events brings into sharp focus. I assert that pleasure and playfulness are important for children *and* adults alike and need to be valued in early childhood practice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Anxiety over children's diet and the consequences of this for future health are high on the policy agenda and media reporting at present. Expressions of this concern can be seen in the re-introduction of nutritional standards for school meals and the development of the National Health Schools Status (Albon and Mukherji, 2008). Indeed Valentine (2005: 209) describes the situation as one of a 'dizzying whirl of initiatives'.

More recently, the School Food Trust (2010) has set up an Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years, which will be producing a set of recommendations to inform the wider review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) in September 2010. Early childhood is also increasingly viewed as at the forefront of *health* strategies, something that is typified in the recent Marmot Review of health inequalities (Marmot et al, 2010), which states that interventions in the early years are vital because:

'What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being' (Marmot et al, 2010: 17)

This positioning of the child in terms of 'futuraity' or what they will *become* (Qvortrup, 1994; Jenks, 1996) and the supposed *malleability* of young children (Ben-Ari, 1997; Pilcher, 2007) permeates much public policy at the current time. This is something I wish to problematise – a point I develop later in this introductory chapter and throughout this thesis.

But rather than looking at food and eating in terms of *health and nutrition*; a biomedical approach to research, the focus for my own study lies in a different area. My own interest lies in examining food and drink practices and their place in four early childhood settings i.e. settings attended by children under the age of

five years. Whilst I have written about the importance of food and health and the role of early childhood settings in promoting this in a range of publications (Albon, 2007; Albon, 2007a; Albon and Mukherji, 2008; Albon and Mukherji, 2009; Albon, 2009a), carrying out this research has given me the opportunity to focus on the *socio-cultural* and *pleasurable* aspects of food and eating. I believe these dimensions to food and eating should *also* be regarded as important in early childhood practice and indeed the education and health sectors more widely, but are often silent at the current time.

Like many people, I have strong memories of food and eating as a young child, both at home and at nursery, and then school. Later, as an early years' practitioner, I can recall many examples from my practice and observations of the practice of others that have developed my interest in the area of food and eating. These observations provided my 'initial orientation' (Jayaratne, 1993) or starting point for the research. However, the subject matter is also of wider importance.

The socio-cultural significance of food and eating is important to early childhood practice as every early childhood setting makes some provision for food/drink, even if it is only a drink during sessional care (see Day Care Standards; DFEE, 2001 now incorporated into the Early Years Foundation Stage; DfES, 2007). Further to this, institutions such as schools and nurseries are particularly interesting to study in the area of food/drink because they are interstitial in character owing to the fact that they do not have the intimacy of home or fall into the public domain in the way that, for example, eating in a restaurant might do. However, meal times and snack times assume significance as they are performed on a daily basis, as part of daily routine (Mennell et al, 1992). In relation to early childhood practice, this is an area that is currently under-researched and therefore, one that interests me and is worthy of investigation. Further to this, because women predominate as early childhood professionals there is another layer of interest in this study, given the body of previous research looking at women's relationship to food (Orbach, 1988; Bordo, 2003),

including feeding their children (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Ekstrom, 1991). This has been a neglected area of research in relation to early childhood practice.

Crucially, my reasons for wishing to explore this area further can be seen in the following quotation: Tobin (1997: 13) writes:

‘The lives of young children and their caretakers are made up of a series of moments that are missing not necessarily because they are disturbing but because they are too quiet for us to hear, too small for us to see, so apparently uneventful that they fall beneath our threshold of attention. Events and experiences hold significance only if our narratives of education and child development name them as stepping stones on the paths toward positive or negative developmental outcomes.’

Thus, in thinking about the area of food and eating, I wanted to explore an area of practice that happens daily, sometimes in various guises more than once in a day. It is an area of practice that has few or no early learning goals attached to it in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (DfES, 2007) and is likely to be one that receives less attention in terms of direct weekly or daily planning (Albon, 2007). It is an area that is deemed commonplace, or to use Geertz's (1983) expression, what might be deemed as 'of-courseness' in relation to early childhood practice. 'Of-courseness' or 'common-sense' understandings about areas of practice are in danger of remaining unquestioned or seen as 'true', or may be deemed insignificant and of lesser importance (Chaput Waksler, 1996). This is something I want to challenge.

Whilst some elements of early childhood practice are deemed as 'counting' for something (Tobin, 1997), other practices are deemed of lesser value. When applied to food and eating, ensuring children receive a nutritious midday meal is clearly seen as important, whereas *playfulness* around food and eating, particularly the kinds of play I describe as 'carnavalesque' (following Bakhtin, 1984), is a less prominent narrative in public policy such as the Early Years

Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) in England at the current time (Albon, 2010). For Tobin (1997) this relates to an outcomes-driven curriculum, where activities viewed as having long-term pay-offs are deemed as more important than the seemingly more frivolous. He draws upon Elkind's notion of the 'hurried child' to encourage early childhood practitioners to reflect upon the extent to which their practice is outcome-driven at the expense of the immediacy of children's lived, embodied experiences. Although food and eating are of crucial importance for children's long term health and well being, as can be seen in the initiatives mentioned in the opening paragraphs, they are also important to children's *present* embodied experience.

Theoretical approaches to research around food and eating include biomedical approaches, with their focus on children's nutritional intake; psychoanalytical approaches, which focus primarily on an individual's emotional experience in relation to food and eating; and materialist approaches, which focus on political economy. Other theoretical positions in the study of food and eating include structuralist and post-structuralist approaches (see Mennell et al, 1992 for a detailed overview of these approaches). These latter positions can be broadly found in sociological and social-anthropological writing. This study draws primarily on work within these two fields as it aims to emphasise the socio-cultural nature of food events.

In brief, in exploring food-related writing within sociological and social-anthropological writing we can see that food is central to our sense of identity; indeed the act of incorporation means that we *become* what we eat (Fischler, 1988). Human beings clearly have a biological relationship with food as we need to eat a range of nutrients in order to be healthy. However, human beings also have a social and cultural relationship with food (Caplan, 1997; Lupton, 1996). As Caplan (1997: 3) asserts:

‘Food is never ‘just food’ and its significance can never be purely nutritional... it is intimately bound up with social relations, including those of power, of inclusion and exclusion, as well as cultural ideas about classification (including food and non-food, the edible and the inedible), the human body and the meaning of health.’

Thus food and eating practices are important to one’s sense of identity and play a significant role in what Viruru (2001) describes as the ‘rhythm’ of the day, as well as being a marker of important events such as birthdays. Mealtimes are a prime site for the ‘transmission and “imbibing” of social and cultural knowledge’ (Golden, 2005: 182). Indeed, it has been argued that food and drink practices are an integral part of how adults ‘manage’ the movement of young children from the family to the wider world (Ben-Ari, 1997). Therefore, food and drink and the practices associated with them assume significance in terms of cultural meaning(s). Furthermore, they are areas which are imbued with emotion, not least as sites of conflict, where power relations are constructed and played out, often between adults and children (Grieshaber, 2004).

The overarching aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the co-construction of early childhood practices through the lens of food events. Chapters Four, Five and Six, which present the data from this study, emphasise the way that children and practitioners are engaged *jointly* in negotiating and constructing ‘rules’ in relation to food events, as well as subverting such practices. This reflects my contention that practitioners and children ‘do’ early childhood practice *together* (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Olsson, 2009). Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates how different constructions of ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ are manifest through the lens of food events.

I aim, therefore, to develop a greater understanding of food and drink practices in order to encourage early years’ practitioners to examine, re-appraise and

improve their practice in this important, yet often neglected area. The key questions explored in this research are as follows:

- What meanings do children and practitioners ascribe to food and drink practices in settings – how are these constructed and maintained?
- How is power exercised in the area of food/drink in the context of early childhood practice?
- How might we conceptualize early childhood practices in relation to food, eating and drinking differently?
- What are the implications for policy and practice in the early childhood sector?

In exploring these key questions, this study adopts a social constructionist approach and draws on ethnographic data from four early childhood settings. Participant observations were carried out over time with children and practitioners and 28 practitioners were interviewed in the course of this research. The youngest child in the study was aged six months and the oldest child was aged four years. Although the focus was primarily on occasions when food was eaten, I also looked at how meal times and snack times 'fitted' into the usual activities of the settings, including children's pretend play. The simultaneous focus on children's pretend play in relation to food as well as meal and snack times is a key feature in this research and reflects my contention that play is part of the 'cultural reality' (Edmiston, 2008) of early childhood settings as well as a key way that young children generate new and creative understandings about the world (following Egan, 1991; Meek, 1985; Edmiston, 2008). This point is developed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Whilst a positivist approach using a quantitative methodology such as a structured questionnaire of a large sample would have had the advantage of reliability in terms of being replicable over time and over respondents (Cohen et al, 2000; Johnson and Christensen, 2008), the social constructionist positioning

of my own research sees this as difficult to realise and undesirable. Similarly, as the research aimed to *problematise* food practices as opposed to seeking universally applicable 'truths' about them (Brown and Jones, 2001), this too is antithetical to a positivist approach.

A term I will be using throughout this study is 'food events'. Douglas and Nicod (1974: 744) refer to food and drink practices as 'food events', by which they mean 'an occasion when food is eaten, without prejudice as to whether it constitutes a meal or not'. A 'meal' is taken to mean a 'structured' event which has certain rules regarding when, how and where it is eaten. A 'meal', then, is seen as a 'food event' that recalls the structure of other 'food events'. In other words, it must evoke other meals. The notion of 'food events' was preferred in respect of terminology as it could embrace the more formal meals in early childhood settings, but also the less formal such as impromptu snack times. In this study I also broaden this conceptualization to refer to both real 'food events' such as meal times and snack times and 'food events' in children's pretend play – a point I develop later.

Before concluding this introductory chapter, I want to add a note about the four settings with which I carried out the research. As Chaput Waksler (1991: 100) notes in relation to her own research, having a researcher examine one's everyday, habitual practice inevitably brings to light aspects of one's work that are often silenced, ignored or 'explained away'. Thus, I wish to acknowledge here (rather than relegating to an acknowledgements' page) the invaluable contribution of the participants in this research, particularly the practitioners. When reflecting on the data, I recognise practices that I too have habitually done in my many years as an early childhood practitioner, practices that were never subject to such external scrutiny. Following Chaput Waksler (1991: 100), I wish to acknowledge the actions of the practitioners as those of *real* practitioners 'engaging in the multiplicity of actions characteristic of living in the world of everyday life' rather than mythical storybook characters. With this in mind, on

occasions I weave in my own story as I was not 'outside' the research and should therefore appear visible.

The following chapters detail literature in this area, the way the research was carried out, and set out the main findings. The findings demonstrate that food events are occasions when children *and* practitioners' bodies are subject to civilizing processes (Chapter Four) and highlight how food events are often constructed in terms of 'risk' (Chapter Five) at the expense of other narratives, not least those that elevate spontaneity and playfulness. In Chapter Six I outline a representation (Figure 1) developed to help explore early childhood practice in terms of its playfulness and seriousness during both real events, such as meal times, and during pretend play. In addition, as noted earlier, throughout the presentation of findings I emphasise the way that children *and* practitioners are engaged in an on-going process of co-constructing practices in relation to food events in the four early childhood settings. Crucially, it is a study that asserts the importance of *pleasure* and *playfulness* in relation to food and indeed early childhood practice as a whole.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

So far, I have outlined the main theoretical position taken in this study as well as the key influences. Rather than drawing upon literature about nutrition, a bio-medical approach to the study of food and eating, my focus is on 'food events' (Douglas and Nicod, 1974) and the *practices* associated with food and eating. This is owing to my interest in food events as commonplace, often taken-for-granted areas of early childhood practice. In this review, I explore literature from the fields of sociology and social anthropology as well as from the field of early childhood studies (a rationale for this is presented later).

Firstly, the socio-cultural significance of food events is debated. This cannot be over-estimated. Before considering early childhood practice in relation to food events, I look briefly at some of the literature that examines food and eating practices associated with such 'events' with a view to positioning early childhood practices in relation to food within the wider milieu of food practices. I aim to demonstrate how food events are permeated with meaning for individuals and groups that goes beyond mere nutrition and aim to highlight the importance of studying the *socio-cultural* significance of food events to human lives. My purpose is to argue that food events are an important area of study in general, before moving on to consider early childhood practices in some detail.

Following on from this, the second theme in this review is entitled 'the importance of food events in early childhood practice'. In this section, I explore literature that emphasises the importance of the routines and rituals associated with food events to *early childhood* practice, which also stresses how it is often through food that, implicitly and explicitly, young children develop a sense of themselves in relation to 'the group' and indeed the wider world. From a 'socialisation' perspective, I also examine some of the literature that views food events as a prime way that children are inculcated into the culturally accepted practices of a particular society at a given point in time. I argue that this process is not as

benign as it might, on the surface, appear. Thus, in this section I begin to problematise practices associated with food events, not least because they are occasions permeated with the regulation and control of young children. This relates to one of the key questions in this research and is further developed later in this chapter and in Chapters Four and Five.

Leading on from this, I examine why food events might assume lesser importance in early childhood practice when compared to other areas of practice (e.g. literacy and numeracy activities). I link this to both feminist perspectives on the invisibility of caring work such as food provisioning in the home as well as the asymmetry of status between practices associated with caring for the body and those aimed at cultivating the mind. It would appear that there has been a tendency to negate the importance of the *body* in education, which is especially salient when we consider the care and education of very young children; children whose growing sense of themselves cannot be divorced from their biological selves as well as the practices employed by early years' practitioners in caring for their bodies (Manning-Morton, 2006).

The third, and final, theme in this review of the literature explores the asymmetry between mind and body in some depth. This theme is entitled '*The child as 'body-project'*' and aims to address the following questions: How might we conceptualize the body? In particular, how might we conceptualize the *child's* body? I argue for a theoretical position that recognizes the body as a social construction, both being acted upon and acting in the world, alongside acknowledging the corporeality of the body, following the work of writers such as Shilling (1993), Bordo (2003) and Leavitt and Power (1997). The use of the term 'body-project' (Shilling, 1993; Ben-Ari, 1997) is introduced here as it recognizes a tendency to view the body as a work in progress; one that is malleable – a point I develop in relation to young children. Furthermore, by employing Bordo's (2003) work on the 'slender body', I also pursue the idea that the physical bodies of children might also be viewed as a 'microcosm' of the larger body of children. In

other words, I will be arguing that the concerns people have about children and childhood at the present time are 'written' into the way they conceptualize children's bodies and the caring practices that have developed in relation to them. In this final section, I will be examining the literature that highlights how food events are occasions in which the child's body is subject to a high degree of 'civilizing'.

It should be noted that throughout this review of the literature and indeed the thesis as a whole, I will be drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives, some of which may seem antithetical to each other (e.g. post-structuralism; feminist post-structuralism; Goffman's symbolic interactionism [Chapter Four]; and Bakhtinian literary theory [Chapter Six]). The rationale for the inclusion of this diverse range of theorising is my intention to use theory to gain a deeper insight into food events in early childhood practice rather than to develop one overarching theory. Tobin's (1997: 30) edited work similarly draws upon an eclectic range of literature and he acknowledges the tension within the group of writers between those who wish to 'emphasise cutting edge theory and those who want to emphasise political action and implications for practice'. My intention throughout this study has been the latter.

2.1 The socio-cultural significance of food and eating

Before focusing on the importance of food events in early childhood practice, this section of the chapter will look more broadly at the ways in which food and eating are of fundamental importance to the lives of human beings. Of course the act of incorporating food into the body is vital from a biological perspective as we are, quite literally, what we eat (Falk, 1991), but the focus in this study is on the socio-cultural aspects of food and eating.

For more than a century, social anthropologists have studied food and eating in a range of societies, arguing that our tastes are socially controlled and culturally

shaped (Caplan, 1997). It has been argued, for instance, that what is defined as a 'food' is, in itself, a social construction as what is considered edible and the meanings attributed to that 'food' are socially and historically constituted (Meigs, 1997). Our sense of identity is bound up with what we eat (Lupton, 1996; Caplan, 1997; James et al, 2009) and this has been explored with a variety of different foci. A number of studies have looked at the importance of food for the preservation of cultural identities, such as the importance of 'Soul Food' to Black African Americans (e.g. Hughes, 1997) as well as Somalian women's experiences of trying to preserve the cultural identity of their families through food, having migrated to Sweden (Jonsson et al, 2002). Other studies have focused on 'green' or ethical consumer perspectives on food choices (for instance Fiddes, 1997; Wright et al, 2001); class and consumption (notably Bourdieu, 1986 – although not always specifically discussing food); and food, identity and gender (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1986; 1988; Ekstrom, 1991; Murphy et al, 1998; BurrIDGE and Barker, 2009). In each of these examples food is permeated with far more properties than mere nutritional content; it is central to a sense of identity.

In terms of the theoretical positioning of food related studies, structuralist approaches to the study of food and eating tend to view food as a symbolic language through which a society reveals its hidden structure (Barthes, 1975). A key writer in this area is Levi-Strauss (1966), who elaborates a theory of the 'language' of food in his now famous discussion of the raw, the cooked and rotten - the 'culinary triangle'.

Structuralist approaches to the study of food and eating tend to emphasise what people eat in a given society as well as the way food acts as an important 'marker' in the year's calendar (Mennell et al, 1992; Albon, 2005). Examples of this can be seen in the way there are different approaches to feasting and fasting; religious observances in relation to food; and the way that food is often central to celebrations (see e.g. Buitelaar's [2005] discussion of fasting and

feasting in relation to Ramadan in Morocco). In addition, but on a more mundane level, certain foods often serve to structure the week or day, such as the way some 'traditional', white British people have a 'roast dinner' on a Sunday (Delamont, 1995).

Mary Douglas is an important writer in this area because she argues that the minutiae of everyday food behaviour is of fundamental importance to human beings, not least because the cooking and eating of food within families is one of a range of systems within families, which are culturally determined, that service the body (Murcott, 1988). In studying the way food operates *within* families, as noted earlier, many writers incorporate a gender analysis, such as focusing on the way food provisioning often falls to women within families (Fischler, 1988) and the ways in which feeding children and their partners is imbued with meanings such as acting as guardians of their families' health as well as loving and pleasing their families (Charles and Kerr, 1986; 1988; Ekstrom, 1991). This, as will be seen later, is an important perspective to apply to any analysis of early childhood practice, given the predominance of women as early childhood practitioners.

Whilst exploring food from a structuralist perspective is insightful in terms of its emphasis on the meanings groups of people attribute to the food they eat and the practices that have developed in particular cultures in relation to eating, the approach can be criticized. A key criticism of structuralist approaches rests in the tendency to ignore the idea that meanings and subjectivities in relation to food and eating are multiple and shifting. As Bell and Valentine (1997) observe, in 'postmodern families', patterns of eating are becoming 'increasingly complex and diverse' (p.78) owing in part to globalization and technology, which has increased the availability of foods and cuisines from across the world as well as changes in family consumption, such as the pervasiveness of eating different meals at separate times. In addition, structuralists neglect the idea that food

events are a site where power relations are constructed and played out (Mennell et al, 1992; Lupton, 1996; Albon, 2005).

A different approach is put forward by Bourdieu (1986), who emphasizes a *class* analysis of 'taste' in his development of the idea of 'habitus'. This can be described simply as the way, from one generation to the next, there is an unconscious cultural reproduction of taste. Here, Bourdieu is referring not only to food, but to a wider concept of consumption, and his work argues that from birth, we are socialized into certain 'tastes'. An example of this that he draws upon is that working class French people tend to value *abundance* of food and have less concern for elaborate table manners in comparison to their middle class compatriots. However, although not looking for a fixed code underlying the food people eat, as can be seen in structuralist thinking, Bourdieu can be criticized for seeming to suggest that there might be a formula from which to explain people's cultural preferences, based on class (Mennell et al, 1992; Lupton, 1996; Jagger, 2000).

Post-structuralist approaches to food and eating aim to address these shortcomings explicitly. In referring to studies that have looked at class and ethnic identity earlier, it is important to recognize that globalization, for instance, has had a profound effect on the foods we eat and our 'tastes' for particular foods. Therefore, it may no longer be appropriate to argue that our 'tastes' for different food have their basis in ethnicity and class (Wright et al, 2001).

Similarly, when considering the ways in which women feed their families, a post-structuralist analysis might emphasise the way that power, influence and control impact on women, such as the different meanings that might be attributed to being a 'proper mother' and a 'good wife' (McIntosh and Zey, 1989; Wallbank, 2001).

Before concluding this section it is important to note that the use of the term 'identity' is not unproblematic for some writers, notably those positioned within

post-structuralist theorising. 'Identity' is a term that is criticized for implying something unitary, fixed, and rationally (and therefore knowingly) taken up by individuals rather than the notion of individuals who are subject (unwittingly) to the discourses that subjugate them. Further to this, the term 'identity' can further be understood and criticized as a 'particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one *is*' (Weedon, 2004: 19). By way of contrast, 'subjectivity' (or 'subjectivities') can be taken to mean selves that are more relational, fragmented, fluid, with the possibility of change if only their discursive constitution can be made visible (Davies et al, 2006). Other writers use the term 'identity' (sometimes 'identities') less problematically but use it in ways that do not imply something fixed and permanent (e.g. James, 1993; Caplan, 1997). Thus, one's identity is similarly regarded as something that is constantly evolving (James et al, 2009). I am primarily interested in *subjectivities* (and the notion of multiple and fluid 'identities') as opposed to *fixed* understandings of identity in this study.

In summary, food and eating have a *socio-cultural* significance to human lives that goes well beyond ensuring we eat our recommended nutritional intake. Indeed it has been argued that the notion of 'food' and 'healthy eating' are themselves, social, cultural and historical constructions (Caplan, 1997). There is a wealth of literature that has looked at food and eating practices in particular communities and my own study aims to explore four such 'communities'; the four early childhood settings that took part in the research.

The next section looks specifically at early childhood practice and refers to a range of cross cultural studies. Significantly, a number of these studies have been carried out in Japan. In Buchbinder et al's (2006) review of ethnographic studies into early childhood practice, 'the Japanese example' is highlighted as a distinct category of early childhood ethnographic research. In terms of their relevance to this research, these studies have often focused on activities such as mealtimes in early childhood settings as key in engendering in young children a sense of being part of a group. Moreover, they highlight the ways this can lead

to the subordination of children's desires and needs as individuals (e.g. Peak, 1991; Ben-Ari, 1997).

2.2 The importance of food events in early childhood practice

This theme in the review begins by exploring literature that stresses the importance of routines and rituals associated with food events in early childhood practice. It then examines why food events, and other practices pertaining to the body, are conferred a lower status than activities associated with developing the mind.

2.2.1 The importance of routines and rituals in early childhood practice

In this section, I will show how the routines and rituals associated with food events in early childhood practice are often viewed as offering predictability; security; and communality for young children from which they are able to engage with the wider range of activities in the early childhood setting with confidence. In addition, I outline how routines such as mealtimes are regarded as a prime means through which children are socialised into the cultural practices of the early childhood institution they attend, including developing a sense of *group* identity. Moreover, I explore how food events are viewed as significant in contributing to a child's sense of national and/or cultural identity. In discussing 'socialisation', I am referring to:

'The process whereby children learn to conform to the expectations of the society in which they grow up and to behave in socially accepted ways' (Grieshaber, 2004: 36).

Throughout this section I begin to problematise the 'socialisation' perspective, not least as putting forward a *benign* view of food events – something that is elaborated further later in this chapter and, in particular, in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

A key argument put forward in relation to routines such as food events in early childhood practice (when 'events' are more 'structured' e.g. meal times) relates to their certainty and regularity. Leavitt and Power (1997: 42) argue that 'the extent to which children experience predictability and security in daily routines and interpersonal relationships contributes to their sense of self and agency.' For Ben-Ari (1997: 143) the way time is organised into the routines of the day should not be regarded as a harsh discipline, but one that relates to a comfortable, albeit mundane, rhythm that punctuates the day. His study explores how the end of each meal in the Japanese day care setting he observed is marked by ritual expressions of appreciation; tidying up; and washing faces and brushing teeth. These rituals associated with mealtimes seem to give a temporal order to the day, something which is repeated daily.

This 'safe-because-same manner' of bodily routines is important in punctuating time and providing a sense of continuity (Crossley, 2006: 109). Moreover, Giovanni (2006) believes that the predictability of routines is important as it makes the rules of a setting clear to children, enabling them to participate in the broader life of the nursery community. It is important to note here that the importance of a well-planned, predictable rhythm to the day is also noted in literature associated with dementia care and care of the elderly (Berg, 2002). It is not confined to early childhood alone. However, later in this study, I will demonstrate that another reading of such rituals and routines is one that sees the child's bodily rhythms subordinated to those of the group (Polakow, 1992).

Crucially, food events are viewed as offering an opportunity for children to interact with others and share companionship alongside the physical enjoyment of the food being eaten (Giovanni, 2006). Corsaro (1997: 18) points to the importance of 'collective communal activity' and the ways in which children 'negotiate, share, and create culture with adults and each other'. He develops a theory of 'interpretive reproduction', which places a high level of significance on language and cultural routines. He also places a high degree of importance on

the predictability of routines, but stresses the socio-cultural knowledge that is imparted and *created* during such events. He argues that:

‘The habitual, taken-for-granted character of routines provides children and all social actors with the security and shared social understanding of belonging to a social group. On the other hand, this very predictability empowers routines, providing a framework within which a wide range of sociocultural knowledge can be produced, displayed, and interpreted. In this way, cultural routines serve as anchors that enable social actors to deal with ambiguities, the unexpected, and the problematic while remaining comfortably within the friendly confines of everyday life.’ (Corsaro, 1997: 19)

For Corsaro, as soon as we are born we take part in cultural routines such as mealtimes but gradually, we initiate more and more of the interactions which take place in them. As children get older, their experience of the world widens beyond the immediacy of their families to one that includes others such as nursery staff, but the people they encounter also operate within particular social worlds and have different relationships with the child (and later the adult). In other words, there is a variety of social worlds a child encounters (Corsaro, 1997).

This process of becoming part of a particular community and the cultural practices associated with it begins from birth, with feeding routines playing a crucial role (Ben-Ari, 1997). One important marker of this is the commencement of weaning. Murcott (1997) examines childcare literature from the mid-twentieth century that points to the place of weaning in the gradual introduction of the young infant to participating in family meals. Thus, weaning is sometimes explicitly imbued with greater significance than purely the gradual introduction of solid foods in the infant’s diet; it is important as a social marker – an important rite of passage into participation in the everyday cultural life of one’s family. However we should recognize cultural and class differences in weaning patterns in different communities and over time. Wright et al’s (2004) study, for instance,

suggests that mothers from lower socio-economic groups in the UK tend to commence weaning earlier than middle class mothers.

Attendance at an early years' setting involves a child in participating in food events beyond their home possibly for the first time. Food events such as mealtimes are therefore deemed important as events in which children are inculcated into the practices deemed 'appropriate' for the social worlds in which they are living – the early years' setting being but one of these - and the types of foods they may encounter in that culture. For Ben-Ari (1997), the interstitial nature of early childhood settings is an interesting context in which to study food and eating practices because it is unlike the domestic or private sphere of the home, but in some ways purports to be like it. On the other hand, it is unlike the public sphere where one might dine out in a restaurant for instance, but bears a similarity in that it is not the home environment (see also Mennell et al, 1992). This 'inbetweenness' in relation to early childhood practice around food and eating is worth exploring because early childhood settings are often charged with managing this movement between the worlds of the home/family and the wider world (Ben-Ari, 1997). As Golden (2005: 182) observes, early childhood settings serve to 'familiarise children with a non-familial and unfamiliar world'.

Developing a sense of self in relation to the group is considered to be an important constituent of food events. Ethnographic studies carried out in Japanese day care (for instance Peak, 1991; Ben-Ari, 1997) are particularly illuminating in the area of food events. Peak's (1991) study emphasizes how eating *together* is considered very important and how a great deal of care is taken to ensure that each child eats identical food in order that mutuality is reinforced. Ben-Ari (1997: 97) maintains that in early childhood settings:

'Food is explicitly and implicitly related to goals of inculcating a sense of group belongingness, absorbing notions of responsibility, and learning the organization and aesthetics of 'typical' meals. Not

only this, but children build on the adjustments they have made to family life to re-orientating themselves to the needs of the peer group as well as the wider world'.

'Groupism', as Ben-Ari calls it, is considered important in Japanese day care. An expression of this is the way that care is taken to ensure individual children eat identical meals in the day care setting he observed. This is further exemplified by the group's participation in formal pre-cursors and post-meal markers, such as saying a form of 'Grace'. Other examples of the way that young children are often encouraged to think of themselves as part of a group are the ways that collective responsibility for the environment is engendered, such as acting as a monitor in pouring out drinks and helping to clean up after themselves (Ben-Ari, 1997). The traditional saying 'to become a (mature) person one must eat a stranger's rice' (quoted on p. 103, Ben-Ari, 1997) sums up what he sees as a 'Japanese' attitude to commensality as mealtimes in the preschool involve eating and sharing food with others as well as being served and serving others. Ben-Ari argues that this is important in the child's being able to distinguish between intimacy and formality, and in-group and out-of-group behaviours. Here, it is important to note that Ben Ari has a tendency to discuss 'Japanese attitudes' as if homogenous and there is likely to be greater diversity than he acknowledges, not least owing to differences in social class. Later in this study (Chapter Four), I also consider further the monitorial role given to children by drawing on Foucault's (1977) work to suggest that children are encouraged to engage in surveillance of each other's mealtime behaviour in accordance with what is deemed 'proper'.

In a similar way to Ben-Ari (1997), but drawing upon practice in nursery schools in Pistoia, Italy, Giovanni (2006) argues that the rituals associated with lunchtimes are important as they are opportunities for young children to participate in the group-life of the setting. She points to the importance of developing a group identity and how mealtime rituals are linked to the particular

group's history such as lighting and blowing out candles to denote the beginning and end of the mealtime. This, she argues, helps to create an emotionally warm, calm environment in which communication can flourish between children and their peers and children and adults. Examples of 'good practice' that she cites are the use of 'fragile and more personal items' as these enable a child to 'behave with greater care and in a more considerate way' (Giovanni, 2006: 11). In addition, children have set places at a table, which creates an atmosphere of trust, predictability and calmness, creating what she believes to be 'a relaxed and affectionate atmosphere that stimulates a convivial situation' (p. 11). Adults eat with the children and are expected to encourage independence, interpersonal relationships and encourage the children to participate in conversation at the table, such as feelings about the taste and aroma of the food in front of them.

Interestingly here, Berg (2002) argues that extra staffing during mealtimes can result in the experience being hurried, resulting in a lessening of the social experience, as more people are on hand to encourage and support eating. In particular, this occurs if the staff team focuses on food events as a *task* to be accomplished quickly as opposed to a relaxed, enjoyable and significant part of the day (see also Eliot, 2007). Whilst Berg's work relates to dementia care, it could be applied to early childhood practice where school settings, especially, tend to hurry children through the dinner hall (Albon and Mukherji, 2008). This, as I will show in the next section, is also indicative of the lesser status of those parts of the school day that pertain to the *body* as opposed to more cognitively oriented activities (Mayall, 1996).

But in thinking about the kinds of practices associated with food events that are deemed 'appropriate' for young children, it is important to problematise them further. As Golden's (2005) study in a Kindergarten in Israel demonstrates, early childhood settings may be complicit in replicating a middle class culture (in relation to food) in working class neighbourhoods. As with other areas of early childhood practice, food events are a site where power relationships associated

with class, race and gender are played out (Grieshaber, 1997; 2004 – notably discussing the reinforcement of hegemonic understandings of gender in relation to mealtimes in the home context). An example of this might be the way ideas about what constitutes an ‘appropriate’ school lunch box serve to marginalise families whose practices are deemed ‘other’ or outside this ‘norm’ (Morrison, 1996; Allison, 1997).

This can be seen further in the way early childhood settings are often tasked with inculcating ‘good’ table manners. Sepp et al (2006) discuss how mealtimes in early years’ settings are important in developing *table manners* as well as food preferences. They discuss how in Sweden there has been a concept of a ‘pedagogic meal’ since the 1970s.

‘The main point was that a role model seen every day by children was more powerful than verbal messages about a healthful diet and good table manners’ (Sepp et al, 2006: 225)

Parallels to this can be observed in the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act in the UK, which made the provision of school meals statutory for the first time. Not only did the Act aim to ensure children had enough food to eat and consequently improve their physical health, there was also an *explicit* intention to develop the children’s table manners (Young, 2002). Thus, the provision of school meals was imbued with class based notions of ‘proper’ behaviour at mealtimes from its inception. Arguably today, the idea that practitioners should eat with children still prevails. This practice is often defended on the basis that adults should provide a good role model of eating behaviour (Kubik et al, 2002), such as eating a ‘correct’ portion size (Sellers et al, 2005).

Later, I discuss further how the reiteration and reinforcement of cultural knowledge such as ‘appropriate’ meal time behaviour is harnessed in food events such as mealtimes. Here, I wish to highlight an example of the

pedagogical importance placed on food events. In Ben-Ari's (1997) study, a Japanese teacher made a direct link between mealtimes and education and highlighted the way that children are required to line up and ask politely if there is enough food for second helpings. However, in Sepp et al's (2006) research, which was carried out in Sweden, few practitioners in the study saw mealtimes as a *pedagogic* activity. The notion of practitioners being a 'good role model' is also elaborated and problematised further with reference to my data in Chapter Four. The research highlighted here suggests that what is deemed 'appropriate' is culturally constructed, but more than this; what is deemed a 'pedagogic activity' is likely to be culturally defined.

Food events are important for more than instilling a child with *institutional* group values; they are also significant as occasions in which children learn a range of cultural values and behaviours that enable them to participate in their wider social world *beyond* their home and early childhood setting. Polakow (1992: 187), for instance, describes the period of childhood as 'becoming at home in the world' and mealtimes may be especially important in this, because as Valsiner (1987: 157) observes:

'Mealtimes are one of the very few recurrent settings in the lives of developing children where they experience the cultural organization of the social life of their culture in its full complexity.'

Writers such as Golden (2005), who carried out an ethnographic study of food events in an Israeli kindergarten, argue that the social and cultural learning that takes place during food events also assumes importance in terms of developing a sense of *national* identity as early childhood settings may be one of the first formal encounters a child has with the state. Golden (2005) points to the way that children learn to be 'Jewish' through the observance of time honoured traditions around food and eating whilst attending kindergarten. Similarly, the Japanese preschool curriculum explicitly views mealtimes as important in helping

children acquire the customs of group life in Japan as well as acquiring 'proper' eating habits (Ben-Ari, 1997). Thus, early childhood settings can be regarded as institutions in which hegemonic, middle class understandings about culture and nationhood are normalized and reproduced as if 'common-sense' practice (Golden, 2005).

It would also seem that the development of children's *motor* skills is interwoven with culturally accepted ways of eating in a particular society (Valsiner, 1987). An example of this is the way Japanese children gradually learn to use chopsticks, not only learning to control their body but also learning how to be 'Japanese' – in other words, they are physically and symbolically acculturated (Ben-Ari, 1997). This could be linked to what Connerton (1989: 72-3) describes as 'incorporating practices', which are patterns of behaviour developed by social actions that are remembered by the body. An example of this might be the way we know how to behave physically in a familiar group meal situation without thinking about it explicitly. Connerton's work is interesting because it assigns a *physical* significance to practices such as food events as opposed to their *symbolic* significance – something that tends to be stressed in the literature.

But these 'incorporating practices' may involve coercion, such as the enforcement of 'body rules' or culturally inscribed ways of behaving in particular situations (Leavitt and Power, 1997) – a point I develop later in this chapter and elaborate in Chapter Four. And it is important to be mindful that children, like adults, move through a *range* of social worlds (Corsaro, 1997) as noted earlier. Thus, identities are not fixed or static (James et al, 2009) and as Caplan (1997: 6) notes, we are able to switch 'food codes', in a similar way to our use of language, according to context. Nevertheless, Connerton's work is interesting as he does attempt to consider how we come to internalize what Leavitt and Power refer to as 'body rules' because one of the difficulties inherent in theories of socialisation is the internalisation processes that take place *within* the child. In

other words, how does the child *absorb* the cultural 'norms' of society within which they are a part? (Prout and James, 1997; Grieshaber, 2004).

In summing up this section, it would seem that the rituals and routines associated with food events are viewed as important in providing predictability and security for children; they engender a sense of belonging to the group in the early childhood setting; and finally, they serve to inculcate children into the cultural practices of their wider world, including a sense of national and/or cultural identity. However, in doing this, the organization of food events may reinforce hegemonic, middle class understandings of what is 'appropriate' meal time behaviour (Golden, 2005) and there is neglect in such literature of the way power relations are played out through food (Grieshaber, 2004). Moreover, underpinning socialization theorizing is a notion of the child as a 'defective form of adult' (James et al, 1998: 6) because children are viewed in terms of what they will *become* – something I take issue with towards the end of this chapter and throughout this thesis. Thus, food events are not consistently the *benevolent* area of practice that some of the literature discussed in this section suggests. Yet it is important to note that Viruru (2001), writing from a post-colonialist perspective, *critiques* the notion of socialisation and places a *strong* emphasis on food events as providing a 'rhythm' to the day. She contrasts the stress placed on mealtimes in an Indian early childhood setting with the lack of importance stressed on such practices in minority world¹ settings. Thus, whilst some of the critique offered in this section relates to difficulties inherent in socialisation theorizing, food and food events are nonetheless significant, not least because they provide an opportunity for communality (Corsaro, 1997; Giovanni, 2006) and because children's identities are 'variously and complexly mediated through food' (James et al, 2009: 10).

¹ 'Minority world' is a term used to denote countries, such as those deemed 'developed', which are economically more affluent and more powerful in terms of ideas that hold sway than the 'Majority world' i.e. countries sometimes known as the 'developing world'. Dahlberg et al (1999) provide a detailed discussion of this point.

However, despite the socio-cultural significance attributed to food events in early childhood practice, they are not always afforded much status in the UK. The next section, then, aims to begin to examine the lesser status of food events.

2.2.2 The lesser status of food events

Practices in early childhood settings which pertain to the care of the body are often viewed as of lesser importance than practices designed to develop the mind (Manning-Morton, 2006; Albon, 2007). One such area is food events such as meal and snack times. Expressions of this subordination of the body to practices concerned with developing the mind can be seen in the way that some activities in early childhood settings are given more salience than others, such as those directly concerned with literacy and numeracy (Albon, 2007). Activities concerned with 'body work' (Pilcher, 2007) such as mealtimes and snack times may assume lesser importance and are often given less attention in terms of planning, for instance (Albon, 2007). Yet young children may be receiving their breakfast, dinner, tea and snacks at the early childhood setting they attend; something that takes up considerable time in the day, every day.

In this section, I begin to make the case that a privileging of the mind over the body prevails in early childhood settings in the UK and in other contemporary minority world countries. An example of this can be seen in the way that practitioners (whose role is primarily perceived as the *care* of young children), such as nursery nurses, are often positioned as having a role of lesser importance when compared to the 'real' business of teaching young children. I believe that the invisibility and devaluing of care practices relating to body work, such as food provisioning, appears to mirror the invisibility and devaluing of care practices in the private sphere of the home, primarily carried out by women (Albon and Mukherji, 2008). Possibly, this also accounts for the taken-for-granted nature of many early childhood routines (Tobin, 1997).

It is worth considering the implications of this asymmetry of practice for early childhood practitioners themselves. *Caring for* others (as opposed to caring *about* others) has been likened to a 'labour of love' (Finch and Groves, 1983) and emphasizes human's connectedness to others as opposed to their separateness. It is strongly related to women's daily experience and is therefore the subject of much feminist theorising (Tronto, 1989; Chodorow, 1978). Despite its importance, caring work often takes place in the private sphere of the home and is rendered 'invisible' and insignificant in comparison to the public world of paid employment. This invisibility and de-valuing of caring work is replicated in early childhood practice (Manning-Morton, 2006) and indeed other fields of employment where caring for 'bodies' assumes a high percentage of the work.

One such manifestation of the way practices associated with *caring* for children are afforded lesser status can be seen in the way that in primary schools, a different, less qualified staff group are employed to manage mealtimes. Mayall (1996) points to the way that the teachers in primary schools in the UK have tended to negotiate their working practices so that dinner time is a time when they are, deservedly, able to have a rest whilst a group of non-teaching staff supervise the children. This serves to separate out the 'cognitive' from the 'physical' and 'social' aspects of the school day and means that mealtimes are occasions that operate within a very tightly controlled time frame. She links this to the low status of activities to do with children's health and welfare as compared to more 'cognitively' oriented activities. However, I would add that what becomes defined as a 'cognitive' activity is likely to be culturally and historically specific.

Mayall's (1996) study demonstrates a difference in practice between the practice of the nursery teacher and that of the other primary school teachers. The nursery teacher was the only member of staff to eat with the children and saw mealtimes as an important part of her work in terms of caring for, socializing with, and educating the children. Possibly, this might explain why those practitioners

that work with the very youngest children and babies are accorded particularly low status as their work necessarily involves a high degree of 'body work' (Pilcher, 2007) as well as the *emotional* demands of caring for others (Manning-Morton, 2006). Given the argument put forward previously in this section, it could be argued that it is of little surprise that early childhood is a profession populated primarily by women.

In summarizing the literature reviewed so far, food events play a crucial role in human lives in terms of developing a sense of self as part of a particular cultural community. Moreover, the rhythm and predictability that food events provide in the day are seen as adding to a child's sense of security and are considered to be supportive of the child being able to explore, develop and learn. Additionally, food events are often viewed as playing an important role in early childhood settings in inculcating the cultural values of the setting and wider community, instilling in children a sense of self in relation to the group. I began to 'trouble' some of this literature by asking whether hegemonic understandings about 'appropriate' mealtime behaviour, for instance, are harnessed during food events.

Despite the importance of food events in early childhood practice, the final part of this theme explored the possible reasons for them assuming lesser importance when compared to other areas of early childhood practice. I argued that the association of food events with caring practices carried out primarily by women in the private sphere of the home may, in part, be responsible for their lower status.

But what is missing is an exploration of the body itself. This is important to this study because underpinning the lower status of caring practices carried out primarily by women is their association with the *body*, in terms of both physicality and emotionality. Therefore, the next theme in the review looks at conceptualizations of the body in some detail.

2.3 The child as 'body project'

In this theme of the review, I explore different conceptualizations of the body in order to examine in greater depth the idea that practices pertaining to the body assume a lesser importance to those of the mind. In particular, I will be considering how we might conceptualize the child's body, arguing that the notion of 'body project' (Shilling, 1993; Ben-Ari, 1997) is useful to employ. I use it in a way that attempts to encapsulate an understanding of the body as both corporeal and a social construction. In doing this, I recognize and discuss the tensions inherent in attempting to arrive at this position. Finally, I examine whether conceptualizations of children's *physical* bodies can tell us something about the *social* body of children as a whole, building on the ideas of Douglas (1966) but more particularly Bordo (2003).

2.3.1 Conceptualizations of the body

Firstly, in this section, I will explore different theoretical positions in relation to the body. I contend that the body has tended to be seen as inferior – even as something to be *transcended* in order that the mind, associated with rationality, is released. This is a crucial theme because food and eating are positioned as pertaining to the body more than to the mind, albeit that there is evidence to suggest that nutrition plays some role in children's learning (Dani et al, 2005). I aim to outline a range of constructions of the body, looking at conceptualizations of the body as distinct from the mind; the body as a basis for our 'being in the world' – phenomenological perceptions of the body; feminist conceptualizations of the body; postmodern and post-structuralist thinking about the body – viewing the body as text; and finally a position where the body is viewed both as a social construction and corporeal.

There has been a long standing dichotomy between the mind and the body, with Cartesian thought focusing attention on the *mind* as central in defining personhood (Shilling, 1993). Peters (2004) maintains that the work of Plato has

served to privilege the intellect over the body and argues that educational theory and practice is imbued with dualisms, such as 'girls and boys'. However, the most culturally embedded of these dualisms pertains to the mind and body.

Bordo (2003) traces three different conceptualizations of the mind's relationship to the body, going back to Plato. She maintains

'Plato imagines the body as an epistemological deceiver, its unreliable senses and volatile passions tricking us into mistaking the transient and illusory for the permanent and real.' (Bordo, 2003: 3)

It is our locatedness in time and space that is viewed as problematic as this means we are always *perceiving* the world rather than truly comprehending it, or as Bordo (2003: 4) puts it, trying to attain a 'dis-embodied view from nowhere'. Over time, she notes how the body came to be seen as inseparable from the mind but at the same time distinct or 'other' from it. Later, the body was viewed as caging the mind – as something from which the mind needs to escape. Lastly, she notes the tendency to see the body as the *enemy* of the mind as it tempts the mind away from the rational towards the 'sins of the flesh'. The notion of the body as being in need of *civilizing* is one I return to in Chapter Four. In characterizing the mind as 'other' to the body, we arrive at a position where embodied experience and sensation are devalued (Bordo, 2003); something that is challenged in the work of phenomenological philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty (2002).

In more recent philosophy, there is an emphasis on the *becoming* self; one that is sensuous, embodied and gendered (Peters, 2004). For Merleau-Ponty (2002) the lived, bodily experience is inseparable from time and space and the body is viewed as both active in the world and acted upon. In brief, Merleau-Ponty's position is that our bodies are the basis for our 'being-in-the-world' and a crucial part of our subjectivity. This differs distinctly from the thinking of Descartes in that

it is a position that is non-dualist in relation to mind and body and emphasises the way we *experience* the world around us (Leder, 1990).

Psychoanalytical theory similarly focuses on an individual's embodied and emotional or psychic experiences and what drives individuals to do what they do (see for instance Flax, 1990 or Grosz, 1994 for further discussion). But whilst the valuing of embodied experience is important, because it addresses some of the concerns with mind-body duality and the privileging of the mind that the previous approach to viewing the body encompassed, such accounts neglect discussion of *power relations* pertaining to the body (Howson and Inglis, 2001). This is something addressed by writers within a post-structuralist framework.

Post-structuralist theorizing elevates the concept of *power* in relation to the body. This is crucial to Foucault's (1977) work. Rather than seeing power as held *by* someone, Foucault views power in a more multifarious way. For him, power is exerted over the body through a range of normalizing and regulating techniques, not least the normalizing 'gaze' over each other's and our own bodily practices. Power is ever-moving, ever-changing, and therefore opens up the possibility of multiple sites of resistance and transformation.

More generally, postmodern and post-structuralist theorists on the body have a tendency to treat the body as a text (see especially Butler, 1990). This can be seen in Butler's (1998: 72) assertion that 'materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect ... the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialisation'. From this perspective it would appear that there is *nothing* that is pre or extra discursive, something I take issue with later on in this review.

Feminist perspectives on the body have often used post-structuralist theory to support their analyses (see especially Butler, 1990), drawing on the work of Foucault, for instance. Whilst tensions between Foucault's work and feminism

have been acknowledged (e.g. the neglect in Foucault's work of pre-discursive experience and feeling [Cain, 1993]), these accounts have added an important contribution to conceptualizations of the body as they maintain that women experience their bodies differently from men and are often constructed in terms of their *bodies* as opposed to their minds (Dalmiya and Alcoff, 1993). Women tend to be associated with emotionality, physicality as well as passivity, and men with rationality and activity. These supposed dualities and the biological determinism that they suggest are contested in much feminist writing (see for instance Butler, 1990; Bordo, 2003). In terms of this study, I argue that such constructions of the body serve to devalue practices associated with 'body work' (Pilcher, 2007) such as food events.

Furthermore, post-structuralist feminist accounts of the body tend to see gender as a *performance* as opposed to a biological reality (Butler, 1990). For Bartky (1990: 65), masculinity and femininity, as opposed to being born a male or a female 'is an artifice, an achievement.' Given the predominance of women in comparison to men in early childhood work and the degree of 'body work' (Pilcher, 2007) that is required in the job - as noted earlier - this may be an especially important perspective. In delineating women's experience as distinct from their male counterparts, feminist writings about the body also encourage us to think about *children's* different experience of their bodies, for instance, not least in terms of gender, physical power and size (James et al, 1998) when compared to adults, something I discuss later.

But postmodern and post-structuralist theorizing about the body is not without criticism. Whilst writers such as Giddens (1991) see embodiment in terms of expressing personal identity as we are the embodiment of the lifestyle *choices* we make, we should be wary of assuming that these 'choices' appear in a social and political vacuum (Bordo, 2003; Pile and Thrift, 1995a). Inevitably, we have to weigh up the competing claims of the various choices open to us (Crossley, 2006) and some positionings may not be open to us. Here, I find Bordo (1993:

191) useful when she states that the seemingly 'impersonal' Foucauldian view of power does not mean that individuals are similarly positioned in the power 'game'. Class, gender and race impact on the degree to which individuals are positioned and consequently able to participate equally in the 'field'. The textual play of post-structuralist theorizing, she argues, ignores the importance of hegemonic 'texts' within cultures that serve to normalise particular practices and ways of being.

Bordo's (1993) analysis is significant when applied to the ways in which young children are 'managed' in early childhood practice, because age impacts significantly on children's perceived ability to participate on an equal footing with adults. Often decisions are made on their behalf. In relation to very young children, parents especially mothers, weigh up a range of choices in relation to their bodily identities for much of the time and as the child gets older, they come to make these decisions for themselves (Crossley, 2006). However, there are also practices in 'managing' the child's body that are less benign.

More coercively, very young children are often subject to much physical handling and restraint in comparison to adults owing to a perceived need to 'manage' their bodies, which is made possible owing to differentials in size and physical power as well as cultural constructions of the 'proper' role of adults (and here we might especially think of early childhood practitioners) as one of controlling children (Phelan, 1997). It is important to stress that whilst we might 'read' the child's body in terms of being in need of control, the child's *embodied* experience of this control is real and immediate – something I extend further in the next section. As Elias (1994) notes, the 'civilizing process' may leave 'scars' on children.

But post-structuralist theorizing tends to place little emphasis on embodiment (Albon, 2010 forthcoming), such as in Butler's writing (1990; 1998). However, as Crossley (2006) states, the social world and embodiment are inextricably linked as the former could not exist without the latter. Similarly, James et al (1998: 147)

argue 'embodied action (is) performed not only by texts but by real, living corporeal persons'.

For Turner (1992), the body cannot be reduced to a mere social construction because however the body can be viewed in terms of social relations, it remains corporeal, physical and biological. Shilling (1993: 13) similarly argues for a conception of the 'mind and body as inextricably linked as a result of the mind's location within the body.' Grosz (1994: xii) considers this further by employing the notion of a Mobius strip – an inverted three dimensional figure eight - to envisage a conceptualization of the body in which the mind and the body are 'not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives'. Through its twisting and inversion of interior and exterior, the Mobius strip metaphor does not privilege the mind or the body and also allows consideration of the permeability of the social, the corporeal and the psychical. Elsewhere, Grosz (1993: 196) refers to the body as a 'hinge' or 'threshold' between the psychic interior and socio-political exterior.

These conceptualizations of the body seem especially appropriate when applied to very young children because whilst their bodies can be 'read' as a 'text' – something I develop further in the next section - much of young children's experience of the world appears to be immediate and *physical*. It is also appropriate because much early childhood practice, particularly that pertaining to the youngest babies and children, involves caring for the *body* as well as the mind (Manning-Morton, 2006).

Whilst the focus of this study lies in the socio-cultural practices associated with food events in early childhood settings, it would be limiting to ignore the biological because human beings quite literally 'are what they eat' and have a direct physical relationship with food (Fischler, 1988). Moreover, for mothers that breastfeed their babies, there is a biological relationship to food as *producers* of

food in the form of milk, (like all mammals), that seems to transcend the boundaries between the biological and the socio-cultural (Albon and Mukherji, 2008). Leavitt and Power (1997: 42) encapsulate this position by arguing that:

‘The child’s body, then, is both a corporeal phenomenon and a social construction, shaped, constrained and invented by society. It is the recipient as well as the generator of social meanings, an expression, an instrument of communication, interpreted by the caregivers and for the children. It is with her body that the child ‘speaks’, offering her first gestures to elicit responses from caregivers.’

Many of these first communications relate to the infant’s bodily need for food and drink. Therefore, in feeding, the corporeal and the social are intertwined. Certainly, as the child develops, food events continue to assume importance as social events as well as a means to receiving one’s nutritional intake. Thus, the idea of a Mobius strip to act as a metaphor for the relationship between the social, the psychic and the corporeal (Grosz, 1994) is a compelling one.

This *dynamic* vision of the body can also be seen in other writing. The body might also be viewed as an ‘event’ in order to overcome the bifurcation of the body as corporeal and as representation. McNay (1999: 98), for instance, sees the body as a ‘dynamic, mutable frontier’ and Budgeon (2003), drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, develops this idea further by asking us to reconsider ‘not what bodies *mean*, but what can bodies *do?*’ (p. 48 *my italics*). She argues for a position in which bodies can be thought of:

‘Not as *objects*, upon which culture writes meanings, but as *events* that are continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade’ (Budgeon, 2003: 48).

