How do two-year-olds construct outdoor play as part of the two-year-olds offer? A multimodal ethnographic study of an inner London nursery during the global pandemic

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Abstract

This research employed a multimodal, ethnographic approach to explore how a group of two-year-olds, who received 'the two-year-olds offer', experienced outdoor play in a London nursery playground during the pandemic. The two-year-olds offer is an education policy initiative in England, introduced in 2013, in order to provide 'free childcare for the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds' (DfE, 2013). While some important aspects of the introduction of the two-year-old offer have been given considerable attention in research, (e.g. assessment of the policy's take-up by providers and families, and its impact on early years outcomes), there is little research evidence documenting the experiences of the two-year olds who are the subject of this policy.

To explore young children's outdoor play experiences at the nursery, the study draws on multimodal social semiotic theory, which challenges the common assumption that meaning is primarily made through speech and focuses on all the resources which people use to make meanings through interaction. Using a multimodal frame enabled me to take notice of young children's complex, motivated and transformative orchestrations of semiotic resources, including their bodies, the objects and spaces that were (made) available for the purposes of engaging in playful communication and forming relationships with peers (Potter and Cowan, 2020). Combining multimodal social semiotics with the 'new social studies of childhood' (James and Prout, 2015), created a hybrid interpretative lens through which to problematise developmental and attainment discourses currently dominating much of early years policy rhetoric. The study's methodology combined multimodal semiotics and ethnography (Dicks et al, 2011; Sidiropoulou, 2015), using video-recordings of young children's interactions in their everyday setting along with photos, field notes, maps and informal conversations with staff.

The findings suggest that free outside play offers unique affordances for children's meaning making while interacting with their peers and that this is a key way in which the young children co-constructed learning at nursery. The 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds were revealed as capable, agentic, multimodal meaning makers contrary to dominant policy discourses that conceptualise them as 'deficient' or attribute their perceived failure to families and teachers. This finding resonates with other literature which challenges such discourses (Cameron and Moss 2020; Williams, 2022).

The findings are important to policy and practice because they provide a distinctive insight into how two-year-olds learn through outside play. The multimodal analysis also suggests ways in which the organisation of the nursery enhances very young children's learning. It describes ways of recognising signs of learning, which are seldom recognised in nurseries (Cowan and Flewitt 2020). The research promotes democratic education (Moate et al., 2017; Cameron and Moss, 2020) by arguing that children and families, from marginalised groups, have strengths and value, and that their voices should be listened to. In addition, the analysis counters popular discourses about 'learning loss' by revealing this group of children's complex ways of playing and learning during the pandemic.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This thesis offers insights into the outside play of a group of two-year-olds at an inner London nursery. Play is not easy to define because it encompasses a wide range of behaviours and means different things to different people. Hedges (2010) suggested that the reason is because it is 'both a social and cultural construct and a social practice' (Hedges, 2010, p.5). Definitions of play are further discussed in chapter 3 where I also consider how different ways of understanding play shape children's experiences. Hedges defined play as 'a meaningful activity that children choose to participate in that involves children in physical, cognitive and communicative efforts in social and cultural contexts' (Hedges, 2010, p. 5). Such a definition is congruent with the aims of my research because it highlights children's agency and sees play as meaningful. My research understands play as children's meaning making (Kress, 1997).

Outside play was chosen because it is often a domain where the children are most able to express agency and to play with less adult control (Stephenson 2002; Cowan 2018). Agency is foregrounded in this research because one of the aims of the research is to emphasise children's voices in the light of deficit discourses. The two-year-olds and the nursery setting are the context where children exercise agency.

Outside spaces have special qualities for the play and learning of two-year-olds. Throughout the thesis I refer to the playground and outside space interchangeably. There is considerable research about outside play for three and four-year-olds (e.g. Stephenson, 2002; Maynard and Waters, 2007; Rosen, 2015) and some research about two-year-olds playing outside in settings outside the UK (e.g. Stephenson, 2002; Engdahl 2012). However, there is very little research about their outside play from a multimodal perspective and Mathers et al. (2014) and Georgeson et. al (2014) note gaps in research about the experiences of children playing outside as a result of receiving the two-year-olds offer.

The two year-olds-offer is a policy introduced in 2013 (DfE, 2013) and increased in 2014 whereby 'disadvantaged' (DfE, 2013) two-year-olds from low income families are entitled to fifteen hours a week free education and childcare. This policy was introduced in order to reduce a gap in achievement between 'poorer' five-year-olds and their 'better off' classmates

(DfE, 2013) and states that 'high quality learning' for two-year-olds can mean that they start school on an 'equal footing' (DfE, 2013).

My research challenges the discourses in the two year-olds-offer. It suggests that these discourses are detrimental to young children and presents evidence for an alternative way of understanding them which recognises their strengths. The categorisation of some children as 'disadvantaged' is problematic. It is pejorative to parents and children and, in this policy, is associated with failure and deficit. Disadvantage is a key concept in the two-year-olds offer so I use the term carefully in this thesis. I argue that conceptualising two-year-olds primarily as future school pupils, who can be measured, precludes consideration of them as full human beings with their own views and experiences.

My study foregrounds the meanings and experiences of two-year-olds in the moment when I was with them. I focus on their meanings to make their experiences, interests and learning visible. I see all children as actively and skilfully seeking to learn through representing and sharing the knowledge, culture and interests that they bring with them to nursery. Children, families and practitioners co-construct learning through interactions. The children's learning is motivated by their interests and based on what they already know and can do (Early Education, 2021). This perspective is aligned with a range of literature which emphasises the strengths of young children and conceptualises education as the co-construction of knowledge (Kress, 2010; Cameron and Moss, 2020; Early education, 2021).

1.1Aims and research questions

The research aims to shed light on the experiences of a group of two-year-olds playing outside at an inner London nursery as a result of the two-year-offer. It also aims to explore the value of the theoretical approach of social semiotic multimodality combined with childhood studies in researching the play of two-year-olds. The research used the context of the global pandemic to examine the way different circumstances shaped the children's play. This leads to the first research question.

- What was the context for the outside play of a group of two-year-olds at nursery during the pandemic and how did it shape their experiences?

The aim of the second research question was to gain a deeper understanding about what the two-year-olds were doing during their outside play. This question was:

- How do a group of two-year-olds at a London nursery multimodally construct their outdoor play in the context of the pandemic?

This question was answered through the use of ethnographic study and multimodal analysis of video recordings of the children's outside play. Selected episodes of the children's play were analysed and described with the aim of exploring how a group of two-year-olds made and shared meanings multimodally, using their bodies, the objects and the space of the nursery playground.
The third research question was:

- How do a group of two-year-olds experience outdoor play during the pandemic as part of the government's two-year-olds offer and what are the implications for policy and practice?

As such it draws together the two previous questions. It considers what two-year-olds do during their outside play, and what influences it, in the light of policy and practice. The aim of this research question is to critically discuss policy and make recommendations for practice in the light of the research findings.

In summary this thesis develops the argument that the-two-year-olds offer constructs two-year-olds from low income families as future pupils who are vulnerable (to educational failure) but who can be brought up to the level of other children by 'high quality' education or childcare. Their families are implicitly blamed for this because they are constructed as unable to teach their children the things that wealthier children know. My research challenges this discourse and finds the two-year-olds to be resilient and motivated to learn. They are resourceful in co-constructing their own learning, combining and expanding cultural resources both from their homes and nursery. The research is important because it foregrounds the experiences and meaning-making of a group who are not usually 'heard' or 'seen.' It explores and documents how these young children's complex multimodal meanings are made and communicated so that these are recognised and taken into consideration more often and widely in policy and practice.

1.2 The hybrid theoretical framework

In order to counter the discourses in the two-year-olds offer, and in the curriculum, I needed to consider the lens through I which I would observe and analyse children's behaviours. Childhood studies explains how childhoods are socially constructed and how the way in which they are socially constructed influences how children are seen and how they are treated. Childhood studies conceptualises children as agents creating their own social worlds in a way that is unfamiliar to adults (James and Prout, 2015 p. xii).

This study also employs a social semiotic approach to multimodality (Kress, 2010) because it aims to explore how meaning is made in social interaction. Social semiotic multimodality explains how children make meaning agentically, through interaction, using the knowledge, culture and interests they bring to nursery. Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016) describe multimodality as an interdisciplinary approach which understands communication and representation to be about much more than language. Multimodality asserts that communication is always realised in a variety of means such as gesture, speech, gaze, and in the framework of social semiotic multimodality these semiotic resources are called modes. During the fieldwork I used video to record children's play. I analysed the video to explore how different modes were used and combined and how meanings were made multimodally. This is particularly appropriate for understanding the meaning-making of very young children who do not speak very much and who are making meaning through movement, gesture and gaze in the nursery playground.

In this section I have introduced the elements which comprise the theoretical framework for this research, and have begun to explain how they contribute to the understanding of children making meaning, and how they may be complementary. In the next chapter I will elaborate on both theories and on the challenges and opportunities arising from the combination of these two theoretical approaches. I maintain that this theoretical combination is an original aspect of my research and that this combination is particularly well-suited for focusing on the experiences and meaning-making of a group of two-year-olds who are making meaning through movement, gesture posture, gaze and sometimes minimal speech in the nursery playground.

1.3 Rationale

1.3.1 Personal and professional rationale

I am interested in understanding the experiences of these two-year-olds for professional and personal reasons. I managed a children's centre when the two-year-olds offer began and was instructed by the local authority to deploy the centre's staff to contact parents of two-year-olds who were on a low income. Staff were expected to encourage parents to put their children in nurseries by telling them that it would mean they did better when they started school. This raised questions which I wanted to answer. How could the education authority say this without evidence? I was also being asked to recommend putting children into nurseries that I knew little about as the nursery in the children's centre did not offer places through the two-year-olds offer. I had difficulty with aspects of the two-year-olds offer because of my understanding about deficit narratives, how children learn, and my experience of nurseries.

A narrative that some children are lacking in comparison to others troubled me. The narrative in the two-year-olds offer implies that there is something about working class homes that leads to poor educational outcomes at age 5. I am from a working-class background and experienced prejudice at school myself. I was a young parent on a low income and witnessed attitudes towards my own children that were based on negative expectations due to our income, address and social class.

As a student teacher I read Tizard and Hughes' (1984) seminal research and developed a critical attitude to deficit narratives about working-class children and parents. Tizard and Hughes carried out research on middle class and working class 4-year-old girls using recording equipment to assess the complexity of the interactions they experienced at home and at school. They found that all children experienced complex conversations with their mothers which were likely to promote learning. At school, however, the working-class children spoke less and were assessed as less capable by the teachers. The teachers spoke less to the working-class children, used less vocabulary and less complex sentences and ideas as a result of this assessment. This resonated with my personal and professional experiences. In nurseries it can be difficult to spend time listening to children and responding thoughtfully, due to the number of children and the need to monitor and maintain various activities. In contrast at home there was lots of time to discuss things with my children.

It was difficult for me to tell parents that children would do better at school if they went to nursery at two-years-old because I was not convinced it was true Some children will benefit from nursery provision at two-years-old and some families will benefit from childcare but my experience of children showed that young children do not need to be at school or nursery to learn. Parents can be particularly good at helping young children to learn because they know children well and are very devoted to them. My professional practice has been influenced by Froebelian principles (as disseminated by Whalley, 2007) where parents are seen as the child's first teacher and the person who knows the child best. I understand parents to be experts on their own children and able to make informed decisions about their care. If I knew a family I could discuss their circumstances and offer advice but would respect parent's views.

With the two-year-olds offer in place more two-year-olds from low-income families started to attend nurseries. I do not see them as 'disadvantaged' but as competent, agentic, having interests, skills and resources which they bring to nursery. My study explores the benefits of 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds going to nursery. I wanted to know more about the benefits, to children's learning, of attending nursery at age two, and how two-year-olds experience this policy initiative.

My personal and professional experience led me to be interested in outside play and learning. My experience also suggested that children do not need to be sedentary or indoors to learn. As a child I preferred to be outside and enjoyed physical play. Over my career I have seen that many children prefer to be outside and that running and climbing were very important to some of them; however, I noticed that not all nursery settings allowed children space to run, jump, climb and play physically outdoors for long periods. Children who chose to play outside for long periods or who were very physical were often seen as problematic or resistant to learning. My personal preferences led me to develop an empathy with children who do not want to sit down, and an interest in ways of learning outside. This interest led me to focus my study of two-year-olds attending a nursery specifically on their outdoor play experiences. The research enabled me to gather data about what two-year-olds did in the playground and to show how this might be conceptualised as learning.

1.3.2 The importance of outdoor play

Outside play is important to children and their learning in nursery. Many children prefer to play outside (Stephenson, 2002; Waller et. al., 2017). Outdoor play has long been seen as a

crucial element of Early childhood education (Tovey, 2007; Ouvry and Furtado, 2020). It has a history of being central to early years practice in the UK which began with the influences of philosophers and practitioners such as Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, Margaret McMillan and Susan Isaacs (Tovey, 2007). Tovey suggested that outside spaces in nurseries offer 'unique environments offering learning opportunities that are not available indoors' (Tovey, 2007 p. 13). Some of the main reasons for the importance of outside play in Early years education are the additional freedom that they experience outside; the opportunities for different movements outside; the dynamic and changing (or changeable) nature of the outside environment, and the context outside play provides for peer culture (Stephenson, 2002; Tovey, 2007). These features are expanded on in chapter 4 and throughout this research.

However, outside play in early years education is under threat because of discourses about learning. Discourses in the two-year-olds offer and in the curriculum for children from birth to five (DfE, 2021a.; DfE, 2021b.) characterise learning as the transmission of predetermined knowledge and skills rather than as the co-construction of learning motivated by the children's interests. This applies to two-year olds because ideas about school readiness move down the age range as shown by the explicit aim of the two-year offer. Since 2002, children under three in English settings have been subject to a statutory curriculum (DfES, 2002; DfE 2014; DfE 2021a) along with non-statutory guidelines (BAECE, 2012; DfE, 2021b). These suggest what should be taught to two-year-olds and how it should be taught.

The way in which the Early years curriculum has become more aligned with that of schools means that learning has become divided into subjects. Such a discourse relegates outside play to the development of physical skills and reduces the role of play and children's interests in learning. The curriculum also strongly emphasises the role of language in learning. It states that 'The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development' (DfE, 2021a., p.8). I make the case that multimodal meaning making, including movement, is learning and a focus on language misses some children's signs of learning.

A further threat to outside play in nurseries is the reduction in the amount of time suggested for outside play in the curriculum. This has gone from guidance stating that, 'where possible, link the indoor and outdoor environments so that children can move freely between them' (DCSF, 2008 p. 27) to a recommendation that 'outside activities are planned and taken daily' (DfE, 2021 p. 36) or should be provided for '45 minutes' (DfE, 2021b. p.63). Outside play is

provided for different lengths of time in different settings and this is dependent on the ethos and resources of the settings. A national survey of practitioners in 2015 found that some settings had no outside space and some did not use outside space daily (Davey, 2015).

The amount of space that is available is relevant to children's experiences of outside play and two-year-olds receiving the offer in inner London are likely to have less outside space at nursery than other children. Space is at a premium in inner London. It was difficult to find data about the outside space available at nursery settings but in the borough where I work the schools have less outside space per pupil than any other borough in London and there is an increase in space per pupil with distance from central London. The two-year-olds are likely to have less space because the vast majority of children receiving the two-year-olds offer attend private or voluntary settings (Pacey, 2019) which are less well-resourced than maintained settings.

Another factor which mitigates against outdoor play, particularly physical and vigorous outdoor play, is the discourse about risk and children's play (Tovey, 2007; Rosen, 2014; Knight, 2017). There is a counter argument that risk is an important part of children's enjoyment of outside play (Tovey, 2007) and that managing risk is a part of learning for children (DfE, 2021b. pp. 62 and 63). Rosen (2014) found that while staff would endorse this kind of argument they were centrally concerned about safety when interacting with children's physical play in the garden.

In this section I have argued that outside play is important to early years practice and to children under five. I have outlined some of the ways in which outside play for two-year-olds in nurseries is threatened by discursive and material factors. The research which follows will challenge the discourse about learning described in this section by presenting an alternative multimodal theory of learning (Kress, 2010) and showing how children learn through their outside play. My research is also able to make some comments about the way in which outside play is presented to two-year-olds and the importance of space to their outside play.

1.3.3 The two-year-olds offer

The two-year-olds offer is important to a large number of families, settings and two-year-olds in England. A total of 135,400 children are attending childcare settings as a result of the two-year-olds offer in 2022 (UK Government, 2022). This research explores the challenges and opportunities it entails, especially in relation to the group of two-year-olds researched. There is considerable literature concerning the two-year-olds offer but this rarely mentions the

experiences of the two-year-olds participating. The research about the two-year-olds offer is carried out and reported within its own frame of reference. It focuses on measurement of children to evaluate impact, and on aspects of implementation, and is mainly quantitative (e.g. Melhuish et al 2017; Teager and McBride, 2018; Hutchinson et al., 2019). This research is discussed in the methodology, chapter 3. My research is aimed at exploring the experiences of children in the two-year olds offer in a nursery in London.

The premise of the two-year-old offer is that nursery education is a homogeneous intervention which has the same value for all 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds. The assumption, implicit in the two-year-olds offer, that settings and two-year-olds are all the same, masks the reality of nursery provision in the UK and discounts the different experiences of those two-year-olds who are participating. As I am only looking at one nursery setting my study cannot make visible the differences between settings but it does highlight the diverse experiences and needs of two-year-olds. My research aims to counter this discourse by focusing on two-year-olds in a specific nursery and making visible their experiences and the meanings they made at nursery during their outside play. I describe the setting in chapter 4.

The two-year-olds offer stated that settings must be of 'high quality' (DfE, 2013). The government suggested that, to ensure high quality, local authorities should only place children in settings which are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted (DfE, 2013). In fact, according to recent data, 97% of all early years settings are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2021) and 96% of two-year-olds in the two-year-olds offer were in such a setting (Pacey, 2019). Given the immense variety of early years provision in England (Campbell and Moss 2020) it is questionable what this means. The social constructionist element in the framework of this research questions the taken for granted 'truth' about quality. Quality in nursery education is a contested concept (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2005). The discourse that it is measurable by experts invalidates alternative perspectives such as those of children, parents and practitioners (Fenech, 2011).

I have explained that the two-year-olds offer is important because it has an impact on a large number of children and families but I have noted that the discourses which underpin it are problematic. The discourse about future pupils obscures the experiences and perspectives of two-year-olds in the present and the discourse about deficiency may be self-fulfilling. Discourses about measurement of children in the two-year-olds offer construct two-year-olds as future-pupils who are expected to fail. I referred to Tizard and Hughes because it showed

how constructions of children as deficient meant that teachers underestimated the children's ability and interacted with them accordingly.

Discourses that underpin the offer, and the curriculum, construct learning as the acquisition of predetermined, subject-bound, knowledge and skills rather than learning as co-constructed by building on the strengths and interests of the learner. This discourse disregards the strengths and knowledge that children bring to nursery and further defines them as deficits in relation to the predetermined knowledge. Tizard and Hughes (1984) carried out research in which the perceived deficiency of working class children was based on language. The centrality of spoken English to the way in which young children are measured is problematic to children with English as an additional language (EAL) because it conceptualises them as deficient.

My research includes children with EAL and shows how young children can demonstrate learning using modes other than speech. This is significant given the overemphasis on language in the curriculum (DfE, 2021a.) and the potential for some children's strengths and learning to be overlooked due to the way children and learning are understood in the discourses underpinning the two-year-olds offer. Outside play is important to children and many of children's strengths, knowledge and interests may be related to outside play but the discourses above do not sufficiently prioritise it.

My research focuses on two-year-olds as people in the present who are capable and knowledgeable. It documents children's meaning making and reveals the way they learn through their outside play. It gives insight into their multimodal meaning making and enables their 'voices' to be heard. This research reveals two-year-olds to be capable and agentic and makes visible how they use the knowledge they bring from outside nursery.

1.4 Changes in the research due to the global pandemic

I started working at West Street nursery (all names in this thesis are pseudonyms) in January 2020, job-sharing the role of senior teacher. My role involved being a key person (to a group of three and four-year-olds) and taking a lead in the running of the centre and its development. All the children shared the same room and outside space, but in fact the two-year-olds usually played separately from the older children. The short duration of my work at the nursery and my job role meant that I had previously had minimal experience of working directly with these two-year-olds, although I had sometimes been in the same space as them.

I had planned to carry out the research at a different setting to the one I worked at, but COVID-19 made me change my plans so that I decided to research my own workplace. This was a significant change to my research and the implications of this are discussed in the methodology. From 23rd March 2020, nurseries and schools in England were closed as part of restrictions aimed at limiting the spread of the virus. Children of key workers, those with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and those with social workers were still entitled to attend (DfE, 2020). West Street nursery remained open to a few of these children.

When the children returned in June they were grouped into 'bubbles' and they were expected to use different, less familiar, spaces in the setting. Bubbles was a term used to describe grouping children in settings to reduce the likelihood of infection and to manage instances of infection and were required by government. Groups of fifteen children or fewer were cared for and educated separately by groups of staff who were expected to stay separate to staff, children and parents from other groups (DfE, 2020). The term was not used in early government documents but began to be used in the media (e.g. Weale, 2020), research (e.g. Pascal et al., 2020) and later government documents (UK Government, 2021) and was in general usage when the fieldwork was carried out. The restrictions prevented staff from working across different nurseries or spending time in different groups within the same nursery (DfE, 2020). Because of this, I negotiated with the management of my workplace that, for what remained of the summer term, I would work with the two-year-old bubble. On my days off I would come into the nursery and undertake my research with that bubble.

The research took place in 2020, at a stage of the global pandemic when settings in the UK were beginning to reopen after a lockdown which closed schools and nurseries to all but the most vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers. The children were admitted to nurseries which were changed due to restrictions imposed by the UK government (DfE, 2020). This thesis is therefore able to consider some of the implications of the transformation of the nursery's in/outdoor spaces into protective 'bubbles', and the impact of the re-design and re-contextualisation of the policy initiative into the practices used at the setting (Kress and Sidiropoulou, 2008) concerning specifically its physical, material and social environment and how it influenced the children's experiences of outdoor learning and meaning making. The context of my fieldwork during the global pandemic adds a further layer of interest as it was able to explore the way the changes shaped children's play. It also means that through this study, it was possible that the experiences of some two-year-olds during the pandemic are made visible (Sidiropoulou, Perez-del-Aquila and Richards, 2021).

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of six further chapters. Chapter 2 gives details of the combined theoretical approaches which frame this research. It discusses social constructionism and details what childhood studies contributes to research about young children. It then outlines multimodality and explains why social semiotic multimodality is a suitable theoretical approach for this research. A discussion follows which sets forth the rationale for combining the two approaches, considering the precedents and evaluating their compatibility.

Chapter 3 explores how policy discourses influence the experiences of two-year-olds. The discourses are exemplified in definitions of play and the chapter traces how these different understandings shape children's' outside play. A definition of play as multimodal meaning making is explained and chapter 3 also considers literature about the play of young children during the pandemic.

Chapter 4 explains the methodology and why ethnographic observation was chosen as the appropriate methodological approach to complement the theoretical framework. It provides a detailed description of the setting, the sampling strategies and the importance of my standpoint as an insider researcher. Data collection and data analysis procedures are explained.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the analysis of the data. This is organised into two complementary chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on how the setting is changed because of the pandemic and how this shapes children's play. It explores how the design of the 'new' space is interpreted and used by the two-year-olds. The analysis is structured in different sections considering the spaces, objects and time that the children use. The restructuring of the setting into bubbles, and other changes due to COVID 19, altered the size of the group, its composition and the ratio of adults to children. The chapter discusses the effect of these changes and considers the findings in the light of the relevant literature.

Chapter 6 presents a fine-grained multimodal analysis of the children's play and demonstrates how it is constructed. Chapter 6 details the complexity, resourcefulness and learning involved in the children's play. One of the conclusions of this chapter is to appraise the mechanisms by which individual agency intersects with structure through social and material factors, and how this can be accommodated within the chosen theoretical framework. Chapter 7 draws together the findings from the data analysis chapters. It summarises how the research questions were answered and defines the contribution to knowledge made by the research.

This final chapter considers strengths and weaknesses of the research and outlines recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical framework

2.0 Introduction

This chapter considers how a theoretical framework can enable a researcher to understand the communication of very young children. The theoretical framework for this research is social constructionism (Gergen 1985), and childhood studies (James and Prout, 2015), combined with multimodal social semiotics (Kress, 2010). Each of these contributes ways of understanding young children's meaning making.

Social constructionism understands reality to be socially constructed and shaped by discourses. Childhood studies uses social constructionism to consider the ways in which adults understand children and offers ways of understanding how children shape and are shaped by social historical and cultural circumstances. Multimodality challenges the conception that communication takes place primarily through language. It offers a way in which young children's meaning making can be gathered and understood, and enables researchers to look beyond language to understand how children make meaning in their outdoor play. Social semiotics add a focus on the social dimensions of young children's meaning-making.

This chapter explains social constructionism and childhood studies and considers how these theories relate to the study of young children's meaning-making during outdoor play in nursery settings. It considers the concept of embodiment and discusses how embodiment and materiality can be incorporated into a social constructionist theoretical framework. After this, the chapter defines multimodality, introduces multimodal social semiotics and justifies the use of multimodal social semiotics as a part of the theoretical framework for researching very young children. The final part of the chapter considers the combination of social constructionism, childhood studies and multimodal social semiotics and explores their compatibility and the way in which their combination enhances my research.

2.1 Social constructionism

Social construction is a theoretical perspective which sees what we understand as reality to be socially constructed (Luckman and Berger, 1966). This means that 'reality' is not really fixed and enduring in the way that it is generally understood in our daily lives, rather that what we understand as reality is created through interactions and ideas and is subject to continuous change as a consequence. Burr (2015) gave, as an illustration, the concept of a 'woman'. Burr

suggested that this is understood in everyday 'common sense' life as a stable category with a universal meaning but Burr (2015) showed how it means different things to different people. The meaning of this concept changes according to historical social and cultural perspectives and discourses. This is also true of the concept of 'child' as will be discussed later along with childhood studies.

Burr (2015) described social constructionism as underpinning a range of approaches (including, for example post-structuralism, discourse analysis, deconstruction) from disciplines such as psychology, social science and the humanities. Because of this Burr suggested that a definition is not possible but that social constructionists across the approaches and disciplines have some key concepts in common. Burr (2015) attributed these concepts to Gergen (1985) but I have drawn on Burr's organisation and explanation in the account below.

'A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge' (Burr, 2015 p.2) Social constructionists question common sense or conventional wisdom. They reject the idea that we can understand phenomena through observation and believe that assumptions which may appear obvious need to be challenged. This is pertinent to this research because there are a number of assumptions in early childhood education, and concerning the two-year-old offer, which are seen as common sense but will be critically discussed. Some examples of these are ideas about two year olds themselves and the extent to which they are independent, competent and agentic and others concern the parenting in low income families and the compensatory effect of nursery education.

'Historical and cultural specificity' (Burr, 2015 p.3) Social constructionists do not look for universal rules and explanations because they see ways of understanding as specific to the place and time in which they are situated. This ethnographic research aims to understand children's meaning-making in the culture created in their nursery playground as well as in relation to wider social, historical and cultural contexts such as the location of the nursery setting in inner London with the specific social and cultural context that this entails and the policy background of their attendance at nursery.

'Knowledge is sustained by social processes' (Burr, 2015 p.4) What we understand as truth is a product of social processes and interactions between people. This research looks at how some ideas about two-year-olds are constructed and explores how two-year-olds create meaning through their interactions.

'Knowledge and social action are entwined' (Burr, 2015 p.4) Constructions (or understandings) of the world enable some actions and not others. Therefore, knowledge and social actions go together and are entwined with power because they define what it is acceptable for people to do and how it can be understood. The understanding of power that is referred to here is a Foucauldian perspective of power as fluid, changing and diffused through discourses (Foucault, 1972) rather than the more rigid definition of power located in institutions which would be advocated by a more structuralist ontology.

Discourse is an important concept in social constructionism. Foucault defined discourse as 'practices which form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972 p.49) and Foucault's definition of discourse includes a range of ways of making meaning such as 'metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on' (Foucault, 1972 p.49). Foucault further described discourse as 'a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons' (Foucault, 1972 p.49).

Burman (2008 p.1) used the term discourse 'to refer to socially organised frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done.' Together these definitions emphasise the ideas that discourses can be made through a variety of ways of representing meaning, that discourses constitute particular understandings and that these have power to influence actions. In addition, Foucault (1972) suggested that discourse also offers opportunities for resistance. Discourses are constantly changing through interactions and agency is attributed to people to resist and change discourses. Such an understanding about discourse is used in this research to explore how understandings about two-year-olds shape their experiences and how they are understood. It is also used to understand how the two-year-olds make meaning.

Social constructionism sees people as 'complex, contradictory and dynamic' rather than 'unitary, coherent and stable' (Davies, 2003 p. xii). To paraphrase Davies, individuals continually remake themselves in different places and times through discourses. People learn the discourses in society and position themselves accordingly, both aligning with, and opposing, the discourses which constitute the ways in which others see them. The dynamics of social interaction and the way understandings are made, enacted and changed are appropriate subjects for social constructionist research. The aim of this research is to understand the ways in which the young children in this study make meanings, which are culturally, and historically specific and are emplaced.

There have been criticisms of social constructionism which are considered in my theoretical approach. One criticism is that social constructionism has placed undue emphasis on language. The use of a multimodal approach in this research enables a greater focus on communication through a variety of means. Burr (2015), Gergen (1999) and Nightingale and Cromby (1999) noted that social constructionism has been critiqued for its relativist position. This critique suggests that social constructionist research is not able to promote social justice because it does not recognise any truth or reality.

Alternatively, it can be seen as supportive to social justice because through exploring different perspectives and discourses it is able to question 'truths'. Burr (2015) and Gergen (1999) asserted that research using this theoretical framework can be progressive because it has given voice to hitherto unheard discourses. The criticism that social constructionism is relativist also entails a concern that it cannot accommodate embodied experience or materiality. Later in this chapter I will consider how this criticism has been acknowledged in the field of childhood studies.

2.2 Childhood studies

Childhood studies was first proposed in the UK by James and Prout (1990). It incorporated elements from interactionist sociology, structural sociology, and social constructionism. These are, respectively, an understanding of children as social actors and agents, an understanding of childhood as a part of the social structure of society, which is continually present, and 'the historically and culturally specific constitution of childhood in and through discourse' (James and Prout, 2015 p. viii).

Because childhood is seen as historically and culturally specific, social and cultural variables, such as gender and class, intersect with the construction of different childhoods. There are diverse childhoods rather than one singular, universal understanding of childhood. Because of this my research understands two-year-olds as individuals responding to their historical and cultural contexts rather than expecting them to be homogeneous.

In line with James, Jenks and Prout (1998), this research will consider how prevalent discourses about children influence understandings of physicality in the nursery. Five 'pre-sociological' constructions of children are summarised by James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p.14). The 'Dionysian' child is a construction which sees the child as pleasure-loving and easily corrupted or already evil, as in the discourse of original sin. This is associated with a need for strict control as in the popular discourse of 'spare the rod and spoil the child' (James,

Jenks and Prout 1998, p.14). The 'Apollonian' child describes the idea, exemplified by Rousseau, that children are innocent and superior in various ways to adults (Jenks, 2005). This construction of children implies that children need protection and encouragement to draw out their intrinsic virtues and talents.

The other pre-sociological constructions of children suggested by James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p.14) are the 'naturally developing child', the 'immanent' child and the 'Freudian' child. The naturally developing child equates to the idea of children as developing naturally towards maturity given the right environment. The immanent child refers to the idea of children as potential as opposed to people in the present. Similarly, the construction of the Freudian child, for James, Jenks and Prout (1998) concerns the importance attributed to the healthy psychological development of the adult psyche through resolution of unconscious dilemmas in childhood as well as the role played by unconscious drives in the child's behaviour.

These latter ideas view children as individuals who are moving towards adulthood rather than as people in the present. Murris (2019), in her analysis of the South African curriculum describes this as a 'becoming adult' view of children as opposed to a 'being' view of children (Murris, 2019 p.10). Murris sees the becoming adult view of children as hegemonic in early years policy and practice. The statutory guidance for the Early years foundation stage (DfE, 2017), can be seen as an example of a curriculum informed by what James, Jenks and Prout (1998) described as an 'immanent' view of the child or one of the child as 'naturally developing' and Murris (2019) described as a 'becoming adult' view of children. These views are indicated by the repeated use of the word development and in the central narrative that children move through a series of age related stages towards 'readiness' for the next stage (DfE, 2017 p.5). I suggest that the two-year olds offer constructs two-year-olds as future pupils because, rather than referring to children's experiences in the present, the policy refers to their achievement when they start school.

Because this research aims to find out about what children do, experience and what they think about it, during their outside play it sees children in terms of their lives in the present rather than as future pupils. Uprichard (2008) argued that children are 'always and necessarily 'being and becoming' (ibid p. 303) and this is true of all people but my aim is to counter a dominant discourse which obscures children's present meanings so I argue that a focus on the children's present is appropriate to this context. Such constructions of childhood are relevant

to my research because, as Jenks (2005) asserted, these perceptions are pervasive and influential in understandings of children, in literature and in policy and practice in early childhood education.

Childhood studies sees childhood as a structural space which children occupy (Corsaro 1997; Mayall 2002), and early childhood centres are socially structured contexts in which some childhood experiences are formed. This resonates with Giddens' suggestion that agents are rooted in a structural context from which they draw their knowledge (Ebrahim 2011).

Prout (2005) discussed some sociological ways in which childhoods can be understood as socially constructed and organises sociological ways of understanding children along axes of structure and agency, universalism and particularism. They are: the socially constructed child understood as on the axis of structure and particularism; the socially structured child associated with structure and universality; the minority group child which refers to children as a group with less power in society in relation to other groups and is on the agency/universalism corner of the matrix; and the 'tribal child' (James and Prout, 2015 p. xii) which sees children creating their own social worlds in a way that is unfamiliar to adults and is most agentic and particular.

2.3 Embodiment and childhood studies

Two-year olds are widely understood to differ from other under-fives (Georgeson et al. 2014) and one of the dimensions of this is the way they express themselves. As they are less verbally adept than older children they communicate more physically. Because my interest is in children's bodily behaviour I will be understanding children's use of space as both embodied and socially constructed and understand embodiment in children's social actions. This relates to Bourdieu's (1993) idea of habitus as culture written on the body and acquired from birth through cultural interaction, and to Mayall's (2015) understanding of young children's emotion as embodied. In this research, I understand embodiment as the way in which culture and experiences are felt physically and expressed bodily. Waskul and Vannini (2006 p.3) defined embodiment in this sense; 'The term 'embodiment' refers quite precisely to the process by which the object-body is actively experienced, produced, sustained and/or transformed as a subject body'

I noted earlier that social constructionism has been criticised for the difficulty such a discursive theory has in dealing with material phenomena such as embodiment. Like Burr (1999), Prout (2005) saw the need to incorporate embodiment and materiality into

constructionist ontology. The solution advocated by Prout is that dichotomies emphasised in earlier versions of childhood studies should not be seen as exclusive. He argued that rather than seeing childhood as exclusively biological or social it should be understood as being social and biological. This view of children as social and embodied underpins this research. Such a position enables understanding of lived physicality and embodiment alongside their social construction and discourses about them. As previously discussed, emphasis on the body can be seen as inconsistent with social constructionist ontology, but Carspecken (1996), Sprague (2005) and Davies et al (2001) have discussed ways in which understanding existence as embodied is important in studies of how people make sense of their lives.

Mayall (2015) suggested that this exclusion of children's embodiment from research understanding of them is associated with a masculine bias in research. Sprague (2005) described how white male middle class researchers have instigated a tradition of research which is estranged from bodily reality, as the researchers themselves are separate from the bodily realities of caring and sustaining life. Sprague (2005) noted how this is gendered and classed. Other authors (Leary and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Burr, 2015) also noted this mind-body split. They discuss how science has associated the mind with rationality and masculinity while the body is associated with emotion, irrationality and femaleness. As these authors and Prout (2005) suggest, I will see embodiment and interaction as interconnected in understanding how children experience outside play at nursery.

Similarly, there is a recent 'turn' in childhood studies which places greater emphasis on materiality. This suggests that children's agency in the nursery could be understood as distributed through an assemblage of objects and human resources which contribute in diverse ways to outside play (Spyrou, 2019). The inclusion of social semiotic multimodality in the theoretical framework of my research makes clear the link between materiality and meaning making and this is explained in the following section.

Social semiotic multimodality is another way in which embodiment and movement in space can be recognised through the theoretical framework of the research. Multimodality was integral to my research theoretically and methodologically because it is a framework with which to understand how very young children make meaning through play in the outside space at nursery. I aimed to answer the research questions through observing, and listening to, children who may be pre-verbal, may not be comprehensible to me and who, because of

their age and perhaps the place they are in, communicated through a variety of modes such as gesture, facial expression, gaze and movement and speech.

2.4 Multimodality

The approach of multimodality emphasises embodiment, reduces the disproportionate emphasis given to language in other theoretical frameworks, and sees consciousness and action as emerging through 'the medium of the body' (Flewitt, 2014 p.42). Flewitt cited Johnson who sees human reality as 'shaped by patterns of bodily movement' (Flewitt 2014 p.42).

Flewitt (2005) introduced multimodality in the following way:

> "A multimodal perspective looks beyond a focus on learning through language by giving new insights into how young children and the adults they interact with explore and express meaning through combinations of different modes, such as gaze, facial expression, body movements/gestures, manipulating objects and talk. This approach sheds new light on how young children exploit the potentials of different modes to express meaning in ways that are not constrained by the rules of language." (Flewitt, 2005 p.1)

Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016) described multimodality as an interdisciplinary approach which understands communication and representation to be about much more than language. A mode is defined as a means for making meaning. These include gaze, facial expression, gesture, movement, speech, as described by Flewitt's (2005) introduction above, and many others such as written language and images. The authors give three principles that define multimodality:

- Meaning is made with different semiotic resources, each offering distinct possibilities and limitations.
- Meaning-making involves the production of multimodal wholes.
- If we want to study meaning we need to attend to all semiotic resources being used to make a complete whole.

Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016 p.3)

Multimodality is appropriate for this research because it provides a lens to recognise communication as happening through modes other than or in addition to language. Because of my interest in physicality, and because of the ways in which young children communicate,

this is an important approach for gathering material concerning young children's interaction during outside play.

Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016) and Jewitt (2014) introduced multimodality and explored diverse perspectives and applications contained within it. Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016) identified these distinct approaches to multimodality as systemic functional linguistics, social semiotics and conversation analysis.

2.5 Social semiotic multimodality

The aims, perspective and area of my study are most closely aligned with a social semiotic theoretical approach to multimodality. While multimodality is concerned with how meaning is made through different modes, their combination and their interaction, a social semiotic approach to multimodality is concerned with the social and cultural dimensions of multimodal communication. Social semiotics is 'a social theory of meaning-making and communication in which modes are intertwined with their user and social context of use' (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran, 2016 p.60). The aims of social semiotic multimodal analysis are to understand the social dimensions of meaning-making. Social semiotics sees signs as changing according to social contexts and the choices made by the sign makers. Within this theoretical framework a sign is seen as the 'core unit' of social semiotics:

> In the sign meaning and form are fused in one entity. In a social semiotic theory signs are made - not used - by a sign-maker who brings meaning into apt conjunction with a form, a selection/choice shaped by the sign maker's interest. In the process of representation sign-makers remake concepts and 'knowledge' in a constant reshaping of the cultural resources for dealing with the social world (Kress, 2010 p.54).

The above passage notes the importance of the 'interest' of the sign-maker in the creation of the cultural resources for communication. Elsewhere Kress asserted that signs are made by both the sign maker (or rhetor – Kress, 2010 p.45) and the interpreter. The agency of communicators and the way in which they recreate and change signs and meanings is a central aspect of a social semiotic approach to multimodality as is the role of the interpreter.

Social semiotic multimodality understands agency to be expressed through the concepts of 'interest' and 'the motivated sign'. Interest refers to the condensation of a sign-makers prior social experiences as they are prompted by the social circumstance in which a sign is made. This means that sign making is always agentic and unique because it is generated from a person's experiences and because it is a response to a particular social situation. The term

motivated sign adds to this because it points to the way in which the choice of modes with which a sign is made is not arbitrary.

Modes were introduced in chapter 1. A mode is a term used in social semiotic multimodality to refer to 'a socially organised set of semiotic resources for making meaning' (Jewitt Bezemer and O' Halloran 2016 p.157). In order to be seen as a mode, a practice must have a set of organising principles that have been developed in a social group. This research describes how some modes were developed in the group of children I observed in the nursery playground.

Social semiotic multimodality asserts that sign makers make signs using combinations of modes which are most appropriate to express their interest. Signs are made as a result of the agency of sign makers and the modes with which they are made are also the result of an agentic choice, which also expresses the interest of the sign maker. The selection and combination of modes is understood in social semiotic multimodality as design. Design is the 'situated process in which a sign maker chooses and arranges semiotic resources to realise a particular social function and purpose' (Jewitt Bezemer and O' Halloran 2016 p.156). 'Design is always socially located and regulated, for example by the types of resources that are made available and to whom, as well as the regimes that regulate and shape how these resources are used to create various norms and expectations' (ibid. p.156).

Another key concept in social semiotic multimodality is modal affordance. Modal affordance refers to 'the material and the cultural aspects of modes: what it is possible to express and represent easily with a mode.' (Jewitt 2013). This concept describes how materiality is linked with meaning making. In social semiotic multimodality materiality is 'the inherent characteristics of the material used by a culture for making meanings' (Kress et al. 2001 p. 15). Different modes have various material (and cultural) affordances and I give examples of how children used the material and cultural affordances of modes in section 6.4.

All modes have specific potentials and constraints for meaning making based on their materiality and their cultural use (Price, Björkvall and Kress 2013). Movement for example is a mode that has material potentials in that speed; height; proximity; location, and orientation to others, can be varied, and different types of movement such as jumping and spinning can also be used to communicate meanings. It has material potentials and constraints regarding what other modes it can be combined with, physical ability and the spaces and resources

available. The data analysis chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how this is enacted in the nursery playground.

My research understands people (including two-year-olds) as part of an entanglement of social and material factors which enable meaning making. This point is important because it clarifies the relationship between our meaning making and our social and material environment, and emphasises the common ground between two-year-olds in nursery and people of other ages in different social situations.

Social semiotic multimodality has been used to analyse a very wide range of texts and artefacts but has been used to explore embodied interaction through examining video recordings, which is how it will be used in this research. Social semiotic multimodality is a suitable theoretical framework for answering my research questions because it has potential to foreground children's meanings, expressed in different modes, as they are made in the particular cultural social and spatial circumstances of this group of children in this nursery garden. Archer (2013) used social semiotic multimodal analysis to research the meaning-making of much older children in South African schools. This research was able to show which meanings are privileged and to indicate how children's meanings could be incorporated into pedagogy to enhance learning and social justice.

Cowan (2018) used social semiotic multimodal analysis of video recordings and observation to explore the child-initiated play of a nursery class of three- and four-year olds over two weeks. A small proportion of this play was outside physical play. Kress and Cowan (2017), in a discussion of this research, described how multimodal video analysis illuminated the meaning-making and agency involved in the free outside play of two four-year olds which would otherwise potentially be seen as meaningless. They suggested that outside play which involves running around is often seen as lacking meaning and value by practitioners. Like Archer (2013), Cowan (2018) has made visible children's meaning-making which was previously disregarded and proposed an argument for its recognition. A theory and methodology which demonstrates the meaning and learning in such play and enables it to be better understood in two-year olds could make a substantial contribution to practice and understanding.

As well as contributing to understanding about children's meaning-making in different modes, the research of Cowan (2018) has explored and discussed ways of gathering and transcribing multimodal data. Cowan (2018) indicates that there remain methodological

questions and challenges in this area and I therefore anticipate that this research will also make some contribution to knowledge about the methodology for researching the multimodal communication of young children in the garden of an early years setting.

2.6 Multimodality and ethnography

In this study children are understood to create their social worlds multimodally, using and influencing the cultural and material resources available. This theoretical framework sees children's meaning-making as specific to the place and time in which they are situated. The aim is to collect detailed localised data about a social situation over time and, therefore, the methodology is ethnography.

The 'new literacy studies' (Street 2006 p. ix) are ethnographic studies foregrounding children's meaning-making in educational settings. Street, Pahl and Rowsell (2009) advocated combining new literacy studies with multimodality, and Pahl (1999) did this in her ethnographic study of children's representation through drawing and model-making. These studies are of children over two and are about children's literacy practices, but they correspond to my research in their combination of multimodality and ethnography.

Flewitt (2005) used ethnographic multimodal video research to look at four children's communicative practices at home and at school during activities indoors. This research was able to show communicative strengths and group involvement in three- and four-year old children who rarely spoke in school. They communicated through movement, gesture and gaze. This is relevant to my research because the way in which some two-year olds use of modes other than speech potentially renders their 'voices' unheard and a multimodal semiotic theoretical framework and the methods associated with it could enable their experiences to be recognised and understood.

The combination of multimodality and ethnography is discussed in Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016), Street, Pahl and Rowsell (2009) and Flewitt (2011). There is a consensus in this writing that ethnography complements multimodality by providing a social and historical context which enables a deeper understanding of the use of different modes in communication. Flewitt (2011) discussed the tensions and benefits of combining ethnography and multimodality and concluded that this can be fruitful. Street, Pahl and Rowsell (2009) suggested that 'an ethnographic lens gives multimodal analysis a social map' (Street, Pahl and Rowsell, 2009 p.197), and Kress (2011 p.258) considered that they complement each

other and that the special insights of each approach benefit the analysis where the 'reach' of each perspective is recognised.

Although ethnography is a methodology rather than a theory (Crotty, 2015 p.5), this discussion has implications for the combination of social semiotic multimodality and some theories such as social constructionism. James and Prout (2015) stated that ethnography is integral to childhood studies because of its ability to foreground children's meanings and experiences in the present moment of their daily lives. Given the association, discussed in previous paragraphs, between multimodality and ethnography this is a potential area of compatibility between the childhood studies and multimodality.

2.7 Childhood studies and social semiotic multimodality

This research aims to combine social constructionism, childhood studies and multimodality. This is because neither theory can answer my research questions alone. Social semiotic multimodal analysis is a particularly appropriate way of seeing and describing the complex way in which children make meaning through different modes, but social constructionism provides a way of understanding the social and cultural contexts for this.

Kress (2011) advocated combining other theories and methodologies with a social semiotic theory of multimodality and Sidiropoulou and Albon (2016) combined social semiotic multimodality and childhood studies in work with early childhood educators. Kress suggested that theories have limited 'reach' or 'gaps' in relation to particular research questions (Kress, 2011 p.239) and that partnerships can be created, initially experimentally and temporarily, to provide more comprehensive answers to research questions.

Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016) for example, described how a social semiotic description of an event was criticised because it was not sufficient to lead to a sociological conclusion. Jewitt (cited in Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran, 2016) suggested that sociological theories could be combined with social semiotics to enable this relevance where needed. It is in this spirit that I plan to combine social construction and multimodality.

Kress (2011) noted the need to ensure epistemological compatibility. The view of meanings as socially constructed, through communicative action involving meaningful choices by agentic participants, underpins both theories which denotes some compatibility. At the same time, they have a different focus. Social semiotic multimodal analysis is closely focused on

the way people make meaning using different modes and is uniquely able to describe it. Social constructionism and childhood studies are interested in understanding how children experience childhoods and how dominant discourses of childhood shape their experiences and are more able to situate and explain young children's meaning-making in a cultural and historical context.

Considering the central tenets of social construction (Burr, 2015 p.2) discussed earlier, more areas of congruence are clear. Social constructionists see knowledge as a changeable product of interactions rather than a fixed truth. Social semioticians also see signs as changeable and are concerned with how meaning is made through social processes and interactions rather than with 'truths'. This idea of communicators as agents and of constant flux in meanings and ways in which they are made leads to the view in social constructionism that understandings are historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2015). Multimodal analysis looks in close detail at what happens in interactions in a particular place and time, but social constructionism is more able to provide understanding of the social and cultural background to the interactions.