Thus, the body is in a constant state of flux or *becoming* as it develops connections with other bodies; the activities it performs; and the practices which form the context of its becoming (see also Olsson, 2009, who similarly draws on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari). Therefore, the postmodern position in relation to the body can also be described as one in which

‘The human body is seen as a project, an entity in the process of becoming, dynamic, not static, and subject to conscious moulding.’ (Caplan, 1997: 16)

In summary, post-structuralist positions on the body are important in encouraging a consideration of multiple and fluid identities, but can be criticized for their emphasis on ‘reading’ the body ‘at the expense of attention to the body’s material locatedness in history, practice, culture’ (Bordo, 2003: 38). Just like the ‘view from nowhere’, the fantasy of transcending one’s time and space in order to achieve an understanding of the world as it ‘really’ is, Bordo (2003: 40) argues that the postmodern position is similarly disembodied. This is something she describes as the ‘view from everywhere’ fantasy. We are, she maintains, always *somewhere*.

Therefore, a conceptualization of the body in terms of time and place that goes beyond thinking of ‘embodiment’ is necessary. Howes (2005), for instance, uses the term ‘emplacement’ in preference to ‘embodiment’ to denote the interrelationship between the mind, the body and the environment. In addition, Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) work highlights how matter and the discursive world should not be viewed as separate. Rather, she puts forward a theory of ‘intra-activity’, which looks not only at human beings as active agents in the world, but also at the power of the *material* environment to produce feelings of empowerment or of subjugation (to name just two positionings). As an example, we might consider the ways in which tables and chairs are arranged in relation to each other at mealtimes and the disciplining effect this might have on the body of a particular child or group of children.

The work of people such as Howes (2005) in the field of anthropology and the work of Lenz-Taguchi (2010) in the field of early childhood education seem to address some of Bordo's (2003) concerns about ensuring the material locatedness of the body is not rendered invisible or subordinate to textual play. The ideas of 'emplacement' and 'intra-activity' as well as Grosz's (1994) use of the Mobius strip metaphor are useful ways forward. The analyses of feminist writers, some of whom have been discussed here, have been important in encouraging a consideration of bodies which are marginalized, not least owing to differences in relation to sexuality (Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994). Feminist theorizing in this area might also be applied to *children* as children's bodies are often viewed as 'other' to adults.

By viewing the body as a social construction as *well as* corporeal, we might conclude that the body is incomplete, malleable and a project in the making (Shilling, 1993); a Mobius strip constantly twisting between the social, the psychic and the corporeal (Grosz, 1994); and an 'event', continuously in the process of becoming in the world (Budgeon, 2002). In thinking about the body in terms of the way it is acted upon and acts in the world we can begin to think of children as engaged in a constant process of being sculpture and sculptor. The corollary of the view of young children's bodies as 'sculpture' is a construction of the body as a project in need of *civilizing* but as 'sculptor', there is a construction of the child as an active participant in the world. This theme is developed in the later findings' chapters. But before concluding this chapter, more needs to be said in relation to how young *children's* bodies are envisaged.

Therefore, in the final section of this chapter, I aim to explore further what these ideas about the body might mean for conceptualizations of *children's* bodies in particular. Here I will be thinking not only about children's *individual* bodies, but I will also be applying Bordo's (2003) thinking about the 'slender body' in her writings on gender in order to consider whether this might tell us something about the *social* body of children and childhood as a whole.

2.3.2 Children as 'body projects'

A central question emerges: 'what is it about the *child's* body that makes it subject to a high degree of civilizing?' This section aims to look at this issue by looking at the way children's bodies, moreover the social body of childhood, are constructed as 'other'. Moreover, it begins to discuss the implications of this for early childhood practice.

Firstly, it is important to provide a brief description of how the child's body has come to be seen as 'other'. Aries (1962) puts forward the view that 'childhood' is multiple and perspectival and is a social construction as opposed to a biological reality (see also Prout and James, 1997; James et al, 1998). Over time, 'children' have come to be seen as a distinct group that can be categorized differently to 'adults' with the work of developmental psychology, notably Piaget, serving to add further, seemingly neutral, credence to this distinction (Burman, 1994; James et al, 1998). Because of this, Viruru (2001) asserts that young children have been 'colonized' by adults just as countries in the majority world (or 'developing' world) have been colonized by minority world countries. She argues that:

'Colonised human beings (including those who are younger) are created as subjects who are lacking, not fully advanced and needing intervention.' (Viruru, 2001: 141)

Unlike other forms of colonization though, Viruru (2001) points out that young children are in the position of outgrowing childhood and indeed becoming 'colonisers' or adults themselves in later life. However, she argues that this should not detract us from looking at the way adults attempt to civilize and control children's bodies. By employing the idea of colonial power to children, children might be likened to those territories that were (and are) colonized and in so doing, be viewed in terms of what they might *become* as opposed to what they *are* at present (Gandhi, 1998).

The *process* through which children become 'normalised' is one in which the prime 'regime of practice' (Grieshaber, 2004: 193) is that children are 'other' to adults. For Elias (1994), this is linked to the gradual distancing between adults and children, which has occurred over time, with the former conceptualized as more 'civilized' than the latter. Moreover, this conceptualization of children as not quite finished or fully socialised, which also has its roots in developmental psychology, means that young children are, by definition, *problematic* and at odds with adults (Grieshaber, 2004). This has particular resonance when considering conflict between adults and children.

This depiction of childhood as a time of 'becoming', rather than focusing upon children's lives as experienced *now* is encapsulated in the term 'body project'. Although not focusing upon children, Shilling (1993) develops the term 'body projects' as there is a tendency, he maintains, in the minority world, to view the body as a work in progress; something that can be developed, altered and changed as part of an individual's shifting sense of identity. He observes 'bodies become malleable entities which can be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners' (Shilling, 1993: 5). Pilcher (2007: 215) maintains that because children's bodies are constructed as 'bodies in progress', childhood, as a period of life, is a stage of 'intensive body work'. A key aspect of such 'body work', Pilcher maintains, is in health education. Like Shilling, Pilcher arrives at a conceptualization of *all* bodies as 'unfinished, corporeal – cultural identities' (Pilcher, 2007: 215), identities that are gendered, for instance.

Whilst Shilling (1993) points to malleable bodies being 'shaped and honed' by their owners, we might argue that this applies to adults in particular (but also acknowledging Bordo's critique about *all* people's relative power in 'choosing', discussed earlier). This is because adults and older children have more *autonomy* over their own lives when compared to young children. For children, especially very young children, parents and teachers (for our purposes, early childhood practitioners) are expected to assume a great deal of responsibility for

the 'shaping' of children's bodies (Mayall, 1996). But this is important in the long term too as Crossley (2006) argues that the care parents take over looking after their children's bodies demonstrates a construction of the body as one in need of maintenance. This is a position that the child takes up gradually for themselves as they get older as they come to see their bodies as vulnerable, for instance, and in need of care.

Public health policy is often directed explicitly at the shaping of children's bodies as well as their attitudes towards their bodies in order to reduce the risk of heart disease and other chronic conditions later on (Albon and Mukherji, 2008). This can be seen in the School Food Trust (2010: 1) guidance in relation to food and drink provisioning in early years settings, which explicitly states 'healthy eating habits in the years before school are important because they impact on growth, development and achievement in *later life*' (my italics). In this sense we can also see the child's body as one of 'futuraity'; a term coined by Jenks (1996) to refer to the way that we often think about children in terms of social (and economic) investment. Rather than a focus on children's lives as experienced now, the primary focus is on investing in their futures as adults. A similar viewpoint can be seen in the construction of children as human *becomings* not human beings (Qvortrup, 1994). Aside from being a problematic construction of childhood, by implication this also pre-supposes a journey towards a stable and assured *adulthood* – something that also needs challenging (Lee, 2001).

However, it is not only constructions of malleability (Pilcher, 2007) and 'futuraity' (Jenks, 1996) that characterise conceptualisations of the child's body as a 'project'; the *unpredictability* of their bodies is also significant. Tobin (1997) argues that women's bodies are constructed as uncontrollable, leaking entities and women, themselves, are constructed as unable to transcend their biology. This, he maintains, has been a key factor in the privileging of men over women. He goes on to apply this notion of uncontrollability and 'leakiness' to young children, arguing that this has resulted in 'young children and women locked in a

daily battle to civilize children's volatile bodies' (Tobin, 1997: 19). This uncontrollability is a point I return to later when discussing risk avoidance in Chapter Five of this thesis as taming uncertainty appears to be an especially important concept at the current time in relation to public health. Furthermore, the *uncontrollability* associated with children's bodies arguably results in practices designed to civilize or discipline their bodies in order that the young child is inculcated into the accepted bodily practices of the particular socio-cultural group to which they belong.

Power may be used with force, as noted earlier. In exploring early childhood practice, Leavitt's (1994: 39) study includes an observation of a practitioner continuing to feed a three month old baby, who had initially seemed to want feeding but after a while was clearly turning her head away. The baby resisted by letting the milk run down her face as opposed to continuing to suck and swallow and the practitioner continued until most of the bottle feed had gone. Other observed strategies employed by practitioners involved direct manipulation of children's bodies in order to get them to conform to required behaviour. Underpinning such practices would appear to be a conception of the child's body as malleable and in need of training (Leavitt and Power, 1997) accordant with the notion of the body as a 'project', discussed earlier. In this sense, the child is positioned as confined to a 'docile body' (Foucault, 1977).

The coercive management of children's bodies can be criticized as children's physicality and their emotional well-being are often viewed as connected (Leavitt, 1994; Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003; Eliot, 2007). Admonishing children for their embodied experiences could be regarded as an attack on the self of the child. Managing the body is important for children's developing sense of self as they learn a set of bodily performances that accord with, or do not accord with, the demands of their setting (Leavitt, 1994; Leavitt and Power, 1997). Thus, Ben-Ari (1997) and Leavitt (1994) ask us to consider how different body practices and emotions are constructed in social settings such as early years' settings.

More broadly, we should recognize that *all* childcare involves a degree of coercion; what matters is the *type* of power that is used. Here, Leavitt (1994) draws upon the work of Janet Smith to argue that *developmental* power is empowering, transformative and not oppositional to the child's developing sense of autonomy. *Extractive* power, by way of contrast, treats children as objects in the work of early years' practitioners – 'objects' in need of controlling and managing (Leavitt, 1994). Thus, for Leavitt (1994), it is not the exercise of power per se that is disturbing, it is the exercise of *extractive* power observed in some of the settings that she finds alarming. In a similar way, Drummond and Nutbrown (1992: 103) use the phrase the 'loving use of power', taken from the work of the psychotherapist David Smail. This is in acknowledgement that early years' practitioners are in a powerful position, but should use this power lovingly.

As in Bordo's (2003) 'slender body' analysis, the bodily experience of individuals is indicative of the wider discursive arena in which ideas come to predominate. Thus, the real and felt experience women have of 'normalising' their bodies through dieting, for instance, can be related to wider hegemonic understandings of a 'slim and healthy' body (Bordo, 2003) including 'patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability' (Bartky, 1998: 38). Applied to young children, the practices that are employed to 'manage' their bodies are an expression of one of the many ways in which 'children' and 'childhood' are constructed - in this instance, as in need of control and discipline. This might be contrasted with more romantic perceptions of childhood such as those linked to innocence and play (Edmiston, 2008). The 'romantic play' literature in early childhood education is often characterized in terms of the child being unfettered by the 'managing' hands of adults, whose role is sometimes positioned within a horticultural metaphor. From this perspective, far from controlling the child, the practitioner (as 'gardener') is expected to prepare an environment in which the child (as 'plant') can flourish 'naturally' and at her own pace (Darling, 1982).

As Stainton-Rogers (2001) observes, different discourses about childhood may suggest different styles of practice, such as more coercive styles of interaction or, in the case of romantic views of play and childhood innocence, laissez-faire approaches to practice. This has been of constant interest to me in carrying out this study as I have sought to examine practices associated with food in the context of a wide range of everyday activities in the four early childhood settings. Thus, whilst Bordo's (2003) 'slender body' analysis is interesting to apply to early childhood practice in order to encourage reflection on the way that the treatment of individual children reflects children's social positioning as a *group*, it may be too simplistic. The multiple and shifting nature of constructions of childhood and their relationship to the multiple and shifting natures of early childhood practice (Alloway, 1997) suggests a more complex connection between the experiences of children as individuals and the social body of childhood.

Another construction of childhood that is gaining prominence in current writing in the field is that of the child as someone with rights of her own; an expert on her own life; and able to participate actively in the construction of her own world (see for instance Lee, 2001; Prout and James, 1997; Greene and Hill, 2005; Clark, 2005). It is a perspective that assigns a more active, powerful role to children when compared to the 'romantic' child of play or the child in need of 'civilizing'. Thus, before concluding this review of the literature, it is important to emphasise that children are not purely *passive* recipients of adult attempts to civilize their bodies.

Children have their *own* perceptions of their bodies and the bodies of others (Roos, 2002; Ludvigsen and Sharma, 2004). When looking at children's bodily agency and resistance, James' (1993) study found that height, shape, appearance, gender and performance seem to be important to children in relation to their bodies. Rather than passively taking up positionings offered to them through cultural stereotypes, the children in her study generated their own meanings of their own and others' bodies. She points to a fluidity of meanings

around status and size, such as the way that in the latter stages of nursery, the older children are thought of and spoken of as 'big', but on entry to school become 'small' again (see also Shamgar-Handelman and Handelman, 1991).

From birth children exercise agency in relation to feeding. For instance Keenan and Stapleton's (2009) study of babies and the feeding relationship they develop with their mothers demonstrates that mothers recognize that their babies are *active* in manipulating this feeding relationship. Moreover babies were constructed by their mothers as 'clever', 'lazy' or 'difficult' (to name but a few constructions) on the basis of how the feeding relationship with their mothers was established and maintained. Similarly, Bembreck's (2009) work on children from immigrant families in Sweden examines the way these children explore and claim new identities for themselves and their families through their encounters with different foods. Far from being sculpture, such research suggests a construction of the child as *sculptor*. As Bordo (1993: 194) observes, when thinking about the work of Foucault, we should always remember that there are two kinds of 'grip'; the grip of 'systemic power on the body' but also the 'creative 'powers' of bodies to *resist* that grip'.

2.4 Conclusion

I have shown that food events are considered to be of fundamental importance because as well as providing nourishment, they offer predictability and security and an opportunity to develop relationships with others, which, in turn, supports the child's growing sense of agency. Food events are also considered to be key occasions in which children are socialized into the particular practices of cultural groups of which they are a part.

Yet the significance of food events is not always borne out in early childhood practice. Over time there has been an artificial division between education and care, mind and body, which has resulted in a lessening of importance accorded

to routines such as mealtimes owing to their association with the body. In particular, I have drawn upon the work of writers, who conceptualize the child's body as both a social construction and corporeal; one of a 'body project'. Arguably, the corollary of viewing children's bodies as in need of control is a conceptualization of the young child's body as in need of *civilizing*. This has resonance when thinking about children's own emplaced experience of their bodies as well as ideas pertaining to the social body of childhood too.

This is an especially important point to develop in relation to this study as food events seem to be structured to a greater degree when compared to other parts of the day in early childhood settings (Ben-Ari, 1997). Whilst this chapter has noted the significance of routines and rituals such as food events in early childhood settings, it is important to further elaborate on the criticisms associated with socialization theorizing and look in more detail at the ways such events are *managed*. Thus, a major theme in the findings' chapters is an examination of the processes through which the child's body is 'civilized'. Crucially, I will be exploring how young children's bodies are subject to a high degree of control in early childhood practice; notably in the regulating of time and space in relation to food. This is of paramount importance because Ben-Ari (1997: 104) argues that:

'Mealtimes predicate a gradual harnessing of the children's bodies – their limbs, capacities for coordination, and cravings, for instance – towards actions and demeanour deemed socially 'proper'.

But this review has also highlighted the symbolic importance of food events such as mealtimes and their location within a particular culture at a particular moment in time. Therefore an examination of food events in early childhood settings needs to include an account of culture and identity in its analysis, with an exploration of intersecting issues of race, gender and class. This is something I explore in relation to both the children *and* the practitioners in my own study (especially in Chapter Five). Whilst there is some research that looks at young

children's experience of food in early childhood settings and elsewhere, such as the home (see for instance Albon 2006; Grieshaber, 2004; Keenan and Stapleton, 2009), there would seem to be a significant omission in the early childhood literature in examining food in relation to the experience of *practitioners*. Given that early childhood practitioners are overwhelmingly women, and given that many feminist scholars have written extensively about women's relationships to food (see for instance Orbach, 1988; Bordo, 2003) this is important. Indeed in many early childhood settings (especially those offering full day care), early childhood practitioners are regularly expected to prepare, serve, and eat meals and snacks alongside young children as part of their work.

Therefore, there are a number of gaps in the literature that might be worthy of further exploration. There is little or no literature that looks specifically at early childhood *practitioners'* experiences of food events. Furthermore, there has been little examination of food events in early childhood settings in the UK within the context of the *wide range* of everyday practices that occur in early childhood settings. This is worthy of exploration, not least because different aspects of early childhood practice have their basis in different constructions of the child. As an example, there is tension between a conceptualization of the child's body as in need of civilizing, such as during food events, and more romantic ideas about the child, notably in the literature about play in early childhood.

Finally, nowhere in the literature has anyone set out to look explicitly at food events in terms of the *real* events of meal and snack times and the *pretend* food events enacted in children's play. Yet, as Pile and Thrift (1995: 4) observe:

'One outstanding problem with the way the structure/agency dualism operated was that it still seemed unable to interrogate 'everyday life' as simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic'

From the outset, play and playfulness were important omissions in research looking at food events in early childhood settings. Thus, I aimed to extend the notion of 'food events' (it should be noted that Douglas and Nicod [1974] discuss the real events associated with food) to the *imaginary play scenarios* enacted by young children as part of 'socio-dramatic play' and 'thematic fantasy play' (Hendy and Toon, 2001). In socio-dramatic play children engage themselves in pretend activities such as cooking a meal that closely resemble 'real' life whereas in thematic fantasy play, children extend and 'play' with the cultural narratives available to them resulting in play that bears little resemblance to 'reality' (Albon, 2010). Both socio-dramatic and thematic fantasy play are important to my study.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) maintain that researchers should look at the way children use storying and 'play-making' to develop a sense of popular cultural artifacts for themselves. Children's playful *participation* in the culture of their settings is something I wanted to explore further, but with a focus on food events especially. I aimed to make connections between writing from the early childhood canon to sociological writings about food and eating, not least because it is my contention that a focus on food events can illuminate wider understandings of early childhood practice. I also hoped that a simultaneous spotlight on play might provide interesting insights into the way children conceptualize food events as in play and in playful encounters, children generate new and creative understandings about the world (Meek, 1985; Egan, 1991; Edmiston, 2008).

Food events may be unquestioned, seemingly insignificant events in the daily life of an early childhood setting, but it is their very *taken-for-grantedness* that makes them worthy of close critical analysis. Unlike some studies (for instance Golden, 2005; Alcock, 2008), which have an interest in food events as an off-shoot of their research, I make food events, real and pretend, the *central* focus of my research. The next chapter details the methodology and methods used in my

own research; an ethnographic study examining food and eating practices in four early childhood settings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Summary

In this chapter, I discuss why a qualitative methodological approach was employed in this research and make the case for the use of ethnographic research methods. The primary modes of data collection used in the study were participant observation and the keeping of associated field-notes as well as semi-structured interviewing. The research was carried out in four early childhood settings; a nursery class (part-time) attached to a primary school (with children aged three-four years); a private nursery with full day-care (with children aged two-five years); a community nursery operating sessional care (with children aged two-five years); and finally a Montessori nursery school, which offers full day care for children aged three months to seven years (the research focuses on the children under two years of age). The rationale for choosing these settings and details of the four 'cases' are provided later in the chapter.

Throughout the chapter, I will be considering issues of reflexivity, as the self of the researcher is inextricably linked to the data collected and analysis in the ethnographic research approach adopted (Skeggs, 1994; Coffey, 1999; Angrosino, 2005; Davies, 2008; Pink, 2009). Similarly, I will be reflecting on ethical issues throughout the chapter owing to my belief that there are ethical issues to consider at all stages of a research project (Alderson, 2004).

3.1 The methodological underpinnings of the research

The previous chapter outlined the ways in which the body has been conceptualized over time and the ways in which it continues to be debated. In discussing some of the positions that might be taken in relation to this issue, I have argued for a position where the body is viewed as a social construction but also a corporeal reality, located in time and space. In this sense, I used the term

'emplacement' from Howes (2005) to give a sense of the *locatedness* of the body.

Following from this, my purpose here is to justify the methodological approach employed in this research. By this I am not simply referring to the research tools such as observations and interviews but also the theoretical *underpinning* of the research. There is a need to establish coherence between the position I am taking regarding the way children's bodies might be conceptualized and hence the food events that are the focus of the study as well as the methodological approach adopted in this study. As the literature review has highlighted, conceptualizations of the body have long been debated and will continue to be so and some of these issues are also extended to the methodological position adopted in this research.

My research is located within social constructionist thinking. This is because it is a viewpoint, or rather a broad range of viewpoints, which in its postmodern turn, advocates taking a critical stance towards taken-for-granted 'truths' (Burr, 2003). The introductory chapter highlighted that a key aim of this study is to examine what might be deemed as 'of-courseness' (Geertz, 1983) or 'common sense' understandings in relation to food events in early childhood practice. Bordo's (1998: 85) usage of Foucault's analogy of ideas as 'intellectual hand grenades' is compelling, because, as she observes, ideas need to impact on *practice* and not remain purely in the 'confines of the academy' (p. 85). This is important in relation to this study because from the outset, my aim has been to try to use theory to highlight aspects of early childhood practice that are rarely problematised and hopefully encourage, at the very least, a re-consideration of everyday practices.

A second rationale for positioning my research within social constructionist thinking is that it recognizes the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge (Pile and Thrift, 1995a; Burr, 2003). This, again, is a vital element in my own

study as food events in early childhood settings are not only *specific* to the four settings in London and the South East where the research was carried out but also a *product* of the particular time, culture and economic conditions that prevailed at the time of the research. This can be seen most starkly in setting three when a World War Two style 'street party' was organized for the children and linkage made to the Iraq conflict. It is hoped that the detailed descriptions and reflections on the data will be of use through analogy to a range of early childhood settings. Stake (2005: 460), for instance, argues that through rich description of a particular case, readers are often able to make connections to their own experiences and those of others.

Thirdly, social constructionism is a position in which knowledge is not objectively realised. Rather, it is seen as 'produced' constantly through the daily interactions of people as they go about their everyday lives. Thus, language has an elevated status in social constructionist thinking as it is a key way that ideas are shared and mediated and eventually come to be taken up as 'true' (Pile and Thrift, 1995a; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009). The idea that the *minutiae* of everyday lives are important is central to my own research, given my focus on food events. I was similarly interested in the ways that children and practitioners co-construct food events in their settings. In addition, an analysis of the ways in which practitioners and children *talked* about food and food events was a key element in my research.

Finally, social constructionist thinking is useful in that it is also a position which, in some guises (such as Foucault, 1977), emphasises power relations in the way ideas and practices are constructed (Burr, 2003). As noted in my discussion of post-structuralist writing in the previous chapter, adults may use their physical size and power alongside the 'weight' of hegemonic thinking that children as a social group should be controlled in an attempt to 'civilise' children's bodies. My data shows children and practitioners engaged in a constant process of negotiation and challenge to 'rules' associated with food events. Thus, my

research is positioned within a framework which acknowledges that power is multi-faceted rather than held universally and in all contexts by adults for instance.

In thinking about social constructionism, it could be argued that there are broadly two main positions; those that emphasise the 'micro' and those that emphasise the 'macro' (Burr, 2003). The former approaches to social constructionism tend towards discursive psychology and can be seen in the work of writers such as Gergen (2009) when he discusses the relational embeddedness of individual thought. The latter, 'macro' positioning, tends to put greater emphasis on power relations, deconstruction and discourse. Foucault is an important post-structuralist writer in this area, but in early childhood writing, we might similarly position the work of Burman (1994), Walkerdine (1986) and Cannella and Viruru (2004). As Burr (2003) advocates, I have endeavoured to adopt an approach that takes both agency *and* structure into account but have found the writings of post-structuralist writers particularly useful in analysing the food events under investigation.

However, employing social constructionist thinking in this research project is not unproblematic. As noted in the previous chapter, post-structuralist writing has a tendency to elevate 'reading' the body as a 'text' over its corporeality (Shilling, 1993; Bordo, 2003; Burr, 2003). This could be regarded as a difficulty, given that *food events* are the focus of this research. Here, I would like to employ a number of arguments to further justify my position.

Firstly, it could be argued that a textual reading of the body is but one way of perceiving it and thus, I am not privileging the position I have chosen over others. In this sense, a bio-medical approach could be regarded as another way of 'reading' the body; but one that is incompatible with a post-structuralist reading. From the outset I have not aimed to look at the *nutritional content* of the meals and snacks the children and practitioners are eating; had I done so, the biological

materiality of the body would have needed to be more sharply in focus. Similarly, had my focus been on inequalities of access to a healthy diet, I may have employed another macro perspective such as materialist accounts of food and eating (e.g. Dowler, 2002).

Secondly, in this research, my focus was on the minutiae of food *practices* themselves as I observed them and the way the participants in the study talked about them. I also reflected on what this might mean more generally for practice in early childhood settings. Thus, rather than focusing in detail on what is incorporated *into* the body, I was more interested in the arrangements made for food *events* and the ways in which such practices were constructed and maintained by the participants. In doing this, I adopted a position whereby I tried to examine the many ways these events 'spoke' to me and the participants concerned. As I engaged in the settings over time, I too *experienced* these events in an 'emplaced' way, not least as someone who shared meals with the children and practitioners.

Social constructionist thinking can be seen in my choice of a qualitative methodological approach. The reason for this is that it is a methodology that allows for an emphasis on the *meanings* people ascribe to their actions and allows for the possibility that multiple 'truths' co-exist (Creswell, 1994). Positivist approaches, by way of contrast, can be located within a modernist tradition, which believes that we can construct universal generalisations about the world and that there are 'truths', which are applicable for all time and across cultures, that are 'out there' waiting to be discovered (Dahlberg et al, 1999; Brown and Jones, 2001). Scheurich (1997) argues that uncertainty and ambiguity, features of post-modernity, are erased from such an approach. It is these uncertainties and ambiguities that interest me. Indeed one of the purposes of the study was to examine an area of practice that is often taken for granted.

In social constructionist approaches to qualitative research, the researcher is not seen to be dispassionately 'outside' of the research (Gergen, 2009). This too is an important element of my own research. In reading my account of how the research was conducted and the interpretation of the findings, the reader will gain a sense of my own authorship as an early childhood practitioner (both nursery nurse and teacher) who is relatively new to working in Higher Education; as someone who lost a lot of weight during the research; and as a feminist (to name but a few subject positionings I might attribute to myself). It is something I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, but I foreground now as a further example of the way my research was positioned in a theoretical tradition that values the *subjectivity* of the researcher and highlights the impossibility or even the desirability of a completely objective position (Skeggs, 1994; Scheurich, 1997; Brown and Jones, 2001).

Similarly, in carrying out an ethnographic research project (something I expand upon in the next section), I was engaged in a project that was characterised by *relationships*; relationships with the children, the practitioners and to a lesser extent, the parents. These relationships developed in slightly different ways over time and continue to do so. The idea that the relationships and the way they developed in each setting could be replicated easily and in their entirety is an impossible undertaking. In addition to this, positivist methods such as a structured questionnaire would not provide me with the richness of detail I was able to obtain through the interviews and observations, which were carried out over time (Robson, 1993). Furthermore, a structured questionnaire would be an inappropriate method for eliciting the perspectives of very young children who are unable to read, reinforcing what they cannot rather than what they *can* do (Alderson, 2004).

Finally, as I proposed to elicit children's views as well as those of adults, my research is positioned within a perspective which views childhood as part of the general social order, not a *preparation* for it. It views children as a particular

social group with relations with other social groups, and sees children as social actors with their own understandings and experiences of childhood (Prout and James, 1997; James, 2007) albeit that are often positioned in an unequal relationship to adults owing to perceptions of their relative vulnerability (Mayall, 2002). Such a perspective is antithetical to the positivist tradition, which has tended to emphasise children's 'otherness' and developmental immaturity (Mayall, 1996; James et al, 1998), which is especially prevalent in the field of psychology as opposed to sociological research (James, 2007). However, as with the adults in the research, I do not believe there is a universal voice that 'speaks' for all children, for all time and recognise the plurality of children's experiences and the individual ways in which they experience their worlds (Greene and Hill, 2005).

So far, I have outlined the theoretical position that underpins my research. I will now describe how I conducted the research, beginning with a discussion of ethnography.

3.2 Ethnography

I conducted a piece of ethnographic research, as I wished to gain a detailed insight into food and drink practices, and the meanings attributed to them, in four early childhood settings. Buchbinder et al (2006) believe that ethnography is an under-used approach to research in early childhood research, stating:

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

Ethnography can be described as 'the study of people as they go about their everyday lives' (Buchbinder et al, 2006: 47). Initially, ethnographic research was carried out by anthropologists and sociologists, but it is increasingly being used in fields of practice beyond this, for instance in education. Rather than aiming to test hypotheses or establish causality between variables, ethnographers look to 'be "taught" the ways, language and expectations of the social group they seek to study' and individuals' understandings of their social world (Edmond, 2005: 124). Whilst ethnography is sometimes taken to mean almost any qualitative research (Pole and Morrison, 2003) owing to its diversity of uses (Jenks, 2000), the position adopted here is one that views it as involving a high level of immersion within the field of study – that is, the four early childhood settings – enabling the researcher to experience the 'sensory rhythms and material practices' (Pink, 2009: 66) of the environment in which the research is carried out.

Aubrey et al (2000) argue that ethnographic research methods are especially appropriate for *early childhood* research as they are carried out in a naturalistic setting as opposed to experimental conditions (see also Hatch, 1995; and Dunn, 2005). In this study, children, practitioners and parents were observed and interviewed in the early years' setting they attended or worked in, and occasionally in their homes on home visits (as in setting one). A key rationale for this in early childhood research is that a naturalistic environment is likely to show children in a more positive light than experimental situations where they are tested, such as used in the positivist tradition. This also has ethical implications for children as a *group* as research that highlights what children cannot do rather than what they can do may perpetuate a negative perception of children as incapable and incompetent in some way (Alderson, 2000; 2004). Like Lahman (2008: 285), I believe it is possible to hold the notion of children as '*competent yet vulnerable*' simultaneously in research – a position that recognises children's capabilities *and* their vulnerabilities. It is also a perspective that can be applied to all participants as anyone might be considered vulnerable to some degree in research, adults and children alike (Murphy and Dingwall, 2007).

Ethnographic research has also been used in a wide range of studies in early childhood, including studies that view children as social actors and 'culture-makers'; research that focuses on care routines; and studies that explore the way that child care settings civilize children's bodies in keeping with the social, moral and political values of the society they are part of (Buchbinder et al, 2006). Some of this research, such as Ben Ari's (1997) study, which looks at the place of body practices and the management of emotions in the everyday practices of a Japanese day care centre, were highlighted in Chapter Two. A key feature of ethnography is its focus on a wide range of everyday social behaviours within a particular setting - in all their complexity (Pole and Morrison, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This was another key factor in my adoption of an ethnographic approach to my research because an important characteristic of my own project was to look at food events in the context of the general activities that were typically carried out in the four settings. However, it should be noted that *what* is seen and *how* it is seen is always directed and filtered by the ethnographic 'gaze' of the researcher (Pink, 2009) – a point I develop later.

Crucially, ethnography involves the intensive and continuous study of a small sample over a period of time, rather than a snapshot, one-off picture of the sample, in order to gain detailed insights into a particular case, such as a nursery (Corsaro, 1996; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000). Ethnographic research provides researchers with opportunities to gain an intimate understanding of a setting owing to the possibility of developing close relationships with children (and adults) over time. Edmond (2005) goes as far as to say that this can be empowering for children. This is because, if carried out with sensitivity, children are able to manage the participation of the researcher. Thus, rather than their presence being *imposed* on the children, as in observing children at a distance, participant observation allows for the researcher's engagement with the children to be *negotiated* (Edmond, 2005). This is something I discuss in relation to the process of developing relationships later in this chapter.

Another advantage of employing an ethnographic approach, involving a long period of fieldwork, is the way that the emotional dimension of the daily work of an early childhood setting is more readily explored than in a superficial, one-off observation (Buchbinder et al, 2006). For Dunn (2005), it is important to carry out early childhood research in situations that are of emotional significance to young children and it has been argued that food and eating is an area that is imbued with emotion (Winnicott, 1964; Falk, 1991).

Finally, a key factor in employing an ethnographic approach was that, from the outset, I wanted to look again at an area of practice that happens in every early childhood setting, but is sometimes not reflected upon critically (Albon, 2007); namely, food and drink provisioning. As Gallagher and Fusco (2006: 302) argue:

‘...the real power of ethnographic study, then, lies in its ability to observe and trouble such everyday practices, the ordinary and habitual moments in given cultures.’

Later in this chapter, I discuss some criticisms of ethnographic approaches to research, not least the critique that ‘entering the field’ is sometimes positioned as akin to being a colonialist explorer (Alldred, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Ahmed, 2000; Marcus, 2007; Horschelmann and Stenning, 2008). But before this, I aim to describe in some detail the four settings where the research was carried out.

3.3 The four early childhood settings

In this section, I aim to provide some detail of each of the four ‘cases’ in the study as this will help to contextualise the data. Table 1 summarises the key information about the four settings in the study. I then specify how and why the settings were chosen and then look at each setting in greater detail.

Table 1: Summary table of the four settings in this study

	Setting 1	Setting 2	Setting 3	Setting 4
Type of setting	Nursery class attached to a primary school. Open 8.50am-11.30am	Private nursery in church hall. Open 8.00am-6.00pm. Open in school holidays	Community nursery in shared community space. Open mornings and afternoons (PT places only)	Montessori private nursery. Open 8.00am-6.00pm. Open in school holidays
Location and context	West London estate Children from local social housing and most are eligible for free milk i.e. families are in receipt of income support	West London – affluent area. The nursery is fee paying so families have a certain level of income (many are in the medical profession).	South West London suburb. Small fee charged. Affluent area.	Central London Borough. The nursery borders a very affluent area but also borders a poor area of predominantly social housing. Highest fees in this study - so parents have high incomes (many are journalists).
Ethnicity and languages spoken by children and their families (see note 1)	Ethnically and linguistically diverse. Most of the children are Somali (15 of 39). 5 children are white and British and speak English as their first language (the only children in the nursery who do so). The other children come from primarily South Asian backgrounds.	Ethnically diverse. Nearly half the children are from South Asian backgrounds and there are 4 children from the Middle East. Most children speak English as their first language.	Primarily children and families of white British backgrounds. There are 2 Black British children and 5 children from South Korea, who are acquiring English as an additional language. Two children are from South Asian backgrounds (English as 1 st language).	Children and families are <i>mostly</i> white and British or white European. The majority of families speak English as their first language, but a small minority speak French, Arabic and Spanish too.
Age range of children (see note 1)	3-4 years	2-5 years	2-5 years	6 months-7 years (NB I observed in the baby and 2 toddler rooms but there are also 2 other rooms)
Number of children in setting	39 (all part time)	Varies per day/ session but approx 35 on roll	Maximum of 45 per session 90 on roll	12 children maximum in each room

				observed
Number of practitioners and roles (see note 1)	1 teacher 2 nursery nurses 1 teaching assistant (for languages support)	Practitioners work shifts but at one time - usually 1 manager 1 deputy manager 5 nursery nurses	1 manager 1 deputy manager 8 nursery nurses	Per room - 2 nursery nurses (more in baby room) 1 room leader who is Montessori trained (except in baby room)
Ethnicity of practitioners (see note 1)	1 nursery nurse has a Black Caribbean background. The others are white British.	Mostly white British practitioners, two are Irish. One practitioner is Indian. NB many students of South Asian background.	All practitioners are white and British	The majority of the practitioners are Bangladeshi (NB English is not their first language).
Number of sessions/days in the setting (see hours of opening in 'type of setting' row)	20 sessions from Sept 2006-March 2007	15 days from April 2007-January 2008 (arrived for breakfast - left after tea)	14 sessions from April 2008-Dec 2008	13 days from April 2009-August 2009 (arrived for breakfast - left after tea)
Types of real food event observed NB pretend play food events observed on every day (See note 2 on 'food event')	Snack times (3 groups per session), 3 birthday parties, Christmas party, Easter egg hunt and a concert for parents (with special food event afterwards)	Breakfast, morning snack time, lunch, tea, a picnic, 2 birthday parties, Christmas party and less formal snack time (on a visit to farm)	Snack times but NB in this setting – self service through a large part of the session (one and a half hours), Christmas party and 3 birthdays	Breakfast, snack time, lunch, snack after lunch, tea. 1 birthday party, 1 picnic
Number of real (not pretend play) food events observed in total	60 everyday food events 6 special occasion	60 everyday food events 5 special occasion	14 everyday food events (lower in number owing to above point) 4 special occasion	65 everyday food events 2 special occasion

Note 1 Appendices F and G provide greater detail of the individual children and practitioners observed and interviewed (using pseudonyms)

Note 2 'Food event' is a term developed by Douglas and Nicod (1974) and refers to occasions when food is eaten and is therefore broader in meaning than 'meal' – see Chapter 1 for discussion. At the end of the literature review, I outlined how I have broadened this definition to include *pretend* food events i.e. children's play in the area of food and eating. Later in this chapter I discuss why it is difficult to be precise about the number of pretend play food events observed and their length of duration. I observed such play in every session attended in every

setting, although not when observing in the baby room of setting 4 as this kind of symbolic play is unusual in this age group.

I spent between 13 and 20 days or sessions in each setting (see Table 1), arriving before the beginning of the session/day and leaving after the end of the session/day. In the case of settings two and four, which operate full day care, I usually arrived during breakfast and left after tea time.

My aim, in choosing the four early childhood settings, was to explore a range of different practices in relation to food events in different contexts and across the early childhood age range. The purpose was *not* to carry out a comparative study between the four settings. Nevertheless, in juxtaposing data from the four settings in the presentation of the findings in Chapters Four, Five and Six inevitably comparisons may sometimes be drawn.

The settings were drawn from three local authorities; one in central London, two in West London, and one in a South West London suburb. The settings differed in terms of the ethnicity, language and class of the communities they serve, as well as in the diversity of the practitioners working within them. It should also be noted that I have never worked directly with any of the practitioners in the study prior to its commencement. Differences between the settings can also be seen in relation to the food events it was possible to study as two settings offered full day care, including breakfast, lunch and tea and one setting offered a self-service approach to snack time, unlike the other three settings. This was a key factor in my choice of settings. The settings were also chosen on the basis that they had not received a poor OFSTED report and were generally considered to have good practice as well as being interested in exploring their work in this area. My knowledge of this came through my contacts in the field, such as early years' advisors.

Knowledge that the practice in the four settings was generally regarded as good was particularly important from the outset in this study owing to my use of

ethnographic research methods. Fielding (2008) notes that ethnography can involve an element of deception as the researcher may keep information back from the participants (see also Murphy and Dingwall, 2007). This is likely to be exacerbated if the researcher's values are *completely* different from those of the participants and setting (Mukherji and Albon, 2010). Stacey (1988), for instance, argues that the level of immersion and intensity that characterises ethnographic research may well involve *greater* exploitation than positivist research methods – a point I take issue with as it negates the agency of research participants (see also Skeggs, 1994).

Whilst I shared my observational notes, interview transcripts and reflections on these with participants, as is often regarded as good practice, I recognise that some of the practitioners lacked time and probably inclination to read these through and may have interpreted the data differently to me (Gordon, 2003). In positioning my research within a social constructionist framework I recognise that the resulting text is one of many 'truths' that may have been arrived at as opposed to being 'definitive and exclusive of others' (Francis, 2003: 65). The issue of power relations in research is a point I take up at various points throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Setting one: Nursery class attached to a primary school (sessional)

(Fieldwork carried out between Sept. 2006-March 2007)

The first setting was a nursery class attached to a primary school. It operates on a part time basis, for 39 children aged between three and four years. There are three members of staff that work there every day and a teaching assistant works in the nursery occasionally to support language development. The team works part-time as the nursery is only open in the mornings, 8.50-11.30. The Reception aged children are in the main building attached, but I only observed them occasionally at lunch-times. The nursery class has a good sized working kitchen attached.

The nursery class and primary school are situated in the middle of an estate of social housing in a West London borough. None of the children live in a house and most live in high rise flats. All of the children in the nursery live on the estate – no-one travels from elsewhere. Many of the children are eligible for free school meals when they enter school (37 of the 39 nursery children in this study). The children are expected to wear school uniform, but many of the nursery children confine this to the school sweatshirt.

The school intake reflects the local, ethnically diverse community. Somali families are the predominant group that attends the nursery but a range of other black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are represented. This diversity is reflected in the languages spoken in the nursery, with Somali being the main language. The children, who speak English as an additional language, are at various stages of acquisition, but as many of them have siblings at school and all have a television at home (according to staff, who have home-visited them all), the children do seem able to speak *some* English. Most of the nursery children were born in the UK, although a high proportion of them come from families that have lived in the UK for less than ten years. None of the staff speak any languages other than English, including the language support assistant.

The nursery team consists of a teacher, two nursery nurses and one language support assistant a few days a week. This is the teacher's first year in a nursery class and she is new to the school this year. She is white, British, monolingual in English, and in her later 40s. She has grown up children, is happy to work part-time, and occasionally does some part time afternoon supply work in the school. One of the nursery nurses is a trained teacher, but does not want the responsibility of being the teacher in the nursery. She, too, is white, British, and monolingual in English, and in her 40s. She also has grown up children and does some part time supply work in the main school on occasions. The other nursery nurse completed the NNEB training and works in a crèche in the afternoons at the local community centre. Her children are of primary school age

and attend the school she works in. She is black, from Grenada, and is monolingual in English. She too is in her 40s. The language support assistant has had no professional training towards a qualification, but has attended relevant short courses. She is in her early 20s, is white, British, and monolingual in English. She works across Key Stage One (children aged five-seven years) and the Foundation Stage (nursery and reception classes).

The nursery class offers the children a snack mid-way through the morning at a set time. The children go in one of three groups, in turn, to have their drink and snack. The school is part of the free fruit scheme and the children either bring a drink from home or have milk provided by the nursery, although only a few take up this offer despite their eligibility for free milk.

Setting two: Private nursery (full day care)

(Fieldwork carried out between April 2007-Jan. 2008)

The second early childhood setting that provided data for this study was a private nursery situated in the same West London borough as the previous setting. The nursery is not one of a chain i.e. it is not part of a large scale childcare corporation and operates from a church hall that is used for other functions in the evenings and weekends. Thus, all the equipment has to be packed away and set up on a daily basis. The children are aged between two and five years and can attend the nursery on a full or part-time basis. There are 35 children on the roll. The nursery is open between 8.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. and many of the parents are in full-time employment. Thus, many of the children have breakfast, lunch and tea every day, as well as a snack mid-morning. The youngest children in the nursery have a sleep in the middle of the day. The church hall is a huge room that has a kitchen and hatch half way along it. The children can see into the kitchen and will often spontaneously look in and talk to the cook as she prepares lunch. Meals are made on the premises by a cook and tea is made by practitioners on a rota basis.

As the nursery is fee paying, the children come from families that are far more affluent in comparison to the first setting. At least one parent in a family is in paid employment and many of the parents, particularly those of South Asian origin, are doctors, dentists and pharmacists, working in the local teaching hospital. The nursery reflects the ethnically diverse local community. The children come from primarily South Asian, White British or Arabic backgrounds and were born in the UK. One or two of the children speak no English – one speaking Urdu and the other speaking Russian, but the others speak English fluently.

The nursery manager (and owner) is a white, Irish woman in her 50s, who holds an NNEB qualification, but is also studying for a BA in Early Childhood Studies. Her sister works in the nursery but holds no formal childcare qualification and used to be employed in the kitchen. The deputy manager is a white, British woman in her early 30s and holds a level three qualification. Her son attends the nursery too. There are other members of staff, who act as 'key persons' to small groups of children. One of the practitioners is a white, British male in his teens who has an NVQ2¹ qualification. There are two other white, British female practitioners, one is in her early twenties and the other is in her forties. There are a number of NVQ2 and three students at any time in the nursery, which is situated near to a local Further Education college that offers childcare courses. These students are often of South Asian origin.

Setting 3: Community nursery (sessional care)

(Fieldwork carried out between April 2008-Dec. 2008)

The third nursery setting is situated in a reasonably affluent South West London suburb. There are 90 children aged between two and five years on roll and the oldest children attend in the mornings, between 9.30 and 12.00, with the youngest children attending between 12.45 and 3.15 in the afternoon. At any one time, the highest number of children that attend is 45 but this is dependent

¹ NVQ refers to National Vocational Qualification. In early childhood, practitioners are typically qualified as NVQ2 or NVQ3 and at the time of writing there is a commitment to raise this to NVQ3 as well as to ensure there is a graduate in each setting such as someone with Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)

on the number of two year old children in the session (as ratios are higher with this age group). No children stay for lunch. Like the second setting, this nursery operates in a shared space, but in this instance it is within a community centre, which also houses various youth groups and social events for different community groups. Thus, like setting two, equipment needs to be set up and packed away each day. There is a kitchen in the building but it is not accessible or even on view to the children. The nursery children have a snack at some point during the session, but unlike the other settings in the study, the children choose when they will have this. The nursery operates a 'snack café', which involves a practitioner being based at the snack table for one and a half hours every session, with the children choosing when to come and have something to eat and drink.

The children that attend the setting are predominantly white and were born in the UK; there are very few children from other BME groups. There are two children from Black British backgrounds (parents born in Jamaica) and five children from South Korea. The predominant non white ethnic group in the area is South Korean, so the nursery reflects the local ethnic population. All but the South Korean children speak English as their first language. The relatively monocultural and monolingual nature of the nursery makes this setting very different to the previous two but is reflective of the locality within which it is situated.

Parents pay a small fee for their children's nursery place and have a strong voice on the parents' committee. The parents' committee is very active in all aspects of nursery life, including fund-raising and social events – this distinguishes the nursery from the others in the research. Most of the families have a parent in paid employment. A number of the fathers are employed in trades such as building and plumbing as well as clerical jobs. The nursery tends to have far more contact with mothers, many of whom do not work and have other young children.

There are usually seven members of staff in the setting at any one time, but there are nine in total (including a manager and deputy). All of the staff live locally, are white, female and in their 40s, apart from one woman in her 50s. Each of these women have children who are at various stages of their school careers, but mostly attending local primary schools – schools the nursery children will soon attend. The highest qualification held is an NVQ3, but most of the practitioners hold an NVQ2 qualification. The manager has recently taken over the role and over the time I conducted the research, three different practitioners took on the role of deputy manager. All of the staff wear identical nursery sweatshirts and there is a strong sense of shared identity. An example of this can also be seen in the shared singing of a song at home time, which associates the name of the nursery with being a happy family.

Setting 4: Montessori nursery (full day care)

(Fieldwork carried out between April 2009-Aug. 2009)

The final setting is located in a central London borough. It is a Montessori pre-school, which takes children from 3 months and is one of two Montessori settings that are owned by a woman who lives elsewhere in Europe. There is a baby room, two toddler rooms, a two-three year olds' room and a pre-school (for three-five year old children). Finally, there is a primary class, which has just opened for children aged between five and seven years. The pre-school is housed in the crypt of an old church, which has been converted for the purpose (and is not in shared use) and is surprisingly airy and bright, given the lack of natural light in each room. There is a kitchen and all meals are prepared and cooked on the premises. The primary class is located upstairs, next to the main church entrance. There is a large outdoor space for the use of the setting alone. My focus in this setting was on the baby and toddler rooms, each of which had no more than 12 children (usually less) in the room at any one time. The reason for this was my wish to observe practice with the very youngest children in the early childhood age range. Whilst older children in the setting use a space in front of

the kitchen at mealtimes (theirs is a larger room), the toddlers and babies eat in their own rooms - each of these rooms has its own small kitchen space.

There are approximately 90 children in total in this setting and they come from predominantly white British backgrounds and speak English, although there are a few children from white European, Arabic or North American backgrounds. Most of the children speak English as their first language. The children's parents are affluent and the fees for the nursery would be out of reach for many *local* families. This is because the pre-school is located in an area of high deprivation in terms of housing, unemployment and such like. The most predominant ethnic group locally is Bangladeshi, but there is only one Bangladeshi child with a nursery place – her mother works in the baby room. Most of the children who attend the nursery live in an affluent part of the borough, which borders this area.

Whilst the children and families do not reflect the ethnicity of the local population, the staffing is reflective of its diversity. Most of the staff (14) are women from Bangladeshi backgrounds, who were not born in the UK. There are three Black African, female members of staff and three white female practitioners. The two kitchen staff are both white and British and live locally. The manager of the setting is white and Irish. There is one male on the team and he is white, British and works in the baby room. There are many students in the setting, who are either undertaking NVQ training or Montessori training. In terms of the training of the practitioners, only one of the Bangladeshi women has a Montessori training; they have either NVQ level 2 or 3 qualifications. The manager, deputy manager and room leaders (apart from the baby room) have Montessori training, unlike the other practitioners in the rooms, who are mostly qualified to NVQ level 2. Thus, there seems to be a higher status afforded to those practitioners that have undergone Montessori training, although all practitioners seem aware of the key elements of the philosophy.

The toddlers have breakfast, snack, lunch (main course before a sleep), pudding/snack (after sleep), and then tea during the day. A similar routine operates in the baby room, although this is more flexible owing to the feeding and sleeping patterns of the babies. The youngest child at the time of the research was 6 months old.

3.4 Ethical considerations

As with all studies involving human subjects, it was important to consider the ethical implications of my research from the planning stage through to writing up. As Alderson (2004) notes, ethical research is not merely a case of 'ticking boxes' in order to get initial permissions, ethical considerations should 'weave into all parts of the research fabric and shape the methods and findings' (p. 110). I referred to the 2004 BERA ethical guidance (www.bera.ac.uk); the 1998 Data Protection Act (www.opsi.gov.uk); the 2005 and later, 2010 Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Ethics Framework (<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk>); as well as London Metropolitan University's own guidance on ethics in carrying out this study. In this brief section, I highlight a few key issues that are not addressed elsewhere in the chapter, but it should be noted that I refer to ethical considerations *throughout* the remainder of this chapter. Therefore, later on I consider ethics in relation to the way relationships were developed and maintained in the field; the issue of informed consent; the methods I adopted in this research; data analysis and writing up as well as ethical issues associated with 'leaving the field'.

Consent was sought from managers, practitioners and children as can be seen in the following section and I was honest and open about the purpose of the research and its application from the start. The names of the four settings and the practitioners, parents and children have been anonymised but I have elected to assign pseudonyms to the participants because to assign the title 'TC' as in the target child approach to observation (Sylva et al, 1980) seemed to eradicate

any characterisation from the writing. In brackets after the pseudonyms used, the reader will find a letter and number, such as (C1) or (P2). 'C' refers to a child and 'P' to a practitioner and the numbers correspond with those in Appendix F (details of practitioners) and Appendix G (details of children). This, I hope, does not intrude too much on the text, but also allows the reader to gain a sense of the age, gender and ethnicity of the participants and in the case of the practitioners, their professional qualifications. Occasionally I do include such detail within the text, when I think it advances a point being made.

Interwoven into the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how ethical considerations in relation to research with the children were paramount in my thinking. Here, it is important to stress that I acted at all times in children's 'best interests' (article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – also adopted in the BERA 2004 ethical guidance).

Eliciting children's perspectives was another important element of this research and links to the notion of children's *participation* enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 12) and also adopted in the BERA 2004 ethical guidance (bera.ac.uk). Underpinning this is a belief that children are experts on their own lives and are able to express an opinion on matters that affect them (Taylor, 2000). In addition, it is a perspective that recognises that children's experiences of their childhoods are various, not least owing to differences in race, gender and class (Prout and James, 1997; Greene and Hill, 2005). My choice of methods, discussed in detail later, aimed to elicit the children's perspectives, therefore I used participant observation which involved playing alongside children and talking to them about food events because these strategies were likely to be familiar and consequently less distressing to them (something I elaborate further later in this chapter). Following Woodhead and Faulkner (2008: 35) I tried to maintain the principle that 'respect for children's status as social actors does not diminish adult responsibilities.' This links to the

notion of the child as *competent* but also *vulnerable* in research (Lahman, 2008: 285) discussed earlier.

In storing the data, I used pseudonyms for each setting as well as for the children and practitioners. Had my memory stick or lap top been stolen or lost, no setting or individual could have been identified. My notes that helped identify individuals were kept separately in a locked cabinet at home and were not available to others. As required by the 1998 Data Protection Act, I ensured no-one was identifiable in writing up the research and I did not ask for or keep sensitive information such as dates of birth. Research participants were told that the data collected would only be used for the purposes of this research project and that they could withdraw from the research at any time as is consistent with ethical research guidelines (BERA, 2004; ESRC, 2010).

3.5 Developing and maintaining relationships 'in the field'

Here, my aim is to stress the centrality of developing and maintaining relationships in ethnographic research (Coffey, 1999), particularly as this is a fundamental aspect of early childhood practice more generally (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003; Elfer et al, 2003). In writing this I have adopted a chronological approach. This is important as when examining my fieldnotes, what becomes apparent is the gradual development of relationships with practitioners, parents and children in each setting. My fieldnotes also reflect the way that this process *differed* in each setting as each setting has different ways of working and the individuals within that setting inevitably differ from one another.

3.5.1 Gaining access

In gaining access to the four settings where the research was conducted, it was important to negotiate access with a range of 'gatekeepers' or people who sanction whether the research should go ahead or not and agree to the form it will take (Greig et al, 2007). In early childhood research, these 'gatekeepers' are

usually headteachers/managers and practitioners and crucially, parents. In this section, I consider how *initial* access was gained and examine the issue of 'informed consent'. It should be noted that I provide a discussion of how the consent of the children was gained later, not because it is of lesser importance, but because *prior* consent, given weeks in advance of the study, is likely to be meaningless or impossible to obtain from many young children and babies (Mukherji and Albon, 2010). However, it is nonetheless important and as I argue later, is constantly negotiated on a *moment-by-moment* basis (Langston et al, 2004).

Access to each of the four early childhood settings was gained in slightly different ways. Initially, each setting was contacted by telephone and a meeting arranged with the manager or headteacher to discuss my proposed research. With settings three and four, initial contact was made via another person, who had an advisory role with the setting to see if they would be interested. I then followed this up with a telephone call. In settings one and two, although I had never worked with the practitioners, I had worked in the same local authority and was known to some of them – at least by repute.

Each manager or headteacher had a slightly different approach to how they wanted me to gain permissions from practitioners and parents and it was important to be advised of this owing to their greater knowledge – particularly of the families they work with. The managers of settings two, three and four introduced the idea of the research to the practitioners in a team meeting, using a letter I sent to each practitioner as a guide (see Appendix B). The teams were then able to discuss whether they wanted to become involved in the research collectively or not and I was later informed of their decision. Once I began the research, I came into face to face contact with all the practitioners and many parents, who were able to ask me about the research whenever they chose and some did this.

Once permissions had been granted from the practitioners, I then sought permission from the parents, whose children attended the settings. In settings two, three and four, I sent written information about myself and the project I was hoping to carry out via the usual systems the settings had in place for communicating with parents. An example of such a letter can be seen as Appendix A. I am indebted to the practitioners in each setting as they helped with keeping permissions slips for me since I was not able to be on the premises every day and inevitably, slips were returned sporadically.

In setting one, I had a meeting over the summer holiday with the early years' team and they added information about my research to their termly newsletter that was taken on home visit and discussed. I then made personal contact with parents individually and in small groups as their children started nursery or on home visit (it was the beginning of the academic year). I discussed the research, what involvement would entail, and assured them of anonymity and confidentiality as well as their right to withdraw. The practitioners in setting one felt this more personal approach was more ethical as it would have greater meaning for the parents owing to their confidence in reading English. In addition, in their experience, families using the school seemed to give more weight to face-to-face interactions as opposed to written communications, which they tended to sign unwittingly.

Standing (1998) observes that when carrying out research with marginalised groups (in her study – lone mothers), there are occasions when the more 'sociological acceptable' (p. 188) methods of gaining access are less ethical as they reinforce power relations between the researcher and the researched owing to a possible mistrust of authority or in the style of language in which letters of access are often written. Whilst meeting practitioners and parents personally prior to the research helped to develop a rapport between us, like Standing (1998), I recognize that I had developed the research agenda and that power relations can never be regarded as completely equal between researchers and

participants throughout the research process (see also Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). In sharing my prior experience and qualifications as a practitioner as well as my present employment as a lecturer in early childhood studies, for instance, this may have been interpreted simultaneously as reassuring in terms of my presence with the children, but also one that reinforced my authority.

As can be seen in Appendices A and B, all participants were informed about who I was in terms of where I work and my qualifications. I also informed them of my recent Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check as the research involved spending long periods of time in the settings, in direct contact with the children. As noted previously, access was gained in slightly different ways and relationships developed differently with each setting, as I will show. Thus, whilst the principle of informed consent remained paramount in the research as would be expected (Robson, 1993; BERA, 2004; ESRC, 2010), it seemed more ethical for this to manifest itself in ways appropriate to the settings and the individuals within them rather than in a *uniform* way. To do otherwise would seem to go against the principle of respecting the idiosyncrasies of all involved in the research and the importance I placed on developing and maintaining relationships (Coffey, 1999). This also seems to reflect the 'messy' and more complex nature of ethical issues which emerge in qualitative research (Grieg et al, 2007).

3.5.2 Developing a relationship with each setting and adopting a role

A key distinction between ethnographic research and other forms of qualitative research, as noted previously, is the level of *immersion* in the field. The quality of data in ethnographic research is linked closely to those relationships developed with participants in the field (Coffey, 1999). However, the development and maintenance of these relationships was not always easy and required work. Fielding (2008: 271) uses the phrase 'front management' to describe this process whereas Coffey (1999: 23) refers to this as the 'negotiation or crafting of ethnographic selfhood in the process of fieldwork'. This section

aims to document this process once initial access to the settings had been granted.

In order to develop detailed insights in research, it is important to gain trust and establish rapport with participants (Fontana and Frey, 2000). However, this should not be confused with the notion of 'entering the field' as used in traditional ethnographic approaches, where the researcher views the subject(s) under study as exotic or 'other' in some way. Alldred (1998: 151) is critical of ethnographic approaches in childhood research, such as Corsaro's (1996) work, which talk of 'entering the child's world' as they imply that children and adults occupy different social spheres, with the child constructed as 'other' to the dominant adult-centred culture. For Alldred (1998: 152), such research ignores cultural meanings assigned to 'children' and 'childhood', and ignores the unequal power relationships that exist between adults and children and between researcher and research subject/participant.

Similarly, Coffey (1999) points to the way that ethnographers have had a tendency to construct the 'field' of their study as something alien to them, positioning themselves as a stranger or tourist (see also Ahmed, 2000; Marcus, 2007; Horschelmann and Stenning, 2008). She says, 'it suggests a distant and remote site, which the ethnographer must learn about and endure' (Coffey, 1999: 19). In doing this, the ethnographer is expected to become increasingly familiar with the values of this culture through remaining coolly distant in order to achieve 'professional' objectivity (Angrosino, 2005). This treatment of the setting and the participants within it as 'exotic' or 'other' in some way has been likened to the way colonialist powers viewed the societies and cultures of the groups they colonised (Viruru, 2001; Marcus, 2007). Traditionally, such ethnographic approaches have had a tendency to render invisible the stance of the researcher in the construction of the text, assuming their position as one of 'neutrality' (Angrosino, 2005). Indeed this has been viewed within the positivist research tradition as essential in attaining respectability (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1997).

But this view has come in for criticism. Fine et al (2000), for instance, argue that:

‘There has long been a tendency to view the self of the social science observer as a potential contaminant, something to be separated out, neutralised, minimised, standardised and controlled.’
(pg. 108)

Thus, recent writing about ethnography emphasises making visible the *person* of the researcher (Alldred, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Angrosino, 2005; Skeggs, 1994; 2007). Sometimes this is known as ‘situating oneself’ (Letherby, 2003: 143). As stated earlier, ethnographic study, from this perspective, does not attempt to iron out the person of the researcher from the research as the researcher does not aim to remain objective and distant from the participants, settings and data. So reflexivity relates as much to the impact of the research on the researcher as the researcher on the research context, which can be seen in Lincoln and Guba’s (2000: 183) assertion that reflexivity is:

‘A conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself.’

What follows is some detail about the process of developing and maintaining relationships and my feelings about this within this research project. I recognise that I am choosing to tell some stories and leave out others (Letherby, 2003) and have confined myself to discussing those that are either indicative of many situations noted down or those that seemed to have had most impact on the direction of the research.

Inevitably, each setting had a different ethos and different approaches were needed with each in order to develop positive relationships. I was able to offer an ‘extra pair of hands’ in each of the settings, which, in part, helped with gaining access. As I am a qualified early childhood practitioner (NNEB and PGCE) with

more than twenty years experience, being part of the 'life' of an early childhood setting is not 'other' to me. In this sense, I had a 'membership-oriented identity' (Angrosino, 2005) as a practitioner in the settings and it would have been very difficult to assume a different role to one I almost 'naturally' move into when I am in an early years' setting. This was important in developing relationships with the children as well as the adults as they are likely to be wise to people acting in inauthentic ways (Edmond, 2005).

Whilst there was commonality between me and the practitioners in terms of being early childhood *professionals*, I recognise that given the diversity of children and practitioners in the study in terms of e.g. gender, age, body size, health status; race and class, there were inevitable differences between us that impacted on the research, albeit in different ways at different times (Skeggs, 1994; Osgood, 2010). In setting four, for instance, I was markedly 'other' to the practitioners, who were primarily Bangladeshi women (I am white and British); considerably younger than me (I am in my mid 40s); many had their own children (I am not a parent); and most of them lived in social housing (I own a flat with my partner in a relatively affluent London suburb). Although I shared an ethnic background with the majority of *families* in this setting, differentials in class were marked as they were far more affluent in comparison to me. Later, I explore the impact of my changing body size on the research as this too has been interesting to reflect upon in relation to my changing relationships with children and practitioners.

The idea that I might be 'entering the field' like some colonialist explorer is one that seems alien to me, especially as I believe that both children and adults move between a *range* of social worlds, many of which they *share*, and they actively construct understandings of these (Graue and Walsh, 1995; Corsaro, 1997; James et al, 1998). In the first of the four settings visited, for instance, I started going to the nursery at the same time as many of the children – we were all 'new' to the experience. As James et al (1998) point out, it is important to present the *similarities* of experience between children and adults as well as the differences

and recognise children's *many* experiences of childhood. For Edmond (2005: 136), this means ensuring that researchers do not 'dislocate children from all other aspects of social life'.

This said, following Alldred (1998), it is important to acknowledge differences in power. Whilst 'new' to the setting, unlike the children, I have a great deal of experience to draw upon about how nurseries operate; I am physically larger than the children; and I share a language about 'early childhood' with the staff. Therefore I was in a more powerful position than the children. Moreover, there was an additional power dimension of being considered a practitioner in the settings. But in recognising the powerful position adults hold as researchers, it is important not to downplay the *agency* of the children in the research.

Children were active in constructing a range of 'identities' for me within the research, especially as they got to know me. In setting four, for instance, I became known as the person who was happy to lift logs and look for minibeasts; indeed a 19 month old child, Toni (C58), ran over to me every time I was in the garden, shouting 'bee' because he knew I would be happy to find minibeasts with him ('bees' to him meant *all* minibeasts). In setting one, Luke (C16) consistently called me 'the lady without this bit' (pointing to his forehead, which on me is covered by a thick fringe). In the first three settings, after a time all the children seemed to know that I was keen to play and observe in the home corner and would seek me out to join them. Children, like adults, construct their *own* understandings of research and researchers (Greene and Hill, 2005; Connolly, 2008).

It is important to recognise that the nature of the ethnographer's position in relation to an ever-changing setting is a *dynamic* one (Angrosino and Perez, 2000). Reinharz (1997) refers to this as the researcher's 'situationally-created self'. As the research was carried out over time, I saw staff and children come and go; I saw changes to organisational systems in the settings; and I saw the

themes of the children's play ebb and flow. These are just a few examples of the changes I observed in the settings over time.

I, too, changed during the research. As noted earlier, this has also been interesting to reflect on post data collection because during my time in setting three and the beginning of setting four, I lost nearly four stone in body weight. Physical size is of fundamental importance in early childhood work as it is a clear and visible indicator of the power differences between adults and children and constantly confronts adults as much of the furniture and equipment is small, being designed with very young children in mind. In this study, becoming physically smaller impacted on the study in a range of ways. In setting three, the home corner was in a very inaccessible space and despite children inviting me to play there, I could not move easily through the door or sit easily on the particularly small chairs. After losing weight, this became possible. In addition, losing weight impacted upon my relationships with the practitioners. My fieldnotes state:

'I seem to have got a lot of kudos in the group as being able to stick to a diet and lose weight. It seems to reinforce a view of me as someone different, with a will of steel and the team seem banded together in both jealousy and a camaraderie of 'naughty eating'. An example of this today was that Sadie (P16) bought round some mince pies mid morning and I refused one. By the end of the morning, there was one left so clearly everyone else in the team had had theirs and I was the only one to refuse. When Fay (P15) asked who had not eaten their mince pies, I had to own up and it felt like I had rejected a very kind offer – after all, mince pies are linked with the Christmas festivities and conviviality. It feels like I am always rejecting their kind offers of food.' (Setting 3: 21.11.08)

Weight was a constant topic of discussion amongst the practitioners and lunch times were a time when different practitioners would bring in cakes and biscuits to share with the team (and in the three other settings too). Food seemed to

serve as a means through which the team bonded together. As I was working hard to lose weight, resisting the temptation to snack on high calorie foods, I became increasingly 'other' to this group of practitioners in a way that I had not been in settings one and two. In the previous settings I had eaten the same foods as the nursery practitioners.

Another aspect of the research that needed addressing was a consideration of how to encourage dialogue with participants about what they were doing (at times other than the interviews). On occasions, it was useful to adopt a position of 'not knowing' something in order to encourage children and practitioners to make explicit what they were doing and why they were doing it. When researching with young children, Mandell (1988) advocates the adoption of a 'least adult' role, which involves taking on the social position of a child in order to gain an insight into their perspectives. However I am sceptical about this as I am *not* a child and am able to refer to my 'adult' and thus more *powerful* role as and when I choose (James, 2007). As Alldred (1998) notes, there is a masking of unequal power relationships in the adoption of the 'least adult' (Mandell, 1988) role.

My position was difficult at times. Sometimes, I observed children engaged in practices that I knew were not sanctioned in the settings, such as squeezing food between fingers; hiding and swapping food and drinks; examining the contents of each others' mouths when thinking they were outside the adult's gaze; and subverting attempts to civilise their bodies, such as by pretending to wash hands, but not doing so. This intermittently made my 'practitioner' identity within the setting a difficult one. If it was a situation that was potentially dangerous or the children had obviously seen that I knew what they were doing then there were times when I 'enforced' the rules constructed by each setting; I say 'rules', but these were not written down and were constantly being constructed. I noticed individual practitioners in settings adopt slightly different practice on separate occasions, with children responding to this and actively co-constructing meanings

in relation to different aspects of practice. At times, I adopted a position of pretending not to have seen, in order to gain an insight into the ways the children subverted rules.

Having the identity of an early years' practitioner also meant that, on occasions, I was asked to help in ways that I would not have been had I not had professional experience and qualifications. An example of this was a day when I was asked to run three consecutive group story and drink sessions, with groups of thirteen children at a time in setting one. I was asked to do this because the staff had a difficult deadline for an assessment schedule to complete. Whilst I felt annoyed initially, as I thought I had made it clear that I was to be seen as 'extra', my status within the setting was greatly raised after doing this. Because I was seen to manage the sessions successfully, both children and staff in the nursery seemed to view me differently – as someone who could *really* do the job. This enabled me to ask the staff for their time on things connected with my research more easily and I found children, with whom I had not had a lot of interaction, came over to where I was sitting after this; spontaneously seeking me out. In looking through my fieldnotes, I notice a range of 'critical incidents' (Tripp, 1993) such as this, which coloured the subsequent direction of the research in each setting.

Sometimes, I became annoyed with the way I was constructed by practitioners, but recognise that many of them had little understanding of what a PhD entails and feel ashamed at my own arrogance in assuming they should know or care about this or that they should remember my initial letter, which outlined my prior experience and qualifications. As Phoenix (1994) argues, it is important to acknowledge that research participants will rarely have as much personal investment in the research as the researcher (see also Gordon, 2003). One day during my time in setting three my fieldnotes sound exasperated (4.10.08). I state:

'I sometimes think they forget that I am a very experienced practitioner - on occasions I am praised for activities such as the way I interact with children in the home corner - in a way like I might have done with an NVQ student. I am sure they are just being nice.'

Children were also *active*, rather than passive, in managing our developing relationship. My fieldnotes are full of examples that document this. For example, on my third visit to the baby room in setting four I noted:

'I notice that the babies are more comfortable with me today as many of them smile immediately on my arrival and some crawl over to me. I do not feel that I need to sit so far back in the room before I sense they are OK with my presence'. (Setting 4: 4.6.09)

I noted earlier that 'informed consent' with young children needs to be seen as an on-going achievement as opposed to achieved in advance of the research taking place with the negotiation of access taking place on a moment-by-moment basis (Langston et al, 2004). I was guided by the practitioners and parents as to the children's responses towards me as their greater knowledge of the children was crucial in alerting me to whether a child seemed worried by my presence in a particular area in a room. I made it clear from the outset that I wanted to be told if anyone felt this was the case.

However, children do not necessarily need adults to speak for them; they can be very adept at making their feelings clear. Millie (C53), aged 14 months, in setting four decided on my entry to the baby room to hide in the tunnel of the large play equipment. She peeked out occasionally to watch me for longer and longer periods over half an hour or so. Eventually, she crawled over to me, bringing me a shell from a treasure basket to look at. *She* had determined the pace and extent of the relationship we developed.

3.6 Methods employed

So far in this chapter, I have outlined the ethnographic nature of the research undertaken and have discussed the way relationships were developed and maintained with participants in each setting. In this section of the chapter, I will be outlining the methods that were employed in the research. Primarily these were participant observation and semi-structured interviewing. Unlike triangulating the data, which by definition implies that it is possible to gain a 'true' fix on a situation – something at odds with the theoretical stance taken in this research (Silverman, 2005) - following Richardson (2000) I adopted the metaphor of a *crystal* as opposed to a triangle. Richardson (2000: 934) maintains this metaphor is useful because it encourages researchers to think about the way light – the data - changes, reflecting and refracting according to 'our angle of repose'. In this sense, who I am impacts upon the way I both conducted the research and interpreted the data. By 'situating' myself (Letherby, 2003) and detailing the process of the research it is hoped that the reader is able to develop an understanding of how the research was conducted as a kind of audit trail. Discussions with practitioners occurred on an on-going, almost daily, basis and this acted as another important perspective on the data.

3.6.1 Participant observation

Observation has a long history in early childhood research (Fawcett, 1996) and participant observation has long been used as a primary tool of data collection in ethnography (Pole and Morrison, 2003; Fielding, 2008). The observations could be described as 'naturalistic' (Angrosino, 2005) as I observed the usual work and play of the four settings – the observations were not carried out in an experimental setting.

There are different levels of detachment available when carrying out observations (Edmond, 2005). Robson (1993: 196) argues that at one level, the 'complete participant' role involves concealing one's role as observer and attempting to blend in seamlessly to the setting. This was not a position adopted

in my research as it negates the principle of 'informed consent' in research. The position I adopted was primarily one of the 'participant as observer' (Robson, 1993: 197) because my role as observer was clear to everyone from the outset of the research. It is a position which is characterized by the development of *relationships* with participants alongside asking them to explain different aspects of what is being observed. It also involves *participation* in the 'life' of the setting unlike other participant observation categories, such as the 'observer as participant' (Robson, 1993: 198) in which the observer plays no part in the activities of the setting under study. Usually, observational notes were written alongside participating in activities with the children. On other occasions, such as when observing a formal group snack time, my observations were undertaken at a greater distance, albeit that I was sitting alongside the children. Sometimes an observation started at a distance and then the children involved me directly in their play. In this sense there was a fluidity to the distance at which the observations were carried out.

Following Angrosino (2005), it is better to describe the use of observations in the study as 'dialogues' between myself and the participants – or a 'context for interaction' (p. 732). This is because I aimed for *collaborating with participants*, discussing the data with them, rather than *conducting observations on the subjects* of research. As Woodhead and Faulkner (2008) note, language is important because the use of 'object', 'subject' or 'participant' denotes the status we afford the people who agree to take part in a research project. My observations, once shared with practitioners, often stimulated discussion about a particular issue, which added further insights and layers of complexity.

Sometimes practitioners asked me to observe other aspects of their practice and share my thoughts on these. An example of this was with setting two, which was interested in managing the sense of loss the children and adults feel as children move on to school from the nursery. Although outside what I was observing for this research project, in the spirit of reciprocity (Skeggs, 1994; Gordon, 2003)

and a general interest in many aspects of early years' practice I was happy to do this.

In terms of my interactions with the children, I initially adopted what could be described as more 'creative' methods (Veale, 2005) or 'precocious methodologies' (Malewski, 2005: 219) in order to elicit their views. In setting one, for instance, I laminated the children's drinks' cartons to use as a stimulus to encourage talk about snack times outside of the event happening. Whilst this did elicit some interesting conversation (see Albon, 2009), I found participant observation and informal conversations to be far more fruitful. 'Hanging out' with children (Lahman, 2008: 296), taking the opportunity to seize advantage of naturally occurring talk and play, proved to be far more useful when compared to more 'creative' strategies. The length of time spent in the field meant that children had time to get to know and trust me and they seemed happy to talk and play with me (see also Edmond, 2005). Moreover, this strategy meant that I was able to become acquainted with the *everyday cultural practices* of the children as is consistent with ethnographic research (Davis et al, 2008).

In addition, I participated in children's home corner play in every setting on most days. However, there were occasions when nearly every part of the nurseries' play areas seemed to have food-related play occurring. Whilst Malewski (2005) argues that educational research has had a tendency to downplay the significance of playfulness and imagination, Edmiston (2005) believes that through play, children and adults can participate in research *together*. This can be contrasted with viewing children's play as something to be observed *at a distance* by adult researchers. Through participating in children's home corner play I was able to 'share authority' (Edmiston, 2005) with the children as we were able to raise and explore a range of issues that were important to us both. Thus, sometimes I would be scribbling notes down frenetically as we pretended to make meals together, for instance, reflecting my own concerns as a researcher. At other times, I would be engaged in other kinds of play such as making rockets

or playing with small cars, which reflected other aspects of the children's persistent concerns and interests and enabled me to further develop my relationships with individuals. Whilst I still made observational notes on these occasions, these tended to be of more interest to the setting than my own research and were often included in the children's records. By focusing on pretend food events as well as real, the child's voice was made more prominent throughout the research.

But a focus on children's pretend play around food events (alongside real food events) was not without difficulties. In note 2 to Table 1 earlier in this chapter, I alluded to the difficulty I had in trying to quantify the pretend food events observed. This is because pretend play is fluid, possibly with no clear beginning, middle and end (Fromberg, 2002), with children joining and leaving the play at various points and with play themes changing direction in an instant. Thus, what counts as an *individual* play episode is often difficult to decide upon. In addition, children seem able to move between real and pretend in a moment. This can be seen in the following observation (setting 3: 21.11.08).

Keith (C42) is in the home corner playing with the plastic food... He looks across to the snack café which has opened and says 'I need some real food – no pretend... No, I need some *real* food'. Then he goes to have some fruit and a drink in the snack café.

Another difficulty with trying to impose order on participant observation of children's pretend play relates to its unpredictability. Unlike semi-structured interviewing with the practitioners or the observations made of real food events such as meal times, I could not decide in advance where and what the children would play with and how, although inevitably there are some 'givens' (Gura, 1992) in the resources on offer. Therefore the direction of the play was shared between myself and the children (Edmiston, 2005; 2008), which could be likened to Bruce's notion of 'play-partnering' (Bruce, 1991) – here applied to research practice. This is in marked contrast to the semi-structured interviews, discussed

later, which inevitably involved a greater degree of formality. The children's play around food events seemed to serve as a commentary on their experience of such 'events' as well as an exploration of the carnivalesque (discussed in detail in Chapter Six) – particularly when the children were engaged in 'thematic fantasy play' (Albon, 2008a; Albon, 2010). In other words, the children's 'thematic fantasy play' (Hendy and Toon, 2001), offered an opportunity for the children to subvert the usual 'rules' of real food events.

Interestingly, an emerging field of practice in the area of ethnography is 'sensory ethnography' (Pink, 2009), which involves the researcher in 'self-consciously and reflexively attending to the senses throughout the research process' (Pink, 2009: 10). A key rationale for such an approach is that different cultural groups assign particular importance to different sensorial experiences in conceptualizing their identities. In a research project that looks at food and drink practices in early childhood settings, this has been especially useful because alongside using my eyes and ears to observe, other senses came into play. Clearly, the smell and taste of food, coupled with the antiseptic smells of disinfectant and sterilising agents were part of the ethnographic experience and influenced my observations and subsequent interpretations.

Crucially, then, sensory ethnography values embodied ways of knowing of which vision is but one. All senses are seen to work in synergy and are valid ways of 'knowing', which are inextricably interwoven with personal memories (Pink, 2009). Porteous, for instance, talks of 'soundscape' and 'smellscape' (Porteous, 1990: 23) to highlight the way different senses come into play as we experience the environments we occupy and Howes (2005) uses the term 'emplacement' in preference to 'embodiment' to denote the interrelationship between the mind – body- environment. As noted earlier, it is a concept that I have found useful to apply in this study.

As young children use all their senses to explore the world around them (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003), it is an interesting issue to reflect upon in relation to *early childhood* research (Warming, 2005). An example of this was noted in my fieldnotes in setting one, where I wrote about a child of three years playing with the flesh of a practitioner, describing it as 'wibbly wobbly jelly'. Similarly, and involving my own embodied – or 'emplaced' (Howes, 2005) experience of the research, I wrote after having lunch with the children one day in setting four (18.6.09).

Tea time today was really difficult. Tarnpreet (P24) insisted that we all eat a bit of baked potato – adults and children alike - and by the time I received mine it was stone cold. I hate cold potato with a passion yet felt compelled to eat it, accompanied by Tarnpreet's comments of 'see children it is yummy yummy' as we all ate, which did not describe my own feelings about the food. Memories of being made to eat foods I disliked during school dinners came flooding back alongside feeling powerless to resist this. Why can't we accept that we like and dislike eating different things – that this is part of who we are? Why do practitioners feel the need to pretend to enjoy foods they hate and why did I collude with this when surely I could have done otherwise?

The sensory ethnography approach is also useful to consider in terms of the *participatory* nature of ethnographic research. Pink (2009) draws on Wenger's work to point to the way we come to 'know' through participation – that is knowingness is situated and created *in practice*. Thus, working alongside practitioners, playing with the children and so on as an 'apprentice' in the field (Pink, 2009) were important aspects in my coming to 'know' each setting and their participants. In the fieldnotes above, my emplaced experience of waiting for the food and it arriving cold must be one some children regularly experience if they sit where I was – on the end of the table - as the food always seemed to be served from left to right around the curve of the table. The children in this room

were always seated in the same arrangement (see also Lenz Taguchi [2010] on the importance of matter in early childhood pedagogy).

In addition to this, attendance to the sensorial nature of the observations was important for the analysis as it focused my attention on aspects of the research such as the meanings of actions on the part of the research participants that have the purpose of creating a sensory effect (Pink, 2009). In a study of food and eating, the presentation, aroma, texture and taste of the food were all important. This might relate to the everyday such as babies being weaned on to solid foods (and the practices associated with this) as well as the celebratory, where greater effort was made to make the occasion 'out of the ordinary'. When I reflect upon the observations I can see that *all* my senses played a vital role in the research. However I recognise that my experiences should not be viewed as a *direct* source of knowledge about how individual research participants think and feel about those experiences – or complete empathy, but should be regarded as an 'indirect or mediated' (Warming, 2005: 57) source of knowledge.

I decided against the use of digital recording devices such as a camcorder for the observations on a number of grounds. I felt that they would be particularly intrusive for the participants and on a practical level (from prior experience), know that it can be difficult to tune into what children are saying on digital recording devices, especially during free-play parts of the day. Handwritten narrative observations were written throughout the days spent in each setting and these were typed up, usually within 24 hours. In doing this, I added further reflections on the day's events alongside the observations or fieldnotes. As Emerson et al (2007) note, fieldnotes can include not only observational data but also thoughts, reflections and reactions to that data. In this sense my fieldnotes appear like a reflective journal and are drawn upon as a data gathering instrument (Brown and Jones, 2001, Richardson and St Pierre, 2005). This was an important consideration in my own study as social constructionist research tends to view observational data not as a 'pre given entity' (p. 354) objectively

arrived at, but as something constructed both in the data collection and the writing up afterwards. A typical day's observation and interwoven fieldnotes can be found as Appendix C. Details of all the children observed and *referred to* in this thesis can be found as Appendix G.

Finally, some of the children became intensely interested in my observations but others were not. In carrying out participant observations, I debated the degree to which I informed the children about the nature of my research whilst writing observations. This was an important *principle* but as Warming (2005) argues, was difficult in *practice* when engaged in research with very young children. Following Warming (2005), I informed the children about what I was doing as and when they asked. Thus, I was able to respond on a more *individual basis* to children's needs and interests as opposed to presenting information to the children as a group. As Warming (2005: 62) notes, 'the most ethical practice might turn out to be unethical.' One child's interest in my observational notes can be seen in the following extract from setting three (21.11.08):

Avleen (C43): 'Are you writing again?' (*she had often observed me writing*)

Debbie: 'Yes – I'm writing about what I see in the home corner again' (*I have been coming to the setting for two terms*)

Avleen: 'Did you write about me yesterday?'

Debbie: 'Well... not really – not like this. To write observations of what you are actually doing I have to be able to see you'.

Avleen: 'What does that say?' (*pointing to my writing*)

Debbie: 'It says 'K... says 'I'll go and have my drink now'

Avleen: 'K... just said that'

Debbie: 'I know. I found it interesting, so I wrote it down ... here' (*Avleen looks intently at the observational notes made*)

NB Avleen asked about lots of other notes in my fieldwork book and borrowed my pen to write her own notes on my pages. The pages are littered with many children's developmental writing.

(Also discussed in Mukherji and Albon, 2010: 40)

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviewing

Alongside the observations carried out in the nursery and informal conversations that went with these, I also conducted semi-structured interviews. Through being a participant observer, I was able to enter into meaningful discussions with the practitioner participants (Davies, 2008) because I had spent time in their rooms observing. Whilst I engaged adults and children alike in conversations about food and eating in an informal way, it was also important to interview the practitioners more formally. This is because it afforded me the opportunity to ask them to elaborate about their food and eating practice away from actually doing the job. I was also able to ask for clarification of issues that arose from my observations and check my own interpretations of these, which acted as a form of respondent validation (Robson, 1993).

Twenty eight interviews in total were conducted, each lasting between half an hour to an hour. Details of the practitioners interviewed can be found as Appendix F. All interviews were carried out in the respective settings within which the practitioners work. I am indebted to the managers of settings two, three and four in making this possible in nursery time (involving arranging cover for interviewees on occasions), which meant that no practitioners had to give up their own time for the interviews. Given the long hours worked by these practitioners, this was an important consideration. The practitioners in setting one – a nursery class that is open in the mornings only - were interviewed at the end of the session in their own time.

The interviews were carried out towards the end of my time in each setting. This meant that I had already developed a relationship with the practitioners and it seemed to increase the likelihood of them agreeing to participate. As an example, one practitioner informed me that she would not have agreed to be interviewed if she had not got to know me first. Furthermore, in the spirit of reciprocity, I think many practitioners wanted to help me with my research because I had been of help to them in the work of their settings, as noted earlier. Osgood (2010) similarly notes how her willingness to help out with a range of activities alongside practitioners in her research was rewarded with an exchange of time for interviewing.

My background as a nursery nurse (NNEB), as opposed to my teaching background (PGCE) was also significant as many practitioners were interested in my professional background as a childcare worker, which was similar to their own. My 'professional' status seemed to hold more kudos than my 'researcher' status for them. Postmodern trends in interviewing tend to see the interview as a 'negotiated text' (Fontana and Frey, 2000: 663) as there is growing recognition that researchers are not 'invisible, neutral entities; rather, they are part of the interactions they seek to study and influence those interactions'. Unlike positivist research, which aims to neutralise the effect of the interviewer, I recognise that my own position impacted on the interviewee's responses (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Fielding and Thomas, 2008).

The interviews were 'semi-structured' in nature as this ensured there was a structure to the interviews as well as the flexibility to allow for probing of areas of interest as and when they arose (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). This probing was sometimes directed towards me when a practitioner wanted to know my own views about something. Thus, the locus of control did not lie permanently with me – the researcher (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Because of this, when looking at the transcripts, the interviews seem to have less structure than the description

'semi-structured' suggests. An example of the interview guide used and an interview transcript can be seen as Appendices D and E.

The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone in most cases. In one instance a practitioner did not want to be recorded in this way and in two others (on one day), I had technical difficulties with the equipment. I transcribed all the interview data myself, which although time consuming, did afford me the opportunity to wallow in the data in a way that would not have been possible had I had them professionally transcribed. As Birch (1998: 179) notes in relation to transcribing interview data, 'through the act of transcribing I had relived the telling.'

Practitioners were informed how the interviews would work and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality as well as their right to withdraw at the beginning of the interviews prior to recording. All were given a copy of the transcript of their interview in order that they could check what had been said. This was useful as a form of respondent validation but also because it added further depth to the data or encouraged practitioners to reflect critically on their practice. An example of this came most powerfully in setting one. One of the practitioners had consistently used the words 'them' and 'us' in her interview to denote what she (and other people in an 'unnamed group') do and what Somali families do (seemingly as one group). I felt very uncomfortable about this and wondered how she might react to seeing the interview transcript and my comments on it.

On seeing it, she scribbled comments on the transcript about how dreadful she felt about the way she had spoken about the Somali families she worked with – she even underlined instances where she did this. Whilst it was uncomfortable to share this data – especially my reflections on it, I do believe it was significant in encouraging this practitioner to review how she speaks about children and families in her work and thus had a positive impact on practice. In this instance, had I adopted a positivist position of 'not spoiling the field', I believe my research practice could have been viewed as unethical. Moreover, this example indicates

the difficult path ethnographers tread between non-maleficence and beneficence in relation to the ethics of their research (Murphy and Dingwall, 2007).

Interviewing the practitioners in the context of an ethnographic research project also served to remind them that I was carrying out a piece of research. For some practitioners, I had become akin to a member of part time staff and I felt they needed reminding who I was and why I was there, even though all had agreed to my carrying out the research (as noted in the section on 'gaining access'). Whilst my observations were shared with practitioners, writing about and talking about practice in this way is not dissimilar to the usual practice of an early childhood setting. Interviewing is not so usual. Therefore, when carrying out the interviews, I was also able to remind the practitioners of what I was doing and why and 're-formalise' my presence in their settings in a way that I believe was important, given that I spent a lot of time over many months in each setting and was going to be writing up the experience in a formal way. As noted earlier, Fielding (2008) argues that ethnographic research can involve a degree of deception.

3.7 Data analysis

In ethnographic research, data analysis involves a movement from rich description to identifying 'concepts and theories which are grounded in the data collected within the location, event or setting' (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 3). Thus, unlike positivist research, which tends to identify categories or themes *a priori* to the data collection, I analysed the data collected from the interviews and observations *during* and *post* data collection. This could be described as a form of inductive as opposed to deductive logic and is in keeping with qualitative approaches to research (Creswell, 1994). In a similar way to Pole and Morrison (2003: 79), I adopted the principle of grounded theory as an 'ethnographic manifesto' as opposed to an 'analytical blueprint'. By this, I mean that I did not

adhere strictly to the coding systems introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their classic text on grounded theory and later developed by Charmaz (2006).

Following Pole and Morrison (2003), I gave each observation and interview a number to help me return to the original text as a whole easily. I also ensured that all the data was in the same format and photocopied. I read and re-read the data many times and did this throughout data collection. Then I assigned some initial index codes, which could be seen as 'sensitising concepts' (Blumer, 1954) or possible embryonic ideas for analysis. Some of these initial codes became more fixed and developed in complexity as I worked through this process. This intricacy can be seen in the way some initial codes became sub-coded and cross referenced.

An example of this can be seen in the theme '*taming uncertainty – risk*', which is written up as Chapter Five of this thesis. Initially, I thought this would form a small part of a chapter but as I read and re-read the data, I reflected that this was a huge area that came through strongly in the interview data as well as in the observations of food events, real and pretend. As I interrogated the data I had put within this initial code, I was soon sub-coding it as relating to food hygiene; food safety – allergies; monitoring food intake; and kitchen spaces as 'risky'. Further to this, I was able to cross-reference these codes with other analytical themes such as those relating to '*civilizing the body*', which highlights the idea that children's bodies can be viewed as uncontrollable and in need of civilizing. In the '*taming uncertainty – risk*' theme, I saw parallels to this as children seemed to be constructed as 'in danger' but also as a 'potential contaminant'. More generally, I began to reflect that food events were being constructed as a 'risky business' in early childhood settings and read more about notions of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) and cultural meanings attributed to risk (Douglas, 1966; Lupton, 1999). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note, ethnography generates a lot of data and the ethnographic researcher has to tolerate a high

level of uncertainty and ambiguity in relation to data analysis that is unparalleled in positivist research.

As I developed my ideas, I tested their 'fit' more systematically against the data – a form of 'dialectical interaction' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 159). In doing this, my research became increasingly focused and meant that I spent slightly less time in the latter settings than I had in the settings at the beginning of data collection (see Table 1). The process of analyzing the data has taken many months and my thinking changed in the light of new reading and having time to wallow in my reflections. In this sense, the analysis arrived at here could be seen as my own personal patterns and typologies at a given moment in time – my own journey with the data (see also Birch, 1998).

Whilst I did not undertake what Clarke (2005) has called 'situational analysis', my own analysis of the data bears resemblance to this in that I aimed to show the *situatedness* of the understandings I reached about the data. I have also, like Clarke, tried to integrate a focus on the micro events to larger, structural elements of early childhood practice as a form of mapping. In addition, also like Clarke, I looked at not only the people within the settings, but the objects too (see also the earlier note on Lenz Taguchi, 2010). This is because objects and the arrangement of objects help to frame the situations in which humans find themselves. In this study, the kitchen and eating spaces and the items used during real and pretend food events were 'read' for meanings in the same way as the interview narratives were 'read' for themes.

I considered using NVivo, a computer programme that is designed for use by qualitative researchers in analyzing data. I attended a course on using NVivo and while I recognize its usefulness to research that is carried out by a team of researchers in particular (unlike this study), owing to the way it goes some way to ensuring replicability of analysis (Pole and Morrison, 2003), I did not find it helpful in this study. The main reason for this is my own preference for being able to

see the data as a whole easily. Computer packages designed to aid qualitative researchers, such as NVivo, can only present data in small sets at a time (Davies, 2008). I, on the other hand, wanted to be able to see the data as a large set and be able to manipulate the data *physically* to make comparisons and connections. This was achieved more easily through making copies of the data, numbering items and physically manipulating it in different ways before working more systematically with the data on the computer. In addition, whilst computer packages such as NVivo are useful for sifting and sorting data, the generation of themes from the data is a creative process carried out by the *researcher*, not the computer (Pole and Morrison, 2003; Charmaz, 2006).

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to note the ethical issues that relate to the writing up of research. As Standing (1998) observes, writing up is not a neutral act in research. There appears to be a crisis in representing the voices of participants in research, particularly within a postmodern perspective (Coffey, 1999; Angrosino, 2005; Pink, 2009). This is because in writing up participants' voices, the researcher may assume a position of 'knowing' and consequently able to represent the 'truth' of the research in some way. As Francis (2003) observes, it is vital to acknowledge the partial and contingent nature of any research – 'it will inevitably represent only one of many truths' (p. 65). Additionally, she argues that it is important to recognise the 'standpoint' of the researcher and how this has influenced the production of the text.

Thus, the position of the researcher in writing up the research assumes importance. I believe, for instance, that food researchers who have not worked with young children may have a different view of this research. They may well have ignored *play* as a research strategy and the simultaneous focus of children's pretend play in relation to food events with the real food events observed. Further to this, I also wonder whether *playfulness* would have emerged as a key theme in the data for other researchers. As an early childhood practitioner who now works in Higher Education, it is interesting to observe that

the three main themes in this thesis and my ordering of these in the following chapters reflect my own journey in this research. In Chapter Four I look at civilizing the body – a theme that could be said to parallel my own experience of losing weight over a long period of the research. Chapter Five looks at the theme of taming uncertainty and risk, which has personal resonance as I was ill for a long period of this research and had to be extremely careful with my food intake, eventually having my gall bladder removed. Chapters Four and Five also draw upon a range of reading outside the usual early childhood canon. Finally, in Chapter Six, I look at playfulness and food events, which seems to parallel my return to deriving pleasure from eating following my operation. In writing this chapter, I also arrive firmly back within the early childhood tradition and my own professional roots. It was not until some months after arriving at these analytical themes and ideas about the presentational order of the findings that this personal insight became apparent (see also Birch, 1998).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodology and methods used in this research. An ethnographic approach was taken in this research, involving the use of observations, associated fieldnotes and interviews. This approach was adopted because it is research that is carried out in a naturalistic environment over time. This enabled me to participate in the life of the settings, as much as is possible, and reflect critically on the food events that occur habitually. In addition, the approach taken could be regarded as more ethical than experimental research because the children were not removed from a situation with which they are familiar and there was an emphasis on developing relationships with children and practitioners over time and eliciting their perspectives.

Finally, inevitably the research in each of the four settings had to end. In negotiating access to each setting, I was also engaged from the start in negotiating when I would leave, as the duration of a research project is an

important part of 'informed consent' for researchers and potential participants to consider. However, people seemed to forget that I was only temporary. In each case, I bought an appropriate gift for the setting, sometimes making them a book with photos of food events within their setting. In this way I was also able to give something back to the children in the setting too. Settings were also given a copy of any relevant work I had published where it related to the research I had been conducting with them. I also received cards and gifts from each of the settings as recognition of the work I had done with them. The mutual gift giving also seemed to act as *closure* i.e. that I would not be returning for my weekly visits.

Coffey (1999: 37) argues that 'leaving the field' is likely to be most difficult for the researcher as opposed to the host and maintains that it is most likely that the researcher remains as an 'honorary member or 'friend' of the setting' when the frequency of visits diminishes or ceases. In the case of my research, I do not visit the four settings as often as I did. However, I remain in contact with them and have become friends with some practitioners that I suspect may be life long. In other words, the sense that the researcher coolly 'leaves the field' as dispassionately as they 'entered the field', is antithetical to the position that I have taken. Indeed, given the principle of beneficence in research (Robson, 1993), it seems important to continue to care about what is happening to the participants and practice in those settings after data collection has finished.

Chapter 4: Civilizing the Body

One of the conceptualizations of the body put forward in the literature review was a characterization of the child's body in terms of its *uncontrollability* (Tobin, 1997). Grosz (1994: 3) similarly argues that children's bodies are seen as 'unruly' and 'disruptive'. A consequence of viewing children's bodies in such a way is a focus on *managing* or *civilizing* their bodies, which is often regarded as a crucial part of daily practice in early childhood settings (Leavitt and Power, 1997). Whilst the practice in institutional settings can be contrasted to the practice of home where 'children's 'bodily lives' are open to greater negotiation (Mayall, 1996), the conceptualization of the child's body as one that needs bringing under control or 'civilizing' seems pervasive. Indeed a key theme that emerged from the data was the notion of *civilizing the body*.

In this chapter, I aim to explore the practices in early childhood settings that produce 'docile bodies'. I also discuss resistance to these practices. In writing about this theme, I am conscious of what Bordo (1993: 194) sees as two Foucauldian 'grips' that relate to the body; the grip of 'systemic power on the body' but also the 'creative 'powers' of bodies to *resist* that grip'. This was something noted in the literature review and is something I carry forward into this chapter. Thus, I will be exploring the 'grip' of disciplinary power exercised on the body during food events in the four early childhood settings as well as children and *practitioners'* resistance to that grip. I stress this early on in this chapter because there might be a misconception that adults (as early childhood practitioners) hold and exercise power over children, with children positioned as occupying a universally passive position in relation to practitioners. This is not supported by my data.

Foucault's (1977) perspective on power is useful to employ here as he considers power to be multifarious and not held by someone or a group for all time.

Foucault develops the idea of the Panopticon, a circular prison developed by

Jeremy Bentham in the 1840s, which theoretically served to facilitate the constant surveillance of prisoners. The ‘beauty’ of this system, at its limit, was that over time, the prisoners behaved as if they were being watched because they could never be sure if they were being observed by the guards or not. In other words, they operated a form of self-surveillance, resulting in ‘docile bodies’ – bodies that are amenable to regulation in time and space. This is evident in Foucault’s statement:

‘It (*the Panopticon*) is an important mechanism, for it automatises and disindividualises power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up’ (Foucault, 1977: 202 – *my italics*)

In thinking about early childhood practice today, the ‘civilizing’ theme, which is the subject of this chapter, shows how children’s bodies and the practices associated with them are subject to a high degree of *regulation*, not least owing to the fear practitioners express about the possibility of chaos in early childhood settings (Nyberg and Grinland, 2008). Moreover, I argue that children’s bodies are highly regulated during food events owing to a sense that these times are especially important in socializing young children into the habits of a particular culture and in preparation for their *future* lives within that culture. Whilst I focus on routines relating to food events, underpinning such early childhood practices in general is an implicit assumption that the child’s body needs to be controlled as a vital prerequisite in order for learning to take place. Indeed early childhood practitioners’ professional identities are often intertwined with issues of controlling the children in their care (Phelan, 1997).

Crucially, this chapter explores how young children’s bodies are subject to a high degree of control in early childhood practice; notably in the regulating of *time* and

space in relation to food. The 'civilizing' theme is of paramount importance because as Ben-Ari (1997: 104) argues:

'Mealtimes predicate a gradual harnessing of the children's bodies – their limbs, capacities for coordination, and cravings, for instance – towards actions and demeanour deemed socially 'proper'.

Whilst my focus is on the practices in the four early childhood settings, it should be noted that children are socialized from *birth* into the gradual control of their emotional and bodily expressions (Leavitt and Power, 1997). In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate how institutional practices serve to subordinate the child's body to a temporal and spatial order determined often by practitioners but also maintained by children themselves. Furthermore, I show how practitioners' own bodies become subject to 'civilizing processes' (to use Elias' term, 1994). In writing this chapter, I offer an alternative, more critical view of routines such as food events in early childhood settings than that offered in the literature review.

In examining the data, I have grouped such practices under the following headings: a 'proper' time to eat and drink; regulating the use of space; 'body rules'; food events as 'teachable moments'; the task or the child; and finally, being a role model. In writing about these practices I have also drawn on my data to demonstrate the ways in which children and practitioners *resist* such practices. As Grieshaber (2004) argues, the 'rules' associated with food events and indeed other everyday practices are not 'finished products' (p. 75) but are open to a degree of interpretation, negotiation and challenge.

4.1 A 'proper' time to eat and drink

In this section, I aim to show how the temporal organization of food events in early childhood settings is significant in the way the child's body is deemed in

need of refining. Polakow's (1992) observations of a nursery school in America seem to be a clear example of this. She observes:

'Samantha approached Teacher Sally and said she was hungry. Teacher Sally looked at her watch and said, 'It's not hungry time yet.!' (Polakow, 1992: 60)

The use of the term 'hungry time' serves to subordinate the child's bodily needs to the demands of the institution's schedule. Polakow notes the striking contrast between the teacher's imposed time schedule and that of the child's immediate lived experience. The demarcation of time in this nursery was defended by the practitioners on the basis of it providing security and consistency for the children, but hampered the possibility of lengthy periods for uninterrupted play with its own natural closure – a position, which arguably derives from a more romantic construction of childhood (Edmiston, 2008). Polakow (1992: 61) describes the demarcation of time in this way as 'temporal rigidity' and observes that the corollary of this was discomfort amongst some of the children when routines had to be changed and an over-reliance on the authority of the practitioner.

Polakow (1992) broadens her discussion by going on to suggest that such practices do not enable children to experience time as a lived force. Rather, it is seen as an external entity, with the body subordinated to acting in a certain way within a certain time frame. She links this to the requirements of the technical culture we live in (in the minority world) and argues that children are being socialized into internalizing the temporal order of an institution in a way that mirrors wider society, such as employment. In addition to this, it could be argued that the early childhood setting is the first place where a child encounters a formal organization of groups of children with a high degree of temporal inflexibility i.e. opening hours (and times of closure); times for meals and possibly snacks; sleep times; and possibly set times for particular activities such as outdoors' play, use of particular resources or activities with a particular practitioner – especially if offering a specialized service. Through this, the child's

individual body rhythms become synchronized with the rhythm of the day of the particular setting they attend (Ben-Ari, 1997).

The 'temporal rigidity' that Polakow talks of can be seen in the following comment from Sharmina (P18) in setting four, when she says 'everything is *routinised* – better for us, better for the babies. Everything according to *time*.' Times for feeding were noted carefully in this setting and the day was punctuated by five separate food events. The first was breakfast, then snack time, then lunch, then a snack on waking after lunch, then tea. However, it is important to note that in the context of the long day that the children and practitioners experienced in this setting (8.00-6.00), these punctuation points seemed to provide a comfortable rhythm to the day.

Polakow (1992: 66) draws upon Merleau-Ponty's concept of time to argue that we are 'beings-in-time', with a rejection of objective views of time to one that favours a view of time that is individually experienced. She (1992: 175) states:

'The creation of 'time-conscious' and, therefore, 'time-objectifying' structures which mirror the cultural configurations of alienated time in the macro-social system erodes the experience of lived-time in young children; for they are socialized into institutional time, where time is no longer a field of presence, an abode, but an austere system of constraints demanding submission.'

In Polakow's (1992: 176) study, for children to be considered 'normal' in their respective early years' settings, they had to conform to being 'normal-in-time' rather than spontaneous, physically active and mischievous, as these behaviours were considered to challenge the setting's temporal and spatial organization. 'Hungry time', 'snack-time' and 'going home time' all serve to fragment children's daily lived experience of the setting they attend.

This is also experienced at a group level. Goffman (1961: 6) refers to this as 'collective regimentation' in his study of asylums. Leavitt and Power (1997: 44) discuss what they term 'body time' using Foucault to support their analysis of 'disciplinary time', which involves the 'correct' use of time as well as the 'correct' use of the body within time. They argue that this is why the movement of children between the routines they encounter during the day (or 'transition points') is often viewed by practitioners as problematic. Lefebvre's (2004) work on rhythmanalysis is interesting here because he talks of 'isorhythmia' or the equality of rhythms, which can be likened to the rhythm an orchestra falls into in response to the beat of the conductor's baton. 'Arrhythmia' is when the body is out of synchronization with the world around it. These concepts can be usefully applied to early childhood practice because some children appear to find the temporal organization of their settings problematic as they have not 'learnt' to fall into the rhythm of their setting.

At worst, Leavitt and Power's (1997) research points to punishment, ridicule and distress for children who do not fit into the temporal structure of the setting they attend. Whilst I did not observe any children being *ridiculed* for their difficulties in fitting into the temporal order of the day in relation to food and drink provisioning, I did observe some distress on occasions. Amin (C14) in setting one was observed on more than one occasion getting a piece of construction kit, which has a cavity in it, and using the cavity as a drink receptacle in the bathroom in order to have a drink of water (but not from a *drinking water* tap). Clearly, he was thirsty at a time *other* to the set drink time and drinks were not available at other times. The parallels with Polakow's (1992) discussion of 'hungry time' and Lefebvre's (2004) 'arrhythmia', discussed earlier on in the chapter, are strong. When I shared this observation with practitioners, they could not see why he would need a drink because it was a cold day, despite the fact that he had been running about outdoors. His individual bodily needs seem to have been subordinated to practices designed for children *as a group*.

Although this resulted in the children being told as a *group* that they could ask a practitioner for a drink of water at any time, when children did this, it did appear as an inconvenience, taking practitioners away from what seemed to be the 'real' business of educating the children. Practitioners were observed to fill a cup of water quickly and leave children sitting in the kitchen while they directed their attention to the activities in the main room. Asking for a drink of water, rather than having a space provided for this on a permanent basis also required a certain level of communication skills and confidence on the part of the children in asserting this right to a drink.

But I take issue with the idea that 'temporal rigidity' is *always* problematic for children as Polakow (1992) seems to suggest. For some children, the routine of the setting and the ordered progression of activities can be comforting and should not necessarily be construed as an imposition. In setting one (Autumn term 2006) I became fascinated watching two Somali girls - Hamdi (C1) and Shahrusaad (C2) - over time, as I started observing in the setting on the day they both started nursery. Hamdi and Shahrusaad spent nearly every morning sitting on a seat under the coat racks observing what was happening in the setting, without joining in any activity directly, despite coaxing from the practitioners. The one time they became animated during a session was during drinks' time, when they would gather their group together and participate in this shared time enthusiastically. My interpretation of this was that for these two children, food events offered something *real* and *meaningful* that they could understand and something which related to events they were familiar with at home. My discussions with the practitioners in this setting, for instance, suggested that on home visits to these children's flats, there were no toys or books that resembled the nursery play environment.

On other occasions, I noticed Shahrusaad (C2) gather her group together for snack time long before the designated time – almost as soon as her mother had left her at the nursery. As snack times and later, story times, were the only 'set'

times in the session, I wondered whether Shahrusaad was trying to *subvert* time by attempting to move these events *forward* in time. Possibly, she might have thought that once snack time and story time were completed, it would be time to go home.

Reflecting on my observations of Shahrusaad has challenged many of my beliefs about the centrality of long periods of uninterrupted play for young children as important for *all* children in *all* situations. Having a set snack time seemed to offer not only a meaningful event in the session for Shahrusaad, it also appeared to offer a temporal marker from which she could structure her morning. In full day care settings, such as settings two and four, I believe such temporal markers may have particular significance in providing a rhythm to what is a long day for children and practitioners alike, something that was highlighted by Viruru (2001) and Giovanni (2006) and discussed in Chapter Two. The idea of *extractive* and *developmental* power is important here (Leavitt, 1994) because the former emphasizes the *control* of children and the latter focuses on the use of power to support children's developing sense of *autonomy*.