Like social constructionists, social semioticians understand knowledge and social actions as inextricably linked and as entwined with power. Both theoretical frameworks are influenced by Foucault (1972) and see power as diffused and created through discourses. Because both frameworks foreground agency they understand interactions as potentially resisting the power in discourses.

As noted previously, social semioticians and social constructionists use the word discourse in specific ways, and they are not identical but not incompatible. Kress (2010) stated that he was following Foucault and defined discourses as the meanings produced by 'institutions' Kress (2010 p.110) and Foucault defined it as 'a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons' (Foucault, 1972 p.49). Burman (2008 p.1) used the term discourse 'to refer to socially organised frameworks of meaning….' The interpretation Kress has of institutions is loose, including for example the family, so it is congruent with Burman's definition. It will be possible to use the term so that it is consistent with both definitions and their Foucauldian roots suggest compatibility. Kress' definition encourages thought about where the meanings come from.

Discourse is an important notion in social semiotics (Kress, 2010) and is defined by Kress as the meanings produced by institutions. Examples given of 'institutions' include 'education, medicine, science, law, the church' and also less clearly organised ones such as 'the family'

(Kress, 2010 p.110). This idea of institutions continually making and disseminating their own kinds of knowledge is associated with Foucault's (1972) concept about the way in which power is diffused.

Both theories emphasise agency, see the social and cultural as central and view meaning-making as both influencing and influenced by these factors. The theories are different in their focus but that is why they are both necessary to answer the research questions. Because they both have a limited 'reach' but are complementary, given the ways in which they are compatible they will provide deeper and more comprehensive understanding of children's meanings than if I was to use either theory alone. Social semiotic multimodal analysis is able to describe children's meaning-making and provide a theoretical frame of representing and communicating through which it can be interpreted. childhood studies will give an understanding of the social, historical and cultural background which enables greater understanding of their meanings.

2.8 Learning within this theoretical framework

Social semiotic multimodality and childhood studies offer understandings of learning that are important in this research. Although my research was not ostensibly about learning the children are in nursery to learn and learning is fundamental to the two-year-olds offer. Kress (2010) explained learning as 'the result of the transformative engagement with an aspect of the world which is the focus of attention by an individual, on the basis of principles brought by her or him to that engagement; leading to a transformation of the individual's semiotic/conceptual resources. (Kress 2010 p.182). As children made new meanings in different ways they changed both the use of the semiotic resources and their own understanding.

In its conceptualisation of children as agentic, capable and socially situated childhood studies has been able to explore understandings of learning as co-constructed and embedded in cultural contexts. Childhood studies has many definitions of learning but Rogoff's definition of learning as 'the transformation of participation in cultural activities' (Brooker and Edwards 2010 p. 39) is resonant with Kress' definition above.

The recognition of meaning making is a theme in social semiotic multimodality. Essentially multimodality is about recognising that meaning making takes place through a variety of modes. This is in opposition to the view that communication takes place through language with other modes, such as gesture, seen as supporting or augmenting language if they are

noticed at all. Kress and Selander (2012) explained two ways in which recognition is relevant to my research aims, recognition of learning and recognition of domains of representation.

Kress and Selander (2012) contrasted a 'traditional' view of learning and a 'culture of recognition where semiotic work is recognised' They defined the 'traditional' view of teaching and learning where canonical knowledge is taught and then the extent to which it has been acquired is measured. They then describe learning as instances of semiotic work where learners engage with prompts supplied by teachers and produce responses which teachers in turn interpret to understand the principles and resources through which the learner has interpreted the prompts. The emphasis is on understanding the learners' semiotic work:

> Assessment is no longer only about evaluating in relation to certain standards, but far more a question of "feed up", "feed back" and "feed forward" to facilitate the learning in a broader sense (Kress and Selander 2012 p.267).

This explanation clarifies the argument for recognition of learning in social semiotic multimodality and how it contrasts with the way learning is (mis)recognised in what Kress and Selander described as 'traditional' ways of recognition of learning. This is significant here because the 'traditional' understanding here corresponds to that in the two-year-olds offer with its understanding of measurement of learning and its misrecognition of the strengths and knowledge of 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds.

The other stand of recognition addressed in social semiotic multimodality is the recognition of modes in which meaning is made. Kress and Selander (2012) noted canonical forms of representation in traditional schooling (such as writing, speech, numbers and certain images) and suggested that, given the understanding that meaning is made in many forms, we need to expand our recognition of modes in which learning is expressed. Kress and Selander (2012) noted that this is a question of power and asked 'What gets recognised and by whom? (ibid. p.267). Recognition of communication in different modes is central to the work of this thesis because I argue that young children use particular modes to make meaning during outside play and that these are not recognised, by adults, as meaning making or learning. I further argue that paying attention to the embodied modes which children use for meaning making can give adults a better understanding of their experiences at nursery and of their preferences.

I have proposed in this chapter that a combination of childhood studies and social semiotic multimodality is a suitable methodology to answer my research questions. At the time of writing this combination seems to be original in studies of young children's interaction

although there has been some research using such a combination in the area of digital representation (Morgan and Kyrios, 2014) and was discussed in Sehimoto's (2012) article about how gendered and cultured adult selves are performed through embodiment and spatiality. It seems likely that there is implicit influence of social constructionist theory on multimodal research and vice-versa and, given the continued development of multimodal research, this combination of social constructionism, childhood studies and multimodality may not be unique for much longer in research in this field.

2.9 Conclusion

This research combines the theories of social constructionism, childhood studies, and a social semiotic approach to multimodality. Social constructionism is an appropriate theoretical framework for answering the research questions about children's experiences and how they construct them because it sees children as having agency and constructing their play socially. Childhood studies enabled a critical stance towards the developmental view of children that is prevalent in early childhood education. It enables a researcher to foreground children's experiences and understandings and suggests ways in which children can be seen as co-creating meaning with peers. The aims of this research are to understand children's social worlds and interpretations of the spaces in which they play.

Some research examples (Flewitt 2005 and Cowan 2018) are included where a social semiotic multimodal approach has been used to foreground physicality and to enable children's meaning-making to be recognised where it would previously have been unnoticed. This is the aim of this research and it is argued that these theoretical frameworks are compatible and that their combination is appropriate for answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

The two-year-olds offer, outside play and the pandemic

3.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by exploring policy literature and research about the two-year-olds offer. It critiques discourses in the two-year-olds offer and in the curriculum. It explores what effects these discourses might have and proposes some alternatives. I suggest that a discourse where children are seen as pupils of the future rather than as people in the present makes their experiences and ideas invisible. In my fieldwork and analysis, I aim to foreground their experiences and the meanings they make in the moment that they make them.

The section considers how the offer constructs children and families as deficient and considers an alternative view that they are capable. My research is evidence for the latter view because it demonstrates some of the strengths of two-year olds that are revealed during their outside play at nursery. The two-year-olds offer proposes that a perceived deficit in children from low income families can be remedied by education at age two. I cite some literature which problematises this contention. While learning and disadvantage were not main themes in my research they are central to the experiences of children in the two-year-olds offer and I have addressed them accordingly.

I then discuss the model of learning in the curriculum, and the two-year-olds offer, and a competing view of children as learning through their own engagement with the world and co-construction of learning with others (Roberts-Holmes 2020 pp. 180-181). This leads on to a consideration of models of learning through play and an exploration of the changing model of play and outside play in the curriculum. The chapter concludes with a section examining literature and research about the pandemic which explores some prominent discourses and the extent to which children's voices and lived experiences are reflected in different research.

3.1 Discourses in the two-year-olds offer

3.1.1 Two-year-olds as future pupils or as beings in the present

The two-year-olds offer, the curriculum for two-year-olds, and much of the research into its implementation, see two-year-olds in terms of their readiness for school, or as future pupils, rather than as people in the present. Soler and Miller (2003) in a comparison of curricula from England, New Zealand and the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, described the UK

curriculum at the time (QCA, 2000) as evidence of a view of children which sees them as 'future pupils' and which is committed to 'subject'-related learning and the perceived need to prepare children for entry to schools (Soler and Miller, 2003 p. 66). Soler and Miller contrasted this, for example, with the child-centred, localised, community driven education in Reggio Emilia which sees children as competent agents in their education, with their own ideas and ways of representing them.

Edgington et al. (2012) and Leach (2008) in their critiques of the EYFS (DfCSF, 2008), maintained that the curriculum is aimed at monitoring children and that the different needs of very young children are not prioritised, but that instead they are seen as children on the way to being older. The view of children as future-pupils has become more marked in subsequent versions of the curriculum. There is less about children and more about assessment. The EYFS (2017) repeatedly states the importance of the foundation stage to enable children to 'make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up' (DfE, 2017 p. 5). The only statement related to children's present experience is where it suggests that 'A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right' (DfE 2017 p. 5).

The extent to which children are seen as people in the present is itself strongly age related with younger children seen more as becomings (Murris 2019) than beings and Bancovic (2014) cited Qvortup in suggesting that the idea of children progressing towards the completeness of adulthood implies that the younger a child is the less complete they are. Such a view could be understood as evidence of discourses about young children's vulnerability and lack of competence or as a symptom of them as a minority group lacking power (Mayall, 1994) but it could also be associated with differences, between two-year-olds and adults, in the modes with which they prefer to communicate.

The two-year-olds offer conceptualises education as a vehicle to accelerate children through developmental stages towards school readiness (House, 2011). This affects the experiences of two-year-olds. Such a way of looking at children and writing about them might have the effect of increasing pressure on practitioners to deliver 'educational' content in a short space of time rather than allowing children to engage with the world according to their own interests and timescales (House, 2011). A view of children as future beings who must be accelerated through a predetermined programme has an impact on children's experiences of play and outside play. The way time matters to children's experiences, play and meaning-making is explored later in this thesis in relation to my observations of two-year-olds.

The curriculum and the two-year-olds offer encapsulate a discourse that education consists of children passing through stages in which they acquire prescribed skills. If they pass through these stages or acquire the skills at the expected rate then they will be judged ready for school. This understanding of education and measurement constructs two-year-olds in the two-year-olds offer as being deficient.

3.1.2 Deficient children and families or capable ones

The two-year-olds offer conceptualised two-year-olds from low income families as 'disadvantaged' and suggested that they have a deficit which means that they will be less able when they start school. The associated discourses of disadvantage and deficit are indicated in the statements made in the press release when the offer was increased:

> All the evidence shows that if you compare two 5-year-olds hanging up their coats next to each other on the first day of school, the poorer child will already be behind their better off classmate. We know that good quality early education can make a huge difference in levelling the playing field and improving a child's life chances.' (DfE, 2014).

This discourse permeates the policy literature and research that preceded the two-year-olds offer and that which evaluates its implementation and uptake (e.g. Melhuish, Gardiner and Morris, 2017; Teager and Mcbride, 2018). However, there is other literature which suggests alternative ways of conceptualising disadvantage and deficit. Some literature suggests that the association of disadvantage and deficit, and the prescription of ECEC as an intervention, blames parents. Mathers et al. (2014) was a review of research carried out for the Sutton trust which aimed to explore the research evidence for the increase in the two-year-olds offer. Mathers et al. (2014) critiqued a discourse in policy which has shifted the explanation for lower attainment in young children onto poor parenting rather than poverty and lack of resources. It describes how poverty impacts children from before birth and how the stress of poverty impairs parental responsiveness to children. Mathers et. al (2014) recognised that, 'Many poor families struggle against the odds to protect their children from the ill effects of poverty' (Ibid p. 12). Dudley-Marling (2015), writing about the idea of deficit, suggested that the idea that some young children have a deficiency creates a problem and locates it in the minds, bodies, communities and cultures of those children (Dudley-Marling, 2015). Georgeson et al. (2014) found a similar discourse operating in that settings saw the free two-year places as requiring new roles of practitioners in supporting the parents of disadvantaged two-year-olds. A discourse that parents are deficient because they have a low

income could have a negative effect on the mutually trusting and supportive relationships that enable young children to make the best start at nursery (Early education, 2021).

3.1.3 Remedies for deficiency

The discourse, underpinning the two-year-old offer, that education can mitigate the effects of poverty is also questionable and pervasive. This discourse locates deficits, caused by poverty, in individuals, and expects schools to alleviate the effects. Other discourses locate the causes of poverty in government policy and suggest that poverty can only be alleviated by allocation of sufficient resources to families. It is argued that schools 'cannot be expected to solve the problems caused by the retrenchment of the welfare state' (O'Connell, Knight and Brannen 2019 p.80) Similarly, Christine Blower, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said early years staff could not "compensate entirely for the effects of poverty and disadvantage on children in their care"; she elaborated:

> If Sir Michael Wilshaw truly wants to see the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged children narrowed, then the focus needs to be on getting the government to stop reneging on child poverty targets and to reverse their ruthless welfare cuts" (Topping, 2015).

A view of children as becomings rather than as beings in the present is also associated with an understanding of children as components in the economy. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) explained such an approach to education as being of interest to government as a way of preparing an economically productive workforce. Such a view sees children both as crucial to future economic success, according to the attributes they bring to future workforce productivity, and as needing care to release mothers to work. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) identified a 'construction of the child as a knowledge, identity and culture reproducer' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999 p. 44) and made a link with Jenks' (1982) description of children constructed as becomings, and with Locke's view of children as empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge. Here the knowledge consists of the curriculum and dispositions required for successful participation in compulsory education. These ideas resonate with the two-year-olds offer and its stated aim of improving the school readiness of those children who are seen as less likely to become ready (DfE 2014). The probable unstated aim of the two-year-olds offer, to support mothers to work, also fits with a way of seeing children as important economically.

My research contrasts with such discourses by seeing disadvantaged children as competent meaning-makers in the present with their own feelings and preferences, rather than as a future workforce. The view of children as economic units, like the understanding of children as future pupils and the related schoolification (House 2011) of education for two-year-olds, makes their perspectives and feelings irrelevant and invisible in policy and research relating to the two-year-olds offer. The understanding of two-year-olds learning as the transmission of knowledge, from teacher to child, with the aim of increasing school readiness, further obscures the perspectives of two-year-olds and misunderstands the way in which they learn.

3.1.4 Two-year-olds in the curriculum

Children in the two-year-olds offer are subject to a curriculum prescribed by the government. In one sense two-year-olds are a social construction. They are all different and have been socially constructed as a homogeneous group. The curriculum is one of the ways in which this is done. Two-year-olds are constructed developmentally as incompetent becomings, and this is particularly true of children who receive the two-year-olds offer. As a group these children were referred to as less school ready than their more advantaged peers (DfE 2014). Two-year-olds are expected to be 'Beginning to put two words together (e.g. 'want ball', 'more juice')' (BAECE 2012 p.19); The curriculum and its associated technologies of measurement construct monolingual English speakers as the norm and could be seen to define children with EAL as outliers and as deficient. Monolingual classrooms in inner London are no longer the norm (Von Ahn et al 2010) and the process whereby some languages are devalued in relation to others, so that the acquisition of home languages is not seen as a strength, is problematic (De Saint-Georges 2013)

Two-year-olds are constructed psychologically as needing 'a familiar adult as a secure base from which to explore independently in new environments, e.g. ventures away to play and interact with others, but returns for a cuddle or reassurance' (BAECE 2012 p.8). They are expected to be able to 'play alongside peers' rather than with them (BAECE 2012 p.8). Physically two-year-olds are constructed as incompetent and dependent. the section on what a child is learning includes 'walks upstairs holding hand of adult.' (BAECE 2012 p.23). In another sense two-year-olds are materially different to older children and adults. They are small, they communicate differently from older children and adults and have different ways of moving.

Two-year-olds can be seen as a powerless group in society and their views are silenced in policy making, although they may be heard in other settings. The views of two-year-olds are sometimes ignored or belittled (for example when rage or grief is dismissed as tantrums (DfE 2021b. p. 26). The hegemony of spoken language sometimes means that when children communicate through other modes their communications are not attended to. Flewitt (2005a.), researching three and four-year-olds, found that they communicated multimodally, especially between each other but that 'the multimodality of pre-school children's meaning making remains undervalued and under-researched' Flewitt (2005a. p. 209).

Children in the two-year-olds offer are subject to a curriculum prescribed by the government. Changes in the curriculum for two-year-olds, indicate a move away from early years education as qualitatively different from education for older children. Over the last few decades, as the curriculum for two-year-olds has become statutory, it has become divided into subject areas and has become increasingly indicative of an expectation that children pass through age-related stages where they learn predetermined skills and knowledge towards 'school readiness' (DfE 2021a.p.5).

The first official curriculum for children under three in England was 'Birth to Three Matters' (DfES, 2002). This curriculum saw children as 'autonomous and competent learners' from birth, learning by doing, rather than by being told, and by 'building on their rich experiences' (Department for Education & Science, 2002 p. 5). DfES (2002) explicitly celebrates the competences of young children and 'steers away' from defined subject areas (DfES 2002 p.5). The curriculum for children under three (Birth to Three Matters DfES 2002) and the one for children from three to five (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000) were replaced in 2008 by the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfCSF, 2008a), for children from birth to the end of reception (aged five or six). This meant that subject areas in the national curriculum were extended down the age range to birth. The EYFS has been updated regularly since then and, at the time of writing, consists of a statutory document EYFS (DfE 2021a) and a non-statutory document EYFS development matters (DfE 2021b.) which apply to children from birth to 5.

Curriculum boundaries are important because they evidence a move away from the holistic co-construction of knowledge, based on the interest of the learner, towards learning as acquiring predefined knowledge organised by adults. They reflect a change in the locus of power and control.

> ‘How a society selects, classifies, distributes transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control’ (Bernstein, 1971, p. 47).

The difference between a holistic curriculum where children learn through following their own interests and a curriculum which is divided into subject areas with fixed learning goals indicates the kind of distinction Kress makes when he contrasts ‘learning’ with ‘conformity to authority around knowledge’ (Kress (2010 p. 183).

Brooker (2010) suggested that learning in early childhood has been characterised by shifts between a belief that learning is transmission (adult led) or that it is acquisition (child led). Learning as adult led is recognised as pedagogy while learning as child led is recognised as play (Brooker 2010 p. 41). This distinction is evident in the curriculum which I have argued has become more oriented towards understanding learning as the transmission of knowledge by adults rather than acquired through children’s inquiry.

As I noted in the previous chapter neither transmission or acquisition models of learning are compatible with the theoretical framework for my research. My research sees learning as co-constructed between participants and focuses mainly on the co-construction of learning between peers during play.

3.2 Play and outside play in the two-year-olds offer

This section compares ideas about play, and gives definitions of play that were used for this research. I trace the changing understanding of play, and outside play, in the curriculum for two-year-olds and suggest that as education has been increasingly understood as the teaching of measurable units of skills and knowledge ‘play’ has been accommodated into this model as a tool planned by adults to meet curriculum goals. I consider what factors might influence the outside play of two-year-olds receiving the two-year-olds offer. Finally, the section outlines the understanding of play as multimodal meaning making which underpins my research.

3.2.1 Competing understandings of play

In the introduction to this thesis I noted the difficulty of defining play and that there were competing models of play in the curriculum. I included a definition of play (Hedges 2010) which gives an idea of the meaningful nature of play, the centrality of children’s agency in play, the effort involved, and play’s location in social and cultural contexts. Another definition, which emphasizes agency and specifies exactly what I looked at in my fieldwork,

describes play as ‘self-chosen activities undertaken by children without adult direction’ (Bayley and Featherstone 2013).

Child-initiated outdoor play was selected, as a focus for observations of children in because it is an activity where children are arguably less constrained by adults in their meaning-making (Cowan, 2018). In child-initiated play, children are not being overtly controlled by adults although the expectations of the setting, the adult supervision and the physical features of the outside space all influence children’s play. Cowan, in research focusing on child-initiated play, states that:

> the choice to focus on child-initiated play enables a close consideration of children’s meaning-making in a range of forms and materials, placing particular attention on moments which are not positioned as direct acts of “teaching”, and so may not typically be given particular attention in early years settings’ (Cowan 2018 p. 11)

Brooker and Edwards (2010) note competing perspectives on play between those which emphasize children’s agency in play and those that see play as a mechanism for instilling prescribed learning. The curriculum for two-year-olds has become less focused on play since its inception and the model of play in the curriculum has changed from one which emphasises children’s agency to one which is instrumental.

Play is ubiquitous in the earliest statutory curricula for early years (QCA, 2000, DfES, 2002) but is much less evident in later versions e.g. DfE (2017). The change in who controls play can be seen most clearly in the literature which precedes and explains Birth to three matters (David et al., 2002). Children’s play here is frequently and consistently related to their autonomy. An example is one of the ‘key messages’ that ‘Play, in which the baby or child takes the lead and makes choices, is a process which fosters cognitive development’ (David et al., 2002 p. 112). The document goes on to state that ‘spontaneity is an essential characteristic of play’ and ‘it is the baby or child who is in control’ (David et al., 2002, p. 108). The same understanding of play is to a lesser extent expressed in the Birth to Three Matters curriculum (DfES, 2002).

The statement that ‘Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity’ (DfE, 2017, p. 9), reveals a different understanding of the meaning of play because of the shift in control from child towards adult. Both perspectives see play as supporting learning, but the phrase used in the more recent curriculum sees play as something which can be planned and

led or controlled by adults to achieve their purposes. This is not the play that I defined earlier this is play as an 'instrumental means for delivering academic outcomes.' (Wood and Hedges 2016 p. 394)

Understandings of play vary according to the age of children. The example of curricular changes above shows how younger children have a history of play being associated with learning. This does not apply to older children for whom play has been seen as a recreational activity. The gradual decrease in children's autonomy and choice as a component of play in the curriculum can be seen as a consequence of top-down pressure from the curriculum for older children when the curriculum became applicable to children aged from birth to five, rather than separate curricula for under threes and over threes (DfE, 2002; QCA, 2000).

3.2.2 Outside play in the two-year-olds offer

An understanding about learning which is closer to the way older children are expected to learn in school leads to a changed understanding about the place of outside play in the curriculum. The time for outside play in the curriculum has been reduced from a recommendation that children have free access to outside space to a requirement that children participate in outside activities daily. This is an example of a shift in control from children to adults, there is a considerable difference to children's experience between going outside when they want, and for as long as they want, as opposed to going outside to join a pre-planned activity.

Children's choice about where they play, and for how long, therefore, is restricted. In addition, a reduction in time outside also constrains children, because of the different ways in which inside and outside play are offered in nurseries (Cowan 2018). Stephenson (2002) notes that outside play is less supervised than indoor play, and that children are able and expected to move more freely and expansively in the outdoor space while they are expected to walk and speak quietly inside.

Children's experiences of outdoor play are culturally specific and this can be understood in relation to two-year-olds playing outside at an inner London nursery. experiences of outdoor play. Maynard and Waters (2007), in a research study about what happens in school reception classes, suggest that, unlike in some Scandinavian countries, being outside is not a part of UK culture and staff are therefore reluctant to engage with outside play while parents also express disapproval. Bilton (2014) also found weather to be reported as a drawback among half of

practitioners interviewed. The view of weather as a barrier to outside play has a considerable impact on the outside play of young children. This is likely to vary in different cultural groups and may also be influenced by economic factors as weatherproof clothes may not be prioritised or accessible to low income families

A discourse about risk also influences outdoor play, particularly physical and vigorous outdoor play (Knight, 2017; Tovey; 2007, Rosen, 2014). Wyver et al. identify 'surplus safety' (Wyver et al., 2010, p. 1), which is where an attempt to remove any risk from children's environments has the effect of exposing them to serious short and long-term risks and sometimes has the effect of distracting attention from greater dangers. Wyver et al. (2010) note competing discourses about the value of risk for children and describe nursery settings in Norway where risky play is permitted and seen as educationally valuable. Rosen (2014) found that while staff would endorse such an argument they were centrally concerned about safety when interacting with children's physical play in the garden. Rosen suggested that constructions of children as vulnerable, as 'animal', untamed or 'dangerous' (Rosen, 2014, p. 112), together with the anxiety caused by the continued emphasis on surplus safety, led practitioners to constrain children's physical play and to be 'ambivalent and contradictory about it' (Rosen, 2014, p. 108). Rosen's research is about the play of three to five-year-olds, but I speculate that there are some similarities with the experiences of two-year-olds, as well as some differences. It might be expected that two-year olds are seen as more vulnerable to both weather and accidents, and that this discourse might therefore cause adults to constrain their play more than it does that of older children.

Young children's physical movement and outdoor play are seen as important to their health, wellbeing and learning (Waller et al. 2017; Mathers et al., 2014; Georgeson et al., 2014; Knight, 2017) but there is a narrative, supported by research with older children, that children are increasingly indoors and inactive (Waller et al., 2017). Narrowing of the curriculum contributes to children being inside and sedentary in nursery settings (Waller et al., 2017; Rosen, 2016b) and this is informed by discourses prioritising school readiness and seeing two-year-olds as future pupils, rather than as children with their own views and feelings in the present.

Discourses which focus on young children's readiness for school prioritise children's speech and cognitive development in a way that reduces focus on their embodiment, physicality and outdoor play. These aspects are neglected in the research about the two-year-olds offer with

the exception of Mathers et al. (2014) and Georgeson et al. (2014). Mathers et al. stress young children's embodied learning and the importance of movement to young children's learning. Georgeson et al. (2014) note the comparative lack of research into the physical activity and development of two-year olds despite the emphasis on outside play in early years literature and the position of physical development as a 'prime area' in the EYFS (DfE, 2017).

Conversations with leaders at the settings observed and the literature review identified easy access to good facilities for outside play as key to high quality because of a perceived need for children to run around, but, in the questionnaire responses from leaders and practitioners, movement and physical development was not seen as one of the most important features of a high-quality setting. The lack of commitment to outside play and movement is seen as a training issue for early years educators by Georgeson et al. (2014), but such a perspective could also be seen as congruent with a view about early years education that cognitive and language skills are more important than other areas of learning, and that movement is separate from other learning.

A survey carried out by Ofsted seems to suggest that practitioners believe that both speech and adult direction are disproportionately important when teaching children who receive the two-year-olds offer (Ofsted, 2015). It concluded that in the 'best' settings practitioners focused primarily on speech, language and communication rather than on social or physical development when working with disadvantaged two-year-olds. The research was carried out by Ofsted inspectors who suggested that the play of disadvantaged two-year-olds should be predominantly adult led or supported (Ofsted, 2015).

The above suggestion was based on a 'finding' through observation at twenty-seven settings that disadvantaged two-year-olds were 'quiet observers of their surroundings, hesitant to interact and engage with new experiences' (Ofsted, 2015, p. 6). Disadvantaged two-year-olds were constructed as passive and incompetent and this construction was used to suggest that they need adults to teach them how to play and interact. This research was criticised by Wood (2019) because of its circular referencing and 'bias' (Wood 2019 p.18). Especially given the lack of transparency and external referencing in this research, Wood draws attention to the power Ofsted have over settings and the concomitant issues around their 'selective use of policy-led evidence' to both define problems and answer them (Wood 2019 p.18). It is

emblematic of the way in which policy currently frames play in early years and how this intersects with the deficit discourse about two-year-olds I outlined in the previous section.

My theoretical framework conceptualises children as agentic and capable learners. The theoretical approach of multimodality leads me to expect that two-year-olds make meanings but that adults fail to attend to their meanings when communication involves modes other than speech. Flewitt (2005) found adults failed to recognise multimodal communication in her ethnographic multimodal research on three-year-old children in nursery settings and meaning making in modes other than speech is also noted by Hackett (2014) and Cowan (2018) in their ethnographic multimodal research of two-year-olds and three and four-year-olds respectively.

Despite the emphasis on language in the curriculum (DfE 2021a. DfE 2021b.) Development matters (DfE 2021b.) includes some references to multimodal communication. Development matters notes that gesture and facial expression are ways in which young children communicate and that practitioners can use them to support children's understanding. These ways of communicating however are associated with younger children and babies and are not referred to in children over three. The treatment of modes other than spoken language implies that they are either a stage which very young children pass through on their way to language proficiency or are confined to a specific subject area.

Mark-making, model-making and manipulation of objects are seen as developing continuously from a young age through to age five but this is contained within the section on expressive arts and design and movement as a resource for meaning making is entirely absent from the curriculum. In contrast to this I propose a more holistic understanding of education for two-year-olds which conceptualises them as agentic multimodal meaning makers.

3.2.3 Outdoor play as multimodal meaning-making

Outdoor play is seen in my research as an opportunity to explore young children's multimodal meaning-making. Explaining play as meaning-making, Rosen (2016) defined it as:

'an inter-corporeal and intersubjective form of action with both real and imagined others, play is a space in which meanings are held up for collective interrogation, contestation, and reformulation.' (Rosen, 2016. p 4),

and cited the sociologist Henricks who stated that to play ‘is to take on the world, to take it apart, and frequently to build it anew.’ (Rosen, 2016 p. 4). These definitions emphasise the embodied nature of play, the way it is shared and its transformative possibilities.

A body of ethnographic research into young children’s meaning making (Cowan 2018; Flewitt, 2005; Hackett 2014; Änggård, 2011; Rosen 2014) concluded that a substantial part of young children’s meaning-making took place through modes other than speech. The research carried out by Rosen (2014) and Änggård (2011) was not explicitly multimodal, but children’s meaning-making through movement, sound and interaction with materials is foregrounded in a way which makes it pertinent to my research. Cowan (2018), Flewitt (2005) and Hackett (2014) however, researched young children’s play using social semiotic multimodal theory. Hackett’s multimodal research of children running in a museum is of particular interest here because it is carried out with two-year-olds and emphasises children’s meaning-making through movement in space, the other research mentioned was carried out with children aged three to five in nursery settings.

During outdoor play young children interact with features of the environment, for example, by using them as things to circle round, hide behind, use as passageways, points to run between, roll down, climb and as vantage points. Änggård (2011) notes the importance of weather and loose parts (for example leaves) to children’s play. Hackett (2014) describes how two-year-olds interact with features of a space to make meaning: ‘The modal choice of running and walking in the museum has communicative properties that spoken language and even gesture would not afford; it is extremely effective in drawing others’ attention to areas of the museum, linking self with specific aspects of the space and also impacting on that space – that is, place making.’ (Hackett, 2014, p. 23).

Cowan (2018) and Flewitt (2005) concluded from their research that play should be recognised as children’s ‘multimodal meaning-making’ and should be respectfully recognised ‘as learning…in order to give due attention to the semiotic work that is always present in child-initiated play’ (Cowan, 2018, p. 157). Cowan (2018) and Flewitt (2005) stated that play is always multimodal and that multimodal communication should not be seen as a way of compensating for a lack of competence in language, but as a way of conveying meaning through the most appropriate means.

The research above found that much of children’s communication took place in modes other than speech and that different spaces, activities and social groupings involved different use of

modes. In the museum (Hackett, 2014), the children's choice of modes was influenced by the spatial organisation of the museum and by the exhibits and materials provided there. Cowan's (2018) research takes place indoors and outdoors in a nursery setting and includes two case-studies of children playing outside which makes it particularly relevant to this thesis. One of these was role play in a small hidden wild space and the modes that were predominantly used here are described by Cowan (2018) as spatial, embodied, material and verbal. A feature of the episode of play was that children's use of particular spaces (a small, hidden space) and their spatial arrangement of materials (chairs) were important and 'under-recognised' factors in their meaning-making during play (Cowan, 2018, p. 96).

The other episode of outdoor play between four-year-olds recorded and analysed by Cowan involved a chasing game. Cowan (2018) noted all the discourses, described earlier in this literature review, which make children's running play unobserved and undervalued in nursery settings. Running games are seen as physical development in the early years curriculum (DfE, 2017), while the observations and analysis carried out by multimodal researchers such as Hackett and Cowan suggest that they should be recognised as 'sophisticated embodied play texts that are skilfully and responsively designed and re-designed in action' (Cowan, 2018, p. 135).

Cowan (2018) and Hackett (2014) note that gesture, gaze and qualities of movement such as speed and direction are the modes that are mainly used in this play. Proximity and distance, sudden changes of direction and contrasts between stillness and action were some of the ways in which movement and positioning in space were used to communicate rules and invite participation. Sound, such as laughing and screaming, was used as part of the play but speech was used occasionally when it was the most appropriate mode, considering factors such as distance from other participants and surrounding noise levels.

Pahl (1999) notes the creativity inherent in multimodal play and suggests that a recognition of the multiple modes with which children make signs extends our understanding of their creativity. Such a broad definition of creativity resonates with the characteristics of effective learning in Development Matters (British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2012, p. 7), which emphasised children 'making links' and 'finding their own ways to represent and develop their own ideas'. The EYFS (DfE, 2017) has a similar but greatly shortened version of the characteristics of effective learning but does not mention representation. In both documents the part of the curriculum that might be expected to link with creativity

(expressive arts and design) is focused on leading children towards representing their ideas through music, dance and visual representation so that children's multimodal creativity is not recognised as such in the curriculum.

As well as being creative, children's multimodal play is profoundly social. Hackett (2014) cited Wohlwend and Pahl who asserted that children's multimodal communication was strongly connected to their construction of their own identities and Hackett (2014) gives examples of such identity construction with two-year-olds in her research. Hackett (2014). Flewitt (2005) found that multimodal communicative practice was co-constructed between peers and was an important way in which young children negotiated social relationships. Drury (2007) researched children with EAL in nursery classes and found that social interactions with other children who were more experienced at speaking English, was an important resource for learning English. My research shows how the way two-year-olds with EAL conducted relationships through their multimodal play supported their learning.

Making meaning in modes other than speech, however, is not associated with a lack of language, some research and literature indicates that children use a variety of modes because they are particularly good at communicating multimodally. Hackett (2014) notes that young children are very effective multimodal meaning-makers and Cowan (2018) suggests that they are less constrained by adult cultural expectations around the use of materials and modes which enables them to be more flexible and creative in their communication. Kress asserted that young children have a synaesthetic creative tendency where they are able to fluidly use different modes but that such a tendency is overlooked and discouraged by adults (Kress 1997 p. 104).

This lack of adult appreciation of young children's multimodal meaning making means that children's 'voices' are unheard. Flewitt (2005) suggested that some children are more likely than others to experience this silencing. Cowan, researching three and four-year-olds, found that practitioners struggled to recognise the learning of children who were independent of adults, who played outside a lot or were highly kinetic and those who were not confident in English (Cowan and Flewitt, 2020, p.123). Flewitt (2005) compared three-year-old children at home and (inside) at nursery. Flewitt found that at nursery children who did not speak were pathologized although they all spoke freely at home. At nursery the children used gaze, facial expression and body movement to communicate but these were not always acknowledged. Flewitt suggested that 'the multimodality of pre-school children's meaning making remains

undervalued and under-researched' (Flewitt 2005 p. 209). My research aims to make visible the meanings, experiences and learning of some two-year-olds playing outside at nursery during the pandemic.

3.3 Play at nursery during the pandemic

The context of this research during the global pandemic was important because the changes made, due to the restrictions (DfE 2020), meant that particular changes could be studied. In addition, the context of the global pandemic means that the thesis can contribute understandings of the experiences of an under-represented group to literature about children in the pandemic.

Research about young children in the pandemic is emerging but it was almost always carried out by consulting parents and practitioners. (e.g. Pascal and Bertram 2020 p.2; Ofsted, 2020a) and rather than focusing on children's experiences it was about learning loss (EIF, 2021; DfE, 2021c; Campbell, 2021; Hall, 2022) and 'catch-up' (EIF, 2021; Ofsted 2022;). The ideas of learning loss and catch-up have been particularly applied to 'disadvantaged' children (e.g. EIF, 2021). These ideas resemble those underpinning the two-year-olds offer in their understanding of learning as measurable, and as a race where learners are ranked. They also assume that children only learn at school and in the context of teacher-led indoor activities.

There has been little research on the lived experience of very young children in England during the pandemic. This is partly because of the lack of access to children at a time when families were isolated and visitors to nurseries were forbidden (DfE 2020a.) but it can also be seen as part of a pattern identified earlier in this thesis that children are not recognised as people in the present who have opinions that matter. Young children have seldom been directly consulted about their experiences during the global pandemic. Exceptions in the UK include children's commissioner for Wales (2020); Pascal and Bertram (2021); and Potter et al. (2022).

Pascal and Bertram (2021) used observations of play and conversations with children in nurseries between August 2020 and December 2020 alongside conversations with practitioners and parents. They deployed practitioners to elicit information from children, aged three and four-years-old, in nursery settings in England, Scotland and New Zealand. This research emphasised that children wanted to play outside and that consistent relationships were important to the children.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) consulted children over seven through an online questionnaire. Younger children were invited to contribute through a simplified questionnaire, and invited to submit drawings, and children aged between three and seven responded. The findings for children aged three to seven were that children mainly felt happy and safe despite missing some friends, teachers and family members. The majority of the younger children reported playing more than previously. The main report for children aged three to eighteen states that many children described positive aspects of the crisis, 'For many there has been a pleasure in spending more time with their family, learning new skills and enjoying the outdoors in gardens and during daily exercise.' (The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021 p.5)

Potter et al (2022) was an interdisciplinary piece of research which aimed at exploring children's play during the pandemic. This took the form of a survey requesting contributions from children, parents and organisations working with children. The overall findings concern the diversity of children's experiences, the resilience, adaptability and importance of children's play, and the possibilities afforded by new technology and online play.

The understanding that play, and outside play was important to children during the pandemic is a common theme that uniting these three pieces of research which resonates with my research. Rogers (2022) stated that there has been little research into children's opportunities for play during the pandemic and suggested that play is the mechanism which enabled children to be resilient (Rogers 2022).

The research discussed above aimed to give voice to children about their experiences in the pandemic. It did this by consulting them in creative ways and accepting that children may respond in ways which differ from the way adults habitually communicate. The research asserts that children's views are worth hearing:

> Children have powerful narratives about how they have been affected by lockdowns and the subsequent opening up of public spaces and places, and we believe that this deserves serious consideration by practitioners and policy makers' (Pascal and Bertram 2021)

It is also notable that, in line with this, the Welsh government stated that they will ensure the experiences and views of children and young people are central to government decisions that affect them (Children's Commissioner for Wales 2021p. 32). Contributions by two-year-olds are almost entirely absent, however, and the extent to which participation is mediated by

parents, practitioners and technology selects certain children and narratives over others (Willet 2022).

Literature and research around the pandemic has also sometimes suggested that something could be learnt from the way nurseries were changed during the pandemic so that they could be 'built back better' (Qvortup and Lykkegaard, 2023). Their research proposed that the changes can be seen as an unexpected experiment where changed ways of providing early years education can be explored. Carrying out the fieldwork during the pandemic enabled me to explore how some changed circumstances in West street nursery influenced children's play.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology and research design

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will explain the methodology that has been employed to explore the outside play experiences of the two-year-olds at West street children's centre. I have argued in the previous chapter that a combination of social constructionism, childhood studies and social semiotic multimodality will provide the appropriate theoretical framework to understand children's realities and interactions in a specific place and culture. The theoretical framework is linked to the chosen methodological approach. Childhood studies considers the reality of children as being constructed through interactions. It argues that using an interpretative epistemological approach, particularly ethnography, 'is a useful methodology for the study of childhood' which is seen as enabling children's voice to be more directly represented than through other methods (Prout, 2005 p. 60).

In my research, ethnography allowed me to immerse myself in the setting and document children's interactions in ordinary settings. Multimodality is both a theoretical and methodological approach that allowed me to research children playing outside and pay attention to interaction in various modes.

I observed children's communication through modes such as movement, gesture, posture and speech. Discussion about the relationship between social semiotic multimodality and ethnography is in section 2.6.

This chapter explains what is seen as real in this research and how the phenomena can therefore be investigated. I see the reality of these children as being constructed through interactions and it follows that using an interpretative epistemology and a qualitative research methodology will allow my inquiry to capture the experiences of these children. Ethnography is an appropriate methodology for gathering detailed data about children's behaviour over time and understanding their social contexts. The discussion about ethnography explains how observations and the use of video recording would enable me to observe children's communication through modes such as movement, gesture, posture and speech.

I describe how the data was multimodally transcribed and then how thematic analysis was deployed as a method for interrogating the data for understandings about the meaning-making

of two-year-olds during outdoor play. The following sections of the chapter provide an overview of the relational ethical approach used in the research and justify choices made about consent and anonymity. They then describe the local area, some attributes of the setting, and details about the children that were in the bubble that I observed. Finally, I give details about which children I observed, when and why.

4.1 Ontological and epistemological foundations

The aim of this research is to find out about how a group of two-year-olds experience outdoor play at nursery. The philosophy behind research determines what kind of knowledge can be produced (Hughes, 2010; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). This section describes how the philosophical perspectives of interpretivism/constructionism and multimodality frame my research. Such a philosophical worldview is known as a paradigm. Hughes (2010) defined a paradigm as a way of seeing the world and organising the world. It is a 'frame' (Hughes 2010 p.36) for research, which influences the way in which a topic is understood.

Hughes' definition of a paradigm encompasses a range of interrelated and congruent beliefs about research, from a philosophical world view to aspects of research methodologies. I understood theory, methodology and research design as inseparable parts of an interlocking whole. This aligns with the idea that theory is 'symbiotic' with the actions of researchers (Collins and Stockton 2018). I applied theory at every stage of the research.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) organised the levels of thinking that constitute a paradigm into ontology, epistemology and methodology and defined them as:

> 'Ontology (what kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?); epistemology; (what is the relationship between the enquirer and the known?) and methodology (how do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?)' (Denzin and Lincoln 2018 p. 12).

The kind of information my research produces is underpinned by my ontological and epistemological assumptions, and a qualitative methodology that resonates with my personal view that two-year-olds should be understood as subjects with thoughts and feelings that are embodied and this view is in in contrast to the policy and the research that has informed the two-year-olds offer.

4.1.1 Interpretivism, social constructionism and multimodality

As discussed in the literature review this policy and research has seen children as members of large homogeneous groups such as those who are disadvantaged and those who are more

advantaged. A positivistic view in policy and research has favoured quantitative methods to assess children's development and achievement. Issues such as the impact of nursery attendance on different groups of children through measurements of their achievement have been at the top of the agenda. In contrast, my personal and professional experience and my research interests lead me to see children as diverse members of their communities and my research aims to understand their meaning-making, rather than assuming a causal relationship which I contend is the aim with the positivist research associated with the two-year-olds offer.

My research is located within the interpretivist/constructionist paradigm as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2018):

> 'The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018 p. 13).

I am interested in understanding how children create meanings socially during their daily lives. This is why interpretivism/constructionism, childhood studies and a social semiotic approach to multimodality are combined in my research. Social constructionism, constructionism and constructivism are terms that appear to be used synonymously in different texts (Bryman 2016) although Schwandt (1998) suggested that there are many different meanings accommodated within these labels. Social constructionism is used in this research to emphasise the social aspect of the paradigm and constructivism is avoided, due to its meaning in education as a theory about learning.

Social constructionism focuses on 'the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes.' (Schwandt, 1998 p. 240). This meaning-making 'takes place within shared systems of intelligibility-usually a spoken or written language' (Gergen and Gergen, 1991 p. 78) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that, because of this, social constructionist research is interested in the processes of interaction between people. This is also the central interest in social semiotic multimodality which sees all meaning making as involving interpretation. However, social semiotic multimodality views meaning as shaped by, and articulated through, all modes of communication and not solely through language.

My research sees young children as making meaning socially during their outdoor play in nursery settings and is interested in the processes through which they do this. For instance,

children express and interpret meanings made. This is through modes such as movement and gesture as well as sound and spoken language. The aim in social constructionist research is to understand the meanings made by participants and how they make them. The aim of social semiotic multimodality is to understand how participants are involved in processes of making and interpreting meaning through the use of all the semiotic resources available in social contexts and the implications of this (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016).

My research sees meanings and methods of communicating as particular to specific groups, places and times. This is why my research focuses closely on a group of children in the nursery that they attend and why I decided to spend a period of time there. I am aiming to understand their historical and cultural setting. Fish (1989) explained how social constructionists understand this cultural, geographical and historical specificity:

> 'Reality is the result of the social processes accepted as normal in a specific context and knowledge claims are intelligible and debatable only within a particular context or community' (Fish 1989 p. 24).

4.1.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a cluster of ideas about research and ways of carrying out research. It is a term which covers a wide range of research strategies and contains tensions. This makes it difficult to define (Hammersley, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Denzin and Lincoln's generic, seminal definition is given below:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations and qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin and Lincoln 2018 p.3)

Several authors have discussed the features of qualitative research (e.g. Lichtman, 2012; Hammersley, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and they have proposed key features of qualitative research which are in broad consensus, although Hammersley (2013) suggested that these characteristics are not all shared by every piece of qualitative research. The following paragraphs explain why my research draws on the features suggested by these authors to explain qualitative methodology.

Qualitative research focuses on the participants' meanings and my research aims to understand the meanings that children make of their play in the outside space of their nursery

setting. It aims to see things from their perspective, and it foregrounds how they make meaning. This is one of the features of qualitative research. 'In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue' (Creswell and Creswell 2018). One of the ways in which qualitative researchers do this is by getting closely involved with a group of people in their ordinary social situations in order to understand their perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

Qualitative research takes place in the natural, everyday contexts of social situations. The naturalistic methodological procedures follow from the interpretative/constructionist paradigm and the social semiotic multimodality that underpin my research. I researched everyday activities carried out on a regular or daily basis (Brinkmann, 2012 p. 24) in the nursery playground.

Researchers doing qualitative research influence the setting, the participants, and findings of the study. My relationship with the children participating in my research needs careful consideration so that I can reflect on how my presence will influence children's interactions. The researcher's subjectivity in making relationships, understanding the social situation, and interpreting the data is considered to be a part of research and considerations around subjectivity and relationships will be discussed later in this chapter. In my research I spent time getting to know the children and being a part of their experience at nursery and I saw these relationships as important to the research and described them carefully.

Description and explanation are important in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers include details of the context and of interactions in order to create a comprehensive understanding of the social situation. The emphasis on description contrasts with quantitative research which emphasises facts or measurements rather than description. I aim to describe in detail the actions of the children and the surrounding context so that readers will be able to understand what happened. Qualitative researchers need to explain how they came to the conclusions of their research because this can be more complex than in research which is testing a hypothesis.

Rather than the theory testing approach that might be found in quantitative research, qualitative researchers build explanation and understanding from data. My research aims to expand theory about how two-year-olds multimodally make meaning in the nursery garden through analysing data collected about their outside play.

> Qualitative researchers place more emphasis on generating and developing descriptions and explanations than upon testing pre-defined hypotheses. This means that a flexible research design is adopted, rather than one in which a detailed plan is laid out at the start of the research and then 'implemented'. This is also reflected at the stage of analysing data, where the task is to generate categories rather than to place data into pre-determined ones' (Hammersley, 2013 p. 12).

Qualitative researchers understand meanings as specific to place and time and therefore emphasise the importance of context in understanding social situations. Context in my research refers to the geographic location of the nursery, the spatial aspects of the nursery and the way in which these are organised. Time is relevant in my research because nursery practices and policies change over time. The presence of these two-year-olds in nurseries and the discourses and practices that surround them are particular to this historical moment. Time is also relevant to my research because weather and the way in which time is organised in the nursery on a daily basis influence children's experiences of outdoor play. Context also refers to the social, historical, cultural, and personal histories of the actors involved and the complex social interactions between them.

Because qualitative researchers see social situations as dependent on their context, and therefore not replicable, traditional generalisability has been seen as incompatible with qualitative research (Ward Schofield 2011). Some researchers have developed conceptions of generalizability that are useful and appropriate for qualitative research. For example Brinkman (2015) suggests the term transferability where researchers analyse the extent to which situations might be similar. So that this is possible researchers need to provide rich description and detail of the setting, and its context, as well as the way in which the research is carried, out and the standpoint and perspective of the researcher.