It seems that practitioners need to construct a set of practices associated with food events with young children that are appropriate for *that* group and this might be different from setting to setting and from year to year. Thus, when I am asked whether there should be set times or not for snacks (as I often am) I will rarely offer anything *clear* as guidance because there are different values underpinning each position. Kjørholt's (2005) work is significant here because she asks us to consider the discourses at work when practitioners stress the *right* of individual children to choose when they want to eat, as is becoming prevalent in the Danish and wider Scandinavian context. She argues that the discourse of 'the right to be oneself' (p. 158) negates the symbolic and relational importance of *collective* food events which affirm and make 'visible everybody's belonging to a specific community of children' (p. 159). In setting one, for instance, whilst I observed some resistance to coming over for a set snack time, in 'green teddy group'

Ahmed (C3) went over to each child in turn and embraced them warmly, calling them 'my friend' as they arrived in the kitchen. Over the weeks that followed, all children in his group did this in a way that affirmed their membership of this group.

Underpinning 'the right to be oneself' position is a view of children as powerless and adults as holding and exercising power over children – something that self-chosen food events will somehow 'miraculously' overthrow. There is also an elevation of individual self-realisation over collective participation. Kjørholt (*ibid*) goes on to suggest that this could be interpreted as a new form of governmentality, following Foucault, which governs the conduct of early childhood settings. Moreover, children do not choose in a vacuum and we should not always assume that these 'choices' are similarly valued.

Other observations in my research show children seemingly trying to *subvert* time by taking a *great deal* of time over washing their hands before designated food events. Children appeared to do this in the knowledge that the longer they spent on this task, the shorter the period of time they would have to conform to the group food event. Spending a long time in the bathroom as a strategy was especially observed in settings one and two, which both had set times for food events and also had the older children on roll. Setting three had a snack café and my observations in setting four were carried out in the baby and toddler rooms. Babies generally need more physical care from adults than older children, and some were not yet mobile. Therefore, they had less opportunity to subvert time in this way, assuming they would want to. However, it would be wrong to suggest that babies do not resist in other ways, such as crying out; tensing their bodies; and in refusing to swallow food (Leavitt, 1994).

Finally in this section, it is interesting to note the impact of 'temporal rigidity' on practitioners themselves, away from their work. Ben-Ari (1997) argues that over

time, children's bodily rhythms become synchronized with those of their setting. This seems to be the case for some practitioners too. Jane (setting 2: P6) joked:

The nursery routine impacts on me – I start to feel hungry at 11.00 even at weekends – I am programmed to eat at around 11 – it even affects my family.

This also has resonance for me as although I have worked in Higher Education for more than five years now, I still feel the need to have lunch at about 11.30-12.00 as this is typical of every nursery I ever worked in. My colleagues and I often have lunch early at a time we call 'nursery lunch', seemingly to denote our 'otherness' to the more usual, later lunch time period. Practitioners in setting four, in particular, shared the exact timings of food events with parents in the hope that parents would be able to fit into the schedule at home. Parents I spoke to noted the way that their children were hungry at particular times at weekends and the impact this had on family meals in the home. However, those I spoke to were pleased that the setting had managed to inculcate a routine for feeding and seemed happy to continue with this at home. Millie's (C64) mother, for instance, stated explicitly that she was glad the nursery had instilled 'some sort of routine' with her child, something she had been struggling to develop prior to and since her transition back to paid employment following maternity leave.

In summing up, it could be argued that a perceived need to instill some temporal order over the children's food and drink intake results in a particular set of institutional practices that in turn, impacts *directly* on the body itself. Children *and* practitioners' own bodies seem to develop a biological rhythm that fits in with the temporal (and social) rhythm of the settings with which they are a part. This can be linked to what Connerton (1989) has described as 'incorporating practices' that are remembered on the body but also to broader issues relating to the *social* body of childhood, namely that young children (as a group) are in need of civilizing.

However, it also seems that we need to be cautious in thinking that adhering to a *collective*, temporal order for food events in early childhood settings is coercive per se. My data show that in some cases the rhythm and familiarity with the practices of the home may be very comforting. Furthermore, the critique of Kjørholt (2005) is significant in asking us to consider the right of children to participate in *collective* experiences in early childhood settings. Certainly, many of the children in my study seemed to enjoy such occasions. It would appear that a new orthodoxy seems to be forming around the idea of the *individual* child. Therefore I am conscious that to dismiss the idea of set-times for food events completely is to add further weight (and subsequent 'technologies of practice' - Grieshaber, 2004) to reifying the individual child's right to choose at the expense of other, more *collective* ways of doing things. Finally, my data suggests that children are very adept at developing strategies for subverting time, although this seems to be less available to babies who are not yet mobile.

4.2 Regulating the use of space

Spatial organization is also interesting to examine in relation to food events. Elias (1994) argues that, over time, spaces have become demarcated as being public and private spaces, with spaces pertaining to the body, especially bedrooms and bathrooms being increasingly viewed as *private* spaces. Kitchen spaces too, as we will see in the next chapter, have become increasingly out-of-bounds and viewed as *dangerous* places. Lefebvre's (1991) work is especially interesting here as it encourages the reader to think about space as more than merely being a container or 'frame' that can contain and preserve smaller parts, but rather as a 'social space', in which space is produced and appropriated by the groups that use it. His analysis encourages the reader to consider who promotes particular uses of space; as well as asking who exploits space and to what ends(s).

Foucault (1977) also explores the issue of space in his study of the birth of the prison. For Foucault, the way space is organized is directly linked to governmentality and disciplinary power and can be seen most clearly in his discussion of the Panopticon, outlined earlier in this chapter. Space in early childhood settings can be conceptualized as an exercise of power in the way it both contains children but also enables surveillance of them (Leavitt, 1994).

In setting one (a nursery class of three-four year old children attached to a school), older school children were permitted to move around the classroom and get a drink when they would like one. This is a practice that is not allowed in the nursery class, as noted earlier in this chapter. In these interview extracts Kate (P1) and Mary (P3) discuss children being able to access a drink when they want to. The practitioners here seem exasperated at children having such freedom of movement, which seemed to be linked to a lessening of classroom control and the possibility of chaos - something also highlighted in Nyberg and Grinland's (2008) research.

Kate: We had a table and the drinks had an elastic band on them with their name, that we used to just put round their drinks, and then there was a bowl of fruit – I think that's where we went wrong – but there was a bowl of fruit we had cut up into pieces and then there was a little table with 4 little chairs – but *honestly*, one of us was *constantly* on chasing up duty, which was just *ridiculous*

Similarly, Mary stated:

I haven't experienced it (*free flow drinks*) here but in the classrooms they're allowed to just go and get a drink – well some classrooms they're allowed to just go and get water whenever *they want*. Well in reception I'm not aware they can just get up when you're talking and go and get a drink but in *year 2* they're allowed to just get up and go and get a drink and it drives me round the bend!

Some of the settings in the study ensured that the children sat on the same tables each day for meal and snack times. In the case of setting two, this was to ensure that the children sat with their key person, but in the case of one of the rooms in setting four, the spatial arrangements seemed to be far more 'managed'. I noted in my fieldnotes on 18.6.09:

Like the other rooms I have been in at this nursery, all the children sit round a semi-circular table. Unlike the other two rooms, the children have their photograph and name on the back of each chair so automatically there is a management issue to ensure everyone sits on the right chair.

In this room of nine toddlers (all aged between about 16 months and two and half years), the children had to find the *right* chair at the table rather than *any* chair at the table. Inevitably, this resulted in far greater physical management of the children in getting organized for food events than in the other rooms. When interviewed, the practitioners in the room felt this was a good idea but could not really articulate why. However, it should be noted that this room adhered most fervently to what they saw as Montessori principles and insisted that when children choose an activity, they put it on an individual work mat and 'work' with it individually. In a similar way, the demarcation of individual space could be seen as extending into the food events in the room. Not only were the children expected to find their own chair, but they were also expected to control their own bodies in order that they did not invade the space of those around them, whether this touching was unpleasant or more playful, such as cuddling and tickling.

I explore the notion of 'body rules' (Leavitt and Power, 1997) in more detail in the next section. Here I wish to discuss Polakow's (1992) notion of children coming to be seen as 'normal-in-space'. In her study, children who deviated from this expectation were moved and expected to eat their meal alone or under the close physical scrutiny of one of the practitioners. It is interesting to note that in my

own study the physical distance between practitioners and children during food events in each setting was commensurate with the perceived level of independence of the children but more particularly the perceived level of 'acceptable' behaviour of the children. Those children seated furthest away from the practitioners seemed to embody a higher degree of trust.

But the management of children in space was not always evident to this degree. In setting two, for instance, there seemed to be far less concern about the children's use of space when compared to the other settings in this study. Children were able to access their drinks whenever they wanted to and could move around the nursery, which operates in a large hall, taking their drinks with them to wherever they were playing. Further to this, I observed Kurt (C21), aged two years, who had been coming to nursery for a few weeks sit at the table with his key person for lunch, then run about for a bit, then return to eat some more. Rather than making a fuss about this, Amy (P5) – his key person – welcomed Kurt warmly on his return but did not admonish him for his movement in space. Whilst I suspect this would not have been tolerated from an older child, who was more used to the nursery, there was a sense that in Kurt's own time he would learn to behave like the other members of the group. This, I believe, can be likened to the idea of developmental rather than extractive power (Leavitt, 1994) because the long term goal appeared to be one of helping Kurt become part of the nursery group rather than bringing him under control.

This is something that is highlighted in Viruru's study (2001). The issue of space was significant as the children in the Indian pre-school where Viruru was observing decided where they were going to sit for lunch as well as which teacher they wanted to sit with on a daily basis. Some of the children would run off and play for long periods, leaving their unfinished lunch-boxes with their teachers, coming back for a few mouthfuls before running off again. Thus, the setting was characterized by a fluidity of space and time as opposed to rigidity. By characterizing space and time taken over meals in a fluid way such as this,

and the practice observed in setting two, there appeared to be far fewer challenges in terms of children's behaviours during food events – after all, the children were not being constructed as deviating from any obvious 'set' rule.

It should also be noted that settings place expectations on *practitioners'* use of space during food events - they too are expected to move in 'appropriate' ways during food events. Kath (P7), in setting 2 emphasised the 'patrolling' of the eating space during mealtimes that is the practice in some settings. She notes, 'I once worked in a nursery and we weren't allowed to sit down, we had to *patrol* all around the table'. This point was emphasized by other practitioners too when they reflected on practice in previous settings they had worked in.

It seems that in settings that are overly concerned with the possibility of chaos and lack of control of the children, the children are expected to sit still and be *contained*. The corollary of this is a great deal of movement on the part of *practitioners* in patrolling space or in the positioning of their bodies in order to corral children into space. Many practitioners cited this as something they disliked and some highlighted the way that it impinged on their own enjoyment of the meal. As Fay (P15) noted in setting three, 'you were expected to eat with the children but all that getting up and down meant you couldn't enjoy it.' Here again we can see an example of the way that the construction of children's bodies as in need of control and civilizing seems to result in practices that are *real* and *felt* in the body. We should also remember that *practitioners* as well as children are affected by such techniques of power.

But children do not appear to accept attempts to curtail their movement passively. I observed children *deliberately* trying to find strategies that would enable them to move about during food events. In the following observation (setting four: 2.6.09), Caitlin (C50) seemed to deliberately throw food onto the floor or spit bits out so that she could move about the room and put food into the bin. Although Nadiya (P19), the practitioner, seemed to know this, her main

concern seemed to be the tidiness, health and hygiene of the nursery and this over-rode her annoyance at what Caitlin was doing.

Caitlin deliberately throws apple onto the floor. I pick it up and Nadiya (*the practitioner*) tells her to put it in the bin, giving it to her. She tells me that Caitlin does this deliberately as a strategy to move about the room and not sit nicely.

Similarly, in setting 2, Dougie (C22) was not keen on the food and apparently rarely ate much dinner. I observed the following (10.10.07):

Dougie 'accidentally' spills some drink and has to get up to get a cloth – it is as if he has hoped to get up all the time and has engineered the situation. He takes the *longest* route back to his seat and this is something I have observed in a lot of children as an avoidance strategy – I have seen other children take the longest route back to their seats to avoid the confines of sitting down.

Further to this, I observed that children often seemed to reject the spatial order set out for food events. In setting two, this sometimes meant children rearranging the name mats so they could sit next to whoever they wanted. In setting four (4.6.09) I observed Leo (C49), aged 13 months, dragging Jack's (C59) chair some distance so he could sit next to him at snack time. However, it is important not to see practitioners and children as *constantly* at odds with each other. Alongside data that can be understood within a frame of disciplining or civilizing the body, much of my data also points to children and practitioners engaged in a continual process of co-creation and negotiating of 'rules' about eating behaviours *together* (see also Grieshaber, 2004; Punch et al, 2009; James et al, 2009a – although it should be noted that these authors do not discuss practice in early childhood settings in these publications).

An example of this can be seen in the way that some children policed adults' behaviour during food events. Whilst this might be antithetical to hegemonic discourses of adult control, this surveillance of adult behaviour was not necessarily seen as wrong by the practitioners. Jane (P6) noted:

Sometimes, if there is not a place for me to sit (*at lunch time*), as we might have lots of visitors,... so I am walking around with my dinner – they'll (*the children*) say 'Jane, you're not sitting down' and they put me in my place and *quite right too* and so I have to go and find a chair and come and sit with them.

One reading of this comment might be that children are reinforcing long-established rules in their setting, themselves acting as 'watchers'. But in the context of this setting, which encouraged children to speak their minds about a wide range of things to do with the setting, I read the comment as one in which the practitioner challenges a long-held view that children should do as adults say (and not always what they do!). Arguably, however, at the present time a new orthodoxy is forming in early childhood practice around the primacy of children's individual rights as noted earlier (Kjorholt, 2005). Seen this way, Jane's comment could be viewed as positioning herself within a more contemporary early childhood discourse with its *own* techniques of power.

It would seem from this section, that children's movement in space during food events is viewed as problematic. For some practitioners, there appears to be fear over the possibility of chaos and children's free movement in space represents a challenge to their authority. Some settings adhered fervently to set seating arrangements for food events, but this is more complex and should not be dismissed in all instances as practitioner attempts to civilize children's bodies. In setting two, for instance, the primacy of providing a warm, comfortable experience during food events with a familiar practitioner and peers meant that the same group of children sat with the same practitioner (as their key person) each day. By way of contrast, one of the toddler rooms in setting four was

vehement in adhering to a set seating plan, unlike other rooms in the setting. This seemed to reinforce the power the practitioners had over the children – a form of extractive power (Leavitt, 1994). However, it is also important to remember that practices aimed at civilizing *children's* bodies in space also impact on *practitioners* too. The corralling of children into space and the patrolling of space around dinner tables – to name but two techniques of power - impact negatively on practitioners' enjoyment of the mealtime experience.

Finally, movement in space was observed to be a strategy employed by a number of children in order to resist conforming to the stillness required during food events. This was not necessarily viewed as problematic in *every* setting for *every* child. Early childhood practice, I believe, is far more complex than some of the writing that falls into the 'civilizing' theme suggests. My data shows that many practitioners make judgements on whether children's movement in space during food events is problematic on the basis of the *particular* child and the *particular* context in which the behaviour occurred. Whilst no patterns emerged here in relation to gender, for instance, the *age* and *experience* of children were significant as older children or those with more experience of the setting were expected to have inculcated the culturally accepted 'norms' of behaviour in their respective settings. And it is notable that some practitioners were more than happy to negotiate or allow deviations from the 'keeping still during food events rule' in order to accommodate children's wishes. I observed changes to the order of place mats or the chair arrangements in order to sit next to another person or a willingness to respond to the chastisement of the children if their own behaviour was different from that expected of the children.

4.3 'Body rules'

Whilst I have looked at time and space in relation to the way children's bodies are civilized into 'correct' forms of behaviour during food events, there are other bodily ways of behaving that are expected of the children and the purpose of this

section is to explore some of these more thoroughly. Goffman's (1969) study of the presentation of self is of relevance to this study because he looks at the way bodies are expected to *conform* in given situations. Leavitt and Power (1997) call this 'body-rules' and point to how practitioners teach these intentionally and less intentionally. In Nyberg and Grinland's (2008: 41) study, for instance, practitioners cited 'chaos' as their worse case scenario during meal times. By 'chaos' the practitioners were referring to high levels of bodily movements and noise being generated by children. In this section, then, I aim to explore further the kinds of 'body rules' children are expected to employ during food events and the kinds of cultural practices that inscribe a particular set of bodily performances of the children.

Firstly, it is important to consider practices that have developed in relation to the *anticipation* of food events. Ben-Ari's (1997) detailed study of a Japanese preschool, for instance, examines the way that children are expected to set the table with the chopsticks, cups and napkins they have bought from home and then they are expected to say prayers, some short, fixed phrases and a couple of songs prior to commencing their meal. This anticipation can be linked to Elias' (1994) notion of the civilizing process, where one way in which we might demonstrate civility is the ability to stave off the *immediacy* of one's emotional and physical drives. Certainly in this study, food events were characterized by a high degree of *waiting*: Waiting on the mat, then lining up to go to the toilet and wash hands before food; waiting to be called to sit at the table; waiting until everyone has their food before starting to eat; waiting for everyone to finish before being able to move from the table and even if permitted to leave before then; waiting on a mat until everyone has finished their dinner.

I observed a high degree of waiting in relation to food events in comparison to other activities in *each* setting. If children wanted to take part in an activity, such as riding a bike or painting a picture during non-food event parts of the session or day, they could in general do it. Even if they could not do it there and then, they

were allowed to play with something else of their own choice while waiting. The waiting that related to food events involved a higher degree of self-discipline on the part of the children because on many occasions such times were characterized as having nothing much to do (such as looking at one's food but not being allowed to eat it or waiting in a long line for the toilet). Whilst many practitioners attempted to engender some fun into these waiting periods, such as singing songs, the fundamental difference was that children's choices during these periods were far fewer in comparison to other parts of the nursery day or session.

Some practitioners stated explicitly that learning to wait was an important attribute for young children to develop. Wanda (P13), in setting three, highlighted a view that children need to learn how to make an '*orderly queue*' at the snack table on entry to nursery. In Ben Ari's research (1997: 104) he similarly notes how the self-control young children are expected to exercise in waiting patiently for their meal and lining up is not to 'reinforce the external authority of the teacher (although this element is also involved) but to help the children internalize self-regulation' (see also Leavitt, 1994; Peak, 1991). In Peak's study (1991), lunch is preceded by a lunchtime song in which children are exhorted to eat well, chew their food well, avoid spilling or dropping their food, and finish their meal. In my own study, as in Leavitt and Power's (1997) work, singing before food events seemed to act more as a strategy to manage the movement of a group who were waiting either to be called to the table or called to the bathroom rather than explicitly teach 'body rules'.

'Body rules' appear to be 'taught' intentionally and less intentionally. Those that seem to be promoted intentionally might involve telling children to be quiet during a mealtime and those that are less intentional might refer to a practitioner singing a finger rhyme which culminates in the children sitting with their hands firmly in their laps ready to attend (Leavitt and Power, 1997). In Leavitt and Power's (1997) study, children who transgressed body rules were admonished and

sometimes given a less-enjoyable snack than the rest of the group – a practice I (thankfully) did not observe in any of the four settings in my own study. Such transgressions might include touching their milk before everyone has had theirs given to them in the group or leaning back on chairs during a meal. Certainly all three practitioners in setting one were adamant that children did not touch their drinks until everyone had received theirs. Given that there were 13 children in a group, this seemed to be difficult for some children to manage, but their punishment was verbal chastisement rather than the withdrawal of food.

In setting one (15.2.07) I also noted that the children had developed a strong sense of what is acceptable or not at nursery snack times. I noted:

Today the children peeled their own oranges. A story was read during this time, but I observed children enjoying the tasty juiciness and smell of the oranges, experiencing the juice running over their fingers and the experience of roundness of the shape of the orange, one child cupping his hands round the orange and moving it from hand to hand...

The children seem to hide away some of these behaviours – if moving the orange from hand to hand, Merry (P2) asks them to eat it properly and not to play with the food. If juice runs down their faces, one child is told to close his mouth properly when eating, indeed a 4 year old child enforces this too, saying 'I can see what's in Jacob's (C4) mouth – ugh – disgusting'

Here it would seem that the children are expected to defer or deny themselves experiences linked to bodily gratification. Arguably, by the time children reach statutory school age they are already inculcated into subordinating their sensory, embodied pleasures to those of more abstract thinking and 'good, clean fun' (Tobin, 1997: 19). Furthermore, it seems that it is not only practitioners who chastise children if their behaviour is deemed unacceptable – children too are engaged in admonishing their peers. This can be linked to other studies that

have found that children may even be given roles as monitors to *reinforce* discipline around culturally accepted mealtime behaviours (Hendry, 1986; Ben-Ari, 1997). Certainly the older children in my own study seemed very aware of the 'body rules' of their setting. Here are some examples of children 'policing' each other in this way:

'Hamza shouldn't be here – it's not his turn for drinks'
(Setting 1: Famida: C5)

'He shouldn't be wearing a cloak at the snack table'
(Setting 3: Errol: C38)

'Tammy had *two* strawberries' (*only one strawberry each was permitted that day*)
(Setting 3: Grace: C44)

But I also observed children *helping* each other understand the 'body rules' of their setting. In one of the toddler rooms in setting four (12.6.09), I noted the following:

The children came in from outside and washed their hands – I did this with them. Today's dinner is rice, carrots, sweetcorn, mushrooms etc... The children eat from white china bowls. They wear napkins and are very impatient for food. Nadiya (P19) emphasizes using *words* to get what they want as opposed to actions with *hands*. Emily (C51) directs who gets what bowl of food with her hands – as she notes how Nadiya is moving down the line serving the food. John (C52) looks a bit distressed at having to wait but Emily points to him to show who is next in line.'

Here, Emily seems to show an understanding of the 'body rules' of the setting that each child will get fed in turn along the line of the table. Furthermore, she seems to empathise with John in his distress at not being fed yet and she appears to try and help him understand that he is next in line. The observation is also interesting because the children are reproached for gesturing what they

would like to eat and are told to 'use their words', which seems to ignore the importance of non verbal communication and serves to subordinate the body (gesture) to the mind (use of verbal communication) (see also Tobin, 2004).

Every setting reinforced particular cultural linguistic rules regarding the giving and receiving of food. In every observed food event (and in total I observed 216 real [as opposed to play episodes] food events in this study), children of all ages were encouraged to say thank you for their food or drink. In setting four, although few of the babies and toddlers were using recognizable words, practitioners said 'ta' or 'thank you' for them as they received their food or drink as a precursor to them being able to say it for themselves. If children wanted more food or drink they were encouraged to say 'more *please*' but also to 'say it *nicely*'. By 'nicely' the practitioners seemed to mean asking for food in a quiet, 'sensible' way once food has been swallowed. I often observed this 'body rule' mentioned in the children's food event *play* too. I did not observe anywhere near the same degree of emphasis on social niceties during practitioner involvement in free play sessions in this study, such as an insistence on saying 'thank you' if passing a toy to a child. Interestingly, the 'body rules' associated with food events were similar in each setting, yet when I asked about this, no setting had discussed the 'rules' explicitly as a team.

On some occasions the reinforcement of 'body rules' involved a high degree of physical management of the children when compared to other parts of the day or session. In setting two (12.11.07) I noted:

I am on a table with a new member of staff Joan (P8). We converse with the children as they eat and Larry (C23) and Aaron (C24) are joking as they eat. Manveen (P9) seems very bothered that they are turning their heads round and looking at her table – even though they are not shouting out. Joan has not picked them up on this and neither have I – it does not seem excessive. Manveen encourages them to turn round a few times, verbally, but then gets up from

her own table and comes over to ours and physically moves them both round. She tucks them *firmly* under the table so they cannot easily move and are 'forced' to sit looking into their own table. Larry seems bothered by the physical handling but does not protest verbally. Manveen looks at Joan as she does this and I wonder whether there is a sense of non-verbal admonishment of the way Joan is 'handling' her table.

Setting two was especially interesting in this regard as at mealtimes, the children sat with their key person on a small table but in close proximity to the other tables. In doing this, there was a sense that the ethos of the setting would permeate the practice of each table, which could be likened to Lave and Wenger's (1992) notion of being inculcated into a particular 'community of practice'. Despite this, I observed what I will call 'table cultures' that differed, albeit subtly from each other, and this was a clear example of this. The practitioners on the other tables in this setting were far less controlling of the children's mealtime behaviours, indeed Sharon's (P10) table as we will see in Chapter Six, was characterized by playfulness and fun.

I observed children on many occasions playing in the designated role play area in a way that emphasised 'body rules' in relation to food events. Here are some extracts from my observations of Naomi's play on 1.3.07 that highlight this.

Naomi (crossly): 'I'm not cooking you toast AGAIN today – you get that dog out of my kitchen' ...
'Tuck your chair in – were you born in a barn?' ...
'Don't get up till you finish your dinner'...
'Don't wave your knife and fork about – use them properly'
(Setting 1: Naomi: C6)

In recording Naomi's play I was struck with how often behaviour in relation to food and eating is viewed as needing to be controlled. In addition, I saw many other examples of children's play that echoed similar 'body rules', with children

taking on the roles of mothers, especially, shouting at their 'children' to behave in culturally inscribed ways at the dinner table. In doing this, the children seemed to be exploring what it might feel like to be a parent, who is expected to instill 'good manners' in her children. Mead (1967) argues that investigating the perspectives of others in this way is an important aspect of young children's play. In addition, in play such as this, children appear to reproduce the culture of which they are a part, albeit creatively (James et al, 1998).

A key strategy I noticed children employing in order to subvert the 'body rules' and 'order' of their settings was *hiding*. This was something I especially observed in setting one. Snack time was signaled by a wave of a tambourine and a practitioner calling a particular colour group into the kitchen area (three colour groups in total). I observed many children attempting to hide from the practitioners during these occasions, such as in the base of the slide outdoors as well as in the bathroom. On one occasion I observed Luke (C16) take off his colour badge, which denoted his colour group for snack time, and hide it in his pocket. The practitioner organizing the transition to snack time had to search through her class list to see which group he belonged to.

The children also policed my own behaviour in relation to the colour badge 'rule' because I was the only person – adult or child – who did not wear a badge. In my research role I inevitably wanted to observe as many food events as possible, across all three colour groups. On a couple of occasions, I found myself pulling my cardigan across my chest to hide my lack of a badge as the children were checking whether everyone was wearing the 'correct' badge – I found myself laughing inwardly at my response to this. On one occasion (19.10.06) I 'came clean' about my lack of a badge and the children helped to think of ways around this situation in order to help me observe all three groups. Ideas included having a special badge of a different colour and having three badges, thus enabling me to change the one I wore according to the group I was observing. All were *adamant* that I should wear a badge.

But hiding did not always mean hiding their physical selves. Children also seemed to know which *behaviours* to hide from practitioners during food events. In the following observation (14.11.08), Toby (C45) shows everyone his Spiderman pants away from what he presumably thinks will be admonishment.

Toby has sat down in the snack café and says he is spiderman but this is not really heard by Wanda (P13) who is sorting out face wiping. He looks at me and tells me that he is Spiderman because he has it on his pants and shoves his hands down his jeans to pull them up to show me (over his belt). Three children look closely to check out this information and while Wanda has her back turned, compare each other's pants' designs.

Making noises deemed unacceptable also seemed to be a form of resistance to 'body rules' for young children. Here I am not particularly referring to children's cries or screams, although this is a clear way that children can register their protestation at having their own wishes thwarted or denied in some way. Leo (aged 13 months) for instance, would often shout in protest if he was not first to get his dinner. In the following observation (setting 4: 4.6.09), Millie (aged 14 months) who is physically near to Leo, gives him food sneakily across the table to assuage his anger:

Leo (C49) sees a bowl going over his head and rather desperately puts his hands up thinking he is missing out on food and cries out loudly in protest. Millie (C53) puts bits of food onto the table quite purposively and pushes them towards Leo. I'm sure she can see that he wants more food and is sharing food from her bowl. Leo puts his hand out in a grabbing motion to show that he wants more.

In other instances, making *loud* noises seemed to be used as a means to subvert the order of food events in the settings. This can be seen in the following extract from my fieldnotes in one of the toddler rooms in setting four (4.6.09):

Rehana (P26) sings a song at the table during snack time and at the end of each verse there is a bit that says 'I love you', which she sings in a very sweet voice. At this point, Sam (C54) shouts 'blast off' whilst jumping up and gets ticked off and told to sing the song *sweetly* with the whole group or leave the table.

One reading of this is to see Sam's loud 'blast off' sound as him asserting a hegemonic, masculinist (MacNaughton, 2000) response to the (female) practitioner's wish for quiet and compliance. Another interpretation might be that Sam was trying to resist Rehana's attempts to assert values of commensality and collectivity. I know my own reaction at the time was one of empathizing with Sam's resistance to the saccharin quality of the song.

The final aspect of noise as a resistance strategy that I wish to highlight here is one of *carrying on when everyone has stopped*. Chaput Waksler (1991) is interested in how some behaviours come to be seen as 'deviant', by which she means the types of actions that are viewed as a violation of the rules or values of the setting. She became fascinated with a child who carried on dancing when the music had been turned off, despite being told to stop by his teacher.

In my own study, I found parallels to this in my observations of children continuing to make a noise long after the practitioner(s) had deemed it acceptable. This can be seen in my fieldnotes from setting four at snack time (26.6.09):

Children make playful sounds at the table as Sudhani (P20) cuts up the fruit. The children tell her which fruits they like. When she has finished peeling and chopping the fruit, Sudhani says 'all done' and the children respond by saying 'all done...all done...all done' as a kind of on-going chorus until told to stop. Caitlin (C50) continues long after being told to stop.

As Chaput Waksler (1991: 105) notes, 'to respond to these actions as rule violations rather than as innovations, experiments, learning experiences etc... is to submerge their meanings under the label of deviance.' But I believe the issue is more complex as the different practices in each of the settings carry with them different cultural expectations regarding the 'appropriate' behaviours of children *and* practitioners. For instance, in the pretend contexts of imaginative play, practitioners may be far more willing to accept and even promote such playful activity than in the more seemingly more serious, 'real-life' contexts of food events. This is something I aim to explore more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

In concluding this section of the chapter, it seems as if there is a range of 'body rules' that operate in the four early childhood settings. Food events seem to be characterized by a high degree of waiting, which could be interpreted as disciplining the body in such a way that the child's immediate desires are subordinated and the body is brought under control (see for instance Elias, 1994). Moreover, the deferred gratification of bodily desires can also be regarded as reflective of middle-class values (Bourdieu, 1986). Other 'body rules' observed related to not wearing imaginative play outfits during food events; keeping food within one's mouth and not showing what is inside one's mouth; using 'please' and 'thank you' to a higher degree than observed on other occasions that might also have warranted this; and not turning round and looking at friends on other tables. These 'body rules' were more or less the same in every setting, but from my evidence in setting two, I suspect that in part, there is a sense in which practitioners are inculcated into the particular ethos of the setting in which they work as in Lave and Wenger's (1992) notion of becoming part of a particular 'community of practice'.

Children seem to resist the 'body rules' of their settings. Strategies I observed related to hiding behaviours practitioners might deem unacceptable during food events; physically hiding to avoid participating in food events; making loud noises and continuing to make a noise when asked to stop. I also observed children on

many occasions enforcing the 'body rules' of their settings, such as reporting children who had taken too much food, were not sitting 'correctly' or were in the wrong group. The children's play was also interesting to observe as I noted many examples of children playing out the role of an exasperated mother trying to feed her children and inculcate 'good manners' simultaneously. Thus, in play, children seem to *reproduce* hegemonic ideas about gender and food as well as *create* new understandings of this (see James et al, 1998 discussion of play).

4.4 Food events as 'teachable moments'

The subordination of the body to practices deemed important in order to cultivate the mind can be seen in the way food events are viewed as important by the practitioners as a learning opportunity for the children. This links to conceptions of the child as 'futuraity' (Jenks, 1996). Indeed schooling – in this study, nursery practice - often seems to be conceptualized in terms of the extent to which children are 'prepared' for subsequent stages of schooling (Romero, 1991; Mayall, 1996). In this section, I aim to demonstrate how children's individual enjoyment of their food and the spontaneous talk that emerged from eating together tended to be subordinate to that of seizing an opportunity for adult directed learning owing to having children gathered together as a group. Many practitioners were mindful of their responsibilities to 'teach' young children as preparation for later schooling.

Thus, the 'learning opportunity' food events seem to afford rarely seemed to have much to do with the *enjoyment* of food itself. This can be seen most starkly in Ben's (P21) assertion:

We always talk about what they (*the children*) are having to eat – we use it (*food events*) as a learning curve. It's an opportunity for learning about language and colours.

In settings three and four, especially, food events were seized upon as a time to test children's knowledge of colour in relation to the fruit on offer as well as the names of the fruit. In my observation of one of the toddler rooms at snack time on 26.6.09 in setting four, I especially noted how snack time seemed to be seized upon as an opportunity for some direct teaching.

Snack time is at 9.30 and Sudhani (P20) encourages the children to name the fruit. Eddie (C56) recognises kiwi and keeps saying the word 'kiwi' as if he enjoys its sound. Sam (C54) also seems to enjoy the sound of this word. They play with the word until told to stop quite firmly. There is *explicit* teaching about the name of each fruit and the colour of each fruit. The children sing songs and a few of them still use the word 'kiwi' playfully until told to stop. In teaching the words of the fruit Sudhani asks 'is it green?' etc... when in fact it is another colour. This is done in order to encourage a correct response from the children but they seem bored with this and are looking around the room.

In this observation, the children's spontaneous enjoyment of playing with the word 'kiwi' as they ate it did not appear to be valued as a learning opportunity, unlike the adult-directed activity of learning colour names. It seems as if snack times, especially, are times that are appropriated for adult-directed learning activities owing to having children 'captive' as a *group*. Furthermore, the use of more direct teaching during snack times seemed to mirror the formality of food events in this room more generally.

Settings one and two, in particular, emphasized the importance of snack times in terms of getting children together as a *group*. Many of the practitioners in setting two argued for this on the basis that it is a 'social time', even though the 'social' adjective seemed to relate more to the children and practitioners being *physically* near to each other as opposed to actually *interacting* with each other as a story was usually told at this time. In setting one, the sense of being together as a

group was linked directly to developing the social skills 'necessary' for children's subsequent school careers as opposed to the sense of *communality* food events might engender (as noted by Giovanni, 2006, for instance). Kate (P1) told me:

'I wanted to have an opportunity over the morning to get the children together in a smaller group so we could do story or singing or talk. It's turned out to be majority story or just talking time and that just seemed the obvious time to do it. The fruit *alone* gives you the opportunity for talking and then, once they're all settled, then there's time for stories. Well that was the original thought behind it.

Mary (P3), also in setting one, was also keen on having a formal group time for snacks, asserting:

'It is really bringing on the children and preparing them for when they go into reception'.

It is interesting to note that in setting three, Wanda (P13) was concerned with the *lack* of experience the children get of being in a large group for meals. Whilst she was positive about the nursery's approach to having a snack café, her comments suggest anxiety that the nursery is not preparing the children for starting statutory schooling and eating in the large dinner hall. Wanda states:

Mind you, the children don't get the *big* group experience. When they go to reception class the dinner hall is so *daunting* and we are not getting them ready for eating *on mass*.

The discourse of *preparing* children for the next stage of schooling was deemed a crucial part of early childhood practice for many of the practitioners in this study. This can be likened to the notion of civilizing the body because the lived experience of children now is subordinate to preparing them for later experiences

(Polakow, 1992; Leavitt and Power, 1997; Tobin, 1997). I only noted a few practitioners (in setting two) that questioned whether *schools* themselves should change their practice in relation to food events.

Unlike the other settings in this study, setting three had a snack café rather than a set time for a snack and a drink. This enabled the children to have a drink and some fruit whenever they wanted to but *always* in the presence of a practitioner as someone was always based in this area. A key reason for the constant presence of a practitioner was the fear of children choking or eating something that might provoke an allergic response – a theme I develop in greater detail in the next chapter. Because a practitioner was always based in the snack café, the practitioners were keen to emphasise the degree of *planning* that went into the area. Vera (P14) stated:

Here we plan for an element of *discussion* in the snack café. Each week we have a *subject for discussion* e.g. new children starting, our families, getting to know you, manners or maths. During spring we might discuss the seeds in the fruit and how they grow into new plants. We might count them in maths. However you might go in there and go off at a *tangent*.

Some staff don't like being there – they find it boring. I like it because you always get a lot of *company*. It's not an activity that can go *wrong* or be a disaster. Children just *come* – it's a *choice*.

Unlike the other settings, setting three had a section in its planning for the discussion topic of the week and the practitioners seemed proud that they did this. It seems as if the enjoyment of the food and the kinds of conversation that might *spontaneously* emerge from being together at a table were less worthy than a pre-planned discussion topic. Vera seemed genuinely concerned that she might 'go off at a tangent', away from the planned learning intentions, when in the

snack café. But in practice, I observed most of the practitioners in this setting taking their conversational cues from the children as opposed to adhering to a pre-planned discussion topic. Underpinning the practitioners' unease, I suggest, is the increased level of paperwork involved in early childhood practice since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) coupled with OFSTED inspections has resulted in greater disquiet amongst many practitioners about justifying what they do. In this setting, only two practitioners held NVQ level three qualifications – the rest have an NVQ level two. Two members of staff had left their jobs in the last few months (but were working as supply staff) and told me that their reasons for leaving were related to the high level of record keeping that now went with their practitioner role. Not only was this team anxious about scrutiny from any OFSTED or local authority inspection, they were also worried about scrutiny from the parents' committee that is made up of comparatively more affluent, middle class parents.

It would seem, then, that set snack times, in particular, are occasions where practitioners feel the need to engage the children in teaching that is far more adult-directed when compared to other parts of the nursery day or session. Getting children into formal groups seems to be viewed as important in preparing children for similar experiences later in their schooling and by virtue of being assembled as a group, some practitioners use this opportunity to instill what they believe to be worthwhile knowledge, such as the ability to recognize colours. The focus on *preparation* could be seen as another way in which young children's bodies are civilized through food events, because *indirectly* they offer one of the few opportunities some settings provide for formally gathering the children together for a group activity.

4.5 The task or the child?

This section looks at the kinds of practices that result in children being subordinated to tasks that need to be accomplished. Food events, like changing

nappies, are occasions that happen every day and many times a day if the setting offers full day care (as in settings two and four). Whilst they may be viewed as 'key times for play' (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003 – from title of publication), some settings seem to be more concerned with feeding a group of children as a task to be completed as opposed to attending to children's *enjoyment* of the occasion.

The importance of the key person approach (see Elfer et al, 2003, who write about the way that a *key person* establishes and maintains close relationships with children and their families) in ensuring that *children* are the focus of attention as opposed to tasks to be completed cannot be over-estimated at the current time. This can be seen in the statutory requirement for a key person approach to be in place as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007). The difference between the key person approach and task-centred approaches to practice is exemplified in Amy's (setting 2: P5) comment:

The difference between my old place and here is they didn't have a specific person like we have here – key groups – they'd have all the babies together and you'd feed just who was left really. I don't know how to put it – they were just like 'well just choose a child and feed it' really.

The 'choose a child and feed it' practice that Amy had seen in her previous place of work was one that many other practitioners in the study had experienced. It was practice that many felt powerless to resist as to organize food events (and also practitioner break times) in such a way that each child sits with their key person for lunch represented a commitment from management teams that was not always there.

Sometimes spatial arrangements and risk avoidance strategies conspired to make eating in key groups difficult to realise. In setting four, for instance, the children ate around a large semi-circular table in each room. These tables were

the only tables that were permitted for use during food events and were sited near to the kitchen areas in order that they were kept scrupulously clean and away from the usual play of the children. Thus, in each room, the children had to sit together as one group of nine as opposed to three small groups of three, each with a practitioner. In setting two, on the other hand, play equipment on tables was cleared away for lunch and four or five small tables were set up to facilitate children eating in small groups with their key person. As James et al (1998) note, spaces may operate differently across time.

Kath (P7) spoke of the importance of having a few children on a table with their key person and how this impacted on making food events a relaxed and sociable occasion, rather than a task to be completed quickly. Her use of the word 'regimental' is particularly interesting in the following excerpt from her interview transcript.

Kath – (*When talking about setting two*): 'It's a *social* environment – other children are talking and we are talking. Children don't feel any pressure – it is a *relaxed* atmosphere. But there (*old nursery*) we adults, we just stood around the table. Sometimes we could sit – putting another chair next to them to help them, like putting pasta onto a fork

Deb: But you weren't focusing in on a few children, who were kind of your group?

Kath: No no no – it could be any one

Deb: About how many were there?

Kath: About nine or ten – a very small nursery. Eleven maximum around the table. But here it is a much better way of putting things across to children. It's not that *regimental* kind of thing. This is *homely* so they learn how – it's like sitting with their parents at home round the dining table and eating. It's the same thing here. They sit around with other children and maybe one or two members of staff like you've seen, and it's a nice, *relaxed* time with social interaction...

Deb: You used the word '*regimental*'. Did it feel a bit like that in your old nursery?

Kath: Yes I felt that. I feel that you should not pressurize the children. All the food that they are going to eat is already served on the plate (*referring to the way her former setting put exactly the same amount and type of food on each child's plate regardless of individual wishes*)

But it is not just children who seem to be subordinated to tasks to be done, I also observed this in relation to practitioners. Setting three was the clearest example of this as at the beginning of the day, after a formal registration period, each practitioner told the group something about what they were doing that day. On *each* occasion they would say e.g. 'I'm toilets' if based as a 'float' to support children with toileting, or 'I'm snacks' if based in the snack café. If based in the workshop area (a space for art, craft and technology activities), the practitioners said what they would be *doing* e.g. 'I'm in the workshop area and we will be ...' Activities pertaining to the body seemed to be relegated to a *task in hand*, devoid of emotion and worth (see also Leavitt, 1994; 1995; Eliot, 2007), and the individual identities of the practitioners seemed to be subordinate to their *task* or so obvious that no further explanation was necessary. The low status of activities associated with the body seems particularly evident here.

Finally, it is important to note that children occasionally saw the funny side of such expressions as can be seen in the following comment after registration in setting three.

Sadie (P16): 'I'm snacks today'

Joe (C46): 'No you're not – I can't eat you' (lots of giggles with friends)

This sense of resistance and *playful participation* in the life of the setting is something I will be emphasizing in Chapter Six especially.

In summarizing this section, it would seem that the child's body is sometimes viewed as a series of tasks to get through during the course of the nursery session or day. This represents the most severe form of civilizing the body as the child is rendered invisible or, to parody the title of Butler's (1998) work, a 'body that *doesn't* matter'. Factors such as room arrangements and a lack of commitment from management to ensure practitioners support *children* rather than *tasks* can sometimes conspire against food events being organized so that children sit with a familiar adult and peers on a regular basis. Writing in the area of civilizing the body, which often has its basis in Foucault's work, is important in encouraging us to apply notions of disciplinary power and governmentality to a wide range of subject matter. However, when applied to early childhood practice, there is a tendency in such writing (see for instance Burman, 1994; Cannella and Viruru, 2004) to neglect the importance of warm, sustained relationships and children's lived bodily experiences (Albon, 2010a forthcoming).

4.6 Being a role model

The final theme to be discussed in this chapter relates primarily to the practitioners and the importance they placed on being a role model for the children in terms of healthy eating and to a lesser extent, being a *physical* role model of 'good' health. This research indicates that being a 'positive role model' is linked to many practitioners' sense of being a *professional*.

However, it is important from the outset to trouble the notion of 'professionalism', not least because new directions in policy (in this study the policy imperatives around healthy eating) have formulated new discursive ways of thinking about professionalism. Thus, we 'become adept at presenting and representing ourselves with this new vocabulary' and the possibility of being 'otherwise' diminishes (Ball, 2003: 217). As Osgood (2006) observes, 'professionalism' is not an apolitical or neutral construct. The data presented here suggest that being a role model as an early childhood professional involves practitioners in

civilizing their bodies to a high degree, which can be likened to a performance of 'idealised' bodily control and rationality (Bruch, 1997).

The following interview extract highlights the importance placed on being a role model of healthy eating. John (P12) and I discussed this issue in some depth:

Deb: So being a role model for the children is really important?

John: Yeh – cos they *watch* whatever you do

Deb: So even if you don't like it, you've got to have a try!

John: Yeh – *grin and bear it!* (laugh) ...I tell you – *I can eat a house off..* mmm... but not here. At home, like, I wouldn't eat a crust whereas when I'm *here* I *would* because it's ... the children and you see the signs and it does make you think a bit about what the children - what they're eating – is it any good for them?

Deb: So what you do here is very different from what you do at home?

John: Oh yeh – definitely!

Deb: So it doesn't have an impact the other way round?

John: No only here it makes a difference. At home ...

Deb: Like you were saying at home you don't eat *crusts*... but you eat *crusts* here even though probably you don't like crusts...

John: I will eat them *here* if it's in front of the children. It's like *tomatoes*. I *despise* tomatoes but here I'll have one, to say 'I've eaten one'

Deb: Cos all of you – all of you here have a little bit of the dinner the children have don't you?

John: We try – we usually try to eat – even if we have to grin and bear it. We have a bit – and then we can say ‘just try a little bit’. If you’re saying ‘try a little bit’ and you’ve got something on your plate and you haven’t tried it then it’s like - you’re sort of being a *hypocrite*

From this extended interview extract we can see that John will often subordinate his own feelings about particular foods owing to a perception that he should be a role model of healthy eating, even when he dislikes a food intensely. Children, are conceptualized as ‘watchers’ (a Foucauldian analogy – Foucault, 1977) who focus their ‘gaze’ on practitioners and their eating behaviours. The ability to ‘grin and bear it’ appears to be viewed as an important attribute in an early childhood professional. Indeed it often seems to be regarded as an important tool in the practitioner’s repertoire to encourage children to *try* foods deemed to be healthy (if unpopular). In the following interview extract, Merry (P2) uses the phrase ‘that is some of the tricks’ to emphasise this skill.

Take tomatoes. I just take one look at it. I don’t eat tomatoes. I don’t eat tomatoes but I will eat it. It doesn’t matter but I will eat it even though I don’t like it. I will eat it with a *straight face* with an *enjoying it face*, you know, just to encourage them to try it. It’s like Hamdi (C1). She don’t like oranges. You’ll be going ‘oh it’s *juicy*, oh it’s *sweet*’. That is some of the tricks.

But whilst children are viewed as needing trickery on the part of practitioners in order to ‘dupe’ them into trying healthy foods that seem to be unpopular, children also appear to be viewed as *passive* within role-model theorizing (e.g. Bandura’s social learning theory [1977] in which people are said to reproduce actions they have observed, a process that is furthered through ‘vicarious reinforcement’). A key criticism is that role model theorizing ignores the way that children take up as well as reject the range of discursive *positionings* that are open to them (Grieshaber, 2004). The passivity associated with role model theorizing can be

seen in Wanda's (P13) commentary, which is similar in focus to John's, in which she suggests that children will *automatically* copy the behaviour of practitioners.

We need to act as a *role model* – we need to be *seen* eating with the children. If they see you eating they will eat more and so on. I would never walk through the nursery eating a packet of crisps (might when they've gone home though). If you say something with children, you *must* do it otherwise you send out mixed messages and they copy what we do.

Similarly, Amy (C5) in setting 2 stated:

'They (*children*) are *aware* of what we eat – we've got to be role models in that sense. It's a *balance* between what you want and being a role model.'

The practitioners in setting three were often observed *hiding* their eating behaviours from the children. The setting has a large, walk in cupboard, which houses the coffee and tea making facilities and on most days the practitioners took it in turns to bring in sweet treats to have in the course of the day. When in the snack café in the main room with the children, the practitioners were a model of healthy eating, but I often observed them popping into the cupboard for a biscuit or sweet, especially in the run up to Christmas. In this sense, being a role model of healthy eating was akin to a *performance*, 'performed' when being a 'professional' and framed within a particular socio-cultural and historical policy context (see Osgood, 2006). Although not discussing early childhood practice, Goffman's work on the presentation of self can also be usefully applied here.

Goffman (1969) discusses how we present ourselves in different ways according to social context and highlights the way that we often move seamlessly between different styles of performance. What Goffman describes as 'impression management' (p. 203) is important here as it involves 'dramaturgical cooperation'

(p. 205). In other words, a team needs to have a sense of collective performance and this involves discipline. For Goffman (1969: 211) 'the disciplined performer is also someone with 'self-control'', able to suppress her spontaneous feelings. He adds:

'And the disciplined performer is someone with sufficient poise to move from private places of informality to public ones of varying degrees of formality, without allowing such changes to confuse him.'

Thus, what happens when relaxing 'behind the scenes' may not necessarily be in synchrony with one's *public* performance and access to 'backstage' (the cupboard or staff room) is controlled in order to prevent the 'audience' (for our purposes; children) seeing a performance that is not addressed to them.

Therefore, when 'performing' as an early childhood practitioner, maybe the impression management 'required' in such a profession is adherence to being a model of healthy eating. Backstage – be it in the cupboard or in the staff room – early childhood practitioners can relax and eat what they like. I observed this in each of the settings in this study. The practitioners ate similar healthy foods to the children in public, which sometimes they disliked intensely but outwardly made a show of liking. Away from the gaze of children, I observed practitioners eating take-away fried chicken, burgers and chips (especially in setting four, which was near to a Macdonalds). Thus, despite the policy imperatives to adopt healthy eating practices in early childhood settings, and the discursive 'push' towards being a role model of healthy eating (Kubik et al, 2002 – although discussing teachers working with older children), practitioners resisted such techniques of power when away from the children¹.

¹ It should be noted that my data show children are aware of different 'performances' in relation to food. For example, Melanie (C28) was observed on a few occasions playing in a role play area akin to a fish and chip shop/cafe. When dealing with 'customers' she asked them sweetly and in a more middle class accent what they would like, but when 'backstage', calling out the order to those cooking the food, she used a strong London (working class) accent and shouted out the order whilst nibbling the 'chips'.

However, the foods eaten away from the children seemed to be imbued with a great deal of *meaning* for practitioners in this study, especially if shared. Food shared between team members seemed to act in a way that united them as a group as well as being important in highlighting individual identities within the group. In setting three, one of the practitioners was a former school cook and seemed to delight in making what she called 'nursery puddings' once a week for the practitioners she worked with. Setting three also had a 'chocolate club' which meant that every Friday it would be someone's turn to buy a chocolate for each of the team (e.g. ten Bounty bars). Great kudos was given to practitioners who were inventive in their choice of sweet to buy. In setting two, I often observed the manager talking to the team about the foods they would like her to buy in for their break periods – it seemed to be a significant and very tangible way that she could show she cared about them. Doughnuts, cakes, pot-noodles and other snacks were always available to take upstairs when on a break. In setting one, when it was a planning session at lunch-time, the practitioners took it in turns to bring in biscuits or cakes in order to make the occasion more enjoyable. In setting four, nearly every lunch period was characterized by someone bringing in chips to share or the practitioners collectively spicing up what they saw as bland children's food served in the nursery with shared pots of chillies and hot pepper sauce in order to make it more palatable.

The link between food and identity has often been made (e.g. Caplan, 1997; Meigs, 1997; James et al, 2009) as has the importance of commensality in relation to food and eating (e.g. Mennell et al, 1992; Giovanni, 2006). Valentine's (2002) work focuses specifically on food, the body and the workplace. When examining data from a nursing context, Valentine argues that sharing food such as cakes at break times is permeated with meaning for the nurses she interviewed because the context in which such food is shared and eaten transforms its significance from 'refueller to stress diffuser and pleasure giver' (p. 6). This has clear resonance for my own study.

What also interests me in relation to my data is the way the *socio-cultural* significance of food and eating, as opposed to its nutritional value, seemed to be *hidden* from the children - unless a special occasion such as a birthday or Christmas party. To be an early childhood *professional*, it seems, involves a performance in which the performer (or practitioner) is able to control her own feelings towards particular foods and project a model of healthy eating – one that, it is assumed, will be replicated by the children. This seems to deny the *embodied* experiences of individual practitioners and appears to result in practitioners acting in inauthentic ways in order to maintain a public performance – or Goffman's 'impression management' (*ibid*).

Being a role model also seems to have implications for the *physical* bodies of practitioners. Not only do practitioners feel the pressure to conform to healthy eating practices in front of the children, but three of the interviews highlight the pressures some practitioners feel in relation to conforming to a physical 'ideal' that is the embodiment of 'health'. This was seen most starkly in an interview with Kate (C1) in setting one. Kate is very overweight and stated that a key reason for going part time is the embarrassment she feels about her size when she has lunch with the reception class children in the lunch hall². Kate maintains:

When I first started teaching my weight was a *personal* issue for me, it certainly wasn't an issue for me as a *teacher* ... and part of the reason I went part

² My own story interweaves into this as I too have felt such pressures and a partial reason for losing weight has been to assuage my feelings of not being a role model of physical health. In particular, this became manifest when presenting a paper to a collaboration of New York and London health officials as well as academics on childhood obesity – as I was obese at the time. When Kate discussed her weight and its impact upon her practice, I was five stone heavier and I wonder whether she would have been quite so candid with me now. However, the 'match' (or not) between researcher and participant and its subsequent impact on the data is a complex issue and it would be wrong to assume *all* research participants wish to be interviewed by someone who shares their characteristics such as gender and race (Phoenix, 1994) or in this instance, size.

time was because I felt that I'd gone as far as I could being overweight as a teacher and it was time to lose weight because you're spouting 'healthy eating', 'healthy eating', 'exercise', 'healthy', 'healthy', 'healthy', 'healthy' and then - here I am. So it was a *big, big* reason for going part time.