4.2 Research design

The qualitative research methodology described above is underpinned by the ontology and epistemology of interpretivism/constructionism and social semiotic multimodality. This philosophical worldview, my research aims, and my personal experience lead towards a qualitative strategy of inquiry that enables me to explore the meanings made by two-year-olds at nursery. Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 14) defined a strategy of inquiry as 'a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world'. I have explained these assumptions (ontological and epistemological) as well as the key features of qualitative research and I use the term research design to describe the plan for data collection and analysis

Qualitative strategies of inquiry include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnographies, case study, action research and discourse analysis (Crotty, 1998; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The strategy of inquiry selected for this research was ethnography combined with social semiotic multimodality. The compatibility of ethnography with social semiotic multimodality was discussed in chapter 2.

Ethnography was selected because of the need to get deeply involved with the participants and setting in order to understand the children's experiences and perspectives and the way in which they express them. Ethnography enables a researcher to collect detailed localised data about a social situation over time. Brewer described ethnography as:

> 'The study of people in naturally occurring settings or fields by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings, and ordinary activities involving the researcher participating in the setting, if not also the activities, to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally' (Brewer, 2000 p. 49).

My research design did this through combining the ethnographic principles described above to get to know the children and their social and material context and using social semiotic multimodality to understand and reveal how they made meaning making through movement and other modes.

These children use varying levels of spoken English and their communication, especially that directed to peers, is expressed largely through the modes of gesture, sound, movement, facial expression, manipulation of objects and touch. Understanding these children's communications is only possible when their context is known and employing ethnographic observation is a way of achieving this. In order to understand the way young children communicated I combined ethnography with social semiotic multimodality. My research design follows Kress' pragmatic approach of a temporary assembly of theoretical tools which works for a particular study (Kress, 2011).

The time ethnographic researchers spend in the field can be years, in order to deeply understand social situations. Time in the field in ethnographic studies varies widely and my research commits to the idea that it takes time to get to know participants and to understand social situations. Because the time for this research was limited and because of its use of video recording, my research could be seen as 'focused ethnography' (Knoblauch 2005,) where a particular aspect of a social setting is studied and 'the short duration of field visits is

typically compensated for by the intensive use of audio-visual technologies of data collection and data analysis' (Knoblauch, 2005).

4.2.1 Positioning and reflexivity in ethnography

Subjectivity and the position of the researcher in relation to participants is seen as part of ethnographic research (Sprague, 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The importance of context in social constructionism and the idea, from interpretivism, that researchers need to interpret what participants mean leads to a recognition of the influence of the researcher on research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Acknowledging this, and including it in research, given the socially constructed nature of interaction understood here, enhanced the depth and meaning of the research. (Komulainen, 2007).

My experience as a nursery teacher led to some understanding of the daily lives of young children in nursery settings, to an ability to blend into nursery settings, and to contacts which enable me to gain access to a nursery setting. This professional interest and understanding can be both valuable and problematic as this research requires a different perspective. My positioning as an experienced nursery teacher has entailed decades of observations focusing on individual child development. This research requires me to look at children through a different 'lens (MacNaughton 2000), because I am observing for different reasons.

As Knoblauch (2005) suggested, 'This knowledge constitutes a methodological problem in its own right. It has to be controlled; it has to be taken into account reflexively' Knoblauch (2005, para. 6). Knoblauch was arguing that ethnographers need to be able to approach situations that are familiar as though they are strange. This enables new questions to be asked about mundane social phenomena that were previously too obvious to be reflected upon (Gunderson 2020).

My position as an insider researcher also brings challenges and opportunities. The setting was quite familiar and I needed to overcome this familiarity, although during the research I was working under quite changed conditions which made many people question what was normal. It was quick and easy to gain the relative trust of staff and to gain information about the setting. We worked together when I was not observing, this meant that we were in a mutually supportive relationship. They knew who I was and I could see that their interactions with the children were similar when I was working and when I was-observing. Some practitioners avoided being recorded on the video but that did not significantly affect my data as I was aiming to record children rather than adults.

Mercer (2007) suggested that researchers are always on a continuum between outsider and insider according to different facets of the situation. I was an insider as a work colleague but was an outsider as a new member of staff and as someone who did not work with the two-year-olds in their long-standing team. I was positioned in various ways in relation to members of the team because of my age, gender, ethnicity, status as a teacher and perceived relationship with the Head of centre. Although I had not worked directly with the two-year-olds I was a familiar figure to the older children and most of the two-year-olds would have seen me. This level of familiarity and distance with the two-year-olds made it easier to be an observer. My positioning as insider and outsider had an impact on how I could carry out the research. To enable me to consider aspects of my positionality, and to remember and reflect on my experiences of the research, I kept a journal during the fieldwork This is described in section 4.2.5

4.2.2 Methods of data collection

Ethnographic research may involve a variety of methods and I have selected methods which are suited to collecting data about the experiences of two-year-olds in the nursery playground and the way in which they make meaning. The mosaic approach (Clarke and Moss, 2017) is an approach which has been used to gain the perspectives of three and four-year-olds (Baird, 2013; Clarke and Moss, 2017) by using a variety of methods such as child interviews, looking at children's drawings, asking children to take adults on tours, asking children to take photographs and talk about them and talking to their parents and key person. When applied to two-year-olds, however, observation was the only method used which directly involved the child (other methods include asking the parents, sibling, and key person).

The mosaic approach resonates with multimodality in its attempt to understand children's communication through using methods tours, and visual representations to elicit their meanings which do not solely rely on speech. However, the methods do not readily apply to two-year-olds because they are not closely attuned to the way in which two-year-olds communicate. When the mosaic approach is applied to two-year-olds it depends heavily on consulting parents, staff in the nursery and siblings. This is not the focus of this research. I wanted to look at how children communicated with each other in their everyday play in the nursery playground. This is explained by the following quote:

> Methods grounded in visual and embodied modes enabled us to recognise the subtleties of children's communicative practices, and to problematise some of the

> dominant models of communication and learning which tend to prioritise Western and/or adult perspectives. (Hackett and Yamada Rice, 2015 p. 30)

My research sees children as competent multimodal communicators and the aim of the research is to explore how they communicate rather than offering them methods with which adults are more familiar. The research methods used remained close to children's expression and communication as they play, rather than asking them to do something else. This way of eliciting children's perspectives is informed by Stephenson's reflection when working with children aged two to four (Stephenson 2009) and Baird (2013), whereby some significant insights occurred when children had the opportunity to interact with the researcher freely, using their own ways of communicating and choosing their own times and contexts, rather than during the completion of a planned research exercise. In the two cases mentioned, in Stephenson (2009) the children communicated by manipulating objects. Their communication would have been missed in research which did not recognise this communication or only recognised meaning making which fitted adult expectations such as responses to an adult planned task.

Multimodal research with three and four-year-olds (Flewitt, 2005a.; Cowan, 2018) and with two-year-olds in a museum (Hackett 2014), suggested that different environments and activities are associated with the use of different modes of communication. Cowan (2018) stated that some outdoor activities particularly involved three and four-year-olds in communication through movement. This research aims to understand how two-year-olds make meaning in the outdoor spaces of their nursery settings.

Because of the above considerations, the methodological ideas, my understanding of how children communicate, the location of the research and in order to best answer my research questions the data for my research was planned to be collected using observing and video recording the children during their outdoor play. The first method of collecting data is observations which are both ethnographic and multimodal in character. These will be described in this research as multimodal ethnographic observations.

4.2.3 Multimodal ethnographic observations

The main method of collecting data is through observation of two-year olds during self-directed activity in the nursery garden. Self-directed behaviour here means that which is chosen by children as opposed to activities directed by adults. This behaviour is selected

because it is seen as more indicative of children's own desires and interests, as mediated by the context of what the setting encourages and provides. This is also a way of sharpening the focus on the young children rather than on the behaviour of the adults working with them. The plan was for children to be observed for two sessions a week over two months.

These observations are ethnographic because they take place when the researcher is embedded in the social setting of the nursery over a period of time. Embeddedness in a social situation implies close and familiar relationships. At the beginning of the research, time was spent getting to know the staff, the setting, and the children. Most time in the setting was spent observing and videoing but being friendly and open at the beginning and end of sessions and assisting staff and children will support positive research relationships and enable embeddedness. These observations are participant observations because I am speaking with children where appropriate and participating in some of the work of the setting (Bryman, 2016). Participating in the life of the setting enables a greater understanding of it. Murchison suggested that because the researcher is participating they can 'discover and analyse the categories and questions that are most relevant for the people being studied' (Murchison, 2010 p.12).

Children's thoughts and feelings are understood in this research to be embodied (Mayall, 2008). My research is looking at what children do with their bodies and what meaning can be made from this. Observations focus on children's movement and on their behaviour in groups. As a way of focusing on movement, my research is collecting data using video recordings of the children's play outside after the initial period of familiarisation.

4.2.4 Video observation

Video recording enables a close focus on physical movements and multimodal communication. It produces a 'fine grained multi- modal record' (Jewitt 2012 p.6) By considering children's multi-modal communication I aim to represent the perspectives of two-year-olds more fully and gain insights into how this group of young children in the nursery garden make meaning. Video is able to record the sequential and temporal nature of interaction and can be revisited and slowed down so that information can be gathered which was not immediately clear. This is valuable when exploring aspects of young children's meaning making which may be unfamiliar to the researcher.

This research is using a single hand-held IPad which makes it partial in the sense that it records what the researcher points it at. This means that the recording is both a product of the

selective interest of the researcher and is limited by the ability of the researcher to follow the action with the recording equipment. Where children move some distance their speech or vocalisations are unlikely to be recorded audibly. In order to make transparent decisions about what to record, and when, these decisions and their rationale are noted. The act of recording children might affect the behaviour of the two-year-olds. Many settings however use video recording to record children's development so the children may be habituated to it (Jewitt 2008). Jewitt argued that the researcher's subjectivity, in using video and issues arising from the technology, is part of the investigation and as such notes regarding will be recorded in the research journal and considered in the use of video and in the analysis of the data.

A video recording is constructed rather than an impartial record of what happened (Robson, 2011; Jewitt, 2012). This raises issues for researchers about who is selected and what is the focus. The ethnographic aspect of this research counterbalances this so there is a sense of the typicality or strangeness of the events recorded and the careful use of the research journal explains choices concerning the video recording. Flewitt (2006) described the use of ethnographic observations alongside video recording as creating more than a 'mosaic' of complementary data but as generating a 'new multisemiotic dynamic, creating relationships between different data sets' (Flewitt 2006 p.29). The video recordings are also constructed in the sense that this research uses an iterative strategy where data are analysed as they are generated, and further recordings can be made as a particular aspect becomes interesting in the light of this.

Video was used to record play among groups of two-year-olds in the nursery garden. Initial selections about what to observe or video were made prior to the observations so that a variety of children are observed in a variety of places and activities. The length of video recordings will depend on the activity being observed and its relevance for my research. About ten video recordings of about ten minutes each were planned, based on making two a week at a stage of the research when children and staff are familiar with the presence of the researcher. Transcribing video is time consuming (Mavers 2012) so the extracts transcribed and used will be selected according to their value in answering the research questions. Mavers discussed some of the tensions in these decisions and emphasised that they influence the nature of the research and so need to be carefully considered. As I explained above I noted decisions, questions, impressions and feelings that occurred to me, during fieldwork, in a research journal. Using this journal strengthened the personal, contextual and

methodological reflexivity of my research during data collection and analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

4.2.5 The research Journal

Field notes were written as immediately as possible recording my feelings, ideas, and impressions and this was to be used as part of the data. Using a research Journal enabled me, as the researcher, to better consider, and respond to, ethical dilemmas relationally (Mosselson, 2010; Reinharz, 1997). I used the research journal to note feelings and issues in order to be able to reflect on positionality and other influences on the data collection. Appendix 8 is an example of a research journal entry.

There were two main categories of entry in the research journal, contextual details which might help me to interpret what happened in the video recordings and reflections about how I felt during the research. Contextual information included the weather, who was present that day and things that were said that I felt might be relevant.

An example is included in appendix 8, the weather was cooler than it had been and most of the staff were complaining about this. Ibrahim's mother said she thought it was too cold for Ibrahim to play outside. The lead practitioner said that she thought it would get warmer and she offered to get Ibrahim one of the nursery's spare coats if it was cold. I wrote down this information because I thought it might influence the outside play I would observe that morning, especially that of Ibrahim. In fact, Ibrahim played outside all morning and so did most of the children present although some staff stayed inside. These observations in the research journal raised some questions about parental and staff preferences regarding outside play.

Another incident recorded in the research journal was a conversation I had with a staff member who said that she felt anxious when I was videoing children. She felt that I might be observing her. I immediately reassured her that I was not aiming to look at adults and in the longer term this made me more thoughtful about how I positioned myself, how I was able to reassure staff, and what impact the apprehension staff may have had about being observed may have had on the research.

I noted many incidents where there was tension between my professional role and my role as a researcher. One day I stopped videoing because there was a new parent present who only spoke Arabic. I felt that she was quite anxious and chose to demonstrate that I was supporting

children because developing a relationship of trust with this parent was more important to me in that moment than a short period of videoing. Although I lost some time researching this ultimately helped the research because I was later able to sign this parent up for my research using an Arabic translator.

The status of the research journal as a place where I wrote my immediate thoughts and feelings meant that what I wrote was often what interested and concerned me rather than directly related to the research questions. This meant that some data about the emotional responses of two-year-olds was included in the research journal.

4.3 Data analysis

4.3.1 Multimodal Transcription of video footage

It was planned to watch the video footage repeatedly, viewing it with and without sound and in slow motion, speeded up, and paused so that the researcher becomes very familiar with the material (Jewitt 2012). It is then transcribed. Researchers emphasising multimodal aspects of communication refer to transcription as a process of transduction because this term emphasises the process of translating data from one mode into another (Bezemer and Mavers, 2011). In multimodal research the process of transcribing video emphasises the modes through which communication takes place and how they are used together to create meaning.

As suggested previously in the section about video observation a qualitative and social constructionist approach sees video footage as a subjective representation rather than an objective record. The process of transduction is a further representation of the footage which foregrounds some aspects rather than others according to the interests of the researcher. Strategies for multimodal transcription of video include written ways of recording communication in writing and also methods of recording communication visually. Some ways of transcribing video visually include the use of drawings, video stills and mapping (Mavers 2012, Cowan 2018).

The ways in which video is transcribed depend on the researcher's interests, and on the videos themselves, and therefore it is not possible to make these choices in advance of the research being carried out. The aims of this research to understand children's communication through movement, however, made it important to choose the methods for transcribing each video episode that foregrounded the ways in which children express themselves through movement. Where children were moving in space as part of their play mapping of their

movement was appropriate and combinations of ways of representing communication, such as stills, line drawings, maps and comic strip style sequences were considered in the light of their suitability to represent different video sequences in order to foreground the children's ways of communicating. (e.g. Cowan 2018).

When making decisions about how to transcribe visual data some aspects are represented in detail and others neglected because of these choices. Bezemer and Mavers (2011) noted that multimodal strategies for representing transcription are not standardised in the way that conventional methods are and that this does not need to be the case but that 'it is crucial to make these gains and losses transparent, for example which modes of communication used in the observed activity have been excluded from the transcript and why and what the effect is of that exclusion on the analysis and subsequent reader interpretation' (Bezemer and Mavers 2011 p. 201). The process of transduction of video footage is a methodological choice and the reasoning behind decisions is relevant to the research. I watched the videos repeatedly, with and without sound, and often stopped and re-watched fragments. As a result of this I transcribed the videos focusing, separately, on gaze, facial expression, gesture, movement, speech and manipulation of objects. A few examples of parts of the transcription are included as appendix 7.

4.3.2 Thematic analysis

Qualitative research, especially that including video observations, (Jewitt 2012) generates large amounts of rich data (Lofland et al 2006; Bryman 2016). The data produced consist of written observations with field notes, multimodal video transcriptions, and a research journal. The analysis of these data begins from the start of fieldwork because the process of analysing the data is then used to guide future data collection.

The strategy that was used for analysing the data was thematic analysis (Bryman 2016). This was influenced by grounded theory (e.g. Charmaz, 2006). The way in which this was carried out was applied flexibly in response to ideas suggested by the analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bryman 2016). The first step was for the researcher to become very familiar with the data (Lofland et al., 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bryman, 2016). In my research transcribing the video footage generated familiarity.

The data were coded in different ways as the analysis progressed. In qualitative research coding means 'naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorises, summarises and accounts for each piece of data' (Charmaz 2006 p. 44.). The first coding

carried out was initial coding (Charmaz, 2006), where coding is applied to each line so that the analysis is close to the data. The material that I coded were the multimodal video transcripts and the research journal. (appendices 7 and 8).

I photocopied them, cut them up and arranged them according to themes. An example of this is in appendix 9. This grouping of ideas into themes from the data took place whilst retaining an understanding of the data as a whole. This was because I wanted to retain important information about the whole episodes of play as well as analysing parts of them and exploring similarities and differences. I did this by retaining the whole transcript as well as the parts.

Subsequent layers of analysis consisted of refining the codes through comparing them and exploring ways in which they might be grouped, which were the most frequent, significant or surprising. During these phases of analysis, the relationship between the emerging categories, the literature and the research questions was considered, and the large amount of data was synthesised into fewer detailed and more explanatory or theoretical categories. A matrix was used to represent and further examine the relationship between the data and concepts arising from analysis. As the relationships between categories were explored, understandings and explanations emerged which were based in the data. The aim of the analysis was to elicit understandings, from the data, about the children's multimodal construction of their outdoor play. A representation of the themes generated from this analysis is appendix 10.

In order to do the research, I needed to obtain consent from stakeholders; the next section explains the process.

4.4 Ethical issues in researching nursery settings

4.4.1 Access and consent

The research was carried out in the children's centre where I work as a teacher. I gained written consent from the headteacher using the letter in appendix 2. I shared the information sheet, in appendix 1, with offers of further information as required. The headteacher can be seen as a gatekeeper. These are people who can give formal access to a setting and sponsors are those who can help with access to a setting in a less formal way (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Sponsors are able to give access to other relationships such as with parents and children and sponsorship is gained through making relationships.

The staff who work with the two-year-olds were sponsors in this research and I got consent from them verbally and then in writing (appendix 3) and shared the information sheet (appendix 1). Time was spent initially on building positive relationships with staff and parents and attention was paid to maintaining these relationships throughout the fieldwork as suggested by Albon and Rosen (2014). Following this I got consent from parents using the information sheet and consent letter in appendices 4 and 1 respectively, and using the relationships already made with the sponsors and gatekeeper. After this I sought consent from the children. This order of gaining consent is necessary because it reflects relationships of power and responsibility regarding settings and children.

4.4.2 Consent from children

Informed consent is based on participants knowing about the research, how they would be involved, and that they may withdraw (BERA 2018). Young children will understand research differently from older people. (Cocks 2006; Mayall, 2008; Skanfors, Lofdahl and Hagglund, 2009; BERA, 2018). I negotiated 'consent in particular moments' (Albon and Rosen 2014 p. 5.) rather than expecting it to be given for the duration of the research. Cocks (2006) suggested that researchers maintain vigilance and should 'attune themselves to the child's unique communication in order to know when to remove themselves' (p.258). This is the approach I took.

Boggis (2010) discussed research with children who are non-verbal due to disabilities. This research resonates with mine because it explores issues around researching children who do not speak and the children in my research may not speak much. Boggis (2010) concluded that in order to communicate and gain the consent of the children researched it was necessary to communicate with them about the research in an individualised way and to pay more attention to aspects such as gesture and movement. When I collected data, I was attentive to the children's ways of communication through movement, facial expression and gesture in order to assess consent. My research started from an understanding that communication with young people is multimodal and I understand gesture gaze and gaze as important modes with which to communicate with young children.

Stephenson (2009) suggested ways in which young children express their disinclination to be observed and gives examples of researchers being sensitive to this. Examples given

include children indicating, by facial expression, or by moving away from the researcher, that they do not want to be observed. In my research children had the opportunity to move away, given the space of the nursery garden, and its focus on child-initiated play, but if children expressed discomfort with the presence of a researcher this would be understood as withdrawal of consent. In this case the researcher would withdraw from that particular space or, in the case of one child removing themselves, make a judgement about what is the best ethical choice in that moment.

Children may also withdraw from observations or be uncomfortable with them if they see them as an invasion of privacy. Children are observed by practitioners, in order to plan their learning and assess their progress (DfE, 2017). Nevertheless, there is sometimes evidence in children's play that they do not wish to be observed by adults. (Rosen and Albon, 2014; Cowan, 2018). My research focused on child-initiated play in the garden. It is possible that children play here to avoid such surveillance and I allowed children to be private if they wished.

4.4.3 Ethical issues working with young children

I used a relational approach to ethics in this research. Ethics was defined by Morrow and Richards as 'a set of moral principles and rules of conduct' (Morrow and Richards 1996 p. 90) and these were considered throughout the research process. Many ethical issues could be planned for but others arose and required 'situated judgements' (BERA 2018 p. 2). A relational approach was advocated by Dalli and Te One (2012) and Rosen and Albon (2014) which refers to making ethical judgements in unpredictable social circumstances. These are often described as the 'messiness' of qualitative social research (Dalli and Te One 2012, p.227). This situated or relational approach was used during data collection, as unpredictable social circumstances are expected in nursery settings (Rosen and Albon, 2014).

Children of two years old are seen in my research as both vulnerable and capable (Lahman, 2008). They are vulnerable because of their size, their relative fragility and because they are seen as lacking power in society and in settings. They are seen as capable although they communicate in a different way to adults (Forbes and Jackson 2015). However, their vulnerability, and the requirements of working in a nursery setting raises ethical issues.

4.4.4 Safeguarding

The setting's safeguarding procedures were followed. If there was an indication that a child may be at risk, the designated safeguarding officer would have been informed, and concerns would have been recorded in the form required by the setting. DfE (2019) suggested that this is an expectation of staff and volunteers in the setting. Following the setting's safeguarding procedures was an expectation because I also worked in the setting. Reporting safeguarding issues can potentially be disruptive of relationships but was an ethical responsibility which took precedence over my research interests. As Denzin suggested:

> our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear, and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us. (Denzin, 1989 p.83)

A tension is sometimes seen between the protection of children and recognition of their competency and agency (Alderson 2014) but, as I suggested above, it is possible to see children as both vulnerable and competent. The extent to which children are understood as vulnerable, competent, and agentic, influences understanding of their ability to consent to research.

4.4.5 Research relationships in a nursery setting

Two-year olds are a group lacking in power in society and are therefore dependent on adults. In nursery settings and in society as a whole there is an expectation that adults are in a relationship of power over children. This corresponds to the idea of children as a minority group (James and Prout, 2015). Younger children are seen as less competent, more vulnerable, and therefore less able to exercise power. Dalli and Te One (2012) and Stephenson (2009) noted the limited possibilities that young children have to wield power, although they frequently resist the power of adults. The ability of children to wield power could be seen to vary according to circumstances, but power relationships between adults and children in nursery settings are institutionalised and enacted in very specific ways. The way in which adults generally relate to children in this setting influenced the ways in which children responded to a researcher (Boggis, 2010).

Relationships of power influence the likelihood of research successfully eliciting children's perspectives so I aimed to minimise these. Ways in which researchers have minimised power relationships include getting down to children's level e.g. by, sitting on

the floor (Alderson 2014), avoiding being directive, and communicating as a person who is interested in their perspective. I work with these children when I am not observing them so they were familiar with my way of working which generally corresponds with the above.

Issues about power arise through the theoretical framework of this research and its subject matter. Both social semiotic multimodal analysis and social constructionism understand power to be created, diffused, and resisted in discourses. My research understands young children to be capable multimodal communicators whose communication is not always recognised. The power differentials between adults and children are one reason why young children's multimodal communication is not recognised. This absence of young children's voices is an ethical issue (Alderson 2014).

The purpose of my research was to make disadvantaged young children's capabilities and learning visible. 'That which was regarded as implicit because it was embodied but not spoken or written' will be 'shown to be explicit—embodied still, and yet modally explicit at the same time' (Kress 2004 p. 224). This ethical purpose of my research and my interest in understanding young children was reflected in my conduct during the research and ultimately constituted an advantage to young children which will be gained through the research.

Staff might also have felt 'watched' and under pressure. There were potential issues around power relationships with staff. Nursery staff are poorly paid, low status, work extremely hard in a job that is constantly demanding both physically and emotionally (Osgood 2012). They invest personally in their work and this is seen as a part of their personality and aspiration by themselves and others (Albon and Rosen, 2014; Osgood, 2012). Staff could feel stressed and criticized as new initiatives are introduced and they themselves were assessed according to various, changing, criteria. I sought to cultivate friendly and open relationships with all staff to avoid this and talked about what I was observing. I used my understanding of the setting and staff in doing this and, while obtaining written permission from staff, I also understood their consent to be in particular moments. I made it clear in the consent letter and information sheet that I was not looking at staff. If they moved into shot while I was videoing I would aim to move the camera and would not analyse material which inadvertently included staff without

discussing it with them. I avoided videoing them and occasionally they avoided me. I did this in an ongoing, reflective, manner so that different circumstances were adapted to.

4.4.6 Ethics and video recording

There are additional ethical issues associated with video recording. (Flewitt, 2008; Robson, 2011; Alderson, 2014; BERA, 2018). These are related to how children might feel when they are being videoed, who the video belongs to and who might see it. The use of video for observing children is common in nursery settings and this may mean that children are habituated to it, but I treated children's consent as provisional and in the moment as discussed above..

I asked for permission to use the video data for the purposes of my research (see appendices 1 and 3) and did not put it on the internet. Video data has ethical implications in that people could be identifiable. The visual data collected in this research is of small children using movement, gesture, and facial expressions to express meaning in the nursery garden. It is a central part of my research and its dissemination. Alderson (2014) is clear that researchers should anonymise children's visual data and conceptualises this as a child protection issue.

Where facial expression is not central to the arguments made Flewitt (2008) suggested several ways of blurring facial details to anonymise participants as well as sketching video stills. The possibility of doing this was considered although Cowan (2018), Robson (2011) and Flewitt (2008) suggested that these methods may not be suitable for the representation of all multimodal communication and Robson (2011) and Cowan (2018) gained permission from parents to use children's identifiable images. Robson (2011) acknowledged that this raises issues as children's views may change as they get older. I have obscured children's faces in photos and also used line drawings of video skills in order to maintain anonymity.

4.4.7 Anonymity and confidentiality

BERA (2018) noted that:

> 'The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity' (BERA, 2018 point 40)

Because of this convention staff, setting and children have been given pseudonyms in notes or in the research, and identifying details changed. All physical data were kept in a locked filing cabinet and digital data will be stored on the centre's secure network. However, Nespor

(2000), Farrell (2016), and BERA (2018) noted that there are studies where researchers contest this conventional wisdom by arguing that participants' rights to be acknowledged should be granted.

Nespor (2000) challenged the idea of anonymity of places and people suggesting that this anonymisation has:

> 'ontological and political implications' in that 'anonymization naturalizes the decoupling of events from historically and geographically specific locations (and with the way location or place itself is conceptualised) (Nespor 2000 p.549)

Nespor (2000) suggested that when places are not named, described, and linked to the communities that surround them readers cannot make judgements about how they relate to other situations. Lack of attention to this spatial, contextual detail and lack of information about how the setting is related to shared community and neighbourhood spaces leads to a placelessness in research which makes it abstract rather than emplaced. My research used a pseudonym for the setting and anonymised children and staff because this is a convention which I felt made me more likely to obtain access to a setting and ethical clearance from my university. In order to ensure that anonymity does not diminish the geographical and historical specificity of my research it is explicitly located in inner London and aims to include detail of socioeconomic and spatial factors which are relevant to readers while retaining the anonymity promised to participants and the university.

Criticising the conventional practice of promising anonymity to research, Nespor (2000) suggested that in local settings it is not difficult for those who are close to the situation to work out which setting and which participants are involved. BERA (2018) also acknowledges this. I am giving the setting and participants pseudonyms because I see it as discreet and respectful. Those who attend the setting will know that I am researching there as will staff and colleagues from other settings. If someone close to the research is really interested they could identify the setting. Parents or staff could identify two-year-olds who attended the setting at that time. I have documented the research with this possibility in mind but if any stakeholders find my research problematic I would be happy to discuss their concerns.

Staff and leaders of the children's centre are likely to want research to reflect positively on them and possibly to represent their beliefs. Researchers should not publish work which would cause distress to the people studied (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). My findings, therefore, will be disseminated to stakeholders in a forward looking, problem solving and non-blaming way that is unlikely to cause offence.

4.5 Research site and sampling

4.5.1 Local context

West street Children's centre is in inner London in the middle of two large housing estates. These consist of more than 23 high and low-rise blocks interspersed with street properties. There are several small playgrounds on the estates (which were locked during the pandemic), and it is within walking distance of a large park. Overcrowded housing was an issue for some of the children at the nursery and very few indeed had gardens. The issue of space and of outside space were likely to have been significant for the nursery children when the nursery was closed to most of them because of the COVID 19 lockdown.

There were a high proportion of low income households around the setting. People in this area were more likely to have a low income or be on benefits in this ward than in most of London. As an indicator of this, 33% of children in the schools in the area receive free school meals which is well over the average for England and high for London. There are a high and growing number of children with special needs in this area according to the local council.

The area has a high proportion of adults who were born outside the UK (47%) and the most common first language for families in this area is Arabic followed by English, Bengali and then Kurdish. There are many other languages spoken and the area is ethnically diverse compared to most places in London. The nursery reflects this diversity. There is normally a vibrant market on the edge of the estate but at the time of this research, because of COVID 19, the local area was extremely quiet on weekdays.

4.5.2 The setting

The maintained nursery school at West side children's centre is rated outstanding by OFSTED with a strong focus on play and on following children's interests in order to promote their learning. It provides traditional early years continuous provision although this was somewhat changed during the time of the fieldwork because of COVID 19 (details are given in the following chapter). The setting usually provided health services, family support and other outreach services, in an integrated way with education, and had a strong emphasis on inclusive education for children with SEND. Services other than nursery education were largely absent during the time of the fieldwork.

Maintained nursery schools are unique among provision for two-year-olds in that they employ specialist nursery teachers as Heads, as well as nursery teachers to work with children (although seldom directly with the two-year-olds). Maintained nursery schools are

concentrated in areas of disadvantage and have higher levels of children with SEND referred to them (BAECE 2015).

The school had eighty-four children on the roll, of whom twenty-four were two years old. All the children usually shared a space but, at the time of this research, due to COVID-19, the children were in two 'bubbles' of up to 15 children. The bubble that I was researching had thirteen children. Six of them were two years old and the others were three and four. At the beginning of the fieldwork in June 2020 these children began attending this bubble after ten weeks of absence due to the coronavirus lockdown.

Part of the centre's space that was previously used for the drop-in group became a space for the bubble of nursery children that I researched. Drop-in groups, also known as parent and toddler groups or stay and plays, are groups where parents bring their children (mainly children under three) so that the children can play with the toys provided and gain experience of playing with peers. The parents (or other carers) are able to talk with each other and access support from each other and from the staff who run the group. Due to the limit on group sizes and family mixing during the pandemic (DfE, 2020a), drop-in groups were closed in March 2020 and remained closed until September 2021. This meant that the nursery children could use the indoor and outdoor space that was vacated.

The management of the nursery divided the children into three bubbles. Two of the bubbles used the nursery space, and the bubble that I researched used this 'new' place which was both familiar and unfamiliar to them. It was familiar to them because most of them would have attended the drop-in with their parents before they started attending the nursery. The two-year-olds in the nursery were taken regularly to the playground of the drop-in as it was often less busy than the nursery playground. On the other hand, this place was unfamiliar to them because it was not their usual nursery playground and, except for one child, they had not been able to attend nursery since March.

4.5.3 The bubble

The children I researched were two-year-olds who have free places for fifteen hours a week in a nursery in England because of the two-year-olds offer (Gov.uk 2020). This means that the children's parents have a low income. Children who are looked after by the local authority or adopted (looked after children) are also given free places as are children with SEND. This setting only offers nursery education funded by the government, so all the two-year-olds are subject to these criteria.

Table 1., below, shows some of the characteristics of the children who were included in the fieldwork. Although the aim was to research the children who were aged two, they played with other children who were three or four, so I obtained permission from the parents of these children and have included them in the table. Children who were part of the group but who did not feature in the research because they did not play outside or communicate with the two-year-olds are not included.

Table 1. showing children in group

Name* (gender)	Age (years. months) When research started	Main language spoken at home**	Length of time children attended setting before lockdown
Basheer (m)	2.4	Arabic	3 weeks prior to lockdown
Hamza (m)	2.4	Arabic	
Fateehah (f)	2.4	Urdu	
Jordan (m)	2.7	Itsekiri	7 months (attended setting during lockdown but in different room with different children)***
Naeem (m)	2.8	Kurdish	7 months
Ibrahim (m)	2.10	Bengali	9 months
Kacey (m)	3.3	English	1yr 2 months
Andy (m)	3.5	English	1yr 4 months
Aston (m)	3.6	Somali	11 months
Saba (f)	4.6	Arabic	1 yr 5 months
Abdul (m)	4.7	Kurdish	2 yrs 6 months
Emir (m)	4.7	Urdu	2 yrs 6 months
Amir (m)	4.10	Arabic	2 yrs 9 months

* These names are pseudonyms

**This was identified by parents on arrival at the nursery

***Only Jordan attended during lockdown from this group

All the children had siblings, and some had siblings in this group. Naeem and Abdul are siblings, as are Fateehah and Emir, Saba and Basheer. Some of the children would be unfamiliar with each other although most of the two-year-olds had been playing close to each other before lockdown.

Of the six over threes in this bubble four have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and one of these also has a chromosomal disorder which means he does not yet walk or talk. This child understood and used some Makaton signs. Staff used some Makaton signs with this child and with the group during story and song sessions, but Makaton signs were not used by other children or by staff during their outside play over the time of this research.

Although the two-year olds have English as an additional language all of them except Basheer (who has not attended the setting very long or very regularly) used English to communicate at nursery although the extent and clarity varied widely. The three and four-year-olds are also almost all bilingual. The proportion of children with SEND and EAL in this bubble is representative of the wider setting.

All of the children had some time off sick during fieldwork, some due to contact with suspected coronavirus. Because of the low number of children, and the way the group was organised, the observations made of two-year-olds included some three and four-year-olds. I focused on the two-year-olds but the three and four-year-olds were important to the play of the two -year olds so they were included in the observations.

There were unusually high adult to child ratios because of the low numbers of children attending and the high number of children with SEND in the setting. This setting usually has higher adult child ratios than the government minimum because of the needs of the children and the status of the setting as a hub for SEND in the borough, but this ratio was increased during the fieldwork. Statutory adult/child ratios for two-year-olds in nursery were 1:4 (DfE 2017, p. 23), and for children over three the ratios were 1:8 when there is no teacher present (as was the case when I observed) (DfE 2017 p. 24). Ratios for adults to children with SEND vary according to funding streams received and allocated by the management of the setting. Mixed age group classes were expected to use these ratios in combination (DfE 2017, p.26).

The practitioners were the key persons of the two-year-olds. A key person's role is defined in the EYFS as:

> to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents (DfE, 2021a, p. 27).

Each two-year-old had a key person who had built a close relationship with the child and the parents. The practitioners were part time, except for the senior practitioner, they range in age from 25 to 50 and in qualification levels from NVQ level 3 to graduate level. The senior

practitioner is a graduate. Duration of experience varied from a few years to decades. Pseudonyms were used for practitioners when I included them.

4.5.4 Sampling

Sampling refers to 'techniques used to select groups from a wider population' for research (Davidson 2006). Sampling is a term from quantitative research, but it also needs to be planned and considered in qualitative research. (Brewer, 2000). As well as sampling participants initially, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) noted that ethnographers may subsequently sample participants from the group and that sampling can also be considered in terms of time and context. Ways in which my research selected participants both initially and subsequently are discussed below, followed by ways in which time was sampled in this research.

I videoed two-year-olds who played with other children. I concentrated on two-year-olds and did not record Fateeha and Emir playing together. They played together a lot but as they were siblings I felt that this might not be 'typical' of play at nursery. I tried to video all the children so when several children were playing I might prioritise one I had not recorded previously. It was not always obvious when children were playing or when they were playing with other children because such things appeared be fluid and fleeting.

Children sometimes appeared to move swiftly between activities. This initially made it difficult for me to decide to follow them or to determine when they were engaged in play. As I observed I found that the idea that children were stopping and starting when they changed activity did not correlate with what I was seeing. Rather children played continually, across different spaces and using different resources. They developed ideas over time in this way and often returned to the same 'activity' shortly after leaving although what they did with the equipment might be the same or quite different.

Adults can see nursery in terms of 'activities' and fail to recognise children's continuous interests as they are explored through play across different places and equipment. Children do not necessarily see moving away from an 'activity' as a change in their play interests. They can pursue interests across activities. Children use a variety of resources to explore their inquiries but teachers tend to interpret playing with sand as an interest in sand play (Hedges, 2010 p.16) rather than as an interest in cooking. This resonates with Athey's (2007) work on schemas which also explains behaviour across activities (especially behaviour which adults find hard to understand).

A focus on multimodal meaning making and the use of video observation, along with an ethnographic approach, enables a close attention to what children are doing along with an understanding of the context. This attention to what children were doing rather than interpreting it through an adult construction of activities as separate enabled me to understand the way in which children were using the outside space as continuous meaning-making when they moved from activity to activity.

As the research progresses and the data were analysed decisions about what to observe were directed by what was arising from the analysis. An example of this might be where a particular type of play became significant in the light of the analysis. This is an example of the flexibility and strategic collection of data which Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) described as an integral part of the exploratory orientation of ethnography. This way of making sampling decisions is known as purposive sampling (Davidson, 2006; Bryman, 2016; Robson and McCartan, 2016), purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), and judgemental sampling (Brewer, 2000). In line with the qualitative nature of my research this is a non-probability sampling technique because it was not aimed at statistical generalisation like a sample in quantitative research.

Time was also sampled in my research. Time is an example of convenience sample because the times at which I observed were dictated by my availability and the accessibility of the nursery (for example two-year-olds may not attend during school holidays). Time of day, and time of year were relevant to the research and their relevance was considered when I analysed the data. I have suggested in chapter 3 that the time of year was relevant to research on outside play in the UK.

Sampling is an important part of research and influenced the data and the conclusions of the research. I recorded sampling decisions and my reasons for them in the research journal so that they were considered in the analysis and explained transparently. There is an ethical dimension to sampling in that it determines who is included and who is excluded (ideally, I would like to have included all the two-year-olds who play outside). Issues around children's provisional consent were considered when deciding what to observe as discussed in the section above about ethical issues.

This section has described how and why the paradigm of social constructionism and interpretivism and the theories of social semiotic multimodality combine with ideas from childhood studies to underpin my research. I have suggested that the methodology of

multimodal ethnography was suitable for collecting the information needed to answer my research questions. Practical and methodological outlines of the methods of data collection and analysis were presented and I have indicated what ethical decisions I have made and suggested that I will continue to make ethical decisions throughout the research. Some local context and attributes of the setting were given and the group of children who I researched were introduced. The next chapter looks more closely at the children and the context of their play.

CHAPTER 5

What was the context for the outdoor play of two-year-olds at nursery during the pandemic and how did it shape their experiences?

5.0 Introduction

The first chapter of data analysis examines the 'new' setting during the pandemic and it explores space, material resources and time in the playground. Before the closure due to COVID-19 this was a busy nursery of 50 children aged 2 to 5 years, at any one time, with all the children sharing the inside and outside space. When the fieldwork was carried out (June-July 2020), the children were placed in bubbles of up to 15 children. At the time, nurseries were subject to 'protective measures' which were imposed by the government (DfE, 2020b) and interpreted and implemented by the local education authority and then by the setting's management and staff. Some of the 'Protective measures' (DfE, 2020a) that were introduced were: reducing contact between the small groups; preventing children with symptoms from attending nursery; cleaning hands frequently; cleaning surfaces and equipment; and removing resources that are hard to clean (Ibid.). Some of the ways that the nursery implemented the protective measures were explained to parents in a handout that the Head and Deputy Head of the nursery prepared and this is included as appendix 1. The way different changes presented both opportunities and challenges to the two-year-olds is discussed in the relevant sections of the chapter.

The first part of this chapter explores changes in the playground space, and the way play resources were placed in it, and considers how these alterations signal meanings and enable meanings to be made. The second part looks at the way the social conditions in the nursery were changed and the implications of this for children's play. The discussion section considers the changed environment for outside play and how this shaped the meaning making of the two-year-olds. It explores the impact of the re-design and re-contextualisation (Kress and Sidiropoulou, 2008) of the material and social environment of the nursery on the outside play of two-year-olds. The discussion draws on the literature about space, material resources, time, and social organisation, in nurseries, and considers the relationship between material and social factors and children's agency.

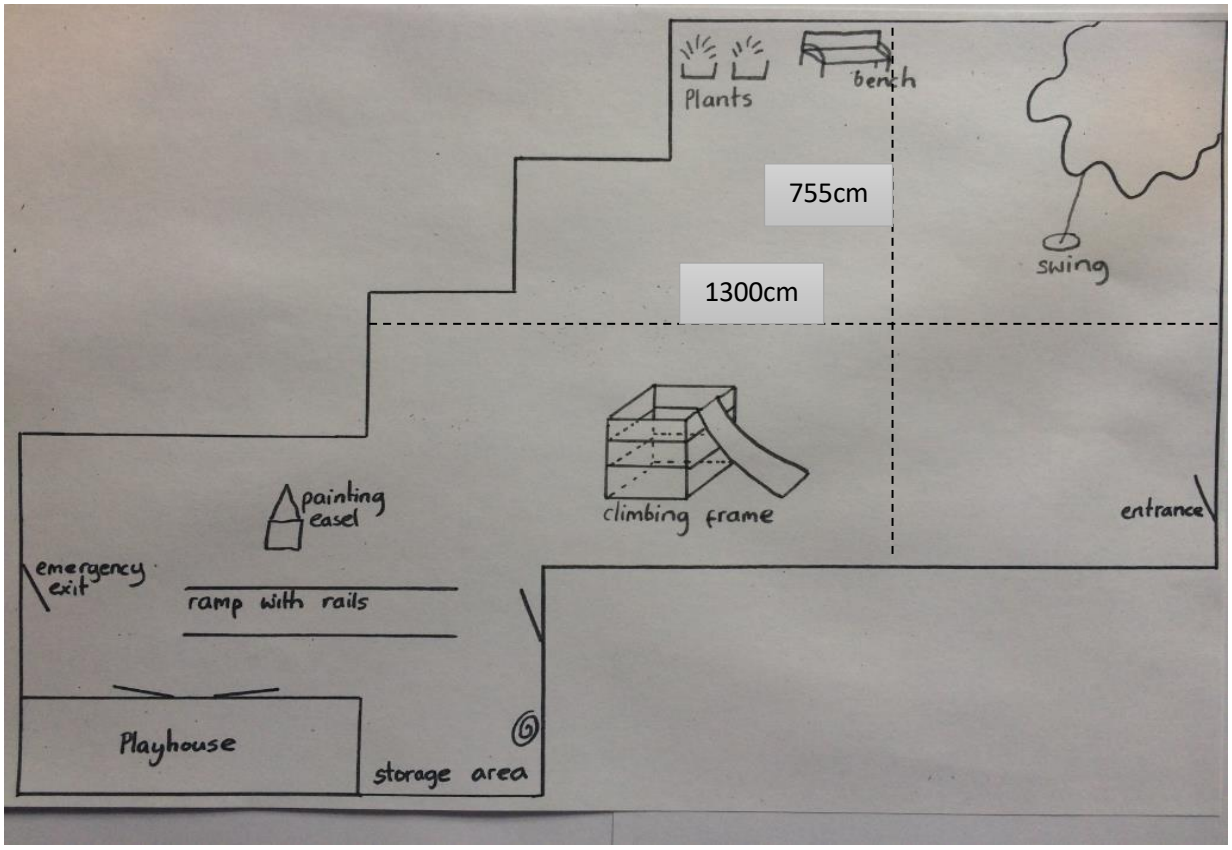
5.1 Changed outdoor space, new meanings

The theories that guide this research can be seen as complementary in their conceptualisations of space. In social semiotic multimodality space is a resource for meaning making in some modes (Kress, 2010). Multimodality describes space as fluid, dynamic and materially instantiated and place as 'a lived instance of the environment, an embodied experience of space' (Jewitt, 2012). Childhood studies defines place as a specific site that is known, understood, and discursively constructed, through interactions (Christensen, 2003, p. 16).

Part of the centre's space that was previously used for the drop-in group became a space for the bubble of nursery children that I researched. Drop-in groups, also known as parent and toddler groups or stay and plays, are groups where parents bring their children (mainly children under three) so that the children can play with the toys provided and gain experience of playing with peers. The parents (or other carers) are able to talk with each other and access support from one another and from the staff who run the group. Due to the limit on group sizes and family mixing during the pandemic (DfE, 2020a), drop-in groups were closed in March 2020 and remained closed until September 2021. This meant that the nursery children could use the indoor and outdoor space that was vacated.

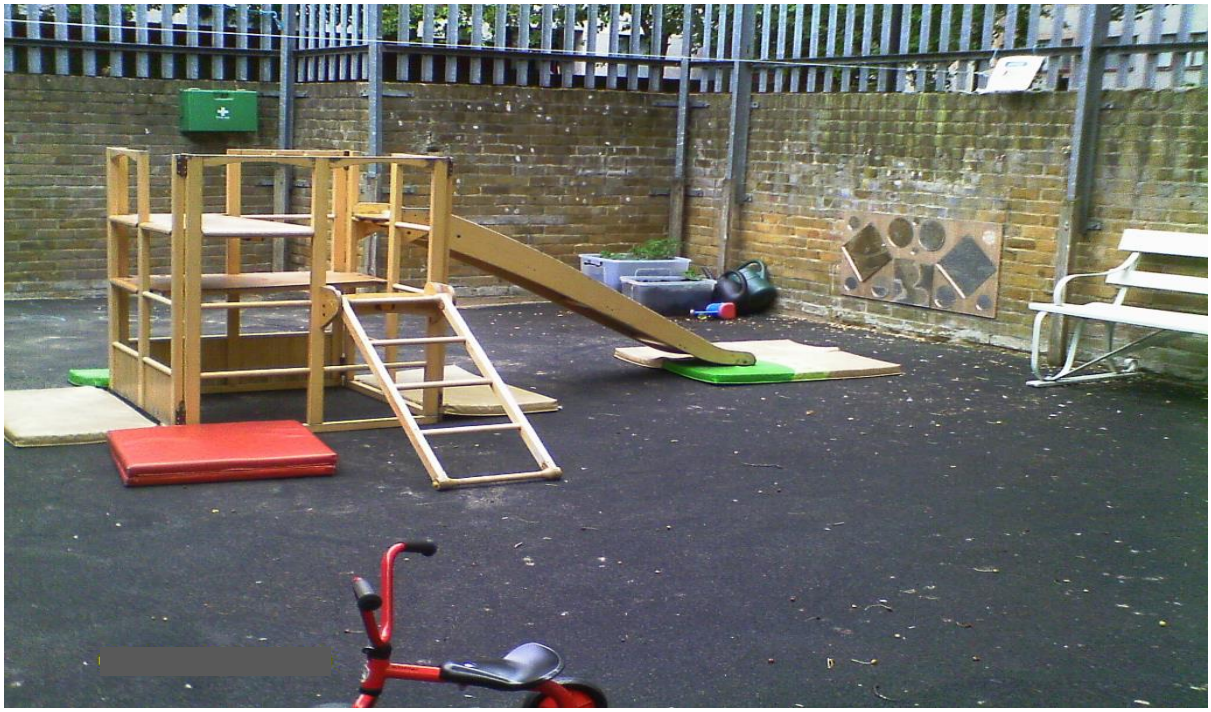
The management of the nursery divided the children into three bubbles. Two of the bubbles used the nursery space, and the bubble that I researched used this 'new' place which was both familiar and unfamiliar to them. It was familiar to them because most of them would have attended the drop-in with their parents before they started attending the nursery. The two-year-olds in the nursery were taken regularly to the playground of the drop-in as it was often less busy than the nursery playground. On the other hand, this place was unfamiliar to them because it was not their usual nursery playground and they had all been off nursery since March with the exception of one child, Jordan (2 years and 7 months), who had been previously attending the main nursery space. The extent to which children are familiar with the space is important to how the children understand it and make meaning in it. Children make the space into a place through their movements and interactions within it over time (Christensen, 2003 Jewitt 2012). A map and pictures illustrating the space are included below (Map 1, pictures 1, 2, 3 and 4). This map and pictures show some of the objects that are always in the playground but additional objects were placed in the playground as described in section 5.2.