...
Reception were walking in (*to the lunch hall*) and one said 'you have got big legs, you can touch the ceiling' so it was all about size and then there was Sam with 'your big belly' ... So it absolutely just confirmed to me that I'd made the right decision – you just can't say one thing and be something else.

But being a 'good' physical role model for children is more complex than merely embodying a slim ideal. Later, Kate stated:

I have a problem with food, being big. Children have noticed and ask me things like 'why are you fat?' or 'how are you fat?' and I know they're not being nasty. I think that with the Healthy Schools' agenda you should be a good role model. It wasn't such an issue years ago – I've been big for years... It is nice, though, to be big and cuddly for the children. But I have to be honest that I get out of breath keeping up with all the PE the children do now. They have 4 hours a week and because they tend to do literacy and numeracy in the mornings, when I do supply cover in the afternoons I often end up doing PE. At the end of the day we are a 'healthy school' and I don't exactly project an image of healthy living do I?

Here, it would seem that embodying a slim and healthy 'ideal' is not the only discourse at work. Other, competing discourses prevail, not least the ideal of the *voluptuous* body and its importance to being a practitioner. This was something I also noted in my fieldnotes much later in the research (Setting 4: 14.5.09).

Lots of talk about body size and the importance of being healthy but not *too* slim. Sharmina (P18) is

pregnant and talks about how hard it can be in the baby room (*moving about*). Others talk about being cuddly (large) for the children and that's why the children like Nadiya (P19 - *who is plump*).

It should be noted that in early childhood education, there has long been a maternalistic discourse associated with the role of the practitioner (Ailwood, 2008). Further to this, underpinning much of public policy in relation to healthy eating, although rarely stated explicitly, it is *women* (in this instance as early childhood practitioners) who are expected to put such strategies into action (Warin et al, 2008). But this puts practitioners in a difficult position. On the one hand they may be expected to be the physical embodiment of someone who is cuddly and nurturing – an idealized image of mother (Powdermaker, 1997). However, by way of contrast, this 'cuddliness' is frowned upon as being a poor physical role model for the children in their care (see also Crossley's [2009: 84] discussion in relation to breastfeeding and the competing desires to be a 'relational' mother able to be physically and emotionally available to her child and the desire to be 'in control' of her body again). Possibly, early childhood practitioners are *especially* subject to these contradictions owing to the linkage of aspects of their work to mothering.

Yet, further to this, there is a real sense in which physical health and accompanying fitness impacts on the daily work of an early childhood practitioner. As Kate's interview extract shows, a level of physical fitness *is* needed in the job and I observed a few practitioners in the research who were unable to get to a seated position on the floor owing to their size. As Valentine (2002: 11) argues:

'Food, as an object which is implicated in ...workplace practices, is therefore intimately and complexly involved in some employees' efforts to incorporate their employers' aesthetic standards into their own embodied presentations and performance.'

But it would be wrong to suggest all practitioners in this study felt the need to conform to being a role model for the children. My fieldnotes for 29.11.07 state:

Sharon (P10) does not like macaroni cheese but unlike other staff I have observed, let's children know. She calls out, across the tables, 'I don't like macaroni – I'm going to make myself a sandwich. Anyone else want one?'

Sharon makes herself a sandwich and eats it with the children at her table. None of them seem to be bothered by this and make no comment – nor does it seem to diminish their enjoyment of their own dinners. I find her honesty very refreshing.

In concluding this section, two features predominate. Firstly, many practitioners who were interviewed mentioned the importance of being a role model of healthy eating, even if this means subordinating their own feelings towards particular foods. Away from the children, however, practitioners eating behaviours were very different. This was linked to Goffman's (1969) work, in particular the notion of impression management and the difference between front stage and back stage behaviours. Food seemed to unite the practitioners together as a group in each of the four settings in the research, but the socio-cultural significance of food for these practitioners seemed to be hidden from the children. I questioned the idea that practitioners should act in inauthentic ways with regards to foods they dislike. After all, it is possible to say that you dislike tomatoes but also highlight how you can get the same important vitamins from a pepper, for instance.

Secondly, some practitioners' feel pressure to conform to a physical 'ideal' that seems to embody a healthy lifestyle. Like Valentine's (2002:12) work on food, the body and the workplace, it seems that food may play a 'key role in aligning workers' identities and bodies with the goals of the organisation'. Whilst only a few practitioners mentioned this directly, I believe this is significant as a severe example of 'civilizing' the bodies of practitioners. Kate (P1) linked this *directly* to

the current array of initiatives linked to health in schools and nurseries. However, the data show that the physical size and shape of practitioners is also subject to a competing discourse, one that favours the voluptuous, 'motherly' body. I posited the idea that early childhood practitioners may be especially caught between these contradictions owing to the way their work is sometimes positioned as akin to motherhood. Possibly, the slim and healthy 'ideal' gives the outward appearance of rationality and control of the body whereas the larger body is seen as out of control (Bruch, 1997). In the final section of the next chapter, I explore this issue further when I discuss dieting.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that children become subject to a range of civilizing processes in early childhood settings, which seem to have their basis in a view of the child as 'uncontrollable' (Grosz, 1994); a 'work in progress' (Pilcher, 2007); a 'body project' (Ben Ari, 1997); and 'futuraity' (Jenks, 1996). These civilizing processes are manifest in the ways in which time and space are organized; the way 'body rules' are constructed and enforced; in the way children's present bodily experiences are portrayed as less important than preparation for school; and in the way that tasks are sometimes elevated over a concern for the child. All of these conspire in ways which subordinate the child's bodily needs to that of 'the group' and 'the institution'. It is significant to note here that in examining the literature in this area, much of the early childhood writing in relation to power and civilizing the body uses instances taken from food events to exemplify the points being raised (see for instance Ben Ari, 1997; Leavitt, 1994; Grieshaber, 2004).

However, in this chapter I have also tried to highlight the *complexity* of early childhood practice and put forward alternative ways of looking at the civilizing processes that occur in early childhood settings. Thus, practitioners do not

always hold power over children and can themselves be regarded, on occasions, as occupying 'docile bodies' as the practices they are expected to employ to civilize the bodies of *children* sometimes impact negatively on their *own* bodies. This was especially evident in relation to containing children in a particular space during food events as well as practitioners naming themselves as a task to be performed (notably in setting three). In addition, practitioners seem to make judgments that take into account the individual needs of particular children in particular contexts, suggesting a fluidity in their practice that is less acknowledged. More generally, the impact of food events on practitioners *themselves* is largely absent from early childhood literature. In maintaining a model of healthy eating and the physical embodiment of health, practitioners' bodies also appear to be subject to civilizing processes.

In this chapter, I also challenged the idea that having set times for food events, notably snack times, is wrong in all contexts. Primarily, my observations show that most children enjoy food events in their settings and in some cases appeared to enjoy the collective, familiar experience of eating together or the food itself. Kjørholt's (2005) critiques the current discursive field that is beginning to centre around individual children's right to choose when to eat rather than their *collective participation* in a shared meal. The work of Foucault (1989: 173), who looks at the 'archeology of knowledge', is important here as he urges the reader to examine the 'multiple dissensions' inherent in any discursive field as opposed to expecting a 'calm unity of coherent thought'.

Children, as we have seen, appear to employ a range of strategies to subvert the 'techniques of practice' (Grieshaber, 2004) employed in their settings. Thus, practitioners and the children in their care seem to be engaged in a constant process of negotiation, co-creation, regulation and challenge of 'rules' relating the food events in their settings. Although Corsaro (1997) argues that it is as children become older that they perform an increasingly significant role in impacting on the cultural routines of the groups with which they are a part, my

own research points to children playing an active role from a very early age. Babies and toddlers in this study were observed to understand some of the 'rules' of their setting. I observed them helping each other to understand these 'rules' and adopting strategies to ameliorate each other's experience of these 'rules', such as by passing food sneakily to each other.

But alongside a conceptualization of the child's body as needing to be *civilized*, there is also a sense in which in contemporary minority world societies we are engaged in a project of taming uncertainty by managing the body today in order that we discipline the future (Lupton, 1995). It would seem that an important question to ask would relate to what this might mean for early childhood practice in the area of food and eating. The next chapter looks at another perception of children's bodies, one that sees them as both *dangerous*, or a contaminant, and *in danger*. Thus, I explore the increase in risk-avoidance in relation to food and food events in early childhood practice, locating this within broader readings of 'risk' (Lupton, 1999).

Chapter 5: Taming uncertainty: Food events as a 'risky' business

In the previous chapter, I examined conceptualizations of children's bodies as in need of civilizing owing to constructions of them being 'uncontrollable' (Tobin, 1997), 'unruly' and 'disruptive' (Grosz, 1994: 3). The corollary of this is that food events, with their linkage to the body as opposed to the mind (Ben-Ari, 1997), are positioned as occasions that involved a high degree of 'management' or 'body-work' (Pilcher, 2007). This chapter develops this idea further by exploring the notion of *risk avoidance* in relation to early childhood practice, locating the issue within a broader umbrella of concerns about 'risk' at the current time. I argue that there has been an increase in health and safety concerns around food and eating that have at their root, constructions of the body as 'messy', 'uncontrollable' and even 'dangerous' in terms of being a potential contaminant. This seems to have resulted in the construction of activities relating to the cooking, serving and eating of food as an increasingly 'risky' business.

Before discussing the data, it is important to contextualize the debate within some broader theorizing about risk in contemporary minority world societies. Lupton (1995: 77) notes the prominence of risk avoidance or 'taming uncertainty' in contemporary public health promotion. Risk avoidance involves one in a rational project of disciplining the future through judicious management of the body today because the body is viewed as an enterprise or project with a future that can be predicted and planned for rather than one that is subject to the vagaries of events happening without warning (Beck, 1992). In this sense, a link can be made between risk avoidance and modernity, with its associated desire to control, tame, and standardize.

To elaborate further, in writing about the 'risk society', Beck (1992) argues that we have become increasingly alerted to risks in our everyday lives as a result of

modernity because our understandings of 'risk' have multiplied with the growth in scientific knowledge and statistics so that even the imperceptible, such as toxins in food, can now be constructed as a threat. However, alongside this, the power of lay people to identify risks has lessened because risks are now constructed as potentially invisible and everywhere, rather than purely associated with what is widely visible, such as earthquakes. As a result of this, the knowledge of 'experts' rather than the experiential knowledge of lay people is reified, but rather than this resulting in greater *certainty*, this has resulted in greater *uncertainty* and confusion over the many different knowledge claims over what constitutes a 'risk' and what our responses should be to these 'risks' (Beck, 1992; Lupton, 1995; Tulloch and Lupton, 2003).

This links to the idea of the 'civilized body' discussed in the previous chapter because a lack of desire or inability to *control* risk is seen as akin to irrationality and the inability to master the self. As Lupton (1995: 10) notes:

'The emphasis in contemporary western societies on the avoidance of risk is strongly associated with the ideal of the 'civilised' body, an increasing desire to take control over one's life, to rationalize and regulate the self and the body, to avoid the vicissitudes of fate. To take unnecessary risks is commonly seen as foolhardy, careless, irresponsible, and even 'deviant', evidence of an individual's ignorance or lack of ability to regulate the self.'

The food we eat and the practices associated with its production and preparation seem to be a clear example of the way individuals are expected to tame uncertainty in their everyday lives. This can be seen in the way that people in contemporary minority world societies have access to a great deal of information about what constitutes a 'healthy diet' and are expected to make 'sensible' choices on the basis of this. It can also be seen in the growth in media interest around food safety issues with 'scares' over *Salmonella*; Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or 'Mad Cow's Disease'); the use of pesticides and

genetically modified foods being reported widely in the press (see e.g. Booth, 2006; Boseley, 2009 to name but a few). Eating, in itself, has become increasingly pathologised as a 'health risk' and *enjoyment* of food seen almost in terms of 'addiction' (Lupton, 1995: 60) but paradoxically, there are contradictory messages projected through the media as can be seen in the pervasiveness of celebrity chefs and cookery programmes (and channels) on the television. Practices pertaining to food echo broader concerns about risk-management and can be seen in the growth in health and safety legislation used in kitchen spaces; healthy eating guidance; and such like. The body, from this perspective, is one that is not only conceptualized as in need of civilizing, it is seen as positively *in danger* or *dangerous* as a potential contaminant.

Crossley (2006) points to the way that risk is an ever-expanding phenomenon as even hospitals are a source of danger such as evidenced in the attempt to curb the spread of 'super-bugs' on wards. Individuals, then, have to become 'risk-managers', making lifestyle choices in relation to their own bodies that in turn serve to shape their narratives of themselves (see also Giddens, 1991). Draper and Green (2003) argue that, increasingly, self-governance in the area of risk-management can be viewed as a badge of citizenship. Moreover Crossley (2006: 19) notes:

'The individual is forced to make difficult decisions in unclear circumstances. The way forward is not clearly prescribed and she must therefore take her own, existential step. She must choose for herself and, in doing so, choose herself.'

In relation to food, as noted previously, in contemporary minority world countries people are bombarded with information about healthy eating and are therefore compelled into making choices that centuries ago would not have been possible - even if they *choose* to continue eating as they have always done (Giddens, 1991).

In early childhood practice, nursery practitioners are expected to support children to make healthy choices and ensure that food practices comply with stringent food hygiene standards in order that children are both protected today and maintain such practices in later life. As noted in Chapter Two, this is because practitioners are expected to assume a great deal of responsibility for the 'shaping' of children's bodies (Mayall, 1996), which has an additional effect of showing children that their bodies need to be maintained and cared for. Thus, there is an expectation that children will increasingly take up such bodily maintenance and care for themselves as they get older (Crossley, 2006). Gustaffson (2004) argues that this has led to tensions in contemporary school meals' policies as, unlike adults, children are not deemed capable of *choosing* healthy food for themselves when given the option. Nevertheless, contemporary public health approaches to risk management in general have tended towards the 'privatisation of risk' as opposed to risk being managed by the state.

However, there would appear to be tension between the idea of a rational, responsible, active citizen and one who needs to be *persuaded* to 'do the right thing' (Lupton, 1995) and this is as much the case for *adults* as it is children, who are often positioned as less rational (Burman, 1994). People do not always 'do the right thing' and the 'right thing' is itself a social construction. Tulloch and Lupton (2003) criticize approaches to risk, such as that put forward by Beck, that emphasise individuals as a homogenous group *rationally* assessing the risks around them. Such approaches, they argue, fail to pay attention to factors such as age, class, gender, ethnicity and nationality in the construction of risk. This was something that came through the data in this study strongly as we will see.

Lash (2000), for instance, argues that there are 'risk cultures' as opposed to a 'risk society', in which constructions of risk are more fluid and based on the subjective, habitual experiences of risks of different cultural groups. This position is important because cultural definitions of 'risk' arguably serve to identify self and 'other' (Douglas, 1966; 1992). Thus, understandings about 'risk' and

responses to this are shared within communities or cultures and serve to maintain *boundaries* between self and 'other'. This results in the power to define some food practices as 'healthy' or 'hygienic' and those that are 'other'. An example of this can be seen in the way that mothers who choose not to breast feed their babies, at a time when breast-feeding is being promoted strongly by government agencies and the World Health Organisation, are positioned as 'other' as their choice is currently viewed as impairing the *bond* between themselves and their babies and putting the *health* of their babies at greater risk. Mothers who choose to breast feed their babies, by way of contrast, are seen as 'doing the right thing' (Lee, 2008).

At the present time, there seems to be a risk-avoidance frenzy gripping early childhood settings in the UK. Tobin (2004: 111) goes as far as to say that 'preschools are now a battle-zone in the war against the body' with risk-avoidance, rationality and control underpinning much of early childhood practice. This is manifest in many ways; the use of risk-assessments for a growing number of nursery activities; the 'no-touching' debate (Tobin, 2004); and the stringent use of health and safety measures in ways that appear to try to eliminate risk altogether – something that is impossible (Lindon, 2003). Leavitt and Power (1997: 65) point to the growth in 'bodily, social and emotional isolation' and the way that safety is elevated over spontaneous pleasure in children's developing bodies to the extent that they are subject to a high degree of surveillance. In addition, they point to an uncertainty and accompanying lack of consistency among practitioners in responding to children's pleasure in physical and sensory play.

In relation to food and eating, Piper et al (2006) make reference to the Paranoid's Almanac (2004), which parodies worrying trends around nourishing children owing to simultaneous concerns over obesity and anorexia. In response to the panic around food, some nurseries do not provide food or drink for fear of litigation; those that do so are governed by increasingly weighty guidance.

Parents form 'child nourishment circles' to inspect the food cupboards and cooking practices in nurseries. Nurseries and schools are sued if children are too fat or too thin. Only headteachers who have undergone risk-assessment training can open the seals on water bottles and lunch boxes have to be packed, sealed and validated by parents/carers. Those professionals that do give children morsels of food do so in fear of their careers and there is a general sense of anxiety about the food that children eat. What is noteworthy is that in an article about the culture of fear that has developed around *touching* children, the authors include this reference to food and eating. This would suggest that the panic around touching children's bodies has extended to what they eat and drink. Whilst the practice referred to in the Paranoid's Almanac is an obvious parody, it is one that is not too far from the imagination.

This chapter will now examine understandings about 'risk' that emerged through the interviews with practitioners and my observations of practice in the course of this research. The issue of risk avoidance in relation to food events emerged so significantly that I have devoted an entire chapter to the theme. I have grouped the data under the following headings; the body as a contaminant; the body in danger: health, hygiene and allergies; the body in danger: kitchens and tools as dangerous; monitoring food and drink intake; and finally, dieting.

5.1 The body as a contaminant

In this section I aim to demonstrate how children as a group are often constructed as a potential *contaminant* in relation to food. This can be linked to constructions of the child's body as uncontrollable and in need of civilizing (Tobin, 1997). However, more than this, children also appear to be regarded as *dangerous* because perceptions of their cleanliness (or lack of it) and lack of knowledge and skills in relation to bodily maintenance such as washing hands, seems to position them as a potential health hazard. In particular this was

evident in practitioner discussions about children and hygiene, but it was also evident in the way some families' food practices were 'othered' by practitioners.

In setting one, in the days preceding the Christmas party (15.12.06), the children had been occupied in making sandwiches and iced biscuits. Practitioners who wanted to eat a sandwich joked 'are there any *not* made by the children?' as if the food the children had made would be far less safe to eat. Given that the practitioners were responsible for the sandwich making activities in the preceding days and thus had supervised the activity and associated hand-washing this seemed especially unfair. Comments were made about where children put their hands, which positioned children as a *group* as being inherently less 'civilized' when compared to adults and consequently a threat to the health of practitioners i.e. adults. It is important to note that the children's perceived lack of hygiene was not viewed as a threat to other *children* as there was no such concern that *children* might eat food other children had prepared. As Tobin (1997) observes, young children are constructed as uncontrollable and 'leaky' or 'unfinished' as well as not fully socialized (Grieshaber, 2004). Whilst these writers argue that such constructions of children result in practices designed to civilize children's bodies, I wish to argue that children are also positioned as a potential *threat* to the ordered and more 'hygienic' world of adults – a point I develop further later in this section. This is also exemplified in the distancing over time between adults and children (Elias, 1994).

In early childhood practice this appears to lead to some contradictions for practitioners. In setting three, Vera (P14) stated:

We have an emphasis on *whole* fruit now so children can actually see us preparing the fruit because we used to always do this in the kitchen but the children could have been eating anything – they might not know what it was. Now they see the whole fruit and it means snotty hands don't grab fruit and put it back on the plate – you know ... when hands have gone in ...

ugh ... and to be honest it puts you off eating the food yourself. The *sensory aspect* is important though. S is very good at this but I find it hard when it is so sensory – like letting go (I suppose I just like control).

In this interview extract we can see that Vera acknowledges the importance of young children learning through their senses, one aspect of this being to handle food. However, she also positions children, as a group, as having 'snotty hands' and a threat to her own safe enjoyment of food. Here again, children's 'snotty hands' are not perceived as a threat to other *children*. Thus, there are tensions in early childhood practice in relation to food because practitioners seem to appreciate the importance of sensory play, but also recognize the need for a degree of food hygiene, which seems to result in possibly contradictory practices. In emphasizing the learning to be gained from handling whole pieces of fruit as opposed to cutting it up into pieces, Vera is able to position the setting's practice as both important for *learning* as well as *hygienic*. However we should not forget the personal in relation to practice (Manning-Morton, 2006). Practitioners' personal biographies in relation to food; the 'letting go' Vera talks of, are interwoven into the food practices they feel comfortable with (Albon and Mukherji, 2008).

Practitioners in this study also seemed to discuss the importance of eating a healthy diet in terms of the 'risks' associated with their work. Here are two examples from the interviews that seem to exemplify this:

A healthy diet helps your immunity – it helps your immune system as the children might be ill and you might catch things...
(Setting 4 – Neela: P23)

We (*practitioners*) need to be healthy. Things can cause illnesses – we can catch things – so yes, it's important to eat healthily.
(Setting 4 – Farah: P27)

In these examples from the interview data, practitioners seem to be emphasizing a construction of *children's* bodies as a potential contaminant, putting their own bodily health at risk. From this perspective, a healthy diet is important in maintaining the immunity of practitioners from disease (carried by *children*). It should also be noted that the practitioners in this study who particularly emphasized this position, were those that worked with the youngest children. Possibly the higher degree of physical care of very young children is viewed as putting practitioners, who work with age group, at greater 'risk'. Again, very young children are constructed as a greater potential contaminant.

Owing to a construction of children's bodies as less civilized than those of adults in terms of personal cleanliness and general awareness of the need for hygiene in relation to food, children's bodies appear to be subject to a high degree of *surveillance* in relation to hygiene. Whilst each of the four settings observed ensured that children adhered to washing hands before eating food, in setting three, before the children ate or drank anything, their hands were wiped with an antiseptic wipe because the bathroom was some distance from the snack café. The wipe had a strong smell and I would not have wanted my hands to touch the food I was about to eat following this owing to concerns about the food tasting of antiseptic. I also observed the use of strong smelling antiseptic wipes in some of the rooms in setting four. This has links to Porteous' (1990) notion of 'smellscapes' discussed in chapter two, as the smell of the antiseptic seemed to permeate the 'smellscape' of the food event in these settings. I rarely observed practitioners subjecting their *own* bodies to the same degree of washing and wiping, both during food events with children and during food events in the staff areas. It would seem that this is another example of the way *children's* bodies are constructed as a greater pollutant than adults' bodies.

However 'othering' in relation to food hygiene is not confined purely to children. On Christmas party day in setting one, families brought in food from home to share with the group as a whole. One family had made a plate of sandwiches,

which were not touched by the staff, indeed the practitioners went out of their way to *warn* each other which foods to avoid. Mary (P3) stated 'God I wouldn't eat anything from there. It was filthy on home visit'. My fieldnotes on the day (15.12. 2006) encapsulate how I felt about this.

I feel very uncomfortable with this positioning of a family as 'other' and not fit to eat food from (isn't eating something offered from another person an ultimate form of acceptance in a way?). Yet food is incorporated into the body in a way unlike other forms of culture e.g. we only have to *listen* to music and there is a very real sense in which you won't want to eat food that comes from a very dirty household and of course we probably all have our own definitions of 'dirty' here. It is uncomfortable to recognize it in oneself and memories of a few of the homes I have visited in my work – one where quite literally there were mice on the floor - over the years come flooding back. What *matters* is whether you consider this as an issue of personal failing or an issue of structural poverty.

Home visits are occasions when the home is quite literally visible to practitioners, unlike much of their usual work. In this study, only setting one carried out home visits and it was this setting that had the highest proportion of children whose families were in receipt of Income Support and living in social housing (37 of the 39 families). As a consequence, the households of families in setting one were more visible to the 'gaze' of practitioners when compared to the other three settings and possibly as a consequence of this, the families also seemed to be 'othered' to a greater extent owing to differentials in social class. To a lesser extent, but nonetheless significant, food bought in from home makes the home visible to the setting (Morrison, 1996). This is a point I develop later in relation to monitoring food and drink intake.

The issue of hygiene is important to explore further. As noted earlier, Douglas (1966) argues that culturally defined concerns over policing bodily margins can

be linked to wider anxieties about containing disorder in the body politic. For Douglas, bodily control is linked to social control, thus ideas about what is pure and safe to incorporate into the body also reflect anxieties over the maintenance of boundaries within society. As Lupton (1999: 40) observes, this regulates 'the entry of certain types of people "in" and keeping others "outside" the body politic'. Dirt, according to this typology, symbolizes the eradication or blurring of boundaries and 'threatens the "proper" separateness of the individual from other things and people' (Lupton, 1999: 41). Applied to my data, possibly, in positioning young children and some working class families as 'dirtier', practitioners feel especially compelled to police the boundaries between self and 'other'. This can be seen in the way that they tried to avoid eating foods prepared by these groups. But more than this, such practices serve to keep children and some working class families on the *margins* of society.

To sum up, it seems that owing to constructions of children's bodies as less civilized than the bodies of adults, children as a *group* are viewed as a potential pollutant to a far greater extent than adults. However, the practices I observed suggest that this 'threat' is primarily perceived as pertaining to adults and does not extend to other children. In addition, families whose households are regarded as 'dirty' are also 'othered' in relation to food. Possibly, by 'othering' the perceived cleanliness of children and some working class families, the 'proper' order of society is maintained, with children and some working class families on the margins (see also Bourdieu, 1986).

5.2 The body in danger: health, hygiene and allergies

In this section I explore another aspect of taming uncertainty, one that constructs the child's body as *in danger*. This was evident in the emphasis many practitioners placed on food hygiene above anything else in relation to their food-related training. Furthermore, the possibility of allergic reactions to food was stressed by practitioners as a key concern at the current time. However, as we

will see, allergies themselves appear to be viewed as a social construction by those practitioners, who reflected on their experience of living and working in majority world countries.

Food hygiene was mentioned as a crucial aspect of training by many of the practitioners interviewed in this study. Here are some examples of interview extracts that provide evidence of this. It should be noted that *all* practitioners were asked about any training that they had done in the area of food and eating but were not asked specifically about food safety, yet in nearly every instance this was brought up as an issue.

I did a course in food and health and hygiene; preparation of food, different types of bacteria that can affect food and how we should store food properly, the temperatures that it has to be stored, high risk food – when it should be eaten and sell-by dates, preparation such as washing hands, and even nutrition – how it should be a balanced diet (Setting 2: Manveen: P9)

A tiny part (*of NVQ2 training*) was on food and nutrition – more from health and safety angle. I *started* my NVQ3 so we looked at different practices such as our snack café – I think it was under *health and safety* – not a *big* thing because we are a day nursery. It's not seen as important. (Setting 3: Tracey: P17)

In my NVQ3 we touched on food and hygiene – more hygiene. We did some things about healthy eating but not in any *great* detail. We did a bit on the healthy eating plate and a bit on how to encourage children into healthy eating. I will be doing a basic food and hygiene course soon. It's in the local authority's training directory. I'll be able to check our procedures at snack times then, such as wearing aprons and gloves and food preparation – to check we are doing what we should be doing. I have a health and safety role in the nursery. We are supposed to wear an apron and gloves when preparing fruit but the children

don't like the look of the gloves (Setting 3: Wanda: P13)

In these interview extracts practitioners' training in the area of food seems to construct food in terms of *risk*. In Wanda's last comment we can see that children seem to resist some of the procedures that are expected to be put in place in relation to food safety such as wearing plastic gloves and do not passively accept the measures put in place for their protection. Moreover children seem to be aware of what will not be tolerated in relation to hygiene in their settings from an early age. On 4.6.09 in the toddler room of setting four, for instance, I observed Annabel (C55) wait until practitioners were looking away in order to lick the table, seemingly in the knowledge that this would not be permitted.

Annabel likes the way the couscous sticks to her fingers and she flicks it off slowly. She puts it all over the table and then licks it off the table when adults are not looking.

The perceived importance of food safety over other aspects of food and eating can also be seen in this extract of my interview with John (P12), in setting 2, who is undergoing NVQ2 training.

Deb: Tell me about any training you've done or that you know is coming up in relation to food and eating

John: I am doing the... I think I'm doing the hygiene certificate. I asked Jane (*manager*) if I could get that so I should be doing that - cross fingers

Deb: Is that because you prepare teas and things?

John: Not really – it's cos I *wanted* to do it and think more about it

Deb: And in your other training, do you ever talk about mealtime practice or anything like that?

John: No not really. We just get told how to *prepare the food*

Deb: So you don't have much training around – like the social aspect of mealtimes or managing – I don't know – like... children who are 'fussy eaters' - how to encourage them and that kind of thing?

John: No. Not really. Sometimes I'll see Kath and she'll say 'just try a little bit of things' but really that's where it all comes from. Like you'll listen to everyone's ideas about how to help children with their eating – like with Ali (*child*), how to help him and seeing Sharon – she's got him to eat *really well*. *Before*, he wouldn't even *touch* it...

It seems that John views food hygiene as one of the most important aspects of his food related training and has requested going on a specific training course in relation to this. Given that there is a wide range of early childhood courses on offer in the local authority and that John sees himself as being involved in childcare long-term, this seems to be surprising. He was not alone in elevating the importance of food *safety* training in this study.

I believe that in analyzing his position, it is important to look more generally at issues of risk at the current time, especially as risk avoidance is of particular concern in early childhood settings (Jones, 2003; Tobin, 2004; Lindon, 2003). Averting risk through scrupulous food hygiene, with its underpinning of scientific discourse, would seem to be something practitioners can bring under *professional* control, although of course we can never entirely eliminate risk from any aspect of our lives (Lindon, 2003). The idea that individuals can *personally* control risk was also a feature in Tulloch and Lupton's research (2003). I am not suggesting that food hygiene is *unimportant*, rather I would argue that food events are increasingly being constructed as a 'risky business' that practitioners are charged with managing. This has its own 'disciplinary logic' (Fournier, 1999: 290), which frames how being an early childhood 'professional' is constructed.

In addition, it may be far easier to control for the hygiene in kitchens than to enter into a critical debate about how children might be supported to assess and manage risks *for themselves* in relation to outdoor physical play, for instance. As Tovey (2007) observes, there is often a tendency to keep children safe *from* things as opposed to safe *to do* things, which negates the multiplicity of meanings children attribute to 'risks' and their on-going engagement with these understandings (Christensen and Mikkelsen, 2008). It is in John's present setting that he learns about the myriad of other important components of early childhood practice in relation to food and eating – on the job – as he is inculcated into its particular 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1992).

In Tulloch and Lupton's (2003) study of risk and everyday life, they found that perceptions of risk were sometimes shared or spread beyond individuals to others. This sense of a 'shared risk' was especially evident when interviewees talked about family life and the need to protect their children. Possibly this notion of 'shared risk' can be related to Lave and Wenger's (1992) notion of 'communities of practice' in that practitioners in settings develop a *shared* sense of responsibility for the children in their care and risk management forms part of this – they are certainly expected to act *collectively* in loco parentis.

Whilst Tulloch and Lupton's (2003) study found that people tend to be more risk averse as they get older, this does not entirely hold up in relation to my own study. My own data suggest that practitioners are more relaxed about what children eat and the practices associated with this if they have had their own children. In setting one, Kate (P1), who has grown up children states that being a parent helps her to feel more relaxed about 'risks' associated with food in her work as a practitioner. She also seems to relate the importance of having a relaxed attitude to food to a discourse of children, as a group, as 'dangerous'. This can be seen in Kate's use of 'weapon' as a metaphor for children's perceived manipulative strategies around food and eating.

I also think just not being neurotic about it (*food*). If they don't eat they don't eat. *She's still alive!* (*nods towards grown up daughter who is in the nursery for the day*) There are no issues, but, like Sumi (*a child in the nursery whose parent seems anxious about what she eats and drinks at nursery*), I can see that it doesn't matter how much you say that to someone, unless you go through it - her next child – she won't worry about this. Ummm, that's the difference. Having been through it you realize that they won't starve themselves to death and they'll be quite happy and you just have to... and the more you worry the more *manipulative* they can get – using it as a weapon.

Similarly Janet (P28), also a parent, recounted a story from her time as a nanny in which the mother of the child she was caring for insisted on high levels of food hygiene. Janet noted:

When you see what children put in their mouths off the floor over time - when they're babies - you soon relax a bit. A bit of dirt never did much harm – in fact it can build up resistance.

Here we can see Janet positioning herself as having a more relaxed approach to hygiene than a mother she had worked for. Indeed she draws upon ideas that have circulated in the media that suggest in our zeal to eliminate germs in contemporary minority world societies, we have possibly made the environment *less safe* (Baker, 2010). Although not stating this explicitly, I got the impression that Janet also seemed to be positioning herself as more 'practical' and less 'fussy' than the middle class mother she had worked for.

Many practitioners talked about children's allergies and the importance of risk avoidance strategies. Most mentioned in this area was anaphylaxis in relation to peanut allergy. Vera (P14) recalled:

One time, I was with a child who had an anaphylactic shock in a wood. It was Halloween and there was a 'do' at a farm which had a trail. Some children were scared. One child was given a chocolate and it must have had nuts in it by one of the parents and his mum didn't have his epipen and he fell to the ground. We had to race through the woods.

Fear of a child going into anaphylactic shock coloured many practices in each of the nursery settings. In the baby room of setting four, Fatima (P22) stated:

We never introduce new foods – parents always do this first. We do this in case they (*the children*) have a reaction – we don't want to take the risk here of some allergic reaction.

Practitioners in every setting studied packaging of any food bought in from home to share with others carefully to ensure it was safe for children to eat, even when there were no children known to have a serious allergy in the nursery. It should be noted that only one of the settings at the time of the study had a child known to have a peanut allergy. In setting two, any allergies children had were written onto their placemats as a permanent reminder for practitioners what they were *not* permitted to eat. Children seemed highly interested in what was written and many could say who could not eat certain foods on their table.

However, this *public* demonstration of difference did not seem to extend to the practitioners in some of the settings, with the exception of setting two. Colleen (P4) was insistent that she did not share her allergy to milk with the children in case it implanted the idea that milk is not good for you in the children's minds. This seems to suggest a construction of children as entirely malleable, swayed by the actions of the practitioners around them, which seems to elevate the importance of the practitioner as a role model as noted in the previous chapter. Moreover, it appears to negate the idea that children come into contact with a

wide range of food related behaviours, or 'food codes' (Caplan, 1997), and negotiate this information successfully.

An example of this involved me very directly. On one occasion in setting one, I was asked to peel oranges during snack time. I had to refuse and in doing so, shared my own allergy to orange juice when it comes into direct contact with my skin. I found the children were very interested in this information and whenever it was snack time following this, those that remembered this told me to 'take care' whenever oranges were around. However, it never seemed to stop their *own* enjoyment of eating oranges – the children appeared to recognize that it was something that was linked to *my* personal identity and not their own.

The most extreme example of a setting making a child's allergy details public was recollected by Ben (P21). He recalled that in his previous nursery the children had photographs on their placemats as well as details regarding any allergies and religious requirements. He remembered a child who always wore a T shirt with his allergy details on it so all the practitioners in the setting had a permanent and highly visible reminder of his particular requirements. Ben was concerned that this interfered with the competing demands on practitioners to ensure confidentiality. However, I believe there is something more problematic in terms of early childhood practice. Whilst there were understandable concerns for the safety of the child in relation to food in this instance, the constant wearing of clothing with his allergies listed on it seems to put 'risk' as *central* to this child's sense of identity.

The abundance of seemingly ambiguous information available through the media about healthy eating was viewed as problematic, especially for parents. Kath (P7) noted:

There is also concern about junk foods and what have you – sweets –all that side of it – I think parents are becoming more educated to that side, you know,

healthy eating. I think it's the media - yes the media – it does *scare* parents because it says things like 'give them six tomatoes' and the next week tomatoes are bad for you – and you figure 'well which one?' and it's *really hard* being a parent with things like that

This has links to Crossley's (2006) conceptualization of people as 'risk managers', reflexively weighing up and choosing courses of action from an abundance of competing knowledge claims available to them. As Beck (1992) suggests, this abundance of information with the competing 'expert' knowledge claims that underpin it does not necessarily make us feel safer - indeed it may have resulted in greater uncertainty and anxiety over possible risks. Some of the practitioners interviewed found the range of seemingly ambiguous information available about food difficult to fathom and were worried about giving parents the wrong advice. This seemed to have at its root understandings of professionalism as having 'expert', objective and *certain* knowledge to draw upon (Beck, 1992; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Moss, 2006).

Nevertheless, 'expert' knowledge in relation to food risks may sometimes be drawn upon to *market* the practice in early childhood settings. Setting 4 differed markedly from the other three settings as it appears to promote itself, in part, on the basis of its particular food stance. Whilst I was there, each room had a water filter added to its taps so that all the drinking water would be filtered. In addition it has an organic food policy, which was promoted as a key marketing strategy to attract parents. During the time of my visits, the nursery also canvassed parents about the possibility of becoming completely vegan. Louise (P25), the manager, explained:

The owner is vegan and she sent a letter to everyone with some facts and figures about veganism. She did special training in South America and hired someone to come over here and teach us how to prepare vegan foods. She bought us a dehydrator for fruit and paid for this person's hotel costs while they were

here. I was flexible to change if the parents agreed. 30% were *not at all keen*, but some of our American mums were keen on it. Some were disappointed when we didn't do it. There was lots of opposition in the other nursery but lots of parents did want organic produce. The owner is so passionate about it – she will pay. The costs of food have gone up by 25% - I know because I do the ordering - so we will see what happens.

It would seem from this that social class is an important factor in perceptions of risk. Those who are able to pay the higher cost of organic food are able to move the boundaries of 'risk' ever wider and seemingly 'protect' their children to a greater extent than poorer families. As Rehana (P26) noted starkly, 'in private schools parents pay and they get healthier food'. None of the practitioners interviewed in setting four bought organic food at home, citing the high cost as a key factor in their decision making as well as skepticism about its professed benefits. As the majority of the practitioners were Bangladeshi, working class women and the majority of the families were white and affluent, the distinction between parents and practitioners in relation to the construction of food 'risks' was especially marked.

It also seems that ethnicity is an important factor in relation to how food risks are perceived. Manveen (P9), a South Indian practitioner in setting two, stated:

We check for allergy advice and I think here we don't have anything with nuts. These kind of things don't happen in other countries like India – anybody eats *everything* – you never see anything like people with *allergies*. In this country the system is *different*. There are so many people with different allergies so you have to be very, very careful what you give them.

Similarly Farah (P27) noted 'I'm from Guyana and we don't have the same food intolerances there as people do here.' This adds further weight to the idea that 'risk' needs to be seen as socially constructed and consequently, variable across

time and space (Lupton, 1999). However more than this, it would appear that in contemporary minority world countries, the boundaries of 'risk' are further extended, possibly owing to their relative affluence when compared to the socio-economic positioning of many majority world countries. This may result in a perception that practitioners need to be 'very, very careful' what people in contemporary minority world countries are given to eat and drink, as Manveen suggests. This, in turn, could be read as constructing people in minority world countries as in need of more *care*, which is clearly problematic (Viruru, 2001). Another reading is that greater 'weight' may be given to scientific discourses associated with 'risk' in contemporary minority world countries and there may be greater access to information about these. This may result in more 'diagnoses' of allergies, but more evidence would be needed of this than is provided in this study.

Practitioners appear to regard food safety training as important, indeed in some of their training programmes, issues relating to food seem to be subsumed into health and safety topics, which appears to neglect the many other important issues to do with food, not least its socio-cultural significance and its link to one's sense of identity. The emphasis on hygiene and allergies in the practitioner interviews demonstrates that practitioners are very concerned about the risks to children from food and the way it is prepared. In this sense, the child's body is constructed as in danger, possibly due to perceptions of children as being especially *vulnerable*. Certainly, there appears to be some evidence that very young children are at greater risk from environmental toxins owing to their different physiology or biology than adults (Holsapple et al, 2004), notably the immaturity of their organs and immune systems (Samet, 2004).

But particular discourses of risk also appear to be played upon as a marketing tool. In setting four, its water filtration and organic food policy were attractive to many parents. However, this setting had the highest fees and none of the practitioners interviewed continues this practice at home. Perceptions of 'risk', it

would seem, vary according to social class and ethnicity, indeed some practitioners who had lived in majority world countries argued that allergies did not exist where they had lived before.

5.3 The body in danger: kitchens and tools as dangerous

As well as an emphasis on hygiene and allergies my observations show that kitchens are constructed as particularly 'risky' places in early childhood settings. In this section I highlight how this positioning of kitchen spaces as 'risky' is also evident in the children's pretend play in the home corner. The crockery used in relation to food events was deemed to be of high risk in three of the settings in this study, but setting four - the Montessori setting – had a different approach to risk with regards to this, stressing the importance of using *real* items with young children.

A focus on spatiality can be seen in Fielding's (2000) work on the cultural geographies of the primary school. He makes the case that the spatial organization of schools acts in a way that regulates pupils in order to produce 'appropriate' behaviours. Similarly, Davidson (2004) argues that the way that schools, and we might add nurseries here, are designed is to make possible the surveillance of children by those who care for them. Therefore, space, as Lefebvre (1991) suggests, can be seen as a 'social space' which is produced and appropriated by the groups using it. For the purposes of this study, this might relate to the way in which kitchens are often closed off spaces, or have a glass window or hatch for viewing. This has as its basis in a construction of the kitchen as a *dangerous* space and the child as a potential *contaminant*.

From a very early age children seem to develop a sense of where they can go in their settings. An example of this comes from setting four in the baby room (4.6.09). I noted:

Over the morning, lots of the children seem to want to see into the kitchen but most seem to *know* it is out of bounds. Many crawl there and peep in at the adult activity there e.g. making up feeds, filling the dishwasher, washing bibs etc... but they don't crawl in.

In each setting children were deeply interested in what was happening in the kitchen spaces but were rarely permitted to enter, even during periods when no cooking was taking place. In setting one the children would look over the low door to see what was happening and in setting two the older children would bring a chair across to the large, high hatch and stand on it so as to talk to the cook and observe her preparing meals. In this sense, the kitchen was like a *theatre*, with children intensely interested in the drama that happened there – indeed theatrical metaphors have often been applied to food service (Morgan et al, 2008).

But setting two permitted far more access to the kitchen when compared with the other settings in this study. The importance of this was explained to me in an interview with Kath (P7):

Kath: In the mornings, Sharon (P10) will take some of the children into the kitchen to help her with the toast. The kitchen is a place, well it's a *bit like home* isn't it? The kitchen is the *place that you're in and you're cooking* and it's a *nice place*. Yes of course there's *dangers* in there, but you just say 'that's hot' and they can come back out again

Deb: It's an experience that not a lot of children have in nursery

Kath: Yes it's significant. Sometimes I go in there and there's a big gang of children in there and I have to say '*alright – everyone out*' and the big gang go out but sometimes there's one or two children, like Owen (C25), who's really quiet and shy and you can go in there with Owen and make the breakfast and I think

that's such a nice time for him in the mornings, to go in there just with Sharon and do the toast. But if there's a riot I have to say '*everyone out!*' (*laugh*). This morning there's no Sharon here, so I say 'Oh no there's no Sharon, *who's going to make the toast? Who's going to show me what to do?*' and we all had to get the butter out and they were showing me how to put the jam on and saying 'this is how Sharon does it' and that's OK. It's really nice.

Here, we can see Kath acknowledging the dangers of the kitchen space but simultaneously emphasizing the importance of the kitchen in terms of its link with *home* – indeed the importance of linking children's home experiences to those of the setting is often emphasized in numerous early childhood related writing (e.g. Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003; Goldschmeid and Jackson, 2004). Her comments also link to the idea that early childhood practice is *complex*, with practitioners having to weigh up a range of possible courses of action, which have their underpinnings in different constructions of childhood. For Kath, policy imperatives (at both national and local levels); the children's safety; their playful participation in the life of the setting; the link between the kitchen space and home; and the needs of individual children for a 'special time' with a practitioner are interwoven in her decision-making with regards to children's access to the kitchen.

Many practitioners in this study recognized the importance of the kitchen space, in terms of its link with home, in relation to children's *pretend play* as opposed to the *real* kitchen space. This is something I explore further in the next chapter, but suggest here that in part this might link to the home corner being a space where food events can be explored without the threat of burning pans or food contamination. The seemingly playful approach to practice that Kath's interview extract evokes was a strong characteristic of setting two. Indeed the importance of *playfulness* in relation to real food events is something I outline in depth in the

next chapter as I believe it is under threat at the current time, as the fun to be had during food events is subordinate to the 'risks' such activities may engender. I observed a strong sense of risk in relation to kitchen spaces in the children's role play. Many children seemed to replicate concerns for safety such as talking about food items being hot and being careful not to get burnt. A typical example of this can be seen in this observation from setting one (14.11.06) of Samuel (C17) playing in the home corner:

Samuel retrieved something else from the oven in the home corner and said, 'I need an oven glove to touch it'. I asked why that was.

Samuel: 'Cos you can burn yourself'

As there was no oven-glove in the home corner, Samuel improvised by getting a piece of material – an apron – and folded it over carefully so it would protect his hands. He carefully lifted things out of the oven and brought them over to me. When I took them from his hands, I made "OW HOT!" noises, which made him giggle. He said that I needed something to protect my hands too and made me something.

Another example of this can be seen in this observation from setting three (28.11.08):

There is a new cooker/snack bar in the home corner and Emma (C37) and Lee (C36) seem keen on using it together. They especially like the saucepan that looks most real (it has a kind of Teflon coat to it). Emma says to me 'I make you hot chicken' and finds the chicken, puts it in a pan and cooks it on the new cooker. Every now and then she tells me 'not ready yet' and later 'ready now'. I ask her if I can eat it yet and she tells me 'very hot' so I carefully remove it from the pan using a couple of forks and when it touches my fingers I pretend to blow on them to cool them down. She thinks this is funny and so does Lee.

I remember that he was engaged in a lot of play about things being too hot on another one of my visits.

Lee makes lots of food and every time he brings it over he says 'too hot' and seems to enjoy watching the way I try to handle the hot food. When he brings pizza over, I blow on it to pretend to make it cool and then say to Emma and Lee that it is probably OK to eat with my fingers. As I pick it up, Emma tells me off and says 'not like that - dirty' and hands me a fork. I pretend to eat it with a fork and every so often start to use my fingers again and she tells me off (*but we are both laughing*).

In this second observation, alongside the play replicating concerns in the real world about burning oneself in the kitchen, we can also see the children exploring how food should be eaten. It would seem that my pretend actions at eating with my fingers are greeted with admonishment for not adhering to more 'civilized', and thus less 'risky', behaviour. However, the sense of fun to be had in addressing this in play also appears to characterise the observation.

It is not only kitchen spaces that are viewed as 'risky', breakable items were often avoided during food events. Setting four appeared to have a different approach to risk when it came to the crockery used during food events. Whereas the other three settings used plastic plates and cups, setting 4 used what it called 'real' plates and cups made from china and glass. This was in keeping with the Montessori tradition and was explained to me by Sharmina (P18) when I was observing the baby room for the first time (14.5.09):

I talk to Sharmina about food in the baby room. She is adamant that the use of china and glass is to be encouraged from the outset because children learn from using real objects – what it feels like, tastes like and how delicate it is. She does the same at home with her own children and says 'I really like this about Montessori'. She argues that plastic is not healthy for children as it causes cancer and also states that

children need to know that not everything can be chewed and some things break if dropped.

All practitioners I spoke to in this setting were in agreement that the use of objects made from glass and china were important from the outset with young children, but the three other settings in this study used plastic items, despite the fact that the youngest children in their settings were 2 years. This again supports the idea of 'risk cultures' (Lash, 2000) that are constructed and maintained by particular cultural groups – in this instance, practitioners in early childhood settings. The data also supports the idea of the development of particular 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1992) and the sense of 'shared risk' amongst particular groups (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003). Not all of these practitioners were Montessori trained yet *all* advocated the use of real crockery and some had adapted their practice with their own children at home accordingly. In Sharmina's commentary on the use of china, as opposed to plastic, crockery, it is interesting to see how she employs arguments to the effect that plastic causes cancer as a counterpoint to the idea that the use of china is dangerous. In this sense, almost anything might be constructed as a 'risk'.

Many of the children in setting four were mindful of the need to take care of the china crockery. Eddie (C56) told me that the china cups were 'delicate' and that I 'had to be careful' when using them (7.5.09). As noted in chapter two, Giovanni (2006) maintains that the use of delicate items during food events encourages children to behave in a more considerate way towards each other. I did not observe any breakages during my time in the setting, although I was told that this had happened in the past, but this did not discourage practitioners from using breakable items.

In summary, it seems that kitchen spaces are viewed as 'risky' spaces in early childhood settings. However, practitioners also seem to recognize the link between food and the kitchen space and home and how this might be important for early childhood practice. All practitioners seemed to identify this as a key

argument for the home corners in their settings – interestingly, an area that rarely seems to have risks such as hot pans to avoid (a point that is developed further in the next chapter). Setting two permitted far more access to the kitchen than that observed in the other three settings and generally had a more playful approach to food events than that observed in the other settings. Setting four differed from the other settings in its use of china and glass crockery during food event, practitioners linking this to the setting’s Montessori philosophy, which stresses the use of *real* things in early childhood practice, even if this meant occasional breakages. The notion of ‘real’ and ‘pretend’ is something I explore in more detail in the following chapter.

5.4 Monitoring food and drink intake

In this section I aim to demonstrate further that owing to constructions of food and drink as potentially ‘risky’, children’s food intake comes in for a high level of scrutiny. In addition, I will be arguing that practices pertaining to caring for children’s *bodies* appear to come in for a higher degree of monitoring in comparison to the wide range of other practices that occur in settings. Packed lunches from home seem to be especially subject to practitioner surveillance in relation to ‘risk’. However, I will also show how parents subject each other’s food and drink provisioning to scrutiny.

Many of the practitioners in the study were concerned about children being able to access food and drink at any time owing to concerns over *monitoring* what the children eat and drink. In setting one, Kate (P1), Mary (P3) and Merry (P2) discussed this in terms of the difficulties of self service snack times:

Kate: I found it (*self service snacks and drinks*) really hard. I found that one of us was always *worrying* or *chasing up* people who hadn’t had their drink and it was the same children all the time and it just drove me *absolutely* up the wall. I mean I know it works in some places so maybe...

Merryl: So who *monitors* the fruit eating then?

Mary: I was going to say...

Kate: All we could do was monitor if the fruit bowl is *going down* – you couldn't monitor who'd *eaten it*

In this discussion we can see that this group of practitioners is concerned not only with being able to monitor the children's fruit intake, but also with the degree to which this would impinge on their other work. However, in this setting the practitioners' anxiety might also be linked to their concerns for the children's health in general. On many occasions, these practitioners expressed concerns over the level of tooth decay in the children; the types of food the children ate; as well as the degree of poverty some of the children lived in. Certainly, a detailed analysis I conducted of two children's food and drink intake in the form of what I have called 'food-mapping' (see Albon, 2007a for a more detailed discussion of this) shows that the nursery class was the only place where these children ate fruit. My point here, however, is that the socio-economic positioning of families may well result in the perception that their food and drink intake needs to be subject to a *higher degree* of monitoring. Moreover, the 'weight' of evidence provided by research and used as evidence of a nutritionally impoverished diet (e.g. Marmot et al, 2010) serves to form its own 'regime of truth' and thus further justifies this monitoring.

Although setting one was the only setting that permitted the children to bring a packed lunch from home, or in the case of the nursery, a drink from home, on a daily basis, many practitioners in the study talked about packed lunches in settings where they had previously worked. Some of these practitioners noted a high level of surveillance in relation to food bought from home as we will see in the following commentary from Vera (P14) in setting three:

I have been a dinner lady in a primary school. There were lots of children, some had difficulty in sitting still,

some had physical disabilities, some had food issues such as anorexia – in a primary school! Nutritionally, you could see whose meals were really *poor* (*in packed lunches*). We'd report back on some children if they had *all* chocolate, or a *dirty* lunchbox, or *not* a good meal. Often these were the children with behaviour problems like ADHD. Wholemeal bread and tuna is so much better. You can see the parents who try that approach – it's got to be better.

Here, we can see that not only is the nutritional content of the lunchbox subject to surveillance from school meals' supervisors, so too is its cleanliness, which links to the previous discussions in this chapter about self and 'other' in relation to risk (Douglas, 1966). Some practitioners who had worked in schools reported how parents – usually mothers – are given written advice on how to prepare a nutritious lunchbox for their children. This could be regarded as a form of governmentality or Foucault's notion of 'normalisation' aimed at mothers in particular, advising them about what they should and should not do (Lupton, 1995). It is notable that in doing this, practitioners appear to be reinforcing hegemonic understandings of women as holding *primary* responsibility for protecting and promoting their children's health (Charles and Kerr, 1986; Ekstrom, 1991; Albon and Mukherji, 2008).

A further example of the way some working class families' food practices were 'othered' by practitioners was evident on Christmas party day as families bought in food from home to help provide a feast for the children's celebratory meal. In setting one I noticed, that food was sorted by date as some families had bought in food that would be past its sell-by date in another week and could not be stored for use after the Christmas break. Comments that positioned some families as 'other' were made regarding this and related to the kinds of shops parents shopped in or whether these families had merely produced something

from the back of the cupboard that might well have been thrown away in a day or two¹.

Food bought in from home also made the home visible on other occasions. Sometimes children arrived at their settings whilst still eating their breakfast. The kinds of foods permitted as 'breakfast food' in individual families was therefore subject to the practitioner 'gaze'. Moreover, by finishing off breakfast food at the setting, some households were constructed as 'chaotic'. In the case of setting four, whose intake of children come from affluent backgrounds, practitioners tended to relate this to the employment of the parents. Sudhani (P20) maintained:

It can be difficult for them (*i.e. parents organizing breakfast for their children*). They have really good jobs – some are journalists – and they work long hours.'

However, in setting one, the vast majority of families (37 of 39) were in receipt of the state benefit 'income support' and the 'chaos' of some families' breakfast habits appeared to be linked to social class, albeit in a different way to setting four. Mary (P3) appears to pathologise some of the families she works with in her repetition of 'appropriate' (in relation to food) when she states:

I'll tell you what I find really hard here – when you see some of the children that come into nursery, clutching what they've had for breakfast and it's something that is totally inappropriate, like a muffin, or a cup-cake, or a bag of crisps, or half a waffle. I don't think I've ever

¹ As the methodology chapter noted, when I shared my observations with this setting, I was worried about the reaction they might provoke. It is important to note that these practitioners, on reading some of my observations, were upset with their comments as they had not *intended* to marginalize the families they work with in such a way.

seen anyone come in with anything that is even remotely (*pause*) appropriate for a breakfast.'

For Golden (2005), the classed nature of practitioner and parent relationships is seen clearly in relation to food and eating. In her study of an Israeli kindergarten, practitioners used food as a means through which to undermine the children's homes and their mothers, sometimes very explicitly. Golden maintains that food events were used in this kindergarten to nurture a middle class culture in a working class neighbourhood. Allison (1997) similarly examines *obentoo*, arguing that the construction of *obentoo* (a packed lunch in Japan consisting primarily of beautifully presented, nutritionally balanced rice balls of a size that the child can pick up) serves as a means to observe, assess and construct motherhood. This has also been observed in studies looking at packed lunches in the UK. Morrison's study (1996), for example, explores the way that by bringing in a packed lunch to school, the child's home is made visible to the gaze of practitioners.

For many practitioners in this study, the concern with monitoring children's food and drink intake is linked to the importance of being able to *report to parents*. Working in partnership with parents is clearly regarded as an important part of a practitioner's job and is recognized in the EYFS documentation (DfES, 2007). My observations in each of the settings show that conversations with parents at the beginning and end of the day or session often centred on what children had eaten or drunk. Settings three and four kept *detailed* records of everything that had passed the children's lips and in setting four, which had the very youngest children in the study, the children's bodies were monitored to a great extent. Every nappy change, every morsel of food and every ounce of drink was noted down in detail in order to report to parents. One reading of this is that practices to do with children's *bodies* are subject to a higher degree of *monitoring* than other aspects of the children's experiences in their settings. An example might be periods of free play. During the course of the nursery day, there were long

periods of play indoors and outdoors, which rarely afforded such close observational scrutiny. This seems to provide further evidence of food events being constructed as a 'risky' business.

Some practitioners expressed a great deal of concern if they were unable to report to parents *exactly* what their child had eaten or drunk in the day. In the following excerpt from an interview with Amy (P5) in setting two, we can see her reflecting on a time when she worked in a reception class. Unlike her present place of work, in the reception class the children had their lunch in a large hall away from the classroom and were supervised by a team of school meals' supervisors as opposed to the staff who were with them during other parts of the day. Her repetition of 'you just can't say... you couldn't tell them... you just couldn't say' seems to emphasise her concern over this.

Amy: In the school – well it's different, cos they only have fruit or milk at about 11 o'clock after playtime and that's really all we done for food really because they went off to the hall for lunch

Deb: And as a staff did you have anything to do with what happened in the lunch hall?

Amy: As staff they would just stay with the children – making sure they were lining up until the dinner lady got them

Deb: What do you think about that?

Amy: It was quite strange because when the parents came and said 'what has my child eaten today?' you couldn't tell them because you aren't there – you don't know – so you can't say 'well they ate this and they ate that' you just can't say. You just couldn't say what they'd eaten unless they had packed lunch and they could see what had been eaten and what hadn't been eaten and then thrown away. So, yeh- it was quite strange when parents were asking 'how much did he eat?' cos you couldn't tell them. You know one child

was really not great at eating and you just couldn't say...

So far we have seen that children's food and drink intake is monitored, sometimes to a high degree, by practitioners. Yet parents also appear to be engaged in a form of surveillance of each other as a group. Whilst Valentine (1999) maintains that narratives around food practices can locate people in discourses that are not of their own making, it would appear that women are also engaged in reinforcing ideas about what it is to be a 'proper mother' themselves (McIntosh and Zey, 1989). Mitchell and Green's (2002) work describes how women characterise their success as mothers by distancing themselves from 'other' mothers whose childrearing practices are deemed unfit and uncaring. When considering this, Albon and Mukherji (2008: 108) state:

'A Foucauldian system of self-surveillance seems to operate. This 'othering' of mothers, whose child-rearing practices are perceived as different and inferior to their own, serves to reinforce increased control over what it is to be a good mother in society as a whole.'

An example of this can be seen in my fieldnotes from setting one on 23.11.06:

I observed outside at the beginning of the session, there are many parents and children standing round the table where the box for drinks bought in from home is placed. A group of parents is looking at the drinks bought in by others and commenting.

Ahmed's mother asks Samira's mother (both Black, Somali parents) about the drink she has bought as she sees it comes from a pack (her other children have the other drinks) as the drinks are on offer. Samira's mother tells her about a shop - Lidl on ... High St where cheap packs of drink can be bought. Nadiya's mother says that 'cheap' drinks are 'full of E numbers' and she does not want them near her child.

Anna's mother notes how someone has got a low sugar version of Capri Sun and Nadiya's mother makes it known that she thinks it is good to get low sugar drinks. Is she positioning herself as 'better' than 'other' mothers? There is something about the surveillance of each others' drinks that makes me feel very uncomfortable.'

In these fieldnotes, this group of mothers seem to be positioning themselves as 'good' or 'bad' mothers in relation to each other through their scrutiny of each others' drink provisioning practices and the perceived 'risks' associated with this. Issues of class and race seem to permeate this encounter as Nadiya's mother, a relatively affluent Indian mother seems to position herself differently to Samira and Ahmed's mothers, both of whom are Somali and seemingly less affluent. The interspersing of the language of 'E numbers' and 'low sugar' into the conversations seems to add scientific 'weight' to the practices of some mothers in comparison to those, seemingly poorer, Somali mothers whose drink provisioning is different. It seems important, therefore, that early childhood practitioners examine the extent to which they, often unwittingly, become involved in perpetuating the 'othering' of certain kinds of motherhoods (Albon and Mukherji, 2008). In this instance, the seemingly benign practice of having a box outdoors to put drinks in at the beginning of the day seemed to make the home visible and invite uncomfortable encounters between parents (usually mothers). From my observations, the drink box area outdoors seemed to be a place where no practitioners were present and was one of the few places in the setting where parents spoke to parents from different black and minority ethnic groups.

Religious observances in relation to food were also constructed as a 'risk' by practitioners, with details of foods children were not permitted to eat written onto placemats (setting two); wall charts (setting one); a monitoring book for the setting's snack café (setting three); and in the case of setting four, a monitoring book for individual children. On any occasion where food was shared, practitioners in each setting were zealous in ensuring children ate *only* those

foods permissible. Rather than viewing religious observances in relation to food in terms of their *socio-cultural* significance for particular families, practitioners in this study tended to refer to religious observances using a discourse of 'risk'. Typically, in setting 4, for instance, Muslim children were provided with Halal meat but this meant that they ate a different dinner. My fieldnotes (2.7.09) state:

Plates have been sorted according to whether the child is a 'regular child' (*Farah's definition*) or not e.g. some have Halal meat. Farah (P27) stresses the importance of checking the children are not swapping food as she is concerned that the Muslim children might eat some non-Halal food.

In my previous study of young children's sweet eating behaviour (Albon, 2006), I similarly found that children engage in a high degree of swapping and hiding of food. In this study, I also observed children attempting to dupe practitioners into thinking they could eat anything that took their fancy, especially during celebratory occasions.

Whilst this chapter has emphasized the high level of risk management and monitoring observed amongst practitioners in relation to food and eating in this study, there was a notable exception. Sharon (P10) appeared to *subvert* the monitoring practices of setting two in her former role as a cook. Indeed she seemed to have developed notoriety in this regard. When interviewing Jane (P6), the manager (and also her sister), she stated:

I found it difficult having Sharon in the kitchen, because she wouldn't wear her hat and wouldn't – after (*personal info about S omitted*) she wouldn't go on any courses and wouldn't keep up her health and hygiene – food and hygiene – I found that *difficult* because there are certain things you *have* to do – absolutely *have* to do and she wouldn't keep the records of temperatures and things then would do them *months* on and I'd say 'Look Sharon, you can't

do that' and that's what we fell out about mmm... but Helga does all of that and I trained her up to do all of that and she's been on all the – the health and hygiene course and she's *clean* – the kitchen's always *clean*. Well it's *important*

Here we can see Sharon resisting the food safety requirement to wear particular clothing in relation to food handling, but also the monitoring of temperatures of food. Jane's exasperation needs to be understood in the context of the many regulations that exist in relation to food safety and the regulatory bodies such as OFSTED that govern early childhood practice. For Foucault, the 'watchers' are watched too (Crossley, 2006).

Food and drink intake is highly monitored in the four early childhood settings when compared to other aspects of the children's experiences. The monitoring of such provisioning seems to structure many conversations between practitioners and parents, with practitioners expressing concern if they lack information to share in this area. Issues of class, race and gender permeate such encounters as women, as mothers, are deemed responsible for the food and drink provisioning in their households and working class households, especially, appear to be marginalised. Relationships between home and the early childhood setting in relation to food and eating are complex, serving to reinforce particular constructions of what it is to be a 'good' mother – a 'good' mother being one that takes on board professional advice and reflects the values of the setting. Not only this, but mothers also seem to monitor each others' food and drink provisioning and draw upon a discourse of risk to maintain boundaries between self and 'other' (Douglas, 1966).

Whilst the vast majority of practitioners in this study complied with the food and drink monitoring practices of their settings, this was not always the case. Sharon, as we have seen, subverted the practices devised to monitor food temperatures and the kinds of clothing expected to be worn as a response to

alleviating 'risk'. She often appears as a 'deviant case' in my data and seems to position herself as 'other' to the practitioners she works with, who notably have professional childcare qualifications that she does not possess. This was noted in the section on 'being a role model' in the previous chapter.

In the final section of this chapter, I consider another aspect of taming uncertainty, one that could be regarded as the most extreme: dieting.

Conversations about weight permeated many of the discussions practitioners had with each other during the course of their work and also emerged during the interviews. Of particular concern were the occasions when very young children alluded to body weight in the course of food events both real and pretend. Whilst these were few, they are nonetheless significant.

6.4 Dieting

In the previous chapter, I examined how practitioners in this study emphasised the importance of being a role model for young children in terms of both the way they eat; what they eat; and in some instances, their physical size. In this chapter, I want to explore a specific aspect of this; dieting. Here, the focus is on dieting as a means of *taming uncertainty*. The positioning of this data here links to the idea that individuals have become increasingly expected to manage the 'design' of their own bodies and control of one's diet is an important aspect of this 'self-reflexive' project (Giddens, 1991: 102). Powdermaker (1997: 209), for instance, asks:

'Is the ability to diet, and to diet consistently, related to the belief in a measure of control over one's fate? Is it related to the strength of the belief in science? Is obesity correlated with orientations towards asceticism versus sensory pleasures?'

It seems that in contemporary minority world societies, being overweight or obese is linked to a supposed lack of will power and lack of control over the body

(Bruch, 1997; Crossley, 2009), which has different meanings according to one's social status. For example, in some cases it may be viewed as acceptable for a middle-aged, middle-class man to be overweight as this might be attributed to affluence. However, for a working-class woman, being similarly overweight may be linked to laziness (Powdermaker, 1997). As Bourdieu (2005) suggests, our tastes for different foods become, quite literally, inscribed on the body, thus, 'it follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste' (p. 75). However, issues of gender are *also* crucial to any understandings of the food and the body as I aim to demonstrate.

The link between gender, identity and food was highlighted by some of the children in this study. Instances of this included Owen (C25) describing how he and his father had gone to a café for a 'big boys' breakfast' and Tara's mother telling me that she and her daughter were going to have a 'girls' night in' with ice-cream and chocolates (Tara: C26). In the previous chapter, I examined how different discourses of embodiment position *practitioners* as they are expected to be role models, embodying a slim ideal of 'good health'. However, alongside this, practitioners are also located within a discourse of 'motherliness', which suggests that roundness and cuddliness are a positive physical attribute. As with many other studies in relation to food (see for instance Charles and Kerr, 1986; Ekstrom, 1991; Bordo, 1997; DeVault, 1997), the issue of gender is significant.

The desire to control the body in the area of food and eating can lead to compulsive actions and other symptoms of disturbance (Bruch, 1997), especially in women, owing to the power of hegemonic understandings of the 'body beautiful' (Bordo, 1997; 2003). Examples of such compulsivity can be seen in the increase in disorders such as anorexia, which seem to be prevalent at an ever earlier age (reported by Goldin, 2007). For many anorexics, their eating disorder is linked to being in control of their bodies (Bordo, 1997) in a world where there is a plurality of ambiguous choices to be made in relation to food

(Giddens, 1991). At its extreme, it can be seen as a form of protest (Orbach, 1988; Shilling, 2005).

Shilling (2005) argues that women are often expected to:

'... cater for *other people's* hunger, to make decisions about their own consumption based on how *slim* they look rather than on how *hungry* they feel, and to engage in highly rationalistic calculations about the number of calories they consume' (p.163)

He maintains that it is unsurprising that for women especially, eating becomes 'psychologically and physiologically problematic' (p. 163).

As my study is focused upon early childhood practice and the overwhelming majority of practitioners are women – 26 of the 28 practitioners interviewed – when the issue of dieting and the control of one's food emerged I was interested in exploring this further. Early childhood practitioners often have to 'cater for *other people's* hunger' as Shilling (2005: 163) describes (although talking about women in general). They may have to prepare, cook, serve, cajole children into eating and monitor what they have eaten. They also need to eat, not least to service their *own* bodies during what can be a very demanding day. But further to this, food has a socio-cultural significance in binding practitioners together as a group, as noted in the previous chapter, and plays an important role in developing and maintaining relationships with the families they work with as we will see. Thus, practitioners appear to be placed in a complex position with regards to food.

Some of the practitioners talked explicitly about dieting. In this interview extract, Amy (P5) talks about the difficulties she experiences in dieting. This is because she is expected to eat the same *food* as the children, *alongside* the children, in her setting.

Amy: I'm always on these faddy diets (*laughs*) – it's a whole thing at the moment – don't eat curries, look at labels, you've got to look like this and think like that... Sometimes you won't want to eat cos of this whole calorie controlled thing

Deb: That must be difficult – like if you know something is fattening ...

Amy: Yeh – you have to eat it ...mmm

Deb: Is that what you do?

Amy: Yeh... *Panic!!! (laugh)* I don't know. Maybe you try and get away with it by having a *small amount* but a child may be watching and when you are trying to encourage them to have a bit more dinner they say 'well you've only eaten...'

Deb: So they are looking at what you eat?

Amy: Yeh! Sometimes they say 'well you only ate *that amount*' especially one that's *very determined* and they'll say 'you only ate that amount so I'm only eating that amount' - and I used to be like that with my mum. I used to be always like that with my mum – cos she's not a big eater (nothing to do with diets) and I went through a phase of, if she only ate a small amount, then I'd only eat that amount. It has an effect here. So if you only eat that amount, the children think they eat only that amount

Here, Amy seems to feel the watchful 'gaze' of the children as she eats during meal times and this appears to regulate her eating behaviour – not only *what* she eats but *how much* she eats. For Amy, eating with the children appears to be viewed as 'risky'. Indeed she employs the word 'panic', albeit jokingly, in reference to the position in which her practitioner role places her. Being a practitioner appears to impinge *directly* on her perceived ability to lose weight, something she has been struggling with since the birth of her child a few years ago. Amy often expressed concern about the health risks of being overweight.

Many of the staff room discussions that took place away from the children centred around food and weight, with practitioners debating the merits of various diets and the weight they had gained or lost. In setting one, many practitioners were involved in a weekly 'weigh-in' and if they had gained weight, had to put a pound in a communal pot of money. Interestingly, though, the accumulated money paid for a collective outing, so the incentive to lose weight was counter-balanced with the future enjoyment of a day out together. This ambiguity in relation to food can also be seen in the foods the practitioners bought in to share with each other away from the children. In the previous chapter, I noted how practitioners in each of the four settings often bought in sweet or high fat foods to share together as treats in the middle and end of the day – a practice that seemed to bind the practitioners together as a group. Simultaneously, though, practitioners would talk about the difficulties they had in maintaining or losing weight. In the methodology chapter I made reference to my own position in relation to this in setting three as I intentionally lost a lot of weight during this period and became characterized as someone with enormous will power, able to 'rationally' control her body – something 'other' to the practitioners in the setting.

In each of the settings there are occasions when children bring in food from home, such as birthdays. For some practitioners, this too is constructed as a 'risk' as they are caught between maintaining or losing weight and appearing unsociable or ungrateful. Foods bought in for celebrations were deemed especially 'risky' owing to their higher calorific content and because they were perceived as more difficult to resist. In setting three, Sadie (P16) noted:

I've had issues with food myself. I'm overweight and so is my husband and one of my children. My husband has always been overweight... I have my own food issues and tend to eat in *secret* away from the children... One of my 'key children' bought in a birthday cake and chocolates, which impacted a bit on the fruit that day, but they (*the children*) still ate fruit. Chocolates – they impact on me big time. I hate it

when children bring them in really – I'm like Hitler
'don't do it to me!

As this extract shows, practitioners appear to be conscious of the socio-cultural significance of food, such as its role in commensality, but dislike the impact this can have on their bodies. This was also evident in setting one when practitioners talked about the offers of food she receives during home visits. Mary (P3) stated:

You are getting offered things at each house and you
can't drink and eat *everywhere* you go.

Similarly, Merryl (P2) noted the difficulties of maintaining a calorie-controlled diet when engaged in home visiting at the beginning of the academic year. She outlined the strategies she has adopted in order to overcome this.

... have just a little bit or try to have most of it and then
at any other house we went to it was 'oh we just came
back from nursery and we *just* had a drink or *just* had
lunch.

On some occasions I observed that children appeared to have picked up
messages about food and body size. In setting one (1.3.07) I noted:

Anastacia (C20) joins the play (*in the home corner*)
and says 'mummy on a diet. She can't have this food'
when some cake is placed in front of her. Anastacia
is very particular about arranging the cups, putting
each on a saucer very carefully and then putting a
teaspoon on the side. She stirs very slowly saying
'It's a slim-a- soup'. I ask what this is and she says
'something that mummies have'.

On two other occasions I observed young girls (Diane and Rhianna: C47 and
C48 respectively) mention the importance of having drinks that are 'low in fat'
rather than the milk on offer because imbibing it would result in overweight.

Similarly, Samuel (C17) talked about how his mother eats 'skinny cow' products. Whilst these instances were few in the context of a study that amassed a great deal of data, they are worth highlighting as there does appear to be evidence that eating disorders amongst children are on the increase (Goldin, 2007). In setting three, for instance, Vera (P14) had previously worked with a child in a primary school who was anorexic.

It would seem from this section that dieting is a practice that can be conceptualized in terms of taming uncertainty and risk avoidance. This is because it is linked with the ability to rationally 'choose' a healthy lifestyle, demonstrating a command of oneself in the present in order to control one's own future (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Lupton, 1995). For several practitioners in this study, this places them in a difficult position because some aspects of their work require them to eat the same food as the children, alongside the children (settings two and four). In addition, home visiting (setting one) and foods bought in from home as part of celebratory events (all settings) invite uncomfortable encounters for some practitioners because they do not wish to refuse kind offers of food - with all the symbolic rejection this might suggest - but do not wish to risk possible weight gain. Food and drink are also constructed by some children in terms of 'risk' such as the possibility of putting on weight. Crucially, this 'risk' appears to be constructed as *greater* for women and girls.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that food events are often constructed as a 'risky business'. Avoiding risk and taming uncertainty appear to be emphasised in relation to food and eating in early childhood settings, something that I have located within a wider context of increased risk management in minority world countries at the current time. These 'risks' relate to notions of the body as a potential contaminant as well as the body in danger.

Children's bodies appear to be considered as particularly *dangerous* and *in danger* owing to constructions of the child's body as uncontrollable and uncivilized (Tobin, 1997; 2004), less rational (Burman, 1994), and more vulnerable to disease (Holsapple et al, 2004; Samet, 2004). This links to the idea put forward in Chapter Two of this thesis, that the bodily experiences of individual children are symbolic of the wider discursive arena in which ideas about 'children' and 'childhood' come to predominate (based on Bordo's [2003] analysis). The result of constructions of 'children' and 'childhood' as 'other' is that activities relating to food events (and the body) become subject to high levels of monitoring and risk management.

However, it is not only children who are marginalized in this way, some working class families appear to be similarly 'othered' in relation to food. Furthermore, gender is a significant variable in relation to risk because the data suggests that early childhood practice is a complex mix of negotiating the preparation and serving of food. It involves cajoling children into eating, monitoring children's intake of food and drink and reporting to parents about their children's food and drink intake – often on a daily basis. Alongside this, practitioners are expected to be a role model of 'taming uncertainty' in relation to food but also need to be able to respond warmly to offers of food during home visits and on special occasions. It would appear from my data that these practices have a real and felt effect on the bodies of practitioners.

Yet while issues pertaining to the body are clearly a significant part of early childhood practice, the training practitioners receive in relation to food and eating appears to emphasise food safety and risk avoidance over its socio-cultural significance, for instance. This may be indicative of the 'frenzy' of risk avoidance in early childhood settings at the current time as well as the increasingly disembodied nature of the early childhood curriculum (Tobin, 2004). Thus, whilst risk management can be linked to the idea of taming uncertainty, which has its philosophical roots in modernist thinking, this raises a range of contradictions for

early childhood practitioners. It could be claimed, for instance, that the increase in civilizing and rationalizing the body has resulted in less danger but also less *excitement* (Elias, 1994; Shilling, 1993). Possibly, then, it could be argued that the developments towards greater control and management of risk in relation to the body have resulted in a lessening of *spontaneity* and *fun* (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003).

But are fun, spontaneity and playfulness important in relation to *food and eating*? How can we equate the management of risk and uncertainty with play and playfulness, which often seems to elevate and value spontaneity, fun and ambiguity? Tovey, for instance, uses the term 'gleefulness' when discussing play (Tovey, 2007: 21), which would appear at odds with the austerity of some of the advice given in relation to healthy eating and food safety. It seems that we may have forgotten *playfulness* and *enjoyment* in relation to food events. Therefore, in the final chapter detailing the findings in this study, I aim to explore the significance of playfulness in relation to food and eating, which may be especially important at a time of increased risk avoidance in relation to food events and seemingly anything pertaining to the body in early childhood practice (Tobin, 2004).

Chapter 6: The importance of playfulness in relation to food events

So far in this thesis I have developed the idea that food events are important occasions in the nursery day but often do not receive the attention or status they deserve owing to a perception that practices pertaining to the body are of lesser status when compared to those associated with the mind. Following on from this, I outlined a view of the body as a 'project' (Ben-Ari, 1997), with children's bodies conceptualized as 'uncontrollable' (Tobin, 1997) and in need of civilizing. In Chapter Four I further developed these conceptualizations by drawing on my data to outline the ways in which, through food events, children and practitioners' bodies are subject to civilizing processes. In addition, in Chapter Five, I demonstrated that food events are occasions which appear to be constructed as 'risky' owing to perceptions of children's bodies as particularly *vulnerable* as well as inherently less *hygienic* in comparison with adults' bodies. This, I argued, leads to an over-concern with taming uncertainty, notably in relation to children's future health and health related behaviours. I ended the previous chapter by asking whether this concern has resulted in less spontaneity and fun in relation to food and eating. In doing this, I asked whether a sense of fun and playfulness are important in relation to food events.

It would seem that anxiety over children's diet is increasing and early childhood settings and schools are exhorted to work on promoting healthy eating, controlling what children eat and the way that they eat it in the context of ever more regulation. In the introductory chapter I made reference to Valentine's (2005: 209) assertion that there is a 'dizzying whirl of initiatives' in this area. But alongside initiatives designed to promote healthy eating and discipline the body, practitioners are simultaneously encouraged to view *play* as a primary mode of learning in young children, notably in the Early Years' Foundation Stage documentation (DfES, 2007). Although trying to define 'play' has been shown to

be difficult by many commentators (e.g. Bruce, 1991; Bennett et al, 1997), it is often regarded as something that is self-chosen; spontaneous; often unpredictable; and therefore, something that cannot be *tightly* regulated by adults (e.g. Bruce, 1991; Gura, 1996; Kalliala, 2006), particularly in romantic or nostalgic discourses of play (Ailwood, 2003). This would seem to be in opposition to the civilizing of children's bodies emphasized in other aspects of early childhood practice, notably in the risk-avoidance strategies associated with food events.

In exploring these contradictions, I am taken back to one of my original research questions which asked how food and drink practices in early childhood settings might be conceptualized (i.e. in terms of early childhood practice more *generally*). This has been of constant interest to me in this study as different areas of practice seem to be underpinned by different constructions of 'children' and 'childhood' (Stainton-Rogers, 2001). Thus, *real* food events appear to be occasions which are characterized by a high degree of control and civilizing of the body – particularly when more formal, such as lunch times. By way of contrast, children's *pretend* play often seems to be underpinned by a more permissive, romantic discourse that operates in early childhood practice (Schwartzman, 1991), one that elevates the primacy and special nature of children's 'free' play away from the 'interfering' hands of adults (Edmiston, 2008).

Ben-Ari's (1997) study of a pre-school in Japan demonstrates these contradictions in practice. He notes how children are taught table manners explicitly, such as forms of address whilst sitting at the table, the correct posture for eating, and general politeness. Clear boundaries are set by the practitioners in the study around how not to eat. Whilst this might seem obvious, Ben-Ari contrasts this with the kinds of interactions practitioners have with the children during play episodes. In a highly significant passage, he states:

'It appears that the disciplinary methods used in regard to eating seem to involve more 'negative' sanctions and direct commands than those used in the direction and supervision of play and games: in a word, eating episodes are characterized by greater surveillance and regulation. The reason for this situation, I would suggest, lie in the notion that during such occasions the biological and animal side of the children may surface (nature) and thus have to be most clearly domesticated (culture).' (Ben-Ari, 1997: 106)

Walkerdine (1987) also observes that in early childhood practice overt messages proclaiming the efficacy of child centred pedagogy coexist alongside a less overt discourse of inculcating 'good' behaviour and following the rules. With this in mind, Polakow (1992) argues that a curriculum with a high degree of free-play may not sit easily alongside a hidden curriculum, including the organization of food events, which is rigid and inappropriate. This is because it may lead to compliance and conformity in opposition to the 'free'-play parts of the session. Food events, then, are a context not only where children are taught culturally accepted manners and the types of foods they might eat within their culture, they are also occasions when children's own bodily desires are taught to be reined in to comply with culturally accepted codes of behaviour. The role of the early childhood setting is an interesting one here as it is often regarded as a site which guides the child from their life in their family to life in the wider world (Ben-Ari, 1997; Golden, 2005); a point I raised in Chapter Two.

Turner (1996), although not talking about early childhood practice, has developed the term 'the somatic society' to denote the shift from the 'laboring body' to the 'desiring body' bent on playfulness and pleasure. Arguably, there has been a gradual widening between education and the outside world, which is manifest most clearly in the way that the latter is more closely connected to the pursuit of pleasure and playfulness. This, in turn, has important implications for education, such as the curriculum and accompanying pedagogy (Bresler, 2004). Phelan (1997: 77) views this distancing between early childhood education and pleasure

as a 'fear of disorderly classrooms where the playful exists alongside the serious.' In stating this, Phelan is also arguing that the *present* experiences of children are viewed as of less importance than their *futures*. Similarly, Mayall (1996: 119) asserts:

'The principal interest of the education system at the current time is the time future of children, rather than the time present. Essentially, school is a preparation. From the children's point of view, childhood is being lived now, in bodily and mental terms, but their experience is that their present wishes must give way to school agendas based on concern for the future.'

This links to the earlier discussion of the construction of childhood as 'futuraity' (Jenks, 1996) and is an on-going theme in Tobin's (1997) edited work. The data discussed in Chapters Four and Five also appears to support this view.

In order to explore the possible contradictions of practice between the playful and the serious, in this chapter I aim to outline a representation I have developed that enables observations to be positioned according to whether they are real or pretend as well as serious or playful. As I observed a wide range of practices in the four settings, this representation has enabled me to consider how food events might be understood in relation to the whole array of activities I observed in the settings. In exploring this, I am developing further an idea I outlined in Albon (2010) in which I posited that children's play could be positioned on a continuum of 'playing for real' and 'really playing'. Following on from an explication of this new way of conceptualizing food events in early childhood practice, I aim to show how the observational and interview data might be thus understood and positioned. In doing this, I will be arguing that playfulness is important in relation to food events.

In this chapter, then, I discuss what could arguably be seen as the antithesis of risk avoidance and civilizing the body; playfulness and the carnivalesque (terms

that I will define later). What seems rare in discussion about food at the present time, especially in relation to policy, is food and the events that surround it as something sensuous, fun and enjoyable. My discussion in the chapter therefore often centres on playfulness and Bakhtinian (1981;1984) notions of the carnivalesque.

6.1 Conceptualizing food events in early childhood practice

In this section I outline a representation I have developed to conceptualize food events in early childhood settings. This became important during the course of this study because sometimes the practice I was observing or discussing seemed to be characterized by its playfulness, at other times its seriousness.

Throughout this study I was interested in both the *real* food events of meal and snack times and the *pretend* food events that I observed in the children's 'socio-dramatic' and 'thematic fantasy' play (Hendy and Toon, 2001). This, in part, was due to my belief that play is a 'cultural reality' and not a *separate* sphere of childhood, unrelated to 'real' life (Edmiston, 2008: 6) and also because I contend that through play, children learn to 'do' culture as well as *create* culture as social actors (James et al, 1998: 83). Therefore, I broadened the definition of 'food events' outlined by Douglas and Nicod (1974) to include pretend play food events. I wanted to find a way of encapsulating the idea of real/pretend and serious/playful in a way that allowed for real events to be playful and pretend play to be serious, as I had observed. A key reason for doing this was to move away from a binary position of activities being conceptualized as 'play' or 'not play', something that has been criticized by a number of commentators (Schwartzman, 1978; Pellegrini, 1991; Edmiston, 2008). Edmiston (2008: 8), for instance, draws on the work of Bruner (e.g. Bruner, 1977) to argue that rather than concerning ourselves with defining play in terms of an activity, we should think of it as an 'approach to action'. Later in this chapter I discuss the importance of playfulness with this in mind.

Figure 1 shows the representation developed. Before discussing it more thoroughly it should be noted that it is very *fluid* (as indicated by the arrows). Episodes might start within the quadrant of pretend/playful but become more serious in a moment – such is the ‘beauty’ of play. Similarly, real/serious episodes, which may include practitioner attempts to civilize children’s bodies during lunch time, might move to the more playful in a moment. As Pellegrini (1991: 215) notes, play can be conceptualized on a continuum of ‘more or less play’ and it is this fluidity that I hope to encapsulate. It should also be noted that whilst practitioners were *primarily* observed in the two serious quadrants and children within the two playful quadrants, this was not always the case. As the data will show, I observed children directing events towards the more serious and practitioners directing events to the more playful. This is a further example of the way food events in early childhood practice are co-constructed by children and practitioners.

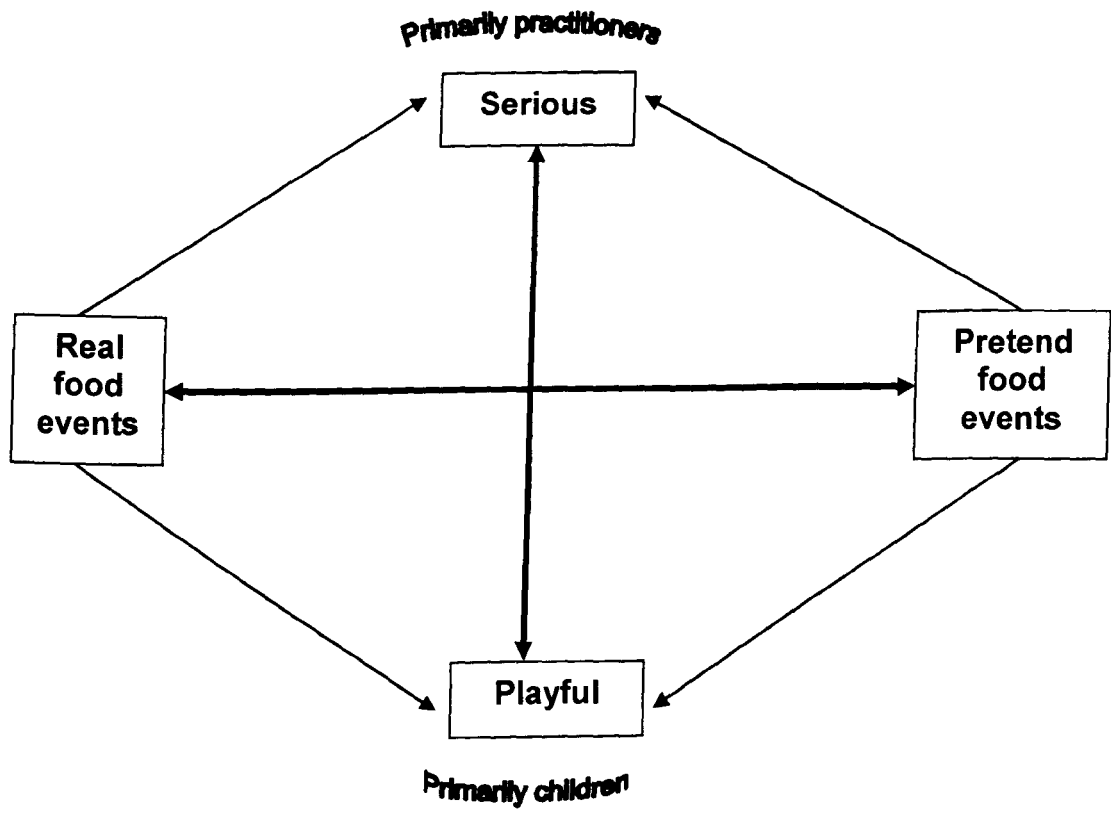


Figure 1: A representation for conceptualizing food events in early childhood practice

In the next few sections, I aim to discuss each of the four quadrants in turn i.e. pretend/serious; real/serious; pretend/playful; and real/playful. Primarily I found that real food events could be positioned as falling within the real/serious quadrant. Although I observed pretend play around food events that was both playful and serious, the play the *practitioners* appeared to value most tended to be in the pretend/serious quadrant. The quadrant that had the fewest observations was the real/playful quadrant with the exception of data from setting two. Setting four also had a lot of data in this section but little data in the pretend/playful quadrant. This may be related to the ages of the children observed in this setting. Babies and toddlers rarely seem to engage in the kind of symbolic, 'let's pretend' play that the far right side of Figure 1 suggests. For writers within the field of developmental psychology this is often attributed to the 'developmental stage' of very young children – here the 'sensory-motor' stage of development (Piaget, 1962).

Whilst the stage theory of development and its universal application has been widely criticized (e.g. Burman, 1994; Prout and James, 1997; James et al, 1998; Cannella and Viruru, 2004), there does appear to be a shift in young children's ability and interest in playing symbolically from about 18-36 months onwards (Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004; Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003). The lack of data from setting four in the pretend/playful and pretend/real quadrants appears to support this view. However, we should be cautious. Setting four was a Montessori setting and some of the practitioners tended to downplay the importance of children's *pretend* play – something that characterizes Montessori's writings (Hyder, 2005).

6.2 Real/serious

Many of the observations and discussions about practice referred to in Chapters' Four and Five of this thesis could be said to fall within the real/serious quadrant. Therefore, I will confine myself to a very brief discussion here.

Real food events might be meal times, snack times or other occasions when food is eaten or is *expected* to be eaten. From my observational data, they are occasions which often appear to be characterized by their seriousness when compared to other areas of practice. In Chapter Four I noted how they are occasions when children's bodies are often viewed as in need of civilizing. Practices I noted relate to the way time and space are organized; the way 'body rules' are constructed and maintained; and the way real food events – particularly snack time - are constructed as 'teachable moments'. In addition to this, practitioners' own bodies are 'civilized' in the way they feel the need to be role models of healthy eating and the physical embodiment of a slim and 'healthy' body.

Further to this, I have also argued that real food events are characterized by the way they are conceived as a 'risky' business. This, in turn, leads to practices designed to bring the vagaries of the future under tight control. Chapter Five noted that a concern with hygiene; allergies; safety in the kitchen; as well as monitoring practices associated with these, demonstrates the way food events are conceptualized as 'risky'. At its most extreme, eating itself is viewed as 'risky', with practitioners balancing concerns (over being a role model and eating the same foods as the children or eating foods prepared for them lovingly by families) with maintaining a certain weight.

Again, such episodes can be placed within the real/serious quadrant because there is little semblance of playfulness during such observations of practice or in the interview data. Phelan (1997), for instance, argues that 'work-like' activities – or real/serious activities according to my typology - are prized highly as they demand 'rational behaviour and the control of impulse and desire' over 'immediate, momentary pleasures' (p.80). As noted earlier in this chapter, the 'business' of education seems to elevate future-oriented, 'work-like' behaviours at the expense of more playful, pleasure seeking behaviours. Possibly, this has its roots in the relative status of the mind and the body in education, a point

developed in Chapter Two, because bodily pleasures have sometimes been seen as tempting the mind away from rational thinking (Bordo, 2003). This, in turn, is underpinned by a bifurcation of the mind and the body (Bresler, 2004).

However, Chapters Four and Five also highlighted the agency of children and practitioners in *resisting* the civilizing of their bodies as well as resisting the ever-widening quest to avoid risk in early childhood settings. One form of resistance that has received little attention thus far in this thesis is *playfulness* as resistance. This, as we will see later in this chapter, appears to be highly significant and also supports my claim that the conceptualization of food events in early childhood practice represented in Figure 1 needs to be seen as fluid. Episodes may begin as serious but may shift into the two playful quadrants in a moment.

To sum up this very brief section, it would seem that the real/serious quadrant is an area where real food events are often positioned. But this study looked at food events as enacted in children's *pretend play* as well as *real* food events. Thus, the next two sections outline the kinds of pretend play I observed and the ways in which they might be conceptualized within the quadrants of Figure 1.

6.3 Pretend/serious

The pretend/serious quadrant refers to children's pretend play that appears to mirror practices seen in real life – hence my conceptualization of this kind of play as being more serious than the type of play I will be referring to as pretend/playful. Hendy and Toon (2001) refer to this type of play as 'socio-dramatic'. For the purposes of this study such play might include pretending to prepare food; cook; feed the family and wash up; all of which children are likely to have seen. In this sense, the children appear a 'head taller' in their play (Vygotsky, 1978) as they are engaged in activity, albeit pretend, that in real life is likely not to be readily open to them – at least not in contemporary minority world countries.

Play that I am positioning within the pretend/serious quadrant is characterized by children appearing to want to encounter reality (Moyles, 1989). Thus, such play could also be regarded as a site of cultural reproduction, albeit that children are not passive mimics of that culture (James et al, 1998). This can be contrasted with play in the pretend/playful quadrant, where children seem to be engaged in playfully pushing the boundaries of what is real – a point which will be developed later. In a previous paper (Albon, 2010), I conceptualized such play as 'playing for real'. However, although I have positioned such play as pretend/serious, it *may* be pleasurable. As Fromberg (2002: 11) notes:

'Despite the serious themes, the children experience a sense of satisfaction that transcends the moment. The sense of pleasure may come from immersing themselves in the action or emotion, or in the sense of control that comes from an awareness of engaging in pretense.'

In Chapters' Four and Five I referred to some observations of pretend/serious play such as occasions when children were playing out roles relating to safety or pretending to police the 'body rules' of other children who were engaged in the same play episode. Here, I wish to discuss in greater detail a few other observations in terms of the way they fall within the pretend/serious quadrant.

In setting one (12.1. 07), I observed the following example of play that might be placed within the pretend/serious quadrant. It is included in this section because it strongly mirrors real life in terms of the skills that are applied to the task; the care taken over the cooking; the time spent waiting for the food to cook; and the general mannerisms and concern over our safety when eating something hot.

Seema (C7) uses the dough to make roti, speaking to me constantly in her first language interspersing it with 'special for you'. She forms roti in the same way as Sarbjit (C8) and puts up the heat on the cooker by turning the knob. Then she stands with her hands on

her hips as if waiting for time to pass by, annoyed at the length of time roti are taking to cook. To cook, she places the dough roti directly onto the heat, pressing them down slightly as if they are bubbling up. I know from experience that this is the way that roti are cooked. As she does this, she piles the cooked roti onto a plate very carefully and carries on cooking.

Raksha (C9) comes over to join her and they both stand at the cooker cooking roti, saying 'wait' as the roti cook. Sometimes that have their arms folded, chatting together as if gossiping. When all the dough is cooked and wonderful pile of roti is made, they bring it over to the table and I am invited to join the group (Noor [C10], Samira [C12] and Nosheen [C11] are still there). Seema gives me a roti on a plate and spoons an imaginary blob next to it, saying 'chutney'. Seema is concerned her roti are too hot to eat at the moment and says 'careful – hot' to make sure we take care.

In setting two (26.6.07) I similarly observed children engaged in play that mirrors closely the kinds of practices they may have observed in real life. The children are playing 'barbecues' outdoors. It is interesting to note how the play moves away from pretence to a real (and serious) task of problem solving in a moment.

Outdoors today, the children had sticks and stones etc... as part of the play materials available. The children used these to make barbecues. Alliyah (C27) made a fire by carefully placing sticks in a core and radial pattern and then placing a few stones on top. Then she threaded some paper onto a thin stick and began to barbecue it on the fire saying 'I make shish kebab'. Other children make their own foods to put on the fire from found materials in the garden. They talk about the food getting burnt, the fire getting hot, and barbecues they have been to. 'My mummy and daddy have people round for a barbie and they have fish and meat and stuff' (Melanie: C28). Emma (C30) kisses guests on both cheeks as they arrive for the

barbecue as you might see in white middle class forms of greeting –she then offers guests drinks.

Other children such as Laura (C29) use the stones to make a circle (to stand for a pond) and Laura calls on everyone to 'come and get a fish for tea'. The sticks become used as fishing rods to catch fish and for a while Laura tries to extend the realism of the play by attaching a stone to the rod to no avail. This does not seem to dampen the children's activity, but not for the first time I am struck by the way that once there is a 'real' task, the children seem to stop playing and come out of the pretence into a piece of problem-solving.

In setting two (2.6.07) I also observed play in the home corner that became almost not like play. Indeed on reading this, it is easy to see the observation as more akin to 'work' than 'play':

Today there are real potatoes in the home corner. This is interesting because the children run over to the cook in the kitchen with them and say they have found them and they belong in the kitchen. The cook (P11) seems a bit confused about this initially but then laughs and says that it is OK. It is very noticeable in this setting that the kitchen is visible to all the children and the children are able to watch the meals being cooked or engage in conversation with the cook about the food they are going to eat.

The children seem to have a very strong sense of real and pretend in the home corner as evidenced by the potatoes. Once they realize that they can have the real potatoes in the home corner, I notice a marked change in the play. Melanie (C28) gets the toy knife and starts to cut one of the potatoes into pieces and puts the pieces into a saucepan. This is tricky given the lack of a sharp edge. Other children do this too but with a lesser degree of ability and there is a very purposeful air in the home corner. The cook supplies extra potatoes at the request of the children, who run over to the kitchen and tell her what they are doing.

The nursery manager brings over some real knives from the kitchen and the children become engrossed in cutting the potatoes and filling pans. Once full, Melanie and Emma (C30) say that they need water in the pans to boil the potatoes. They have clearly seen this being done. A practitioner does not question this and puts some water in the water tray to enable the children to fill their pans with water (on top of the cut potatoes). The children are unable to access water from taps themselves owing to the building design.

The children spend a long time at play - preparing, cooking and serving up food. The children comment on how the water is dirty now and talk about the need to peel the potatoes. Later, Melanie says that she needs to get the water out of the pan like her mum does at home and takes the pans over to the water tray. Melanie selects a sieve from a couple offered to her by the cook and takes it over to the water tray and drains her potatoes successfully. She then returns to the home corner.

It is debatable whether this type of pretend play is 'play' at all (Albon, 2010). Gura (1996: 60) describes activity such as this as an 'in-between activity' because it bears as close a resemblance to *work* as to play. Indeed the skills the children demonstrated in cutting the potatoes and sieving them once 'cooked' could be regarded as more akin to work than play (Wing, 1995; Gura, 1996). As I argued earlier, to try and define play in terms of 'play' and 'not play' (or 'work') can be a fruitless task, however it is interesting to note that I often observed this kind of 'play' when *real* items were added to the home corner, notably real food. This suggests a *fluidity* between 'pretend' and 'real' that is less acknowledged in literature that often positions play in terms of a separate, romantic province of childhood (Edmiston, 2008).

Many of the practitioners interviewed in this study seemed to value the kind of play that I suggest falls within the pretend/serious quadrant highly. As Tobin (1997: 13) maintains:

'Events and experiences hold significance only if our narratives of education and child development name them as stepping stones on the paths toward positive or negative developmental outcomes.'

In the following interview extracts we will see that episodes of play that might be conceptualized as falling within the pretend/serious quadrant were valued because practitioners connected the play of the child or group of children in terms of a positive move forward in their development and learning. Like Tobin suggests in the quotation above, such play comes to be seen as significant because it is compatible with dominant narratives of early childhood education held at a particular time. One such dominant narrative is the belief in the primacy of play in children's learning and how this forms the bedrock of children's *future* educational career (Romero, 1991; Ailwood, 2003; Rogers, 2010). As Ailwood (2003) notes, the language used in relation to play serves to regulate, rationalize and normalize play and govern the work of early childhood practitioners. This can be seen explicitly in the Early Years Foundation Stage document (DfES, 2007: Pg 10 of practice guidance), which states 'a high quality early years experience provides a firm foundation on which to build future academic, social and emotional success'. As in the discussion in the previous two chapters, the focus here is on the child's future as opposed to the child's experience *as lived now* (Polakow, 1992; Phelan, 1997).

Some practitioners in this study employed a discourse of 'risk' in order to elevate the importance of pretend play in developing children's understanding of the *safety* aspects of cooking. In setting four, Rehana (P26) pointed out:

They (*children*) learn about safety and home (*when engaged in play relating to food events*) – they see parents do the same things. Eddie (C56) says things like 'it's hot – can't touch it.' We encourage the children to use utensils in their play – they need to learn.

Similarly, in setting three, Vera (P14) stated:

Children emulate what they see at *home*. You can talk about knives and safety. It's important so children can do what they *can't* do at home e.g. ironing, cooking.

And play helps children develop positive attitudes. We had a bakers (*role play area*) on Monday and I was really proud of it. One boy said 'doughnut shop' – they didn't all know the word 'bakers'. We put the dough in the bakers' shop – they didn't know bread came from dough. Play like this teaches children about different types of food...

Play with food like the bakers is good to encourage talking.

It would seem from these interview extracts that play within the pretend/serious quadrant is viewed as positive because it offers an opportunity for some *explicit learning* about safety and different types of food as well as an opportunity to enhance children's language development. Phelan (1997: 81) argues that play is often cast as an 'instrument of rationality' and is seen as a valuable tool for learning that will be useful in the child's educational career – a point I also develop later in relation to more playful episodes observed. Certainly, such play is sometimes viewed as needing the regulating presence of the *practitioner* in order to maximize the learning of the children (see e.g. Smilansky's [1990] notion of 'play-tutoring'). Such play is also viewed as embodying greater 'cognitive complexity' (Bennett et al, 1997) and thus high status is often afforded to the activity in comparison to play that is deemed more repetitive or seemingly frivolous (Hutt, 1979; Hutt et al, 1989). In critiquing such a viewpoint of play, Tobin (1997: 19) argues that children over the course of their nursery experience are expected to move from 'unbridled expressions of bodily desire to *socially sanctioned* forms of play, from excessive pleasure to good clean fun' (*my italics*).

Possibly too, practitioners may prize this type of play more highly because it tends to be play that involves a greater degree of pre-structuring. Thus, practitioners may have had more of a hand in the direction of the play or even the selection of the play materials (Lally, 1989). Vera's commentary on the 'baker's shop' appears to show a real pride in setting up the role play area in relation to this theme – a theme and physical space planned and set up by practitioners. Bennett et al's (1997) study found that reception class teachers often stated that 'play should be educationally worthwhile and integral to their management of learning' (p.118), which the authors link to Guha's (1988) notion of play 'in schools' as opposed to play 'as such'. They emphasise the need for play to be linked to specific learning intentions. Thus, the construction of 'good' play (Rogers, 2010), which has its own techniques of power, is associated with play that is 'structured' and 'goal oriented' – something that has been linked to the initial development of the Early Learning Goals (Hendy and Toon, 2001) and, I would argue, the subsequent development of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007).

One such 'goal' at the current time is the inculcation of healthy eating habits in children. Perhaps, then, it is not a surprise to see the importance of healthy eating permeating practitioners' narratives of the significance of play. Activity in the pretend/serious quadrant was prized by practitioners because it is deemed to encourage *familiarity* with foods that are deemed to be healthy. Tracey (P17) stated:

If children are familiar with things then they stop being frightened or scared of things. Play helps children to get *familiar* with healthy eating.

In this sense Tracey appears to be drawing on a discourse of play that emphasizes its *therapeutic* role in supporting the emotional development of children as well as the more cognitive (Hyder, 2005). It is interesting that the role

of play in developing 'healthy' eating habits was mentioned explicitly by six of the practitioners interviewed.

The importance of re-presenting experiences from the real world was highlighted by nearly all the practitioners in this study and can be linked to the idea that play is a site where children 'do' culture – noted earlier (James et al, 1998). In particular, the practitioners seemed to emphasise the link between this kind of play and home; and the opportunity pretend play presents for playing out the roles they had observed. Sharon (P10), for instance, makes gendered assumptions about the 'reality' of family life as can be seen in the following extract:

It's the link with their mums. You don't realize sometimes how much they're watching but when you watch them (*in the home corner*) doing what mums do, you think 'ah yes'.

Similarly, in the following interview extract we can see Amy (P5) noting how play in relation to food events is important because children are:

... acting out what they've seen at home. How they'll butter the bread like they've seen their parents or grandparents at home but they'll call their parents' names like 'come on – come for your tea' like they see at home.

Whilst the link between pretend food event play and the home was an area many practitioners felt was important, this seemed to be at the level of *intuitive feeling* rather than something the practitioners could justify clearly (e.g. drawing on *sociological* understandings of play as a site of playful cultural reproduction [James et al, 1998]). This was in direct contrast with practitioners who were able to make a clear case that pretend food event play (in what I am calling the pretend/serious quadrant) is important in terms of the children's language development or for learning about health and safety for instance. Possibly

documentation such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) has given practitioners a *particular* narrative through which to justify pretend play and other narratives are less prominent or even silenced. For example, the *therapeutic* and *emotional* value of play tends to be neglected in more recent writing in the area of early childhood education whereas this may well have been at the fore half a century ago when psychoanalytical theories were more prominent in the field (Tobin, 1997; 2004). In addition, a more critical reading of play as a site where issues of gender, race, class and sexuality are enacted and perpetuated (Connolly, 1995) is similarly silent in the practitioners' commentaries – not least the assumption that mothers universally do the food provisioning in their households. As Moss and Petrie (2002) note, it is important not to valorize play as 'ideal' in some way.

For a small minority of practitioners in this study, pretend play itself – serious *and* playful – was constructed as being of little value. One practitioner in setting four - Tarnpreet (P24) – argued:

In the home corner I make sure we act as a role model – like for what you should do with food. We might say an orange is not a ball for rolling or throwing, it is for eating. I go to their level and role model this.

In the Toddler Room this practitioner worked in as a room leader, children were encouraged to use the home corner kitchen area as if it were real at all times. Thus, the children were encouraged to use the oven gloves; pretend to wash their hands before eating; and eat 'sensibly' at the table – to name but a few examples. The children's 'deviations' towards pretend/playful play, a term which will be discussed in the next section, were steered back towards the more pretend/serious quadrant as we will see later. Indeed Tarnpreet's statement constructs pretend play explicitly in terms of role-modelling *real-life* activity. Possibly, this reflects her Montessorian training as for Montessori, the value of

play lies in its role in learning about *reality*, with pretend play viewed as 'primitive' (Hyder, 2005).