Map 1. The playground used by the bubble.



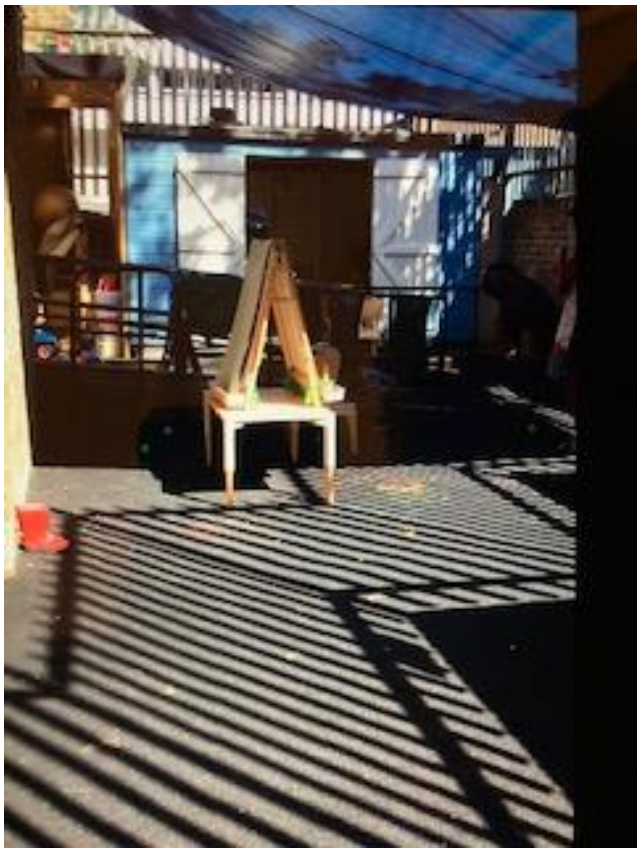
The playground area (Map 1) could be understood as comprising two distinct parts, although they were not separated. There is a larger, more open area and a smaller more enclosed space which is further divided up by the ramp and railings leading to the inside of the nursery. The larger space usually had a climbing frame, a tree, and a swing. This is shown in pictures 1 and 2 but these pictures were taken in the morning when some resources had not yet been arranged. The smaller part of the playground has the painting easel and the water play is often attached to the railings that lead to the inside of the nursery. It is shown in pictures 3 and 4. This map and pictures show some of the objects that are always in the playground but additional objects were placed in the playground as described in section 5.2.

Picture 1. A view of the playground as seen from just inside the entrance



Picture 2. A view of the playground, looking the other way, from near the climbing frame

Picture 3. A view towards the route indoors



Picture 4. The playhouse with railings in front

The playground area (Map 1) could be understood as comprising two distinct parts, although they were not separated. The larger area had a climbing frame, a tree, and a swing (pictures 1 and 2).

The design of the playground carries meanings which shape the understandings and actions of the adults and children who use it. The flat soft surface, the absence of earth or plants, the high, undecorated, walls and railings, the plainness of the walls and the darkness of the floor surface suggest ideas about how the playground might be expected to be used. These ideas are diverse and complex. A flat soft surface suggests a construction of children as fragile and needing protection from injury. It harks back to an era when any risk was seen as needing to be eliminated, as opposed to more current thinking where a certain level of risk is understood as a learning opportunity (Tovey, 2007; DfE, 2021b, p. 61).

The sparse decoration, walls, gates, absence of natural materials and the dark flat surface are reminiscent of school playgrounds for older children. They reminded me of playtimes of my childhood in the 1960s, and of school playtimes more recently, when children were allowed out for fifteen minutes to ‘let off steam’ and were expected to play traditional games. It looks

like a space for physical play, rather than a space for playful learning, as nursery outside spaces are currently expected to be (DfE, 2021b). The way the playground is surrounded by walls and railings suggests a construction of children as vulnerable and needing protection from the outside world and clearly prescribed boundaries between the outside world and nursery.

These meanings contrast with the stated ethos of the nursery management. The 'official' discourse from the senior staff at the centre is that the outdoors is seen as a learning environment across the curriculum, and risks that children choose to take are seen as learning opportunities. This position is documented in a 25-page booklet displayed for parents to read in English and in Arabic in the reception area titled 'Outdoor physical play'. It describes an extensive variety of learning experiences outside and notes the importance of risk taking for younger and older nursery children. Some pages of this, concerning the cross curricular learning that can be achieved through outside play, are attached as appendix 6.

A spatial aspect of the children's routines was changed as a result of the need for social distancing for parents and the understanding that COVID-19 spreads less outside (DfE, 2020b). Instead of entering the setting through the centre's reception, parents dropped children off, and collected them at the gate to the playground (this gate is marked as entrance on Map 1). This was explained in a handout to parents as aimed at 'ensuring the safety of children, parents, carers and staff' by 'avoiding too many adults coming into the building' (appendix 1).

This arrangement for dropping children off meant that children often played outside on arrival at nursery and continued to play there. Going inside became a choice and being outside was the norm, while previously the opposite situation applied. Some children in this group only went inside for snacks, nappy changes or story time. The dropping off arrangements meant that some practitioners were in the playground from the beginning of the session, so that children did not have to go inside to look for them.

Before this bubble was created, the two-year-olds spent far less time outside even though they had free access to the outside space. Before the reorganisation due to COVID-19, the two-year-olds entered nursery through the main nursery area leading to their base where their key persons were. A key person's role is defined in the EYFS as:

> to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents (DfE, 2021a, p. 27).

Each two-year-old has a key person that has built a close relationship with the child and the parents.

In the pre-COVID-19 nursery, the two-year-olds' base was a small part of the main nursery at the end of a long narrow L-shaped room. It was where the two-year-olds' key persons spent most of their time and where equipment and books that were particularly suited to two-year-olds were arranged. There was no physical separation between the two-year-olds and the older children, but the two-year-olds often stayed in or near this base close to their key persons at one end of the very busy nursery. Siblings were an exception to this and would often play together. The younger sibling would typically follow the older one into the wider nursery and the outside area, and play as part of a group with the older children.

Access to the playground was a short distance from this base, but the two-year-olds did not enter the outside area readily before the bubble came into effect. This may have been because the outdoor area (and the indoor space between them and the door) was often busy with older children; it could have been because their key persons were inside or it could have been because they liked their base. Even some of the older children who were very keen on playing outside did not often come outside immediately on arrival at nursery. There was a routine where they hung up their coats when they got to nursery, because the coat rack was near the entrance, and they would sometimes become involved in activities inside.

Following on from this description, it is possible to begin to trace how changes in the nursery space influenced the movement of the two-year-olds. The entrance to the nursery was redesigned and this dictated that children and practitioners followed a different pathway towards different venues. In turn, this made different objects salient (Stenglin, 2009). Objects in the larger part of the playground (see Map 1 and the description underneath it) became more salient to children because they were encountered earlier, whereas they might have remained unnoticed had the children entered through the inside of the nursery.

In an informal conversation during the fieldwork, the head of centre told me that there was always an expectation in this setting that the children had free choice to play inside and outside for most of their time at the setting. However, the change in the way children were

dropped off meant that the children in this group spent much more time outside than before. Some children spent all their time outside. The children came in happily even after long periods of absence and it seemed, from my observations, that entering through the playground, and seeing play objects such as the climbing frame first (see picture 1 above) might have contributed to this.

The outside space for this group of 13 children was similar in size to the space previously used by 50 children. The two-year-olds had increased space which they used as a resource to make meaning in the mode of movement. The increased space and reduced number of children meant that the outside space was quieter and more relaxed than the playground where the children had played before the pandemic. The two-year-olds spent more time outside and this shaped their meaning-making. The meanings they made and how they made them are described and analysed in chapter 6. I have described above how the playground carried meanings through its architecture, organisation and layout. These meanings influenced how the adults placed resources outside.

5.2 The changed layout of resources shaped how they are used

In this section, I explain how the resources and the way they were arranged by practitioners enabled two-year-olds to make meaning with them during play. I begin by looking at what resources were selected, why, and who selected them. I then describe how the resources were arranged in the playground and how they were used. I consider how practitioners made meaning through this mode of layout and how it shaped children's play.

The practitioners added some equipment that was placed in the playground every day and some that was added in response to children's interests. Resources that were almost always in the playground were the 'stepping stones'; the climbing frame; guttering and other equipment to enable play with running water; an easel with paints; chalks next to the blackboards on the walls; plants; and some furniture and play food in the playhouse. Bikes, buggies and balls were also always available. Resources that were placed outside less often and in response to children's interests included additional climbing equipment; a book area; the box of trains and tracks; cars and a road; plastic animals; small world figures; mini-beasts and Duplo. Some of these resources can be seen in pictures 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 below.

The choice of resources for children was restricted because of the government guidelines to prevent coronavirus transmission (DfE, 2020b). Practitioners had to clean all the equipment that children used at the end of every morning and afternoon, so a limited number of easily

washable resources were used. Some resources were prohibited because they were seen as potential vectors of infection. These included sand; still water that could be touched by a number of children; soft toys and playdough. The resources the children had to play with in the playground were therefore sparser than they were used to and they were often plastic.

Practitioners chose resources to encourage the children to play (e.g. in the observation of a practitioner playing with Ibrahim in vignette 5.2). All practitioners in the bubble had worked with two-year-olds for some time, and were guided by the lead practitioner who was very experienced at working with two-year-olds. This meant that the interests of the two-year-olds were always prioritised.

The resources selected by practitioners indicate the kind of play that was expected in this playground. Large train tracks with plenty of trains suggest group play, fixing together train tracks and moving trains along them. The restricted range of play materials meant that some kinds of play were absent in the playground (such as sand play). The careful selections of materials seemed to compensate, in the short term, for the absence of some materials which I would consider important such as sand, playdough and other shared objects facilitating tactile experiences.

The way in which the resources were arranged in the playground conveyed possibilities and constraints concerning outside play. The practitioners placed resources purposefully to encourage certain kinds of activities for different areas of the playground. The playhouse was resourced with play food and dolls for domestic role play and the book area was often set up in a corner of the main playground with cushions or mats. This was reminiscent of the arrangement of the inside of the nursery in that the environment was organised into ‘learning areas’ (Bilton, 2010; Ephgrave, 2015).

Practitioners set up equipment according to their understanding of learning areas and what would work best in different spaces. As I noted earlier (see Map 1) the playground can be seen as several areas. A larger open space and a smaller, subdivided space. Staff often set up additional climbing equipment, a book area and the box of trains and tracks or cars and a road or plastic animals, minibeasts or Duplo in the larger part of the playground. There were two blackboards attached to the wall, one in the smaller part near the easel and one in the larger part of the playground near the bench. Chalk was provided in bowls near the blackboards. These additions are shown below in pictures 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Resources in the larger part of the playground

Picture 5. Trains with the book corner behind.

Picture 6. Blackboard with chalk.

Picture 7. 'Stepping stones', ball trike and buggy

Picture 8. 'A' frames, plank and mattress

The smaller part of the playground had the easel and the playhouse (see pictures 1 and 2) and the running water (see pictures 9 and 10 below). The water was set up between the playhouse and the ramp and consisted of a hose with some guttering on stands. This moving water was set up to enable children to play with water while avoiding the risk of coronavirus infection

that might arise from children touching the same still water. Some resources for this play were stored in boxes near the water and some were added in response to perceived needs or interests when these arose.

Resources in the smaller part of the playground

Pictures 9 and 10: two views of the water

The practitioners organised most resources in a way that was consistent and predictable to the children and the other staff. By consistent I mean that to some extent the same resources were provided in the same place over the weeks I observed. The consistency and predictability meant that the children (and practitioners) knew where things were so that they could access them readily. The resources were placed in the learning areas at the beginning of the session. Often the children played with the toys in the places where they were provided, but they frequently moved resources and played with them in other places. This flexibility enabled children to be creative and have control over the resources. It implies a construction of children as competent and to be trusted to move and use the objects safely and to have their own play ideas.

In some ways the playground was set up and supervised with a strong emphasis on safety (see mats around the climbing frame in picture 1, even though the surface of the playground is rubberised). This could be seen as conceptualising young children as vulnerable and in need of protection (Christensen, 2000; Rosen, 2014). The way children were allowed to use resources, however, was accepting of risk reflected practitioners' conceptualisations of two-

year-old children as competent and able to manage risk. There were often toys on the floor and on climbing equipment, but due to the small group size, and relatively large number of staff, this was felt to be a manageable risk. The accessibility of objects and the permission to move them was important to children's meaning making as can be seen in the vignette below.

Vignette 5.1 Hamza using a Duplo giraffe to make meaning

This interaction lasted one minute. It took place in the larger, open part of the playground and Hamza noticed and joined an interaction between a practitioner and a four-year-old.

Hamza (2 years 4 months) was relatively new to nursery and had not spoken English in nursery except when repeating a word an adult said. He was playing with a bus on the climbing frame and Emir (4 years 7 months) was talking with a practitioner (Donna) nearby. Emir was looking at a pictorial map of London Zoo. Hamza left the bus and came over to them. Emir and Donna were both oriented towards the map and looking at it. Emir held the map and pointed at different places and pictures of animals as he talked. 'We are going to see the zoo, I don't know what um.. these are.' Hamza looked at the back of the map (the back of the map is blank), and then moved so that he was oriented towards the front of the map.

Emir started to point at something on the map but Hamza moved Emir's arm so that he could see more of the map. Donna said (looking at Emir), 'so are you going to show

everyone the map?' Hamza pointed at the giraffe on the map and said 'ooh eeh baah' and then turned towards Donna. Donna turned to Hamza and asked 'What's that?' pointing at the giraffe on the map. Hamza pointed again and said, 'Hey by yaah,' Donna said, 'Show Hamza the map, tell him what it is.' Emir turned the map towards Hamza pointing at the ostrich saying, 'It's the ostrich.' Hamza ran off. Emir continued talking about the map 'If you want to see the giraffe you go in this tunnel and you go through here, then you go back'.

Hamza moved a short distance away where there was some Duplo on the floor. He picked up a Duplo giraffe saying, 'Hey baah, hey hey baah'. He went back to them, held the giraffe up and said, 'hey, hey baah'.

When there was no response Hamza pushed his way between Donna and Emir and held the giraffe to Donna's face but Donna and Emir are in quite deep conversation. They both give Hamza a brief facial expression which I interpret as puzzled and Hamza takes the giraffe to the climbing frame and puts it in a truck. A moment later Donna turned to me and said, 'did he just get that giraffe to show me because it was on the map?'

Hamza's participation in this interaction was made possible because of his use of gesture and gaze and the availability of suitable objects that could be moved. There were many examples in my data of children moving resources and using them in different places. These included Fateehah taking a doll from the playhouse and 'feeding' it with chalks taken from near the blackboard, the use of toy cars and trains on the climbing equipment, and Hamza using a small plastic dinosaur to re-enact his own steps on the 'stepping stones', and his jump off the end of them (see pictures 11, 12 and 13 below).

Taking objects and using them for meaning making

Picture 11. Fateehah feeding a doll with chalks. Picture 12. Naeem using cars on climbing equipment.

Picture 13. Hamza retracing his steps with a dinosaur.

The placement of resources and the way children were able to use them enabled the two-year-olds to use the objects in their play and multimodal meaning making. The way resources were organised was possible due to COVID-19 restrictions (DfE, 2020). In this way, small group size, the high adult child ratio, the staff expertise with two-year-olds and the new space used were key changes in children's spatial, material, and temporal environment that shaped their play. The pandemic limited the materials children had to play with outside, but the

changed space and layout of the playground enabled the two-year-olds to play outside more and to use the objects to make meaning in particularly open-ended and flexible ways.

5.3 The changed organisation of time shaped play

This section looks at how aspects of time were changed in the nursery at this stage of the pandemic and how these changes shaped children's play. Time is important in this research because, like space, it can be conceptualised as a resource for meaning making (Kress, 2010). When children make meaning using the mode of movement they combine time and space. Time is seen here as socially constructed (Burman, 2008). Different people in different circumstances experience diverse conceptions of time and this section introduces competing concepts of time in nursery.

I explained in the first section of this chapter how being dropped off into the playground developed into a routine of staying outside all morning. This was possible because, in this setting, children could play outside or inside for all of their time at the nursery (with the exception of lunchtime, changing clothes or nappies and story time). As well as spending longer outside there were changes in how two-year-olds experienced their time outside. The increased space, high number of adults to children and the small group size meant that there was less competition for resources and activities. Children could spend longer doing things and conversely could spend moments doing something and return when they wanted without needing to negotiate space or resources.

Practitioners' experience of time was also changed. They spent less time policing turn-taking and sharing of spaces and activities. There was less pressure for staff to complete paperwork recording children's progress. Regular discussions with parents and most staff meetings were suspended by the setting and statutory two-year progress checks and Ofsted inspections were also suspended (Spielman 2020). Staff continued to contribute to the children's learning journals but the reduced number of children meant that this required less time. Staff had more time during the session to pay attention to children's play.

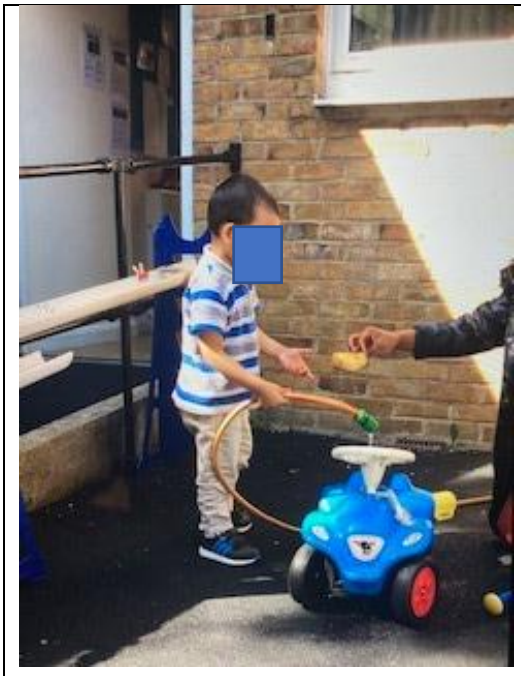
The way this shaped children's play is illustrated by a vignette describing and summarising an episode where a practitioner spent an hour supporting a two-year-olds' play.

Vignette 5.2 Ibrahim washing a car in his own time

It was a warm, sunny day and there was a background sound of conversation, play and talk from children and adults. Ibrahim (2 years 10 months) was looking at the guttering. The guttering was next to the rails that led to the inside of the nursery. A hose was attached to the top of the guttering and ran from a tap in the storage area. This corner was quieter than the rest of the outside area and was enclosed on three sides by the walls and the rails. This meant that children did not pass through the area during unrelated play and there were no other children close by at the start of the episode. A practitioner (Nadia) put some plastic balls on the guttering so that the water made them run down it.

Ibrahim spoke quietly, apparently to himself, 'See that ball, that ball there go, washing the ball.' His gaze was focused on the balls as he allowed them to go down the guttering and then moved to the hose which was clipped to the guttering. Ibrahim touched it and murmured something very quietly. Nadia moved very close to him, following his gaze and hand movements with her eyes, and bent her head close to his.

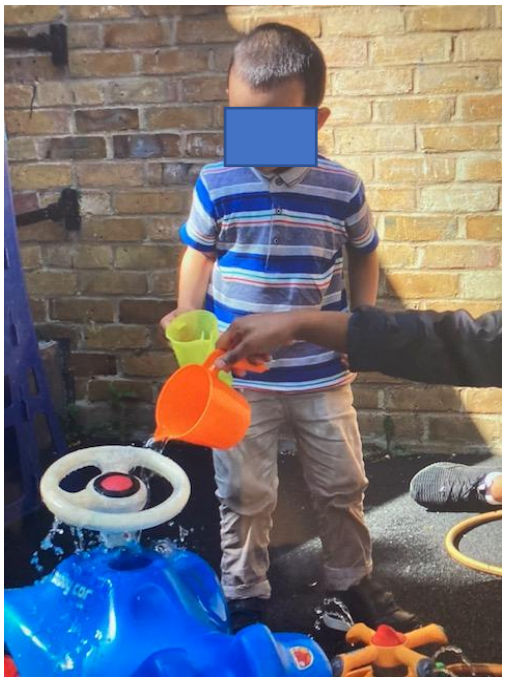
Nadia said, 'you like the water?' and unclipped the hose. Ibrahim said, 'I want it,' and she gave it to him. Nadia asked, 'Do you want to wash the car again?' and gestured to a toy car and a sponge. Ibrahim smiled as he poured water from the hose onto the car. Nadia said, 'Does Ibrahim want to scrub?' while making eye contact and showing him the sponge.



Ibrahim reached for the sponge but then withdrew his hand and poured water on the car singing, ‘wash the car, wash the car, wash the car, wash the car’. Nadia squatted down opposite Ibrahim, on the floor of the playground and scrubbed the car for a few minutes while Ibrahim poured water on different parts of the car. Then Ibrahim said, ‘I want scrub’, and reached for the sponge.

Ibrahim continued to wash the car for 20 mins with Nadia sitting close to him and oriented towards him. Nadia attached the hose to a sprinkler and Ibrahim began to fill a jug and pour it on the car. Nadia watched him, responding to his occasional utterances, and

gestures. He didn't get much water in the jug and then threw it at the car rather than pouring it. Nadia took a jug, filled it and it and poured water on the car saying, 'I'm filling my jug... I'm pouring'.



Emir came and spoke to myself and Nadia. He tipped up the car and emptied off water which was pooled on the top of the car. The water went on his trousers and he said 'Uh oh!' Nadia asked, 'Do you want to wash the car as well?' Emir replied, 'yes I want.' Emir walked around so that he was between Ibrahim and Nadia and said 'Hey you!' It's unclear from his gaze if he said this to the sprinkler or to Ibrahim. Ibrahim got up and walked around Emir to stand close to Nadia, orienting himself towards her and looking at her. She turned towards him, looked at him and said, 'what do you want? Do you want a towel?' At the same time Emir pushed the car away, took the sprinkler and twirled it. Emir said, 'Wow, spinning.' Ibrahim repeated a word several times which could not be understood. Nadia repeated, what do you want?' Ibrahim pointed at the car.

This took him some time. He was holding the jug in his right hand and he transferred it to his left hand in order to point. Nadia said 'Do you want the car?' Ibrahim nodded and Nadia reinstated it. The two children washed the car but Ibrahim kept throwing water on Emir and Emir said 'Hey you, stop it,' several times. Nadia said, in a quiet voice, 'You come and sit here Emir, and you sit here Ibrahim'. She pointed to where she wanted them to sit as she spoke and touched Ibrahim's side as she gestured to where she wanted him to sit.

The children continued to play for a further 10 minutes until Emir left and about 10 minutes afterwards Nadia took Ibrahim to change his clothes.

Nadia supported Ibrahim's play so that he could play with the water for a long time at his own pace. She was able to go close and orient her body towards Ibrahim so that she could hear and see his quiet voice, his small gestures, his gaze and his facial expression. It was possible to pay close attention to Ibrahim because Nadia did not have lots of other children to supervise because of the small group size, and high adult-child ratios. It was more likely that they could hear and see each other because it was quiet. The area was quiet because it was a space that was separated from the more open part of the playground and because of the small group size. This close attention meant that Nadia enabled Ibrahim to continue his play despite Emir's interruption. Nadia attends to Ibrahim's communication through gesture, manipulation of objects, gaze, facial expression and speech and uses gesture, gaze, facial expression, speech and touch to communicate with him.

Nadia's interactions with Ibrahim demonstrated that she knew Ibrahim well and had a good idea how he would behave with the hose. In a nursery with more children, and/or a lower adult/child ratio, practitioners would tend not to notice such quiet communication or have the time to spend on observing a child or play with her/him. They might not give a child a hose to play with, as this would require close supervision to manage turn taking and children getting wet. Ibrahim did get wet but there was plenty of time and staff to change his clothes because of the small group size and high adult to staff ratio.