However, not all practitioners in this setting adhered to this philosophy. Some of the practitioners in setting four critiqued the Montessorian linkage between play and reality. In a telling observation during lunch on 14.5.09 Nadiya (P19) compared the approach with her 'real life' upbringing in Bangladesh:

Conversation at lunchtime is fascinating as a Montessori student is talking about the importance of real meaningful learning and the Montessori method – comparing it to her own schooling in Nigeria. Nadiya is dismissive of the Montessori approach saying that for her, 'practical real life' was working alongside her mother in the village in Bangladesh where she grew up – cooking, washing etc... Nadiya considers the small versions of real things not to be *real things* and some of the activities not to be real in the sense of her own upbringing. Quite a heated debate occurs while the children are having their lunch.

It would seem that Nadiya is dismissive of the small sized equipment and focus on 'real' things in the Montessori approach because she compares it to her own experiences growing up where she was *really* engaged in cooking and cleaning, rather than pretending to do this. In the context of contemporary minority world societies, pretend play seems to be seen as an important vehicle for children to encounter situations that are deemed too 'risky' in real life. In majority world countries, such as Bangladesh, children may encounter real life activities such as cooking at a younger age through a process of 'guided participation' with those who care for them. Rather than being confined to a separate sphere of 'childhood' (as opposed to 'adulthood'), children participate increasingly, and from a young age, in the everyday activities of their communities (Rogoff, 1990). However, it is important to be mindful that in the context of the *home*, some children in minority world contexts may well have chopped potatoes (as in the earlier observation) alongside their parents when preparing a meal.

The pretend/serious quadrant contains play episodes that resemble closely experiences children are likely to have observed in real life. Examples might include shopping, preparing and cooking food or sharing a family meal. Practitioners seem to value this kind of play highly. I posited that a possible reason for this is that they have a professional investment in such play as it sometimes involves a high level of pre-structuring. Perhaps more importantly, this kind of play fits into the prominent discourses relating to early childhood education at the current time, notably the importance of high quality play experiences in providing a firm *foundation* for children's future educational career. I am certainly not suggesting this is *unimportant* but propose that there are other narratives that may be less prominent, but nonetheless significant for early childhood education. Aspects of practice that appear to be less well received (by some practitioners) and less amenable to pre-structuring seem to fall into the two playful quadrants. It is to these, more playful aspects of early childhood practice that this chapter now turns.

6.4 Pretend/playful

Play that falls within the pretend/playful quadrant (see Figure 1) is characterized by a *stretching* of the boundaries of conventional behaviour and what is 'real'. As James et al (1998) note, children, as social *actors*, do not merely mimic culture in their play. Play within the pretend/playful quadrant can be contrasted with play in the pretend/serious quadrant discussed in the previous section in which I suggest play thus positioned mirrors closely the experiences of everyday life. The type of play I am referring to in this section is characterized strongly by playfulness and humour (Albon, 2010) and is likely to be classified as 'ludic' according to the taxonomy of play developed by Hutt (1979). As a result of this, it may also be trivialized by adults (Ailwood, 2003). In terms of the focus of this study, the play episodes that fall within this quadrant are those where children appear to be playfully widening definitions of what is a food and the kinds of unwritten cultural rules that seem to exist in relation to how it is eaten; who eats it; the amount of

food it is acceptable to eat; and where food is eaten. In writing this section I will be exploring further my work which conceptualizes play in terms of 'playing for real' and 'really playing' (Albon, 2010) – in this section the 'really playing' area comes into sharp focus.

In thinking about pretend/playful episodes, the work of Bakhtin (e.g. in his 1984 study of the work of Rabelias) is useful because he employs the terms 'carnival' and 'carnavalesque' in ways that fit well with the idea of playfulness. This is because carnival promotes the subversion and mockery of authoritarianism, officialdom, narrow-minded seriousness, dogma, the usual order of things and 'all that is finished and polished' (Bakhtin, 1984: 3). In thinking about the 'finished and polished' we might make links to modernist thinking, which seeks to establish universality, certainty, order and homogeneity (Dahlberg et al, 1999).

The carnivalesque emphasizes abundance, especially in feasting and in the large and grotesque body. It emphasizes sensuality, spectacle and the language of the 'marketplace'. During carnival there is temporary liberation from the conventional order of things, such as in the tradition of the 'Feast of Fools', where hierarchical precedence and adherence to keeping bodily pleasures in check were suspended.

For Bakhtin (1984), carnival is always accompanied by laughter. He argues that 'every act of world history was accompanied by a laughing chorus' (p. 474) and he draws upon Aristotle's maxim that once a child laughs, s/he becomes a human being. He states:

'Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength.' (p. 95)

Elsewhere, Bakhtin (1981: 23) maintains:

'Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside it, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.'

Therefore, the laughter associated with the carnivalesque could be construed as a source of strength and creativity, not least because the familiarity it engenders makes possible a re-examination and evaluation of that which appears to be 'finished and polished' (*ibid*). Laughter, then, is more than an act of psychological release, it is a 'sociohistorical cultural phenomenon' (Bakhtin, 1981: 236).

Whilst Bakhtin associates carnival with the general populous acting in temporary juxtaposition to officialdom such as the church, the palace and institutions, especially those that were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, his ideas are applicable to early childhood practice. Tobin (1997: 23), for instance, employs an analogy of Bakhtin's work resulting in a position where 'children are to teachers in school settings as peasants are to rulers under feudalism.' In doing this, Tobin suggests that early childhood settings are places where the 'low' (children) meet the 'high' (practitioners). The work of Bakhtin helps us to re-appraise the bawdy and commonplace and encourages us to think about the different responses we might have to them in early childhood practice. In this section, then, I hope to examine play episodes I am placing within the pretend/playful quadrant.

A sense of playfulness and the carnivalesque can be seen in the following observation carried out in setting three (10.10.08):

Harry (C41) and his friends are playing a game that involves making pretend sandwiches (using plastic bread pieces) with items like small dolls inside. They

find this very funny and think of more and more silly combinations, but in doing this they seem to confirm that they know what they *should* be eating.

Similarly, in setting one (3.3.07), I noted the following interaction as part of the children's role play:

Raksha (C9) and Seema (C7) say 'Let's make pizza for breakfast'. They giggle as if they know pizza is an 'unacceptable' breakfast.

I also observed similar episodes of play in setting two. Here is a typical example (12.11.07):

Youssef (C32) experiments picking up lots of different bits of food with the tongs. He puts the food onto Laura's (C29) head playfully, watching it fall off. She thinks this is funny too. He fills the big bowl with food, saying 'yum yum LOTS of food' and puts it onto the baby's high chair and begins to feed the baby. The more he and Laura think of silly combinations of food to give the baby, the more they laugh. They also enjoy trying to stuff lots of food into the baby's mouth in one go e.g. large apples and sweet corns.

Rather than mirroring more closely the practices observed in real life, in observations such as these, children appear to be exploring unreality and the humour that goes with this – a point I will be developing further later in this section. I rarely observed practitioners interacting with children during such episodes of play. Whilst it would be easy to attribute this to practitioners devaluing this kind of play (and this did *seem* to be the case) there is a need for caution. When I was present in each of the four settings, many of the practitioners were happy to have another adult, who is also a trained practitioner, on the premises. Although I was never included in the staff to child ratios, there was a sense in which my presence in the home corner areas in each setting was

sometimes taken to mean that the area was 'covered' in terms of there being an adult presence. In part, this was testimony to the faith practitioners placed in me as a practitioner. However the lack of practitioner involvement in this kind of play may also relate to the *nature* of the play – my observations suggest that this kind of play tends to occur away from the panoptic 'gaze' (Foucault, 1977) of practitioners. I often observed transitory glimpses of such play and when I did, sensed that the children suspected I might change the direction of their play or were guarded, on occasions, in how their play developed. Unlike pretend/serious play, play that I have conceptualized as falling within the pretend/playful quadrant was not mentioned as important by any of the practitioners interviewed. As noted earlier, it is not uncommon for some types of play to be viewed as more 'fruitful' and prized more highly (Hyder, 2005).

Possibly, practitioner unease about play in the pretend/playful quadrant relates to a lack of confidence in how to respond to it as it does not fit easily into a 'developmental discourse of play' that promotes play in terms of children's learning and 'normal' development (see Ailwood, 2003). Similarly, such play may appear to challenge power relations between practitioners and children that position them both in terms of 'normal' or 'appropriate' conduct in the classroom (Millei, 2005). In setting four, such unease was often observed. In a typical observation in one of the Toddler rooms (18.6.09) Nadiya (P19) steers the children's more playful interactions into something more akin to activity within the pretend/serious quadrant:

There are four children in the home corner now and one boy puts food items in the wrong place e.g. in the bed and another says 'oh oh' to show he thinks it is wrong too. It is a kind of game they have developed together. One time, John (C52) puts a baby's bottle upside down in the fridge (so it stands on the nipple and falls) and laughs – it is as if he knows this is wrong. Sam (C54) is kicking the baby doll and is laughing loudly.

Nadiya – one of the practitioners – comes into the home corner and takes the bottle out of the fridge. She nestles John into her lap warmly but firmly and shows him and the other children present how to feed one of the baby dolls with a bottle. She shows John how to hold the baby and tells him to ‘keep an eye on the baby’. She tells him to look at the baby when he is feeding her. She shows another child (Sam) how to be very gentle with the babies.

Nadiya’s re-direction of the play was not coercive as such. It involved an initiation of warm physical contact with the children but also an explicit change in the play theme to one of caring for babies. The context in which I observed this episode is also interesting as it was first thing in the morning and the children were arriving with their parents. Unusually in this setting, the play of the children in the room was on public view and I sensed strongly that there was concern that parents might see the children’s spontaneous, carnivalesque play as problematic – possibly due to the themes of the play and the level of unbridled noise being generated.

In addition, the playful subversion of the usual order of things that can be seen in this play episode may be unsettling for some practitioners. Edmiston (2008: 119), for instance, argues that play offers an opportunity to ‘unfinalise’ meaning and explore new imagined spaces. Possibly, there is a sense in which practitioners try to *finalise* meaning on occasions – to invert Edmiston’s argument – to something that can be packaged, refined and certain. This again would appear to resonate with a modernist conception of knowledge (Dahlberg et al, 1999).

But the observation may also link to the idea of professionalism as a *performance*. Perhaps there is an unspoken assumption that when ‘performing’ as an early childhood practitioner, one is expected to employ pedagogical practices that are seemingly more ‘serious’ and controlling (Millei, 2005) than ‘playful’ in style. The sense of performance may link to Goffman’s (1969: 203)

notion of 'impression management', which on a micro-level relates to the styles of behaviour people adopt according to social context, notably when in public and when in private (discussed in more detail at the end of Chapter Four). However, this notion of 'performance' also links to post-structuralist writings that emphasise the ways in which hegemonic ideas about what it is to be a 'practitioner' are taken up by individuals and early childhood practitioners as a *group* to the extent that they *embody* those bodily practices, often uncritically (Holligan, 2000).

But it may be wrong to suggest that adults (practitioners) are consistently positioned as anti-playful and that children are universally positioned as playful in their interactions as might be the conclusion drawn from Tobin's (1997) analogy of children being akin to Medieval peasantry and practitioners akin to those in power. I also observed *children* re-directing play towards the more pretend/serious. A typical example of this occurred in setting 3 (10.10.08). When Harry and his friends were making sandwiches with increasingly bizarre fillings (an observation mentioned earlier in this section), Grace (C44) was adamant that they should stop being silly and should be eating strawberries because 'they grow in my garden'.

But can play in the pretend/playful quadrant be seen as valuable? Meek (1985) believes that playfulness enhances creativity and the imagination and argues that those involved in education have a duty to nurture this. Similarly, Chukovsky (1968: 97) celebrates the 'intellectual effrontery' and 'topsy turvy' nature of play stating:

'The more aware the child is of the correct relationship of things, which he violates in his play, the more comical does this violation seem to him'
(Chukovsky, 1968: 99)

In observations discussed so far in this section, we can see examples of children playfully stretching the limits of usual practices associated with food events.

After all, we do not eat people in sandwiches; we do not usually eat pizza for breakfast; we take care over what we feed a baby and the amount we give; and we know which way round to put a baby's bottle. It should be noted that there are *many* other examples I could have included here.

Following Chukovsky (1968), 'pizza for breakfast' and 'doll sandwiches' are humorous because the children have grasped that these are possibilities that are far removed from what is usual. The more bizarre and contrasting to real life, the more amusing the play seems to be to children. Other examples of playfulness might be Kalliala's (2006: 95) notion of 'dizzy play', which relates to the 'momentary need to turn the world upside down' (see also Tovey's [2007] discussion of 'gleeful' play). This is the kind of play that is unrestrained, chaotic and sometimes noisy and may involve daring to broach issues deemed inappropriate for the young child. Thus, in playful activity, children become engaged in expanding the boundaries of the imaginable and the possible.

The paradox of playfulness, for Meek (1985), is that in expanding the boundaries of unreality in play, the child develops a greater understanding of what *is* real as well as what the rules are. Similarly, Parker-Rees (1999) maintains that through play, the child is able to manipulate the 'real world' and arrive at a richer understanding of it (see also Alcock, 2008 and Egan, 1991).

But such playfulness, as noted earlier, might also mean a re-appraisal of the prizing of the 'orderly' classroom or setting and the 'proper' relations between children and adults (Phelan, 1997). This was especially evident in the themes generated in the play in the pretend/playful quadrant which were highly transgressive of what is deemed 'acceptable' behaviour. A theme that seemed to emerge regularly in the children's pretend play in settings one, two and three was one of *vomiting*. As this was impossible to ignore I will now discuss a few such play episodes.

In setting one (15.2.07) I observed the following passage of play. Here the children seem to be transgressing the idea that food should stay inside the body; the idea that they should do what their 'mother' tells them to do; and the idea that it is an affront to general ideas of civility to be sick publicly when someone has taken the trouble to cook for you.

In the home corner, Samuel (C17), Luke (C16), Naomi (C6) and Harbijan (C15) are playing together. Samuel says 'let's pretend we are all eating this food – you're the mum (Naomi) and we don't want to eat it so it makes us sick.'

Everytime Naomi, as mum, presents food to her 'children', they are sick. Luke and Samuel say 'UGH HORRIBLE' with Samuel making sick noises, with everyone accompanying this with laughter. Anna (C19) and Shahrusaad (C2) join in as other mothers, putting on aprons as if to denote this status. All 3 girls serve up food only to have it refused and a pretence of regurgitation made. Shahrusaad and Anna add a new dimension to the play because they make a play of being very offended by this action, telling the 'children' off. 'You just eat it all up and do what I say' says Anna. The more the 'children' are sick or refuse food, the more she and Shahrusaad tell them to eat it. Their remonstrations with the children are accompanied with wagging fingers and mock cross faces.

Another example of play with a vomiting theme was observed in setting two (8.7.07):

Aakash (C31) turns the babies upside down to make them sick all over the dinner table, laughing wildly as he does so. Larry (C23) thinks this is hilarious too. Mevhis (C33) feigns annoyance and adopts a 'motherly' like role, telling them to clean up their mess and not to be sick on the table. She shouts at them telling them that they will get no more dinner. This prompts worse bouts of vomiting and I wonder where the play might have lead if the children had not been called for drinks and a story. Getting no more dinner

is not, it seems, to do with them being ill (so a sensible thing to do if being sick) but a punishment for bad behaviour.

Vomiting themes were also seen in the play of setting three. In this observation (14.11.08), like the others in this theme, the children are transgressing the boundaries of civilized behaviour had this been a real-life context.

I see another example of 'sick' play. Keith (C42), Diane (C47) and Tina (C39) are playing in the home corner and I can see them from where I am at the snack café. They are putting plastic fruit onto their plates and pretending to eat – putting it into their mouths. Then, they pretend to be sick, regurgitating all the food they've eaten. As they do this, they all make exaggerated sick noises. Then, they all pretend to eat the cutlery and the plates and, like with the food, pretend to regurgitate the food – saying 'YUK' – casting the cutlery and plates away as they do this.

In Bakhtin's (1984: 3) discussion of the writings of Rabelias¹, he demonstrates how Gargantua (a key Rabeliasan peasant character) is in direct opposition to all that is 'finished and polished'. One aspect of this is Gargantua's enormous appetite and propensity for regurgitating large quantities of food eaten. His behaviour is therefore the antithesis of the 'civilized' behaviour of the aristocracy and church. In regurgitating his food, Gargantua is mocking the established order of things. Possibly this can be applied to the children's use of vomiting as a play theme – it reverses the usual 'required' behaviour during more formal food events and may act as a metaphor for control over one's own body.

However, it is important not to reify children's pretend play and self-generated cultures as 'ideal' or 'innocent' in some way (Moss and Petrie, 2002). In the first two examples of play episodes with a vomiting theme, 'mothers' appear to be

¹ Francois Rabelias (c. 1495-1553) was a French, 16th century novelist – author of 'Pantagruel' and 'Gargantua'. The term 'rabelaisian' refers to the coarse humour and exuberance associated with his work.

positioned as guardians of their families' health as well as responsible for inculcating 'appropriate' modes of behaviour in their children. Thus, if play is to be regarded as part of 'cultural reality' (Edmiston, 2008) and (in part) reproductive of culture (James et al, 1998), it is not a surprise to see hegemonic understandings of what it is to be a 'mother' reflected in the children's interactions. This has implications for the way practitioners attend, reflect and respond to such play (Brown and Jones, 2001).

Possibly the most transgressive observation I noted was in setting one (4.12.06). In this observation the children appear to be exploring the unthinkable.

Noor (C10) is sitting at the dough table where some home corner equipment has been taken and makes a dough baby. She says 'I'm going to make a baby and cut it up and put it in my stew'.

I look disgusted and shocked, so she says 'You know it's not real – it isn't even pretend – it's *pretend real*.'

Maybe pretend is pretend, but it *is* real; 'pretend real', it seems, is when *all* sense of being real is suspended. At least I think this is her meaning. Noor cuts the dough baby into pieces and puts it into the saucepan. She stirs the pan and Amin (C14) laughs saying it is a '*nice* baby' (taking a spoon to the pan).

For Edmiston (2008), when we (as adults) encounter children's play that is ideologically divergent with our usual behaviour in everyday life, it is particularly difficult to countenance. At other times in play we come across ideas that are less 'refractive' (p. 145), which fit easily with our ideas about ways of behaving in the world. Possibly, then, *some* playful encounters are less comfortable for adults to respond to than encounters that resemble the real world more clearly as in those play episodes I have conceptualized within the pretend/serious quadrant. This might also apply to other observations I have discussed earlier in

this section and the unease I noted amongst practitioners in responding to such play².

We can see from this section that pretend/playful events appear to be occasions when children are engaged in exploring the boundaries of what is real and 'acceptable' playfully. In putting forward arguments for *playfulness*, one set of arguments might broadly be thought of as being more 'respectable', functional and future-centred. These would include the notion that through playfulness, children gain a greater sense of reality and unreality (e.g. Egan, 1991) as well as the idea that in play, children are able to explore and evaluate a range of possible ethical identities (Edmiston, 2008). However, this section also argued that playfulness is important for more immediate, *pleasurable* concerns, not least the importance of playfulness as an opportunity to wallow in the irreverent and less serious. This may be especially important in relation to food events as they are occasions which are often emotionally charged (Grieshaber, 2004).

Whilst there appears to be justification for celebrating playfulness when it comes to *pretend/playful* situations, does this extend to the *real/playful* quadrant? In the final section of this chapter I explore episodes that fall into this area. In doing

² I too am not immune from this unease on occasions. In the observation above, I have reflected subsequently on how the play might have developed had I been brave enough to don a superhero cape or the like and initiate a rescue attempt for the baby (Albon, 2010). Edmiston (2008), for instance, argues that by responding playfully to 'refractive' play episodes adults do not abandon children to think ethically for themselves. However, a more 'romantic' discourse of early childhood education may promote the idea that children's play such as this is best left to children alone and that to respond as I am positing, would be too intrusive – a position that reifies children's play as 'innocent' and unconnected to the 'real world' where violence and oppression, for instance, are *real* (Moss and Petrie, 2002). Alternatively, it could be argued that if playfulness is an expression of a child's *secure* knowledge of reality (e.g. Egan, 1991) - i.e. baby stew is clearly wrong - then there is no *ethical* argument for participating directly in such play episodes. These are ideas that I continue to wrestle with and are an example of the many readings that are possible of children's play, which have lead Brown and Jones (2001) to suggest we should aim for 'bafflements' (p. 132) rather than fixed understandings as is consistent with post-structuralist thinking .

this, I will be asking whether playfulness is important during *real* food events – something that has been of central concern in this study - and will be exploring further the idea that playfulness is important for reasons that go beyond a child's *future* learning and development.

6.5 Real/playful

The final quadrant in Figure 1 relates to episodes that I have conceptualized as real/playful. By 'real/playful' I am referring to occasions when I observed playfulness during *real* food events such as mealtimes or snack times. This area could be regarded as the antithesis of the kinds of activity I discussed in Chapters Four and Five, which fall within the real/serious and pretend/serious quadrants – particularly the former. As noted earlier, Figure 1 is a fluid so events that start within one quadrant may move into another in a moment. As Edmiston (2008: 10) argues, children move from the real world to pretend worlds with ease but for adults this can be 'unnerving or even dangerous' as well as 'childish and silly'. Maybe too, as practitioners are often positioned within a discourse of *control* in early childhood practice (Phelan, 1997; Millei, 2005), the fluidity of movement between the playful and the serious, real and pretend, upsets the 'orderliness' expected of them. I noted an example of this fluidity in Chapter Three, in which Toby (C45) jokes about real and pretend food:

Toby is wearing a superhero cape but gets diverted from being a superhero and becomes interested in the scales in the home corner – getting things to balance. He spends 5 minutes experimenting with this and chooses a range of objects to put on one end to balance against a plastic apple. Then, Toby looks across to the snack café which has opened and says 'I need some real food – no pretend... No, I need some *real* food' (giggles). Then he goes to have some real fruit and a drink in the snack café.

Playfulness during real food events was observed in all settings, but particularly in settings two and four.

Before examining the data it is important to consider why playfulness might be important during *real* food events. Ben-Ari (1997: 7) points to children's use of 'obscenities, jokes and general mischief' as important sites of resistance for young children as they enable the child to maintain a critical stance towards what is on offer in the early childhood setting they attend. Maybe, then, obscenities, jokes, laughter and 'general mischief' also point to children as active agents in their own socialization (James et al, 1998), with their own views on the work of the early childhood settings they attend as well as their lives beyond them. This may be an important end in itself in enabling the individual child (and later adult) to distance or disengage themselves from the immediacy of social situations with which they have an ongoing relationship (Ben-Ari, 1997).

Phelan (1997), by way of contrast, conceptualizes such playful, carnivalesque activity in terms of a desire for *union* not distance, maintaining that:

'The desire for union and communion manifests itself in classroom moments of joy, laughter and pleasure. A shift from the normal state of classroom order to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the binary opposition of teacher and student. During erotic moments, boundaries are blurred and established patterns of relations are disturbed; these are moments of exuberance and excess for teachers and students, moments that are unreserved, lavish and joyful.' (Phelan, 1997: 77-78)

Thus, it is good for early childhood practitioners and children alike to enjoy the intensity of being 'in the moment' together as a break from the established order of the early childhood setting, which often serves to define practitioners and children in terms of the distance between them, with the former group charged with controlling the latter (Phelan, 1997; Millei, 2005). This is a point worth

remembering when play is often cast as an 'instrument of rationality' (Phelan, 1997: 81), valuable as a tool for learning that will be useful in the child's educational career as opposed to worthwhile for its own sake to satisfy present, less 'rational', less serious and more pleasurable concerns. This also links to Schwartzman's (1978) assertion that play behaviours are often referred to in terms of what they are not – *not* serious, *not* productive, and *not* work. From such a perspective, transgressive, anti-authoritarian play such as jokes, laughter and 'general mischief' (Ben-Ari, 1997) can be contrasted with the 'good' play encouraged by practitioners, which emphasizes turn-taking and following approved rules, for instance (King, 1992).

Grace and Tobin (1997) draw upon the work of Barthes ('The Pleasure of the Text'; Barthes, 1975a) in relation to pleasure as he makes a useful distinction between *plaisir* and *jouissance*. *Plaisir*, he argues, relates to conservative, conformist notions of pleasure, whereas *jouissance* is associated with more mercurial, anti-authoritarian forms of pleasure. In terms of classroom practice, Grace and Tobin assert that *plaisir* types of fun are sanctioned by practitioners as they serve as a momentary break from the work of the classroom (or, for the purposes of this study: play space) and encourage greater effort on the part of children in relation to their work. *Jouissance*, on the other hand, happens less often in the classroom as it is focused on the moment itself. This reflects the persistent asymmetry in education of privileging the mind (and rationality) over the body discussed earlier in Chapter Two of this thesis. Grace and Tobin (1997: 177) argue that *jouissance*-like pleasures in their work with children have involved them in moments where:

'...the teacher temporarily disappeared, and the children were united in a spirit of camaraderie, a celebration of 'otherness' organized around laughter.'

Such joyful rebellion against authority may be important in order to engage in a dialectical relationship with the 'world of the other' (Polakow, 1992). Like Freire

(1970), Polakow maintains that the child who does not fit into the way of doing things in a given setting is often labeled as 'deviant'. Conforming to such structures results in docility and passivity and practitioners become viewed as instruments of oppression. She asserts that we need to be free to disobey in order to obey in a *genuine way*.

Even within rule-bound routines such as food events, children find opportunities for playfulness. Peak (1991), for instance, notes how, after the formality of the rituals associated with mealtimes in Japanese pre-schools she visited, children make use of the opportunity for ostentatious gargling when brushing their teeth. In contrast to the earlier discussion of children's bodies, another conceptualization is of children as having 'resisting bodies' (Leavitt and Power, 1997: 57). At times the child may actively and playfully attempt to resist the practitioner's 'gaze'. Even during extreme examples of adults exerting power over young children, children seem to resist, using playfulness as an ally in their cause as we will see in my discussion of the data.

For Alcock (2008), whose work looks specifically at playful, social interactions during mealtimes, playful participation in these events serves to engender a sense of togetherness amongst the children and can be seen in 'nonsense' word-play and rhymes used by the children at the table amongst peals of giggles. Playful interactions also act in a way that frees routines from monotony. Like Corsaro (1997), she points to playful activity as indicative of children's ability to create and participate in their own peer cultures. In addition to this, the sharing of humorous situations and the sense of togetherness that this engenders may also be significant as a pre-cursor to forming intimate relationships in early childhood (Dunn, 1988).

The playfulness associated with carnival is also worthwhile when applied to early childhood practice as it enables children to imagine 'what if?' in reference to the established hierarchies, roles and relationships; therefore offering opportunities

for generating new and creative possibilities and imaginings (Grace and Tobin, 1997). Given the centrality of developing warm and positive relationships in early childhood practice (Elfer, et al, 2003; Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003), it would seem that practitioners should be seeking to *maximize* opportunities for playfulness amongst children and their peers as well as between children and adults in their settings.

I observed many episodes of real/playful activity in the baby room in setting four. As noted earlier in this chapter, this setting had the youngest children in this study and in the baby room especially, the kinds of pretend/playful episodes discussed in the previous section were not observed. Earlier on I likened this to wider debates about young children's development, albeit that stage theories of child development are contested. In the following observation in the baby room in setting four (14.5.09), we can see Hassan (C57), aged eight months, deliberately blowing bubbles with his food and Jack (C59), aged ten months banging his bowl playfully:

Hassan laughs as he blows bubbles with his porridge, especially as it causes the student who is feeding him to move her chair ever further away from him as she gets sprayed with bits of porridge. Eventually he is encouraged to play with a toy rather than his food – it distracts him for a bit and he gets on with eating.

Jack gets a bowl and bangs it in a musical way. This causes the bowl to move away from his reach and I am *really struck* with Fatima's (P22) positive reaction, which is to move it near to Jack again so he can explore this rather than move it beyond him for some health and safety reason. He can, therefore, continue enjoying the resonance of the china bowl.

In the Toddler Room of setting four (6.6.09) I similarly observed playful activity during lunch time:

Maryam (C61) pulls her napkin off and runs it from side to side, with just her eyes showing. It is very dance like and given her North African background, I wonder whether she is emulating dance movements as she is doing this in time to music. Then she laughs and runs the napkin between her teeth – side to side again.

Interestingly, in setting four the use of 'real' (i.e. china crockery and napkins) items during real food events seemed to offer many possibilities for playfulness. There are many other observations I could have drawn on of children enjoying the musicality of banging their spoons onto china crockery or playing with their napkins.

In setting one I observed playfulness in relation to the way groups for snack time were gathered together. As each key group in this nursery had its drinks at separate times, a mechanism was needed to gather the group together, something that was especially difficult at the beginning of the year when the children had not developed a sense of 'groupism' (Ben-Ari, 1997) or understanding of themselves as being in 'green teddy group' for instance. Practitioners were observed, in turn, wandering round the nursery space calling children's names from their key-group sheet.

Inevitably, some children managed to avoid being 'gathered' for as long as possible using some of the strategies discussed in Chapter Four (e.g. hiding). However, far more interesting to me was the way that, after a few weeks, one practitioner got a tambourine and shook it as a signal to come to the kitchen for snack time. Increasingly, this became akin to a carnival procession. Indeed Hamdi (C1) and Shahrusaad (C2) seemed to wait on the coat-peg bench for an hour once dropped off at the nursery until the children were gathered together for snacks' time, a point I noted in Chapter Four. Once this time arrived, Hamdi and Shahrusaad seemed visibly more animated and keen to participate in the life of the nursery, often physically manoeuvring children towards the kitchen. Over the

weeks of September-October 2006, I observed more and more children collecting their own instruments from the music area and then following the practitioner around the nursery during the gathering together time. The children generated a lot of noise with their instruments and with their loud vocalisations and exaggerated movements, appeared to parody the movements and call of the practitioner.

Phelan (1997: 94) maintains that:

‘Parody demonstrates that what we thought of as privileged and natural is in fact artificial and constructed... Amid the subversive laughter of the moment, the central protagonists of the classroom management discourse, teacher and student, are denaturalized; nothing in the classroom seems familiar, and our management strategies seem absurd.’

Like Walkerdine (1993), Phelan draws upon post-structuralist theorizing and sees the subject positionings of teacher (or practitioner) and student (or child) as fluid and shifting. This kind of analysis enables us to see children as powerful on occasions as well as practitioners. In relation to the observations of practice outlined above, the practitioners seemed happy to go along with the children’s carnivalesque approach to gathering together for snack time, sometimes following the children’s lead in this. Gathering together time, which can sometimes be a stressful transition point, seemed to be devoid of tension. However, it should be added that this play only lasted a few weeks. As Grace and Tobin (1997: 186) note, ‘carnivalesque pleasures are ephemeral. They appear in unexpected places and begin to close at the very instance when they open’.

Children in settings one, two and three also demonstrated carnivalesque behaviours in relation to bodily functions. Ostentatious and deliberate burping and the breaking of wind were usually accompanied by much laughter; indeed

one or two children seemed to develop a certain kudos in the eyes of the group (particularly in setting one) at being able to do this loudly and at will (see also Albon, 2008). Children were usually reprimanded over this, but on occasions it was very funny and the practitioner who was facilitating the snack time laughed too. This seemed to serve as a means to relieve tension in what was usually a very 'orderly' routine. Furthermore, by joining in with the merriment engendered during such occasions, practitioners appeared to temporarily abandon a supposedly 'high' position in favour of a 'low' position (to use Tobin's, 1997 analogy) in a way that seemed to cement the developing relationships between themselves and the children.

Setting two generated a great deal of data that fell into the real/playful quadrant. One practitioner – Sharon (P10) - can be singled out here; indeed an entire chapter could have been devoted to Sharon as many observations in the real/playful quadrant involved her directly. In the following observation (29.10.07) the children have been given ice-cream for lunch and are complaining how cold it is. They ask for warm ice-cream, which prompts one of the practitioners to seize the moment for some discussion on what would happen if ice-cream becomes warm. Sharon, as we will see, had a very different approach:

It is icecream for pudding and Mehvish (C33) is excited about this. She asks to have warm icecream, laughing as she does so. Emma (C30) wants hot icecream and giggles too. This escalates to 'really really really hot icecream'. Jane (P6) asks what would happen to the icecream if it was made really hot – wanting to make a teaching point it seems, but Sharon is very happy to go with the silliness of the hot icecream idea, pretending to have a blow-torch, saying that she is going to make the icecream really, really, really hot.

Now Emma and Mehvish say 'no no the icecream will melt and it'll burn our mouths' – in mock horror and Sharon continues with the joke moving her pretend

blow torch near to their bowls. I am really struck by the way that Sharon gets the children to demonstrate their knowledge of materials and their properties by using the ridiculous rather than through the more 'teacherly' discourse used by other practitioners – do the children suspect and recognize this? I don't think Sharon has any 'intentions' in mind – just the pleasure of the moment.

Towards the end of the lunchtime, Sharon comments that her table is last *again*, but she says this in a happy way – other tables join in and say that Sharon's table is *always* last. Of course it is not a race, but there is a sense on Sharon's table that they are having more fun and I think Sharon has a sense of pride that her table is often last because they spend time 'fooling around'. Other practitioners seem more wary of 'letting go', so to speak, with the children.

I noticed this sense of 'letting go' in other observations of Sharon during mealtimes. In the following observation (26.11.07) Sharon jokes with the children about how messy they become during a lunch of spaghetti bolognaise. She seems happy to resist the temptation to continuously wipe the children clean in recognition of their sensory enjoyment of the food. This is further extended into her categorisation of children as a 'two wipe job' or a 'three wipe job':

At lunch time, the children get into their usual groups and I sit with Sharon (P10). The children have spaghetti bolognaise and Aakash (C31) has already asked the cook what they are having earlier in the session – across the hatch – and is looking forward to it. Aakash does not want his food cut up and is enjoying picking up the spaghetti with mostly fingers with a bit of help from his spoon and squidding bits through his teeth. It is a very sensuous experience. Sharon and I smile at his enjoyment of it and comment to him – he says he loves it. He has food all over his face and his body but is not bothered by it and neither is Sharon.

I notice Manveen (P9 - on another table) wiping the children's faces regularly (and not solicited by the

children) to ensure they remain clean throughout the meal. Later on, all of the children in the nursery are encouraged to wipe themselves with wet wipes before their pudding (unusually but owing to the mess). On Sharon's table, the children are involved in a joke with Sharon which centres on being a 'two wipe job' or a 'three wipe job' (in the case of Aakash 'millions of wipes job') – the fun being in categorized as so messy Sharon has to give you lots of wipes. There are lots of accompanying giggles to this and children snuggle up close to Sharon as she wipes them clean so her clothing gets dirty. She does not seem to mind.

Observations such as those just outlined demonstrate that practitioners do not occupy a consistently more powerful and 'unplayful' position in relation to children as Tobin (1997) appears to suggest. Furthermore, it appears that practitioners are not universally engaged in *constant* attempts to foster culturally accepted behaviour in relation to food. It is interesting that Barthel (1989) notes that chocolate advertising aimed at adults invites a 'play ethic' in relation to food; one that is free from restraint, the work of work and the pressures of adulthood. Also, in relation to adults' interactions with young children, my earlier research into families and sweet eating suggests that parents, on occasions, join in and even *initiate* playful behaviours with their children (Albon, 2006). One such example is a parent who orchestrated bubble gum blowing competitions with the children in his family. The point I believe Tobin (1997) is making is that practitioners have the *power* to adopt the position that they choose. My data suggest that it may not always be 'unplayful'.

In looking at my data, it would also be wrong to see children as consistently *playful*. Children did not seem to appreciate playfulness during real food events universally. In the following observation (2.6.07) Moinydh (C35) takes exception to Laura (C29) and Melanie's (C28) playful use of 'baby' instead of his name at the lunch table:

Moinydh looks over at Laura and says that she had called him 'baby' and he doesn't like it (he does not

see it as playful). Laura tries to contextualize what she had said saying 'You see me and Melanie – we call each other baby – like 'Hi baby – baby baby baby' (with American accents). The 3 children spend a few moments telling each other the things they don't like each other doing at the lunch table. Laura does not like the way Moynydh leans across at her when they have lunch and he says he does not mind being the 'baby' if it's a 'game' but not when he is having his lunch.

It seems that these children are able to negotiate the boundaries they are happy with in different contexts. Thus, Laura explains that the playful use of 'baby' is not derogatory but part of a game, but Moynydh prefers such playfulness in relation to himself to be confined to pretend play and not *real* food events such as lunch time. In doing this, the children seem to demonstrate an understanding of the shifting nature of social relationships; the importance of social context in shaping their behaviours towards one another; and their ability as active agents in the world in negotiating and affirming personal boundaries (see Corsaro, 1985).

Whilst I observed far more playful interactions during real food events in setting two, there were occasions when practitioners seemed perplexed as to how to deal with these. In the following observation (2.10.07) a student practitioner (in her early 20s) seemed uncomfortable with the playful encounters between two boys on her table, possibly owing to the playful exploration of their sexuality and use of food as a plaything – garlic bread is a wedding ring and then a tormenting mouth:

Dougie (C22) keeps kissing Larry (C23) and poking him, calling him 'cheeky monkey' – more because he likes the phrase it seems. Larry pretends not to like it. Then both of them push their fingers through their garlic bread and pretend they are wedding rings and that they are getting married – giggling and kissing each other. The student practitioner who is supervising the table seems very uncomfortable with

the way this is developing. It seems as if she is worried by the playful sexuality; the noise; the lack of getting on and eating. It is interesting because this is the only table where children have not been allowed to have their garlic bread until they had eaten some pasta – no other table seems to have this rule. After a while, the garlic bread wedding ring breaks and for Larry, it becomes a mouth that opens and shuts and can be used to torment Dougie (in a playful way). The student practitioner is clearly bothered by the use of food in this way, repeatedly telling them to stop and eat.

In some instances, it seems as if the *age* of the children is a significant factor in determining the degree of playfulness practitioners will allow during real food events. In this observation of setting four (4.6.09), we can see practitioners' different response to the same playful activity according to the age of the children. Henry is aged eight months and Fiona is aged 14 months:

Henry (C60) squidges banana onto his clothes and high chair and seems to enjoy the feel of it more than the taste (although he likes this too). Henry also plays spinning the bowl on the table by banging it with his hands – when he does it very hard it flips over and inverts so it becomes upside down. He is initially shocked by this and then really delighted and tries it again. He is placated to stop doing this by a member of staff distracting him by offering him some plum. Fiona (C62) copies Henry and is told to stop as she is a 'big girl now' and 'shouldn't be like Henry now'.

Thus, a child's sensorial, playful activity may be viewed as acceptable by practitioners when a *very young* child, but there may be an expectation that as the child gets older she will adopt a more 'civilized' approach to real food events. Interestingly here, an examination of the EYFS Practice Guidance (DfES, 2007) shows that references to playfulness in the 'effective practice' and 'planning and resourcing' sections occur exclusively in relation to children aged between birth

and 20 months. It would seem, from this omission, that playfulness is viewed as less important for older children. This is something I have noted elsewhere.

'The EYFS (DfES 2007) pays little reference to such playfulness – to the mercurial ability to turn the world on its head and laugh at it. Maybe this is a good thing, because such playfulness resists easy documentation. But its omission ignores the importance of humour and the role it plays in communality and on-going relationships.' (Albon, 2010: 140)

On other occasions, practitioners appeared to take their cue as to how to respond to episodes (within the real/playful quadrant) from more experienced practitioners in their setting. In this observation (setting two: 12.10.07) Kath's (P7) response to the children's playfully ghoulish linkage of tomato ketchup to blood is one that does not close down the episode but equally, she does not engage directly in the exchange.

Tea time and there are hot dogs and the children can choose to have tomato sauce. Jane (P6) is out at a meeting and Kath (P7) is planning and I am interested in the way practitioners ask children if they want ketchup or not and put it on for them from the bottle. I think if Jane and Kath had been there they would have put the ketchup in bowls and let children help themselves.

Part way through, Kath returns and one table of children is chanting 'blood blood blood' rhythmically as they lick the ketchup off. The children seem to enjoy the repetition and the ghoulish nature of the association with blood. Some practitioners seem a bit unsure how to react to this but take their cue from Kath, who does not actively encourage it but does nothing to stop it.

Perhaps Lave and Wenger's (1992) notion of practitioners being inculcated into particular 'communities of practice' can be applied here. Just as I made a

linkage between this idea and the ways in which practitioners 'learn' how to civilize children's bodies, possibly practitioners also develop a sense of how to respond to *playful* encounters in the particular communities of practice they are placed in.

Certainly, Kath (setting 2: P7) felt that playfulness and pleasure are important in relation to food. She talked about one of the children – Ali (C34) – who will only eat chicken and bread that his mother makes and in very small portions. She lamented:

What's happened that food is not an *exciting* – well not an *excitement* – that he (*Ali*) doesn't *enjoy* food – that he *doesn't* enjoy it! And sometimes you'll see him sitting there and he'll just be eating and there's no *enjoyment* there and it's just very difficult...

But talking about food in terms of pleasure and playfulness appears to be a 'risky' position at the current time. One reason for this might be the vanquishing of practitioner power over children that a playful approach to practice seems to suggest (Albon, 2010) or because it implies taking a position where the immediacy of bodily pleasure is viewed as taking risks with children's future health as well as their development into 'civilized' adults. Lyng (1990) employs the idea of 'edgework', which refers to the kinds of risk taking people engage in when they teeter on the limits of boundaries relating to safety – the ordinary and the extraordinary; life and death. Whilst Lyng is referring to activities such as parachuting where one is exploring one's *physical* limits, I think there is a sense in which the idea of 'edgework' can be applied to early childhood practice within the real/playful quadrant. This is because practitioner engagement in interactions within the real/playful quadrant may feel 'risky' because it baulks against the 'civility' they are expected to engender in the children.

Sharon (setting 2: P10) again, was a key figure in my data as someone who took 'risks' in her practice that I suspect would have been considered unacceptable in the other three settings. Unless there was hot food being cooked, Sharon wandered in and out of the kitchen with the children, sometimes trying to sneak out bits of ham or biscuits when she thought the cook was not watching. It is important to remember that the kitchen in setting 2 is in the centre of the room and visible by a large hatch. When interviewed, Jane (P6) told me about a time when Sharon was the cook:

Jane: She was always giving them biscuits

Deb: What – over the counter (*hatch*)?

Jane: Yes – always. And when the cooking was done and the ovens cooled down, we'd have 'where are the children? – they're all gone' and they'd all be tucked round the side (*in the kitchen*), eating biscuits and then with the apples, they'd be cutting them up and eating apples. We went through *hundreds* of apples a week – but how lovely is that! You know, eating those apples because Sharon has given them to us – being a bit *naughty*. It was just so nice...

In setting two, hiding in the kitchen was often observed. For instance, on a number of occasions if a group of practitioners was on their lunch break, Sharon (P10), Kath (P7) and Jane (P6) initiated hiding away from them, often involving the kitchen space. It was not unusual to find children tucked into low cupboards that were free of produce or utensils. As practitioners returned from their break, someone would cry out 'where have all the children gone?' which would initiate a hunt around the nursery (in the large church hall).

The first few times I observed such activity I was surprised to see such a playful use of the kitchen space initiated by practitioners. Kitchen spaces in English settings, after all, are usually constructed as spaces that are out of bounds to children, thus regulating their behaviour. The appropriation of space, as I

discussed in Chapters Four and Five, is never neutral, but can be regarded as an exercise of *power* (Lefebvre, 1991; Leavitt, 1994). Fears of safety and hygiene seemed to cloud my view despite the fact that there was *never* danger to the children from hot equipment. Whilst I would never *advocate* the practice I have just discussed - as to do so implies imposing an order on what is spontaneous and pleasurable - playful activity such as that described did seem to support the development of warm relationships between the practitioners and the children. This is evidenced by the high degree of giggles and cuddles that followed such occasions.

To sum up, it would seem that playfulness during real food events can be seen in the way that children parodied the gathering together times for snack times; in the ostentatious and deliberate flatulence of the children; in the gleefully ghoulish and collective chanting of 'blood' in response to ketchup; and in the sensorial pleasure gained from blowing bubbles with food and smearing it over one's own body and equipment. These are just a few examples of playfulness observed during the course of this research. However, we need to be careful not to position practitioners as universally 'unplayful' and children as 'playful'; early childhood practice is more complex and shifting in nature than this suggests. One practitioner in setting two – Sharon - was especially playful during real food events, initiating playful activity as well as responding to it. Other observations drawn upon in this section demonstrate that some practitioners may feel uncomfortable as to how to respond to playful encounters. I posited that the notion of 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1992) may be useful in developing an understanding of how a 'culture of playfulness' in early childhood practice is either nurtured or stifled.

Episodes that might be positioned within the real/playful quadrant appear to be more mercurial, less easy to plan for and structure, and may be the antithesis of all that is 'finished and polished' (Bakhtin, 1981: 3) in comparison to other, less playful, aspects of early childhood practice. But they are nonetheless important.

In this section, I have argued that the *jouissance* to be found in being 'in the moment' is to be treasured as it helps to develop a sense of camaraderie; a sense of being part of a group; and an ability to parody and in so doing, critique practice. It seems to be important for children *and* practitioners alike. However, it should be noted that *jouissance*-like behaviour may be less available to practitioners who do not see this as the 'proper' role of the early childhood practitioner and are influenced strongly by discourses of civility.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by reflecting that early childhood practice can be characterized as an amalgam of possibly contradictory discourses. Most prominent might be the contrast between discourses that promote the civilizing of children's bodies and the importance of risk avoidance in comparison to another pervasive discourse in early childhood practice – one that elevates the primacy of children's spontaneous play.

In order to try to comprehend this diversity of practice, I outlined a representation (Figure 1) that conceptualizes food events (real and pretend) in early childhood practice in terms of four quadrants; real/serious; pretend/serious; pretend/playful; and real/playful. This representation was developed in order to facilitate a consideration of early childhood practice as a *whole*, to take into account aspects of practice such as real food events as well as pretend play episodes. This, I hoped, would also be useful in overcoming the work/play bifurcation. I argued that real events might be playful and pretend play might be serious. In developing this representation, I emphasized its fluidity in recognition of the shifting movement between real and pretend and the serious and playful that characterizes much of the early childhood practice observed in this study.

In outlining Figure 1, I showed how the data referred to in Chapters' Four and Five relates primarily to the two 'serious' quadrants. In particular, much of the

data that relates to civilizing the body (Chapter Four) and risk avoidance (Chapter Five) could be conceptualized as falling within the real/serious quadrant.

I then analysed pretend/serious episodes and developed the idea that the kinds of play many of the practitioners interviewed in this study valued fell within this quadrant. This was play that mirrored closely the kinds of activity the children may have observed in real life, such as cooking, serving and eating a meal. It was seen to be the kind of play that is easier to pre-structure and 'manage' and for some practitioners is viewed as significant in ensuring children learn about health and safety as well as healthy eating. I argued, following Tobin (1997), that such play dovetails well with current narratives of early childhood education, notably the EYFS (DfES, 2007), as the role of such play in children's *future* development and learning is promoted over play that is more momentary, spontaneous, sensuous, playful and carnivalesque. This was linked to debates raised earlier in this thesis (in Chapter Two) that serve to privilege the mind over the body in education (Bresler, 2004; Tobin, 2004).

The next quadrant discussed was the pretend/playful quadrant. In contrast to pretend/serious episodes, practice observed in this quadrant seems to celebrate the carnivalesque and is more difficult to pre-structure and organise. I drew upon data that show children playfully subverting the usual order of things. This was seen in children playfully widening the boundaries of what is possible to eat; how we should eat food; and when and where we should eat it. Sometimes this play was highly transgressive or 'refractive' (Edmiston, 2008) as can be seen in the 'vomiting' play episodes and the 'baby stew' play episode. However, it was argued that such play may be important in encouraging children to explore the margins of their world and in doing so gain a greater understanding of reality (Egan, 1991). In addition, it may encourage children to evaluate a range of ethical identities and ways of being in the world (Edmiston, 2008). My data

suggest that play within the pretend/playful quadrant is less amenable to pre-structuring and tends to occur away from the 'gaze' of practitioners.

Whilst such playfulness might be tolerated in the context of *pretend* play, this chapter also discussed its importance in the context of *real* food events i.e. episodes that could be positioned within the real/playful quadrant. In drawing upon observations of children and practitioners initiating playful interactions during real food events, I suggested that playfulness is nonetheless significant. Arguments put forward related to the importance of keeping a sense of proportion and distance over situations in which one has an on-going relationship (Ben-Ari, 1997) as well as the way playfulness may act as a way of critiquing or parodying early childhood practice (Phelan, 1997). Playfulness and the humour associated with this also appear to be significant in the development of communality and camaraderie (Phelan, 1997; Dunn, 1988).

The data support the idea that children and practitioners are not engaged universally in struggles in which the 'low' (children) meet the 'high' (adults). Whilst I observed children initiating playful encounters during real food events, I also observed this in some practitioners, notably in setting 2. This was linked to jouissance-like moments (Grace and Tobin, 1997) where there is temporary liberation from the distance that sometimes characterizes adult, child relationships. However, I also observed practitioners *and* children negotiating the degree to which such playfulness appears during real food events. This suggests that the 'rules' around meal and snack time behaviours are constantly in the process of co-construction, although we should always be mindful that practitioners (as adults) have greater power over the ethos; playful or otherwise, in the setting in which they work. I argued that possibly, just as practitioners take their cue from each other in relation to the extent to which children's bodies are 'civilized', practitioners may also come to see *playfulness* as important (or not) through working in particular 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1992).

The final chapter, which follows, summarises this study and draws together some key themes that have emerged from the data. In doing this, I will discuss further some implications this study raises for early childhood practice.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study set out to examine food practices in four early childhood settings in an attempt to raise the profile of an area of practice that often receives less attention in comparison to other activities such as developing children's literacy and numeracy. I wanted to re-appraise a set of activities or 'food events' (Douglas and Nicod, 1974) because they happen daily, in some instances many times during the day, yet the socio-cultural nature of these events and what they seem to signify appear to be silent in current narratives of early childhood education.

Nutrition and health promotion, on the other hand, feature *strongly* in current discourses of education. Many initiatives appear to be flourishing at the national and local levels in order to instill 'good' habits of healthy eating in young children. Underpinning many of these initiatives is a construction of 'early childhood' as a period when the child is *especially* malleable and amenable to adult interventions (see e.g. Marmot et al, 2010; School Food Trust, 2010) and the proposed interventions themselves are deemed important 'in the name of the child' (taken from title of Cooter's book, 1992). This seems to assign a passive role to young children and constructs them primarily in terms of 'futuraity' (Jenks, 1996).

The focus in *this* study was to look in detail at the *practices* that are related to food events rather than the nutritional content of the meals and snacks consumed. This, I believe, is an important issue but one that seems to assume lesser importance at the current time. I wanted to ensure children's voices were prominent alongside practitioners' voices in the research owing to my belief that young children and practitioners 'do' early childhood practice *together* i.e. children are not merely passive recipients of the programmes designed with them in mind. Crucially, I aimed to demonstrate how early childhood practices in relation to food events are *co-constructed* between practitioners and children.

In exploring the key questions below, I hoped to encourage practitioners to re-appraise their practice in relation to food events.

- What meanings do children and practitioners ascribe to food and drink practices in settings – how are these constructed and maintained?
- How is power exercised in the area of food/drink in the context of early childhood practice?
- How might we conceptualize early childhood practices in relation to food, eating and drinking differently?
- What are the implications for policy and practice in the early childhood sector?

In order to carry out the research I employed an ethnographic approach. The justification for this was that it would afford me greater opportunity to develop relationships with the research participants; it allowed me to observe and discuss these observations in detail and over time with participants; and it is an especially appropriate approach to research when researching everyday, habitual practices. In addition, owing to its emphasis on observation in a naturalistic setting, ethnographic research is especially relevant when researching with young children as it recognises their role as social *actors* (Corsaro, 1985); is more likely to show children in a positive light owing to the familiarity of context (Aubrey et al, 2000); and finally, it does not seek to generate *universal* generalizations about 'children' (James, 2007).

I spent between 13 and 20 days in each of the four early childhood settings in turn and carried out participant observations and semi-structured interviews over these periods. I focused on real food events and broadened the original definition of Douglas and Nicod (1974) to include the kinds of *pretend play* food events that one might see in many early childhood settings in England (and indeed other contemporary minority world countries). The simultaneous focus on play and the real food events of meal times and snack times enabled me to gain

further insights into the children's perspectives and also recognized play episodes as part of the *cultural reality* of the settings (following Edmiston, 2008) as well as the importance of play in the reproduction and creation of culture (James et al, 1998). In addition, the approach taken recognised the *playful* nature of some of the real food events observed and in so doing, hoped to move away from the work/play bifurcation that has troubled a number of early childhood commentators (Schwartzman, 1978; Pellegrini, 1991; Edmiston, 2008). As I was present during the whole of a nursery session or day, I hoped to re-appraise food events in terms of how they 'fitted' into other parts of the nursery day or session.

A possible criticism of this research is that whilst I concentrated attention on children and practitioners, the voices of *parents* with regards to food events are largely absent. However, as my focus was on the food events; real and pretend, in each of these settings, the lack of parents' perspectives reflects the *practice* of those settings i.e. there were few parents present during the nursery day unless it was a special occasion.

The findings suggest that real food events are occasions in which children's bodies are subject to a high degree of 'civilizing' in comparison to other parts of the nursery day such as play sessions. Power is exercised in the ways that time and space are organized, which subordinate the lived time of children to the particular rhythm of the setting they attend; it is exercised in the 'body rules' (Leavitt and Power, 1997) of the settings, such as keeping quiet and still and in the reining in of sensory pleasures; in the way preparation for the *next* stage in children's development or schooling is elevated over their lived experience now; and in the ways in which food events sometimes appear to be centred on the *task* to be performed rather than the *care* of young children. Like other writers, I argued that underpinning such practices appears to be constructions of the child as 'uncontrollable' (Tobin, 1997); 'unruly' (Grosz, 1994); a 'body project' (Ben-Ari, 1997); and as 'futuraity' (Jenks, 1996).

But the research also points to the ways in which *practitioners'* own bodies are subject to civilizing processes. This study found that the enforcement of 'body rules' can impact on practitioners' own enjoyment of their meals. In particular, a key theme in this research is the importance practitioners placed on being a *role model* of healthy eating and in some cases a physically 'healthy' and slim body. This in turn leads practitioners to behave in inauthentic ways in order to hide their *own* feelings about foods on offer as well as other meanings attributed to food, such as its role in binding practitioners within the nursery teams together. Thus, the *socio-cultural* significance of food in everyday life and its *pleasurable* qualities appeared to be subordinated to the more 'rational' endeavour of promoting its *nutritional* value. Therefore, practitioner behaviour when 'performing' as an early childhood practitioner often differed markedly from their behaviour away from the children, such as in the staff rooms, which suggests a linkage between modeling behaviours and physical attributes deemed 'healthy' with notions of professionalism (Kubik et al, 2002) at the current time. In addition, it suggests that the notion of 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1992) is further complicated by the idea of 'front stage' and 'back stage' performance within the workplace (following Goffman, 1969) suggesting a range of workplace 'performances'. Furthermore, private behaviour in the home may differ from 'back stage' behaviour in the workplace – both taking place *away* from the children. This, I believe, warrants further investigation.

By way of contrast to modeling 'healthful' behaviour and the physical embodiment of 'health', practitioners in this study also drew upon competing discourses that elevate the *voluptuous* body as important to their professional identities, not least being 'cuddly' for the children. I am unaware of any study that has looked in detail at the impact that food practices and discourses around food and the body have on early childhood *practitioners*. Given that this group of professionals overwhelmingly comprises women, coupled with the weight of literature that explores women's relationships with food (Orbach, 1988; DeVault, 1997; Bordo, 2003), this is significant. Like Tobin (1997; 2004), the findings of

this study suggest that the early childhood practitioner is 'disembodied' in current thinking. This is something I believe to be worthy of further exploration, especially as there is an implicit assumption in policy initiatives around healthy eating that practitioners will be at the *forefront* of putting them into practice.

When considering further the meanings practitioners ascribe to food and drink practices in their settings, this study found that food is strongly associated with *risk*. 'Risks' were associated with hygiene; allergies; religious observances; kitchen spaces and related crockery; and even the act of eating. Children's play, on occasions, also mirrored the 'risky' nature of food events. The majority of practitioners in this study had received food hygiene training of some sort and felt that this was a valuable component of their initial training or later professional development. Few practitioners had received training which encouraged them to think deeply about the *socio-cultural* significance of food and the importance of the *practices* they adopt in relation to food events. This, too, is something for future research to investigate further and, I believe, is something that needs challenging in relation to current practice.

Underpinning the construction of food and food practices as 'risky' I argued that the child is constructed as 'dangerous' but also 'in danger'. This was linked to conceptualizations of the child's body as more vulnerable to disease; less rational; less civilized and consequently; less hygienic. My data suggest that this results in the 'othering' of children but is also paralleled in the way that some working class families' practices in relation to food were pathologised. This, I suggested, is indicative of the wider discursive arena in which ideas about young children as well as class background are played out. The idea of 'risk' itself appears to be dependent on social context as practitioners with majority world backgrounds noted how allergies are not considered as high a risk or even a 'risk' at all in the countries where they had previously resided.

But it would be wrong to see the practices around food events as stable and uniform – early childhood practice is far more complex than this suggests. Practitioners *and* children appear to be actively constructing their own meanings about food and eating and the practices associated with them on an on-going basis. I observed the very youngest children in this study helping each other to make sense of the 'body rules' of their setting; I saw children moving placemats and chairs in order to sit next to their friends; and I noted how children seemed to be intensely interested in variations in dietary requirements. My observations of the children's play show how they explored a range of possibilities in relation to food that ranged from mirroring those in everyday life, such as cooking the dinner, to the more 'refractive' (Edmiston, 2008), such as the play with a vomiting theme. This further suggests that children are *actively* and often *playfully* engaged in constructing understandings about food and food practices for themselves and with others.

The data show that practitioners appear to make judgements as to the degree to which they 'enforce' any 'required' behaviour according to *context*. For example, if a child was new or younger, there might be different expectations on the degree to which they were seen as able to 'conform'. Practitioners seem to take their cues from each other in relation to how to 'manage' the children, be it in relation to civilizing their bodies or initiating and responding to playful encounters with children. This was likened to Lave and Wenger's (1992) notion of developing 'communities of practice'. However, I also noted the development of what I called 'table cultures' within the same setting (setting two), which suggests that children and practitioners who eat together regularly on a particular table develop a set of cultural practices that may differ, albeit subtly, from others in the same setting. This is another area that I believe is worth exploring further, not least because it further indicates the level of co-construction of cultural 'rules' that happens in early childhood settings.

The findings also highlight how children *and* practitioners engage in *resisting* practices pertaining to civilizing the body and risk avoidance. Children were seen to hide; make loud noises; and subvert time, such as taking as long as possible over washing hands before a food event – to name but a few examples of resistance. Practitioners too were sometimes engaged in resisting practices that have at their root a disciplining of the body, such as subverting the monitoring practices of the setting. Playfulness was also found to be significant here, because the *playful* participation of children during food events, real and pretend, seemed on occasions to parody the ‘finished and polished’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 3) as was seen in examples such as the vomiting play episodes; the sense of carnival when gathering together for snacks; the ghoulish chanting of ‘blood’; the ostentatious and deliberate burping and breaking of wind; and the sensory pleasure found in smearing food on one’s body. This study emphasized that children and practitioners should not be characterized as consistently ‘playful’ and ‘unplayful’ respectively, as the data show a greater fluidity, with practitioners *and* children taking an active role in constructing the degree of playfulness (and seriousness) they wished to go along with in the different parts of the nursery session or day.

An overarching aim of this study was to emphasise children's agency and to demonstrate the *co-construction* of early childhood practices through food events. Thus, when further considering the idea of ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1992) the findings in this study indicate that it is important to see children as agentive in the development of ‘communities of practice’ in early childhood settings alongside the practitioners charged with their care and education. Further to this, the early childhood community in England (and other contemporary minority world societies) should be viewed as a particular ‘community of practice’ as evidenced in this study by the commonality of practice amongst the settings in areas such as attitudes towards being a ‘role model’ of healthy eating. However, the notion of ‘communities of practice’ is also useful in considering how, at the micro level, individual practitioners become inculcated

into particular ways of knowing and behaving as an 'early childhood practitioner', such as the degree of playfulness they adopt with the children (as in setting two).

Another important thread throughout this study has been the *different* constructions of 'children' and 'childhood' that appear to co-exist in early childhood practice. On the one hand practitioners are exhorted to promote play as a key vehicle for learning, which is often defined as an activity which is self-chosen; spontaneous; often unpredictable; and therefore, something that cannot be *tightly* regulated by adults (e.g. Bruce, 1991; Gura, 1996; Kalliala, 2006). Play, historically, could be said to have its roots in a romantic discourse of childhood, which promotes the 'special' place of play for young children, away from the 'managing' hands of adults (Edmiston, 2008). Conversely, when bringing *real* food events into sharp focus, the study has shown contrasting discourses of childhood at work. Here, children's bodies are often deemed in need of control or 'civilizing' (Leavitt and Power, 1997) and practitioners are charged with being 'controllers' (Phelan, 1997; Millei, 2005). Ben-Ari (1997), for instance, suggests that when practice is centred on the *body*, as opposed to the mind, a greater degree of disciplining comes to the fore. Whilst this is borne out in this study, as noted earlier in this conclusion, early childhood practice is *far* more complex than this suggests.

Thus, in order to help conceptualize early childhood practices in relation to food events (alongside the many other practices that occur during the day or session), I developed a representation (Figure 1) that enabled a consideration of practice in relation to food events in terms of whether it was real/serious; pretend/serious; pretend/playful; or real/playful. I emphasized the fluidity of the representation to encapsulate the ways in which children *and* practitioners can move between these modes throughout the session or day and sometimes moment by moment. I was therefore able to consider food events, real *and* pretend, and the representation enabled me to reflect upon food events in terms of their 'fit' into the habitual activities of the nursery settings.

The sharp distinction between play sessions and real food events that Ben-Ari (1997) discusses was reflected in this study to some degree – as noted earlier. However, Ben-Ari's analysis does not look closely at the *kinds* of play the children and practitioners engaged in and thus ignores what I believe to be the multifaceted nature of play as well as the competing discourses in which play is variously positioned (Ailwood, 2003). In pretend play, for instance, play in what I have called the pretend/serious quadrant was often prized highly by practitioners as it was linked to specific learning intentions and appeared to be more 'managed' in comparison to the more spontaneous, unpredictable and 'refractive' (Edmiston, 2008) play in the pretend/playful quadrant. Children also had their *own* constructions of play, notably the notion of 'pretend real' to denote the 'refractive' play in the 'baby stew' episode. This is another aspect of the research that I believe warrants further investigation.

Although the study highlighted that primarily, real food events fall within the real/serious quadrant, there were occasions when children and their peers as well as children and practitioners appeared to be engaged playfully *together*. This was likened to jouissance-like moments, drawing on Grace and Tobin's (1997) analysis of Barthes' (1975a) work, where the boundaries between practitioners and children become blurred and they seem united in being 'in the moment' together. These moments seem to counter discourses that promote the idea that practitioners are universally positioned in a 'high' and more powerful position in comparison to children ('low') (Tobin, 1997; Phelan, 1997) or that position play as something that *children* as opposed to adults engage in (James et al, 1998). However, as Bordo (1993) observes, we should not forget that hegemonic texts inform practices pertaining to the body. Thus, the *degree* to which jouissance-like moments occur is likely to be primarily under the control of the *practitioners*, by virtue of their 'adult' and 'professional' status as well as ideas that position children as 'uncivilized' and a 'project' (Pilcher, 2007) in need of moulding. This is important to bear in mind.

Chaput Waksler (1996) outlines what she calls the 'little trials of childhood' (taken from title of book). By this, she means the everyday, habitual things that happen to children – many of which are echoed in this thesis. Like Chaput Waksler, I do not believe these things are 'little' at all: they *matter*. Thus, the civilizing of children's bodies through 'body rules'; the disciplining of their bodies in terms of time and space; the over-concern with risk-avoidance; and the reining in of sensory pleasures - add up to something that is *significant*.

The current orthodoxy in relation to early childhood practice seems to be pushing towards ever more risk-avoidance and ever more future-centredness, which appears to suppress other important narratives – notably, those relating to spontaneity and playfulness. Here, I am not suggesting that their significance is confined to young children and 'childhood', which has often been constructed in terms of being a time of innocence (Mills, 2000) or a developmental stage characterized by irrationality (Burman, 1994). Rather, I am asserting that spontaneity and playfulness are important for *everyone*, children and adults alike. Furthermore, as this study is about food and eating, the *pleasurable* qualities of food and its role in our sense of self and commensality are narratives that appear to be similarly silenced in early childhood education at the current time. For the remainder of this chapter, I will outline what I believe are the implications of this study for policy and practice in the early childhood sector.

7.1 What are the implications for policy and practice in the early childhood sector?

In considering the implications of this study for the wider arena of policy and practice in early childhood, there are many areas of practice that I would want practitioners to re-appraise and look again with the 'incredulity toward metanarratives' Lyotard (1979: xxiv) advocates. In the case of this research this would be metanarratives that elevate 'risk' and taming uncertainty but silence the importance of spontaneous, sensorial and embodied (or 'emplaced' [Howes,

2005]) experiences; metanarratives that emphasise the nutritional content of food but silence its socio-cultural significance such as its role in commensality; and finally, metanarratives that give less salience to *playfulness* in relation to early childhood practice in comparison to more 'rational', future-centred concerns.

Thus, I have chosen to pose some questions of early childhood practice – to further 'baffle' (Brown and Jones, 2001) - rather than provide 'easy' answers to what I believe are the complex issues raised in this study.

- 1) To what extent are children's spontaneous, emplaced experiences valued? Are these seen as secondary to more 'rational', future-oriented goals?
- 2) To what extent are practices around food events centred on *civilizing* children's bodies? How does this compare to other aspects of early childhood practice such as periods of play during sessions?
- 3) Does *everything* have to be monitored? Are practices associated with the body monitored more closely than other practices in settings? If they are, how is this justified? Moreover, is this desirable?
- 4) Does the emphasis on being a 'role model' in front of the children lead practitioners to behave in inauthentic ways? How are children positioned within such a discourse?
- 5) What is the impact of food events on *practitioners'* bodies?
- 6) To what extent is risk avoidance elevated over children's sensory enjoyment of food as well as the socio-cultural significance of food and eating?
- 7) Is there a place for *playfulness* as part of real food events? How much is this valued as part of early childhood practice?

In concluding this thesis, I am conscious that I may be adopting a 'risky' position, given the anxieties that prevail in relation to children and food at the current time. It may, for instance, appear that I am promoting the idea that food events should

focus *purely* on the present, which could be construed as taking risks with children's present and future health. This would be wrong. I am advocating that practitioners look again at some often taken for granted aspects of their practice and reflect deeply upon the *ideas* such practices engender.

In this thesis I have drawn on the work of Bakhtin, especially in Chapter Six, who discusses the work of Rabelais. Rabelais cherishes the *cultural* significance of eating and drinking. However, as Bakhtin (1981: 185) notes, he is *not* advocating drunkenness and gluttony:

'But he does affirm the lofty importance of eating and drinking in human life, and strives to justify them ideologically, to make them respectable, to erect a culture for them. The transcendental ascetic world view had deprived them of any affirmative value, had taken them as nothing more than a sad necessity of the sinful flesh; such a world view knew only one formula for making such processes respectable, and that was the fast – a negative form, hostile to their nature, dictated not by love but by enmity.'

Therefore, what Rabelais appears to be promoting is a re-materialising of the world. In drawing upon Bakhtin's (1981) analysis of his writing, I too am affirming the importance of sensory pleasure and the significance of playfulness as I believe they are vital for our sense of *well being*. Here, I am thinking of well being as a key component in a broad conception of 'health', one which includes mental and *social* well being, as opposed to a definition of 'health' as mere absence of disease (see e.g. Underdown, 2007).

Tobin (1997) argues that in the U.S., Developmentally Appropriate Practice is problematic owing to its 'prescriptiveness, normalization, ethnocentrism, cocksureness, and joylessness' (p. 33). He argues for greater spontaneity in early childhood education as well as practice that is less anxiety-ridden. I would argue that a similar position is prevalent in the Early Years Foundation Stage

(DfES, 2007) and in the documentation that abounds in relation to 'healthy' eating at the current time.

But you cannot replace the current curriculum with tick boxes for pleasure and playfulness. To do so would be to impose an order that would be antithetical to the mercurial nature of playfulness discussed in this thesis, particularly in Chapter Six (see also Albon, 2010). The focus of this study, on food events, brings into sharp focus some current anxieties in relation to early childhood practice, yet more persistent concerns that have *long* existed in relation to education appear to abound, notably those associated with the asymmetry of status between the mind and the body (Bresler, 2004).

In thinking about the implications for policy and practice, I am not suggesting further targets and prescriptiveness - far from it. However I recognize the difficulty inherent in raising the status of something that does not involve some form of *action* on the part of policy-makers. In a sense, I am calling for something quite different, possibly an appeal for greater *inaction*.

To deny the pleasurable nature of food and food events is a denial of one's sensual, emplaced and social self. However, as Tobin (1997) notes, *pleasure* in relation to early childhood practice is often downplayed in the current educational climate. As an antidote to this, Phelan (1997) argues that early childhood practice should embrace Bakhtin's notion of carnival and celebrate those moments of anti-officialdom, *communality* and joyfulness that it encompasses. Therefore, I am suggesting that such playfulness is possible and *desirable* in relation to real *food events* as well as other areas of early childhood practice.

To put some of the ideas contained in this thesis into practice requires bravery at the current time – akin to the 'edgework' Lyng (1990) discusses. But 'edgework' is not merely performed by the brave; it also requires a high degree of *skill* (Lyng, 1990). This has implications for early childhood practitioners as it suggests the

need for critically reflective practitioners, who are willing to take some 'risks' with their practice; who are less fearful of 'disorder'; and most importantly, the need for practitioners who treasure and promote the *playful participation* of the children in their settings. In this sense (parodying Manning-Morton's [2006] 'the personal is professional') I contend that the *playful* is professional.

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Appendix A: Letter of access sent to parents

(NB opening paragraph was adapted to suit setting 3)

Research looking at children, food and eating in early years' settings

I am carrying out a study into food and eating in early childhood settings and will be coming into the pre-school one day a week until August. This is as part of my PhD research. As you know, nursery has a very exciting approach to encouraging healthy eating with its snack café and it is this as well as children's play around food that I am interested in.

About me: Deborah Albon (Debbie)

I am Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at London Metropolitan University and am studying for a PhD, looking at children, food and eating in early years' settings. I have worked with young children and families for nearly twenty years, and am a qualified nursery nurse (NNEB) and also a teacher (PGCE). I also have a current CRB clearance (police check). My most recent publication is a book co-written with my colleague Penny Mukherji (2008) entitled *Food and Health in Early Childhood*, published by Sage

The research: What I will be doing

- I will be spending a session a week in the pre-School
- I will be making written observations of the way the snack café is used as well as children's play around food e.g. in the home corner
- I will be talking to staff about their approach to snack times in the pre-school
- I will be talking to children about snack times in their pre-school
- I will not be testing the children in any way or taking them out of their usual nursery situation

Ethical statement:

- As previously noted I have a CRB check
- All names will be changed so all adults and children as well as the nursery itself cannot be identified
- I will share my observations (and I would also really welcome your insights into your child's eating experiences)
- No child or adult will be coerced into taking part in the research – participation is voluntary
- You can change your mind *at any point* if you decide you would prefer me not to carry out observations on your child
- If you want to talk to me further about the research at any stage please do so.

If you wish to contact me about the research, you can do one of the following:

Email: d.albon@londonmet.ac.uk

Phone: 020 8546 3195 (home)

Alternatively, I am happy to talk to you personally when I am in the nursery e.g. the beginning or end of a session (usually a Friday)

Please could you read through, fill in and sign the following:

I agree to Debbie carrying out observations of my child(ren) []

I understand that I can ask Debbie questions at any time relating to the research []

I understand that my child(ren), adults and the pre-school will not be identified in anything written up []

I understand that I can withdraw consent for observations of my child(ren) at any time []

Signed **Name of child**

Please could you return this to a member of staff, who will keep this in an envelope for me.

Thank you – Debbie Albon

Appendix B: Letter of access sent to practitioners

Research looking at children, food and eating in early years' settings

I am carrying out a study into food and eating in early childhood settings and hope to be coming into your nursery for one day a week until ... This is as part of my PhD research. I am interested in looking at meal and snack times as well as children's play around food.

About me: Deborah Albon (Debbie)

I am Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at London Metropolitan University and am studying for a PhD, looking at children, food and eating in early years' settings. I have worked with young children and families for nearly twenty years, and am a qualified nursery nurse (NNEB) and also a teacher (PGCE). I also have a current CRB clearance (police check).

The research: What I hope to be doing:

- Spending a day a week in the nursery
- Making written observations of meal and snack times as well as children's play around food e.g. in the home corner
- Interviewing you about your setting's approach to meal and snack times
- Talking to children informally about meal and snack times in their pre-school
- NB I will not be testing the children in any way or taking them out of the usual nursery situation

Ethical statement:

- As previously noted I have a CRB check
- I will be guided at all times by you with regards to the way your setting works i.e. any policies and procedures as well as individual needs of the children
- All names will be changed so all adults and children as well as the nursery itself cannot be identified
- I will share my observations and your interview transcript (and I would also really welcome your insights on these)
- No child or adult will be coerced into taking part in the research – participation is voluntary
- You can change your mind *at any point* if you decide you would prefer me not to carry out observations or prefer not to be interviewed
- If you want to talk to me further about the research at any stage please do so.

If you wish to contact me about the research, you can do one of the following:

Email: d.albon@londonmet.ac.uk

Phone: 020 8546 3195 (home)

Alternatively, I am happy to talk to you personally when I am in the nursery

Please could you read through, fill in and sign the following:

I agree to Debbie carrying out observations of my practice []

I understand that I can ask Debbie questions at any time relating to the research []

I understand that the children, practitioners, parents and the nursery will not be identified in anything written up []

I understand that I can withdraw consent at any time []

Signed

Thank you – Debbie Albon

Appendix C: Observational fieldnotes from setting 1 on 16th November 2006

I was late getting to the nursery today so felt a bit out of kilter at the beginning of the session. I decided to settle myself into the home corner.

Observations from the home corner

AV has sneaked some dough into the home corner. I got the impression that children are not allowed to put dough into the home corner in the nursery – probably because it can make a mess of the carpet and such like. However, in many respects it is the most obvious thing to do. I got the impression that it is not allowed from the way AV kept looking at me as she put the dough into pots and pans. Gradually she realized I was not going to say anything. NB I was always OK about this when I was a practitioner, and there was a sense in which I felt I ought to ask what they would do in their setting in my knowledge that many settings would say no. I decided to abandon my practitioner hat in this instance and let the play continue.

AV was rolling the dough into carrot shapes and putting it into the saucepans, using another saucepan as a lid, quite ingeniously. She used the spatula, very appropriately, to serve me up some dinner and indicated where I should sit.

Z joined in and got a cup. She showed AV how to use a teapot, pouring out some tea for me saying 'tea'. Soon afterwards, she picked up a cat and took it over to the food bowl for the pets. I've noticed a lot of play with the pets recently. She poured some milk into a bowl and placed the cat near the bowl saying 'meow'. She did this for a minute or two, then looked up at me saying 'He like it'. She said this whilst stroking him. Interestingly, she and the other Somali children in the nursery do not have pets and I have always shied away from having a pet shop or the like as a role play area as it never seemed appropriate to their experience. I wonder about this now. Where did this knowledge come from? TV, watching others when out in the locality?

Z got a doll and took it out of the high chair and then put it to bed saying, 'she's asleep now'. This paved the way for the cat to come into the high chair. This resulted in peals of laughter from both her and AV as well as T who had just arrived. T got the pet dog and put it into the larger of the two high chairs and both he and Z fed their animals using spoons. Both were laughing as they seemed to know that this was not how you feed pets. I made a comment about Z's cat being in a high chair and T said 'that's not a high chair silly – that's a low chair!' This was an 'appropriate' joke because the pink high chair is considerably smaller.

After a while, Z went over to the dolls' beds and picked up one of the baby dolls and fed it. Then, she took a bottle and the baby and lay down on the sofa and fed it while pretending to fall asleep. Both were snuggled up together very cosily.

After a few moments she woke up and stretched and carried on her topsy turvy play with T, with the pets. Both had their respective pets in the high chairs and were feeding the pets a range of foods. After trying each one, T said 'he like it'. Z was copying him. This became increasingly bizarre, with icecreams, cups of tea, chocolate cake, babies' bottles of milk, and later a clock and some clothing (and so on). The laughter increased as the food items got increasingly bizarre – as if each was egging the other on to find something more and more inappropriate. Each time this was reinforced with the language 'he like it'.

T moved to another activity somewhere else after a while and then Z came in. Z spent some time, stroking her hair and back gently sensuously and helped her dress into a range of outfits. Then, they both got baby dolls and were forcing them to eat a range of foods. Others had come into the home corner by now and there was a lot of play involving forcing spoons of food into the babies or pets' mouths saying 'you gotta eat it!' or 'be a good boy and eat it all up' from a lot of the children.

W was concerned that the babies were eating the wrong foods and asked me to guard his baby while he found a bottle. He put his baby into a high chair and very lovingly fed it, stroking its arm. H came over and had made a carrot like dough shape and gave it to W, who took it and put it to one side. He put the baby to sleep and went over to H at the table.

The two children made sandwiches out of the dough. W said his dad always made him a cheese sandwich when he comes home from nursery. W was very keen to feed everyone when they came into the home corner. After a while he said 'what a lot of washing up to do!' and rolled his sleeves up to wash up. He seemed concerned that he should get the kitchen tidied. NB not actual tidy up time.

Cooking activity

There are lots of children away with sickness. C came in late beaming as it is his birthday today and he had some sweets in a bag ready to give out later at drink time. This was due to happen at the end of the session. I began the morning in the home corner but was going to watch some cooking today that C, the language support (classroom) assistant was doing. C was fine about me observing, but I was conscious that as a new member of staff, she had had less initial say about what I would be doing in the nursery than the other members of the team - although I did negotiate whether it was OK to observe and interview her. Given her relative status in the nursery I was especially conscious of this and was careful how I took notes and ensured I gave lots of positive feedback around what she was doing.

Cooking happened in the kitchen. C, I, N and N were the children chosen to cook this week. This will change each time there is a cooking activity. The children thought it was drink time and there were a few children, who recognized someone as being in their group, who came over expecting to have a drink. The 4 children seemed a bit bemused at the start because C had not actually said what they were going to do.

C put a range of items in turn onto the table to see if the children knew what they were and what they were about to do. N recognized the rice snaps and said that she had them in her house. All recognized the chocolate.

C showed the children how to break the chocolate. Ise was fascinated at this and seemed to enjoy doing it. He kept getting to his feet so he could look into the bowl and see the pile of chocolate pieces increase. C thought it was an opportunity to eat some, but soon realized that he needed to break it up. Throughout this part of the activity, I had control of the spoon, I think he knew it would be needed later.

The chocolate pieces were put into the microwave to melt. C said 'gonna all melt – gonna be soggy' after some questioning about what might happen from C. Predicting what might happen was more difficult for the other 3 children, who have English as an additional language as predicting something they cannot yet see is difficult. C was a very good role model in this.

The microwave method did not work as well as might be expected and a few bits were burnt. C was concerned that the fire alarm might go off (apparently it had happened a day or two before). It didn't. The solution was to melt over a bowl of hot water. All watched intently – particularly I. They each had an opportunity to stir the chocolate. Ise seemed to enjoy this especially, really smiling as he stirred. I think it was the most animated and excited I have seen I in my time at the nursery.

At this point, C asked the group if they should just scoop it up and eat it as it was. C said 'melt melt melt' and later, 'it blobbed off the spoon' to describe the way the melted chocolate behaved. N was not keen on the smell of the chocolate but the others seemed to like it – especially I, who was making obvious deep sniffs to take in the chocolate aroma. C said 'I'm really hungry. I had weetabix for breakfast and shreddies.' N added that she had 'cornflakes'. I also added that he had cornflakes too. N said that she did not have any breakfast.

C was keen to ask the adults if we were hungry or full up while C stirred the last chocolate pieces until melted. Then, the rice snaps were put in and each child took it in turns to stir. N was especially good at this. When all stirred in, each child took it in turns to fill a case. N was especially adept at this, ensuring that she took a good size of spoonful and putting into the case carefully. C was especially concerned to take huge spoonfuls - 'I got a big one!'.

I was very conscious that many children came over to watch the cooking activity from the gate. A was clever about this, asking for a drink of water so that the gate would be opened and she could have a better look. Some of the children were asked to move away and find something else to do, which I felt was wrong because this was the first time anyone had cooked in the nursery and the first time the kitchen had been used for anything other than drinks – inevitably there was interest. Also, much of our knowledge and skill in cooking comes from watching others, often at home.

N said she cooks at home, saying 'I make chocolate'. As the cases are being filled up, C and I become human hoovers, at picking up bits of chocolate crispy that have fallen onto the table and eating them – at first sneakily, then more openly when they realized C was OK about it.

The children pass the spoon round well, sharing the equipment, with some language of sharing coming through. I also noted that C said 'perfect' each time someone filled a case up with mixture.

The cooking session has meant that drinks have to happen in the small book corner area. This confuses some children. Also, as the group of cooking children are from a range of teddy groups, this means they may have to have their drinks with a different group. Three of the group are fine about this, but I is confused. When he hears his teddy colour called out, he wants to join his drink group and looks up anxiously when he sees they are not coming into the kitchen. NB he seems to be enjoying the cooking activity so I don't think this is a strategy to get away from the kitchen. He seemed concerned. This feeling eventually subsides and he sits down next to C again. C talks about the stirring of the mixture at the end of the activity, saying 'it goes round and round the room' making circles with his hands (rotation schema?)

Finally, the group count the number of cakes made. C lets them count the tray with too few on rather than all of them, looking across to me by way of justification. I don't see why they cannot count to 38 – in my experience children are often really excited by large numbers, but I keep this to myself as I do not want to undermine this new member of staff.

Drink time

As mentioned before, drinks are in a different place owing to the cooking. It is not just I who is confused. AV is very confused and kept moving towards the kitchen as if to say 'you're wrong – drinks happen here' when all around her were trying to get her to go to the book area. It made me realize how much children associate different areas with different activities. When AV was eventually encouraged to come into the book area, she tried to take a drink from the bin – she would not have done this in the kitchen. I have observed her many times

knowing exactly where to get her drink from the side. Why would she think she would get her drink from the bin?

K, the teacher, is doing drink time and this week and is focusing on developing letter sounds relating to the children's first names. One or two know something about this, but very few. When K held up F's name card and asked what her letter sound was, F looked carefully, then, noticing the frog picture on the card, said 'gribbet'. Not a joke, but shows her lack of understanding of the activity and desperate attempt to make sense of it.

AV is not concentrating. She takes her label off her drink and puts it across her mouth, only taking it off to put apple in, then sealing it up again. I notice that fewer children are eating fruit in this context. Usually they cannot get enough. It is harder for the children to reach for it as only a few are right next to the coffee table. N passes a plate of apple pieces back to A and I and A. They would not have been able to reach, but N does this without being asked by anyone. She is praised for her efforts and is pleased. I wonder whether this reinforces the idea that women should service men, but note that I too am praising her for this act of kindness.

Home time

At end of session, children have a chocolate crispy cake to take home and C has his sweets to give out. Do the children know what either are for? I say this because the group have sung happy birthday to C but he is not giving out the sweets and this happens half an hour later. Also, only 4 of the children have cooked – what sense do they make of taking it home? There has not even been a time when the group shared what they did with the larger group i.e. a kind of recall time. Given C's pride at bringing in the sweets, I am conscious of feeling that he should have been allowed to give them out. Staff reinforce the message not to drop litter on way out.

On reflection, today I am really struck by the way that the places in the classroom that are most directly to do with the body are the places that are never multi-use i.e. the bathroom and the kitchen. When I have asked the children what happens in the kitchen area, they all know. There is not the same versatility in other areas. Is this comforting to some children? After all, this is like the home. Does it make the area less interesting? Will explore. It is notable that the kitchen area is most definitely not an area for play unlike other areas. Interestingly, the home corner area – very much an area of play – is a site where there is a great deal of topsy turvy play around food. Is food something that involves a great deal of control in terms of space, time and the body in human lives, so in play, there is a joy in turning much of this on its head? I have again and again noticed topsy turvy play around food, play that seems to reinforce the fact that children really do know what is appropriate (after all it wouldn't be a joke otherwise). Is it a chance to re-take control? To subvert? To have agency? I don't think I can ignore this.

Appendix D: Interview schedule

Ensure practitioner is happy for the interview to be recorded and state what will happen to the data and that s/he can see the transcript once typed up.

1) What (if any) training have you done in relation to food and eating in early childhood practice?

- Probe for some detail on training and professional development
- Probe for some detail on placements or previous work

2) Do parents ask you about their children's eating and drinking? If so what kinds of things do they want to know?

- Probe for some detail on current and previous practice
- Probe for kinds of things parents are asked about in relation to their child's eating and drinking
- Probe in relation to practitioners' own experiences of parenting if appropriate

3) Can you talk through the organization of meal and snack times in your setting? Why do you organize them in the way that you do?

- Probe for detail on views of set snack times v self-service
- Probe for any other examples of practice experienced
- Probe for any detail on link to key person approach
- Probe for any exemplars of impact on children

4) Are children permitted to bring food in from home?

- Probe for detail on why the setting has the policy stated e.g. what is/is not permitted and why?
- Probe for detail on birthdays/special occasions

5) Do you believe play is important in relation to food and eating?

- Probe for detail on role play – link to practices observed in the setting
- Probe for detail on why they think what they do

6) To what extent are you aware of the ‘healthy eating’ agenda e.g. in the news? Do you think this impacts on you as a practitioner?

- Probe for any detail relating to impact on own views or on own practices – both personal and professional
- Probe for detail on impact children have on their practice

Finally:

Clarify what happens next

Thank practitioner for her time

Appendix E: Transcription of an interview

Setting 2: Amy: 2.11.07

Re-negotiate taping and say what will happen to data

Me: Can you tell me about any training you've done around food and eating and young children? I know you've got an NVQ or are studying for one.

Oh yeh I got my NVQ already but...

Me: Anything to do with young children and food and eating?

No not really - mmm. Well I've got me NVQ level 3 and a CCE2

Me: So as part of those... What's a CCE2?

Certificate in Childcare and Education

Me: Of course

And it's a full time course

Me: So you've done a lot of training, and in that training did you do anything to do with food and eating?

Yes – I've done quite a lot – especially in my CCE

Me: Tell me the kinds of things you remember

Talking about the daily intakes – the calorie intakes for the different age groups; the pyramid that you do with the different food groups and what you should have ... what else have I done ... about the health and safety of it – you know, the hygiene, working in a kitchen – what you should do; the importance of – you know, the cultural side of it – you know, how different cultures eat different foods

Me: Sounds quite comprehensive. Was that mostly in the CCE then?

Yeh. You know in my NVQ3 I don't think we even covered it

Me: Did you ever do anything about – cos that's the food itself – did you do anything about mealtimes and snack times?

Yeh – we did something about the importance of the social side of things – you know self-help skills, getting the children to dish their own food and serve their

own drinks, you know – turn-taking and all that side of it, the importance of conversation – talking about what they are eating

Me: So it seems to have been quite a comprehensive training around that. So, have you only ever worked here?

No – well full-time mainly here yeh, but for my CCE I did 2 placements as well. Apart from here I done a nursery with babies, yeh- babies that was 3 months to about 18months depending on the children. Then I was in a school as well working with children aged 4-5 years.

Me: Oh a reception class?

Yeh

Me: So how did practice around food and eating differ there?

In the school?

Me: Yeh

In the school – well its different, cos they only have fruit or milk at about 11 o'clock after playtime and that's really all we done for food really because they went off to the hall for lunch

Me: And as a staff did you have anything to do with what happened in the lunch hall?

As staff they would just stay with the children – making sure they were lining up until the dinner lady got them

Me: What do you think about that?

It was quite strange because when the parents came and said 'what has my child eaten today?' you couldn't tell them because you aren't there – you don't know – so you can't say 'well they ate this and they ate that' you just can't say. You just couldn't say what they'd eaten unless they had packed lunch and they could see what had been eaten and what hadn't been eaten and then thrown away. So, yeh- it was quite strange when parents were asking 'how much did he eat?' cos you couldn't tell them. You know one child was really not great at eating and you just couldn't say...

Me: Mmm and do you find that parents often ask you about food?

Yeh, quite often, cos they'll say like 'what did they have for dinner?' the parents will say

Me: Whereas here you will know exactly won't you?

It was different in the baby room. The babies or the children, depending on their age, had their food differently, like blended or cut up. But it was the same as here – well sort of – cos you know what the child eats. The difference is they didn't have a specific person like we have here – key groups – they'd have all the babies together and you'd feed just who was left really. I don't know how to put it – they were just like 'well just choose a child and feed it' really

Me: And what do you think about that?

I suppose it's quite strange actually. Mmm – I don't know, because again when you leave – say you're on an early, there was no communication so you could let the mum or dad know 'well they ate this' when they are picking them up and ...

Me: And what about from the child's perspective – you know, possibly having four or five people that are serving them?

Yes – Well I was only a student and sometimes you could be asked to feed a baby and they wouldn't eat as well as if it was someone else feeding them. Yes definitely. You wouldn't really know what they eat like. Like in my key group I know who'll only eat a tiniest portion and I'll only give them that tiniest portion on their plate, whereas before they'd get a lot, it'd be dished out and just given to them in a bowl. The cook would set it up on a trolley and it would come in

Me: Oh – so the cook would dish it all up and it would come in on the trolley like that

Yeh. And if a child only ate a little amount, with all that food there, it looked, oh my god, too much. Here it's completely different...

Me: Well you're a parent as well aren't you?, so with your parent hat on how would you feel if your child was really small and anyone could come along in that group of staff and feed your child?

I think I'd be quite annoyed because you wouldn't know who to ask – you'd say 'what did they eat?' and they'd say 'I don't know, you'd better ask them' and then maybe they don't know and then it goes to the next person. It's not great from a parent partnership thing because you need that one to one connection

Me: Yeh – I think you're right. It is important. Ok, well, obviously you've got your own child – one child am I right?

Yeh just one child

Me: So you've got experience of feeding your own child outside nursery and obviously yourself – growing up and your own food and eating habits outside nursery – does that have an impact on your practice here?

I would say so yeh

Me: In what way?

Mmm... I can't really explain it, but you kind of know what's working or not working with a child – you know what they can and can't eat such as peanuts and that; the consistency of food children need for their age – you know that. But you know working here also helps at home

Me: In what way?

Well, because of ... well my daughter is only two and a half and working with older children I know what to expect and how to deal with it. Like the whole toilet training thing was a bit AHHGG and working here has helped with that, and like, with feeding, like before, before I started training in childcare if there was – I would put too much food in a bowl for her and she'd be looking... and when I'd done my childcare I put a small amount in and then a child doesn't get too full. That's the main thing it's helped with

Me: Does your unique knowledge of your own child give you a different insight into the practice you have here with children?

Yeh – you try to be with their child how you would want someone to be with your child as a key worker. You try to do it that same way

Me: And nursery and many nurseries, the children tend to sit round the table. Is that how you eat at home?

Yeh - yeh. I always do. Cos when I was younger we couldn't get round a table. There was a lot of us actually

Me: What when you were at home?

Yeh. There was a load of us – there were ten children and I am only the second eldest. It wasn't that we didn't *want* to sit at a table – there just wasn't a table big enough, so we just sat anywhere – on the stairs or in the living room. Things like that. We just anywhere cos there was no... Sometimes there was the odd child upstairs cos they were the special one or something on that day, but no, we've – well, now, it's eating at the table for me – we *have* to eat at the table

Me: Do you think that's important?

Well, I think it's really *nice* to talk when you've got the TV off. Even sometimes it's just me and my daughter but sometimes with my partner – well sometimes he'll be like, sprawled out on the sofa watching the football or something. When we're eating we just have time to talk about things cos other times I am just busy doing something else, so that's the nice thing about it... I do so much different from when I was growing up

Me: So maybe working in nurseries and your training makes you feel differently?

Yeh definitely. And I watch the childcare programmes as well – I watch supernanny

Me: Do you?

Oh yeh – there are some bits I don't agree with. Actually I don't think it is supernanny but it's some programme where the parents and the children go... and the children, they were just left to get on with eating round the table and their parents were just watching the telly. This was what they were doing and then it showed them after – sitting at the table cos before the mum would just be saying 'oi – eat your dinner. I'm watching Coronation St'. It was quite *scary* actually. I wouldn't want to be in that situation.

Me: Do you have conversations with parents here about their children's food and eating?

Yeh. *All the time*. Always with my key group

Me: And what do you talk about?

I talk about what they've eaten and how they've eaten... and like, say if the child has not eaten say, strawberry mousse for 3 weeks, I'll say, 'well I don't think they like that' whereas before I'd just say to parents 'well they ate this today' and they go about their day. Now I try to think about alternatives for next time and if I realize over a number of weeks a child doesn't eat something, I'll say to the parent and the parent might go 'oh –ok' and I'll say 'do you mind if I try to give them something else'

Me: Cos how aware are you – cos obviously there are a lot of children and some don't come every day – so, how aware are you of mmm not just what children eat but how they eat ?

Well like what they are and aren't allowed to eat – with my key children I tend to ask how they eat at home because always it's different. Like my key children really only eat small amounts where – at home – some of them will eat loads... And some will only eat Indian foods but won't eat them here and the mum says it

was because it had this in it. It's good to know what they have at home so we get ideas what to cook here

Me: What about whether they eat at the table or things like that? Do you have knowledge of that?

No not really. It's not something you tend to ask a parent because they'd feel you're intruding

Me: And of course you don't home visit here so you don't actually see...

No No. I think to ask how they eat at home would be a bit...

Me: What about use of fingers or cutlery?

Oh yeh – I always ask that – especially with the younger ones – because I need to know if they use a spoon or a fork, or whether I need to give them a spoon and me a spoon to encourage them to feed themselves

Me: Do you find, then, that parents ask you quite a lot – in comparison with other things – do you find they ask you quite a lot about the children's eating over the course of the day? In comparison with 'did they do a painting' for instance?

'How did they eat today?' is usually the first question and especially as many of my children are – you know – half day – so they'll want to know if they've eaten their lunch and if they've got to give them food

Me: Yeh – they all have a lunch even if half day don't they?

And if children only come in the afternoon, I'll always ask the parents if they've eaten or if they had a sleep – just so I'll have an idea how they'll be – if they'll be hungry or not

Me: Do they ever bring anything from home?

Check of machine

None of my key children do but yeh if they need to – we have one child who does

Me: What about birthdays or times like that?

Oh yeh. They'll bring in cakes and they'll bring in sweets and goody bags

Me: And is there anything that isn't allowed, apart from the usual things like nuts?

No not really

Me: So when it's a birthday they can bring in what they like...

Yeh. Yeh. But if a parent doesn't want a child to celebrate that then we have to respect that kind of practice

Me: How do you feel, and I have to say that I don't particularly think this is right, how do you feel about nurseries that have banned birthday cakes... because of the healthy eating thing?

I think that a birthday cake is quite important for the child. Well it's good for – socially. Well it's –mm it's hard to explain really – it's part of culture to be honest and a culture where you are brought up like that at home, you have your birthday cakes at home, so why should it be different here?

Me: I say this because there are places that say e.g. 'you can just bring in strawberries' because of the healthy eating agenda that I'm sure you're aware of

Oh yeh – it's all over the packets now..But birthday cakes, it's a cultural thing, so I wouldn't agree with that – definitely

Me: What about at your daughter's school or nursery?

Nursery.

Me: What does she do at her nursery?

Actually they have quite a big party. They have balloons and everything and I would send in a cake and a goody bag for everyone to take home – and things like that – cos that's what you do for birthdays now. It's how we've been brought up

Me: OK. You have a drink and a snack time here, don't you? Have you ever worked anywhere where children can go and help themselves to say, an apple and a milk?

No I haven't. I know the standard – water is everywhere. We have the bottles here.

Me: What I'm talking about is when you might have biscuits or fruit and juice in jugs or milk and the children can just go whenever they want to. How would you feel about that? So you wouldn't stop for a drink and a story at 10.00.

I'm not entirely sure that I'd agree with that idea because if it's throughout the whole day, when it comes up to lunch-time, the child may not eat their lunch. It's also about having that structure. Like here, we have the story as well – as a nice

social time rather than just do it when you like. The drink is different I would say, cos water – that's standard – it should be on offer throughout the day – but going to help yourself to fruit or veg all day – no not really. It's nice to have the little social groups we do have but like, sometimes you may get the children who may not have - who may not go over and get the food, so you don't know who's eaten again. You wouldn't know.

Me: And like you say, I know you have water bottles the children bring in that they can access, but do you find that they do?

Well we need to encourage them. Like when we come in from the garden, we encourage them – especially on a hot day – and quite a lot of the children do come in and say they want to come and get a water. At mealtimes we are always saying, 'have a little bit at least'. Even at story, we say 'just have a little bit' so they are always getting a drink

Me: Do they all bring in a bottle from home?

Not all. We do try to say to parents but we'd always give them a cup and check to see if they have a bottle

Me: And do they know which one is their bottle?

Well there's usually something distinctive about it and if there isn't we put a bit of tippex on the bottom – like there's more than one spiderman one

Me: And I've noticed that they don't have to stay by the trolley. They can bring their drink with them to where they are – it's not rigid where they have their drink

No never

Me: Ok – Another thing I am interested in to do with children's food and drink is children's play in this area and obviously today you have a pizzeria place haven't you and I've seen all sorts of play, like the bakers and the home corner has got the table and food there. So lots of play happens around food – do you think play has a role to play in developing positive attitudes to food?

Yeh definitely. Mmm. Well cooking – acting out what they've seen at home. How they'll butter the bread like they've seen their parents or grandparents at home but they'll call their parents' names like 'come on – come for your tea' like they see at home.

Me: So it makes a link with home?

Yeh definitely – because it's meant to be from home to home at nursery. Food comes into that because they can do what they see at home.

Me: This is my final area to discuss. You cannot be unaware of the healthy eating agenda – what's going on in the papers etc... Do you think this has an impact on what you do or what you think you should do as a practitioner? How you should behave...?

As a practitioner?

Me: Yeh – as someone who works with young children

Yeh it does have an impact. It's about what you should and shouldn't eat. Looking at it and thinking 'oh I mustn't give that child any more of that'. We've got, like one of my parents, they've got a child that eats really well – she'll eat a couple of plates - and I have to – well they say they don't want her to be *obese* in later life. You know – it has *that* impact

I'm always on these faddy diets (laughs)– it's a whole thing at the moment – don't eat curries, look at labels, you've got to look like this and think like that. It definitely has an impact on me personally but also works on you being a practitioner cos sometimes you won't want to eat cos of this whole calorie controlled thing

Me: That must be difficult – like if you know something is fattening ...

Yeh – you have to eat it ...mmm

Me: Is that what you do?

Yeh... *Panic!!! (laugh)* I don't know. Maybe you try and get away with it by having a *small amount* but a child may be watching and when you are trying to encourage them to have a bit more dinner they say 'well *you've* only eaten...'

Me: So they are looking at what you eat?

Yeh! Sometimes they say 'well you only ate *that* amount' especially one that's *very determined* and they'll say 'you only ate that amount so I'm only eating that amount' - and I used to be like that with my mum. I used to be always like that with my mum – cos she's not a big eater (nothing to do with diets) and I went through a phase of, if she only ate a small amount, then I'd only eat that amount. It has an effect here. So if you only eat that amount, the children think they eat only that amount

Me: So do you think it's important to be a role model of eating the food the children have?

Definitely. Because even if you just try it – just a little bit... like I can't stand mince but I'll have the spaghetti because I just can't – I can't eat mince – but if a child was to say to me 'go on just try it' I would try it

Me: So they sometimes say things back to you...?

Oh yes! (laugh) Especially *one particular* one

Me: So they are very *aware* of what you are eating

Oh yes. They are *aware* of what we eat – we've got to be role models in that sense. It's a *balance* between what you want and being a role model.

Ask if there is anything to add – thanks A – tells her that she will get copy of transcription next week

Appendix F Details of practitioners interviewed

No	Name (pseudonym)	Prof. Qualifications	Setting	Ethnicity	Gender	Age
1	Kate	Primary teacher (PGCE)	1	White (British)	F	40s
2	Merryl	NVQ3	1	Black (born in Grenada),	F	40s
3	Mary	Primary teacher (PGCE) (but role in nursery is as a nursery nurse)	1	White (British)	F	40s
4	Colleen	None (Language support assistant)	1	White (British)	F	20s
5	Amy	NVQ3	2	White (British)	F	20s
6	Jane	NNEB and studying for BA in ECS (manager)	2	White (Irish)	F	40s
7	Kath	NNEB (deputy manager)	2	White (British)	F	30s
8	Joan	NVQ3 (new to setting)	2	White (British)	F	40s
9	Manveen	NVQ3	2	Asian (South Indian)	F	40s
10	Sharon	None	2	White (Irish)	F	40s
11	Helga	None (cook - NB - observed and talked to her but not a 'formal' interview like others)	2	White (Polish)	F	30s
12	John	NVQ2	2	White (British)	M	19

13	Wanda	NVQ3	3	White (British)	F	40s
14	Vera	NVQ2	3	White (British)	F	40s
15	Fay	NVQ3 (manager)	3	White (British)	F	40s
16	Sadie	NVQ2 (studying for NVQ3 – newly promoted as deputy manager)	3	White (British)	F	40s
17	Tracey	NVQ2	3	White (British)	F	40s
18	Sharmina	NVQ2 (baby room)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	30s
19	Nadiya	NVQ2 (a 'float' across all rooms)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	30s
20	Sudhani	NVQ2 (toddler room)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	18
21	Ben	NVQ3 (baby room)	4	White (British)	M	20s
22	Fatima	NVQ3 (baby room – room leader)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	30s
23	Neela	NVQ2 (toddler room)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	20s
24	Tarnpreet	Montessori trained (3 rd in charge of nursery and room leader)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	30s
25	Louise	Montessori trained (manager)	4	White (Irish)	F	30s
26	Rehana	NVQ2 (toddler room)	4	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	20s
27	Farah	Montessori trained (room leader in 2 nd toddler room)	4	Black (South American)	F	30s

28	Janet	NVQ2 (toddler room)	4	White (British)	F	20s
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Appendix G Details of children in the study

(NB those referred to directly in the thesis not every child who attended the settings)

No	Name (pseudonym)	Setting	Ethnicity	Gender	Age
1	Hamdi	1	Black (Somali)	F	3 years
2	Shahrusaad	1	Black (Somali)	F	3 years
3	Ahmed	1	Black (Somali)	M	4 years
4	Jacob	1	White (Polish)	M	4 years
5	Famida	1	Black (Somali)	F	4 years
6	Naomi	1	White (British)	F	4 years
7	Seema	1	Asian (Indian)	F	3 years
8	Sarbjit	1	Asian (Indian)	F	3 years
9	Raksha	1	Asian (Indian)	F	3 years
10	Noor	1	Asian (Pakistani)	F	4 years
11	Nosheen	1	Asian (Pakistani)	F	4 years
12	Samira	1	Black (Somali)	F	4 years
13	Christopher	1	White (British)	M	3 years
14	Amin	1	Black (Somali)	M	3 years
15	Harbijan	1	Asian (Indian)	M	3 years
16	Luke	1	White (British)	M	3 years
17	Samuel	1	White (British)	M	4 years
18	Nadiya	1	Asian (Bangladeshi)	F	3 years
19	Anna	1	White (British)	F	3 years
20	Anastacia	1	White (British)	F	3 years
21	Kurt	2	White (British)	M	2.6 years

22	Dougie	2	White (British)	M	3 years
23	Larry	2	White (British)	M	3 years
24	Aaron	2	Lebanese	M	4 years
25	Owen	2	White (British)	M	3 years
26	Tara	2	White (British)	F	3 years
27	Alliyah	2	Lebanese	F	4 years
28	Melanie	2	Mixed race (mother white British, father black Jamaican)	F	4 years
29	Laura	2	White (British)	F	4 years
30	Emma	2	White (British)	F	3 years
31	Aakash	2	Asian (Indian)	M	3 years
32	Youssef	2	Moroccan	M	4 years
33	Mevhish	2	Asian (Indian)	F	4 years
34	Ali	2	Saudi Arabian	M	4 years
35	Moinydh	2	Asian (Indian)	M	3 years
36	Lee	3	South Korean	M	3 years
37	Emma	3	White (British)	F	3 years
38	Errol	3	Black (British – parents born in Jamaica)	M	4 years
39	Tina	3	White (British)	F	2.11 years
40	Alice	3	White (British)	F	3 years
41	Harry	3	White (British)	M	4 years
42	Keith	3	White (British)	M	3 years
43	Avleen	3	Asian (Indian)	F	3 years
44	Grace	3	White (British)	F	3 years
45	Toby	3	White (British)	M	3 years
46	Joe	3	White	M	4 years

			(British)		
47	Diane	3	White (British)	F	3 years
48	Rhianna	3	White (British)	F	4 years
49	Leo	4	White (British)	M	13 months
50	Caitlin	4	White (British)	F	2.1 years
51	Emily	4	White (British)	F	20 months
52	John	4	White (British)	M	20 months
53	Millie	4	White (British)	F	14 months
54	Sam	4	White (British)	M	2 years
55	Annabel	4	White (British)	F	14 months
56	Eddie	4	White (British)	M	2.1 years
57	Hassan	4	Moroccan	M	8 months
58	Toni	4	White (Spanish)	M	19 months
59	Jack	4	Mixed race (mother white Irish, father black Nigerian)	M	10 months
60	Henry	4	White (British)	M	8 months
61	Maryam	4	Moroccan	F	19 months
62	Fiona	4	White (British)	F	14 months