Policy on time for outdoor play is sparse and contradictory. The statutory framework dictates that:

> Providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis (unless circumstances make this inappropriate, for example, unsafe weather conditions). (DfE, 2021a, p. 35).

The non-statutory guidance asserted that 'Settings should offer outdoor play every day for at least 45 minutes' (DfE, 2021b, p. 63). It also suggested that children should have 'plenty of time so that play is not constantly interrupted' (Ibid p. 18). There is some inconsistency between these two statements because offering outdoor play for 45 minutes means that children's play would be interrupted when the 45 minute session began and when it ended. It

is also a restriction on children's outside play and an imposition of adult time frames on children's play.

The guidance (DfE, 2021b, p. 63) reflects an adult understanding of time as linear, chronological, measurable and compartmentalised. This can be contrasted with the way young children experience time (Farquhar, 2016). The outside play of the two-year-olds in my research usually appeared continuous rather than segmented into different activities and was not linear. They did different things and went to different places but would then return to earlier activities or themes or repeat similar play in a different place.

An example of such adult understandings of time is the statement that 'children who seem to flit from one thing to the next or children who seem to stay for over-long periods doing the same thing' may have 'developmental difficulties' (DfE, 2021b, p. 54). This invites practitioners to judge children based on the extent to which they meet adult constructions of time. In my research, children's continuous play, with its returns to previously used equipment and ideas and its brief visits to an area followed by very long periods of focus on an activity, did seem to contrast with adult understandings of affordances of time and how children use time.

The two-year-olds' outside play was shaped by the changes in the way time was used and experienced by the adults and children in the nursery. The increased space, reduced competition for resources, and changed workload for staff meant that staff could spend more time observing children and making sense of children's interactions during play. The changes meant that two-year-olds could spend more time making meaning using a range of resources in a multiplicity of ways. They were able to make meanings in their own time.

5.4 New bubbles: new social interactions

The way staffing was organised in this setting during the period of the fieldwork influenced the experiences of the two-year-olds during outside play. The practitioners were already familiar with the two-year-olds because they were their key persons and had previously worked with them. Bubbles were organised in this setting with the aim of keeping together key persons and their key children, but this was sometimes not possible because of siblings being in the same bubbles and because of staff absences. Keeping two-year-olds with their key persons was prioritised over keeping older children with their key persons. As there were fewer two-year-olds in the setting, the team who worked with them remained together. This

meant that all the two-year-olds were with their key persons and other staff knew the two-year-olds well.

The familiarity that the practitioners had with the two-year-olds appeared to be important to the way the two-year-olds experienced outside play at nursery in a number of interconnected ways. One way in which it affected outside play was because close relationships meant the children were quickly settled when they came to nursery. Children usually appeared comfortable and confident when they entered the playground and were greeted by a familiar practitioner.

Before the pandemic, key persons had developed close relationships with the families who bought the children to nursery. This meant that family members felt confident sending children through the gates, and children felt comfortable knowing that nursery carers were familiar faces. These relationships meant that the practitioners were able to support children when there were difficulties, such as disputes or occasional mornings when children were distressed, so that the children were able to resume playing. Naeem (2 years 8 months), for example, often came to nursery having had little sleep because he shared a bedroom with his autistic brother who frequently woke him up in the night. Naeem's key person liaised with his parents and supported his settling into nursery so that he was soon able to play. Conversely there was a reduction of communication with parents due to the changed dropping off and collecting routines, described in section 2.1 above. This meant that staff may not have been as aware of things that happened in some children's lives outside nursery.

Knowing the children very well enabled practitioners to promote children's outside play because they knew what the two-year-olds were interested in and how they responded to things. Practitioners could understand and respond to these children's communication because the practitioners had worked with the children and families over time and spent time developing relationships with them. This was enabled by the fact that practitioners had often cared for older siblings and this was considered when a key person was allocated for a child.

The bubbles had a similar number of two-year-olds and older children playing together. Before COVID-19 there were four times as many older children as there were two-year olds (see Methodology chapter). I observed that almost all the children played with each other, and knew each other's names. This had not been the case before the pandemic where two-year-olds and older children tended to play separately and most children did not know all the other children's names. Smaller groups increased the group cohesiveness (Blatchford and Russell, 2020) and encouraged interactions between all the children in the group.

I observed that the two-year-olds were extremely pro social. They watched one another and then routinely moved towards one another and interacted. This was true of all the two-year-olds, those who might have been characterised as 'shy' and those who might have been considered more socially confident. I noted in my research journal that all the two-year-olds initiated positive interactions with all the other children. This was a contrast to my experience with older children who tended to speak to children of their own age or those they already knew.

The changes introduced because of the pandemic, such as group size, staff to child ratios and the proportion of children of different age groups, influenced two-year-olds social interactions in the playground. I observed that these two-year-olds were much more confident using the playground when they were in a small group with this ratio in comparison to when they were in a larger group and heavily outnumbered by older children.

Some of the older children were bigger, louder and more physical than the younger ones and this meant they had the potential to dominate outdoor play and to demand adult attention. Occasionally, the older children were seen as threatening to resources and frightening to the two-year-olds (see chapter 6). This can be seen as a construction of some young children as dangerous or out of control (James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998; Rosen, 2014). Conversely, there were concerns among some practitioners in other settings that two-year-olds would interrupt the longer stories and more detailed activities that four-year-olds sometimes engage in (Lindon, 2001). I did not observe any occasions where the mixed age group was disruptive to the play of two-year-olds or older children. In this bubble, all the children could usually pursue their interests without being prevented by other children. High staff/child ratios, small group size and these ratios of younger to older children seemed to support this.

I also observed that, when there was a small group size and a higher proportion of two-year-olds in the group, children from all ages played more together. Katz *et al*. (1990) and Fagan (2009) found that mixing age groups is supportive to children's social interaction and learning. All the children were encouraged to play together but they often played alone, alongside one another or interacted with adults. The low number of children, high number of adults and increased space had an impact on the children's social play with one another and contact with adults was increased.

5.5 Discussion

The setting was reorganised because of the COVID-19 restrictions (DfE, 2020a). I was able to explore how the changed conditions shaped children's outdoor play. This section explained some of the ways in which the reorganisation of the space, objects, time and people in the nursery, shaped the outside play of the two-year-olds. The children had a 'new' space and the practitioners redesigned it through their organisation of objects and routines within the space. The space, the way objects were provided within it, the routines, and the way the children and practitioners were grouped meant that children played outside for much of their time at nursery and were able to make meanings, with peers and adults, using the space, time and objects provided.

The new space enabled different kinds of play. Stenglin (2009) noted the ways in which large open spaces and more closed or hidden spaces carry different meanings and affordances for meaning making. The increased size of the outside play space, especially in relation to the number of children using it, meant that there was space for running, chasing and climbing and a large open space allowed longer runs and more choice about direction and trajectories. There were also smaller spaces where children could play with less interruption from others.

The way the playground was designed by practitioners through selection and placement of resources shaped the outside play of the two-year-olds. Social semiotic multimodal analysis of space and layout in museums and classrooms has described how their design influences movement, interaction and emotion in adults and older children (Stenglin, 2009; Hipkiss, 2018) while Hackett (2014) explored the way in which children communicate through movement in a museum and how the design and layout influenced their behaviour.

Research carried out by Pahl (1999), Wohlwend (2011), and Cowan (2018) showed how three- and four-year-old children had play ideas which arose from their interests, and could not be predicted by adults. The accessibility of suitable objects, and the freedom to use them in unconventional ways and to move them in space, was important to this meaning making in the studies above and my research shows how it was significant for two-year-olds. The vignette where Hamza uses a giraffe to join a conversation exemplifies this, as do the other examples which follow the vignette. The way the resources are arranged in the playground can be seen as an orchestrated ensemble (Kress, 2010) which is organised spatially. However, Kress described such ensembles as 'arrangements made in a world of movement' (Kress,

2010 p. 159), which means that they are also experienced and understood temporally. The time children had to use the space and objects was also key to their meaning making.

Farquhar (2016) suggested that adults often impose their own conceptualisations of time on children and that if practitioners engage with children's lived time then relationships for learning would be enhanced. I have suggested that changes made because of the pandemic, together with practices in this nursery setting, meant that the two-year-olds were more able to play outside at their own pace. Children's conceptualisations of time were enabled and adults sometimes engaged with children's lived understandings of time.

Allowing two-year-olds to dictate the pace of play resonates with Clark (2020) who advocated 'slow pedagogy'. This is defined as:

> 'an education that slows down, adopting notions of slow knowledge and slow thinking and slow pedagogy, notions that value lingering, revisiting, reflection, and that lead to deep learning and rich meaning making. It is an education that is comfortable with uncertainty and unpredictability' (Cameron and Moss, 2020, p. 232).

Clark (2020) contrasted this pedagogy with the prevailing culture in early years which she maintained is time pressured and dominated by targets (Ibid., p. 146). Slow pedagogy in contrast involves 'listening' to children in a way which respects and values their otherness. My research was a way of 'listening' to children in that I was able to take time to recognise the meanings that they made through different modes.

When children have their own time space and materials to make meaning, their meanings are unpredictable because they are generated by their own interests rather than fitting into those of adults. When adults tune in to children's meanings they are recognising their agency and their communicative resources. This idea equates with Archer's suggestion for 'unregulated spaces' in multimodal pedagogies where children's resources are able to emerge (Archer, 2014, p. 191). Adults tuning in to children's meanings are facilitated not only by unregulated spaces but also by unregulated times.

The way time was organised was not explicitly changed because of COVID-19 but was altered by the other changes. Because there was more space, fewer children and a higher ratio of staff to children and because of the new dropping off routine children spent more time playing outside and there were fewer interruptions.

All the changes made as a result of the pandemic are interrelated and had an effect on the outside play of two-year-olds. I have presented them separately for clarity, but they are not experienced in isolation. For example, the layout of the playground reflected the emphasis these practitioners placed on the two-year-olds. Previously, this was not the priority in the nursery playground because of the lower ratios of two-year-olds to older children in the pre-pandemic nursery. Similarly, children were able to move the equipment around outside because of the small group size, the large space and the high adult-child ratio. In a larger group of children, with fewer adults and less space, it would have been difficult to prevent equipment from getting lost or mixed up and it might have been considered hazardous to have toys on the climbing frame and ground. Changes in objects and design of the playground changed social relations. They influenced who could interact with whom and for how long.

Some literature suggests that small group size and higher adult-child ratios are associated with more sensitive interactions (Howes *et al*, 1992; Manning-Morton and Thorpe, 2003, Speight *et al*. 2020) and better working conditions for practitioners (Blatchford and Russell, 2020). Small group size was noted as a positive experience for young children's learning during the pandemic, by practitioners interviewed by Ofsted (2020a), because 'the introduction of 'bubble' groups had enabled staff to get to know the children in their group really well' and 'children got more quality time with staff' (Ofsted, 2020a, p.6).

The findings of my research suggest that higher staff to child ratios meant that the adults in the group were better able to listen to and understand the children. They were more able to respond to them in a way that scaffolded their learning. An example of this is given in vignette 5.2 where a practitioner spent time with Ibrahim responding to his meaning making in different modes and enabling him to pursue his interests.

The low number of children and more equal numbers of two-year-olds and three and four-year-olds in this bubble meant that that the two-year-olds played with the older children more than they did previously. Differences in practice around mixing age groups reflect tensions between ideas about children of different ages and competing understandings about learning. Separating children by age could be seen as constructing two-year-olds as 'needing protection' (Christensen, 2000, p. 41). It can also be understood as arising from a developmental view of young children where they are seen as being at different 'stages' which require different experiences (Burman 2008, p. 27; Murris, 2019). Children playing

together across age groups implies a more Vvgotskian understanding of children learning through interaction with those more experienced than themselves (Katz *et al*.,1990; Fagan, 2009).

The way resources, time and people were arranged in the nursery usually placed importance on young children's agency in organising their own learning and play. My observations of two-year-olds playing in their changed circumstances, however, reveal the way in which the children's play was shaped by social and material contexts. For example, in the nursery I researched, children were always seen as having free choice about spending their time inside or outside, but I showed how the new routine where children were dropped off into the playground meant that they played outside more. What was seen as children's choice was shaped by the way their entrance into the nursery was designed.

Social semiotic multimodality can explain the relationship between children's agency and the way their play is shaped through the linked concepts of interest, the motivated sign and design. Interest leads sign makers to design signs which are motivated because modes are chosen according to the aptness of fit between the interests of the sign maker and the affordances of the semiotic resources. Design, however, 'is always socially located and regulated, for example by the types of resources that are made available and to whom, as well as the regimes that regulate and shape how these resources are used to create various norms and expectations' (Jewitt Bezemer and O' Halloran 2016 p.156).

CHAPTER 6
How do children multimodally construct their outdoor play?

6.0 Introduction

This chapter explores how children construct their outdoor play using a variety of modes (such as gaze, gesture, posture, movement, manipulation of objects and speech). The findings show how two-year-olds select and orchestrate semiotic resources to make meaning. Their selection and arrangement of semiotic resources is known as design in social semiotic multimodality (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran, 2016). The way that children choose and use modes is important when it is understood as a motivated choice and Adami (2016) suggested that these choices carry traces of the sign makers' interests.

I describe why the play is important to children and draw attention to the culture that children and practitioners created in the nursery playground (Engdahl, 2012). By culture I am referring here to the patterns of behaviour, interests and values that make up 'the stuff of everyday life' for a particular group (Marsh, 2010, p. 13). Play and meaning making are based on a shared culture created by children and practitioners.

Research about the implementation of the two-year-olds offer policy neglects children's lived experience. Most research about the two-year-olds offer reflects the discourses of deficit and measurement that dominated early years education in England at the time the research was conducted (Trevor, Ince, and Ang, 2020, p.109). This discourse has obscured young children's agency, their differences and their experiences. In my research I was interested in what two-year-old children were doing in their playground and used the theoretical framework of social semiotic multimodality and childhood studies to explore the children's experiences of outdoor play in the nursery playground.

The discussion section explains how children made meaning during outside play. The two-year-olds used modes differently to adults. They used the modes of movement and manipulation of objects extensively to make meaning and they used speech less. This finding is supported, in the discussion, by other research on young children which has focused on the way they make meaning and is congruent with Kress's suggestion that young children are more flexible about using different modes than adults typically are (Kress, 2010, p. 37).

Children are social actors creating their own worlds using material and social resources in the playground. The way that these children were free to use the objects and space in their own ways enabled them to play and make meaning using the modes that best fitted their purposes.

The discussion indicates that young children's play was their way of forming and maintaining relationships. In discussing this issue, I further argue that, because of children's creativity and agency, their play could not be predicted. The way that these children were free to use the objects and space in their own ways enabled them to play and make meaning using the modes that best fitted their purposes. I explain why this multimodal meaning making with peers was likely to enable them to progress with their learning of English.

This chapter analyses three examples of play involving two-year-olds. Episode 1 involves a two-year-old and a four-year-old chasing each other. In the second episode, two-year-old boys spend time together in the playground and then the playhouse. Episode 3 describes a two-year-old, a three-year old and a four-year-old engaged in chasing play around the climbing frame.

6.1 'I'm going to eat you!' A chasing game between a four-year-old and a two-year-old

This section describes and explores a short episode of chasing play between two children (episode 1). The episode is selected to show a typical example of a two-year-old running in the outside space at nursery. However, the episode is not continuous running; the two children are stationary for some of the play, and this too was quite typical of the play of two-year-olds. They tended not to run continuously and different kinds of play would follow each other and sometimes be connected. What links the two parts of this play is the connection between the two children. The analysis shows how children make meaning by communicating through movement during their outside play. It highlights the complexity of the communication and the agency of the two-year-old.

The two children involved in the episode had English as an additional language (EAL). Hamza spoke a little Arabic, and had not yet spoken in English at nursery, while Emir was fluent in both Urdu and English. Both children spent almost all their time in the playground while at nursery. This background information is important to understanding how children make friends and how culture is created by them and practitioners. The children and practitioners in this bubble created a shared culture, synthesising ideas from their homes, the media and from nursery. Children belong to different social groups outside nursery and bring these behaviours and concerns with them, but they also constitute a social group in the nursery and create their own culture there. Hamza brought his experience of chasing from his life outside the nursery and Emir brought his from previous play with peers. It appears that

the ‘three little pigs’ story was another aspect of the culture of the nursery which may have influenced this chase.

Hamza was new at the nursery and, at two years and four months, was one of the younger two-year-olds. He ‘settled’ during the fieldwork although he had visited the nursery a few times previously. Parents who were settling children were allowed in the playground, but others were not, because of COVID-19 guidelines (DfE, 2020 a). Hamza’s father stayed in the outside space for the first few sessions and kicked a ball with him for some of this time. After the first week, Hamza’s father no longer came in the playground, but Hamza always kicked a football with a member of staff when he first came into nursery. This suggested that Hamza came from a family who regularly engaged in physical play and, based on my observations, it appeared that Hamza had experience of playing chasing games with his siblings.

Emir was one of the oldest children in the bubble, aged four years and seven months. He had been at the setting for over a year and previously had firm friends in the nursery, with whom he would play chasing games, although none of them were in this bubble. Emir was in this bubble rather than with his friends because he had a sibling (Fateehah, two years and four months) and bubbles aimed to keep siblings together so that if one sibling got ill, only one bubble would be affected.

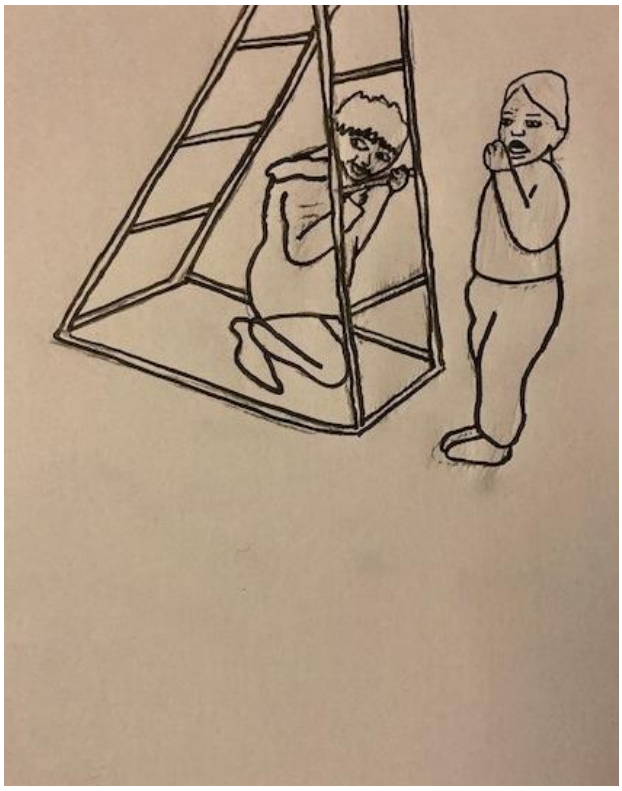
The chasing was video-recorded over 2 ½ minutes. An adult near the climbing frame could be heard telling the story of the three little pigs. I started recording when Hamza, Emir and Fateehah (two years and four months) emerged from the climbing frame and Hamza began running across the outside space. This is marked with an S on Map 2. At first Emir did not respond when he saw Hamza run past. As Hamza passed Emir he smiled although he did not look at Emir. Seconds later, Emir said, ‘I’m going to eat you!’ and began running after Hamza.

They ran in looping movements (see Maps 2 and 3 below) covering the most open part of the space and going around several obstacles (the swing, the two sets of ‘stepping stones’ and a tricycle). Emir stayed mainly behind Hamza by adjusting his speed; sometimes he briefly walked. Walking is shown on Maps 2 and 3 by a dotted line. A few times at the end of loops and on one occasion when they had gone to different sides of the ‘stepping stones’, Emir was level with, or ahead of, Hamza and spread his arms and shouted, ‘Got you’. At a few other times, especially when they were close, Hamza looked behind him towards Emir.

Hamza had an exaggerated smiling facial expression for most of the time and Emir also often smiled. After a few loops, Emir stopped at the 'A' frame, said 'Oh' then 'Huaah!' while climbing over it. Hamza continued running for a few yards. Then he looked around at Emir and ran back over to him. Emir had gone inside the 'A' frame. Hamza walked around the 'A' frame, then stood holding it in front of Emir and put his feet on the bottom rung. He was very close to Emir and nearly touching. They looked at each other for a moment, then Emir looked at the adult near the climbing frame and shouted 'I'm in jail'.

Hamza turned in the same direction, with an exaggeratedly worried expression and shouted 'Da da da, da'. Although Hamza could not explain what he meant by this, my observation of the way Hamza used gesture, gaze, orientation of body and facial expression, pitch, volume and posture in this sign-making, alongside my other observations of Hamza in the nursery playground, suggested that he was joining Emir in shouting towards the climbing frame that they need attention. Picture 14 is a line drawing from a video still illustrating this moment and depicting the way some of these modes were used.

Picture 14. Emir in 'jail'.



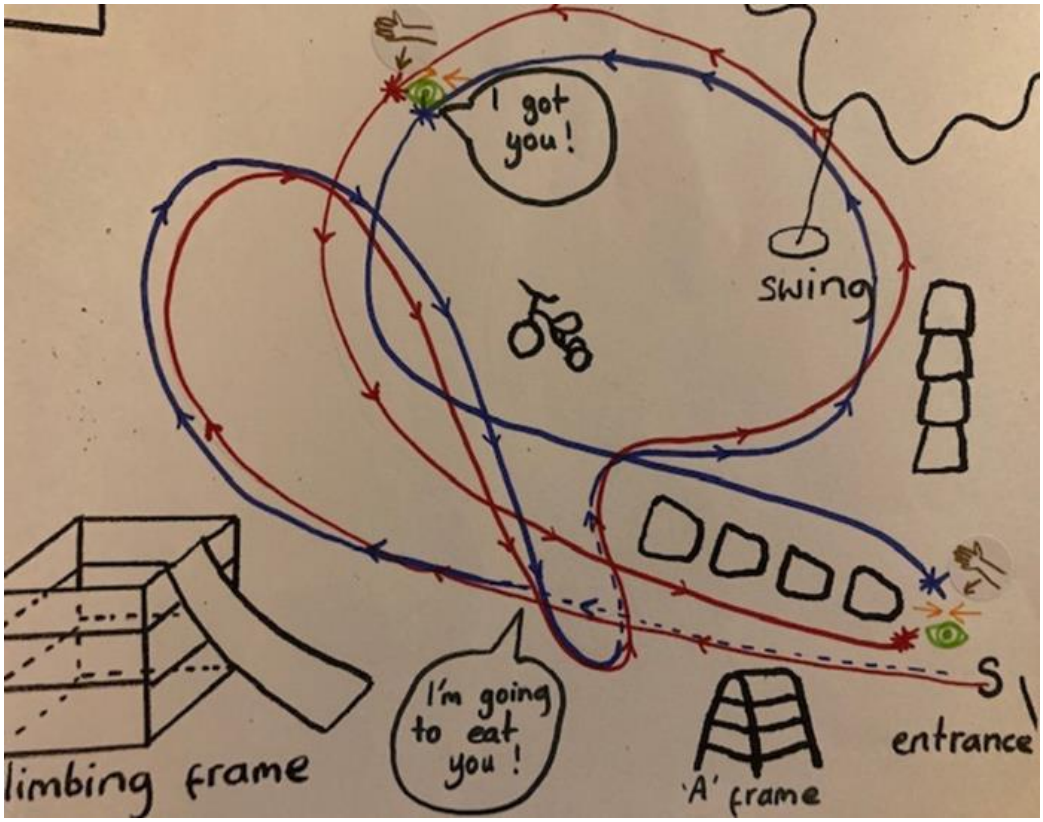
I knew from previous observations that when Emir was in jail he wanted someone to interact with him and rescue him. (He used the words 'save me' and 'get me out' on other occasions). After Emir had shouted to the practitioner who was near the climbing frame, Fateehah

(Emir's younger sister) came to his 'aid'. She pulled Emir from the 'jail' by the hood of his coat and brushed him down.

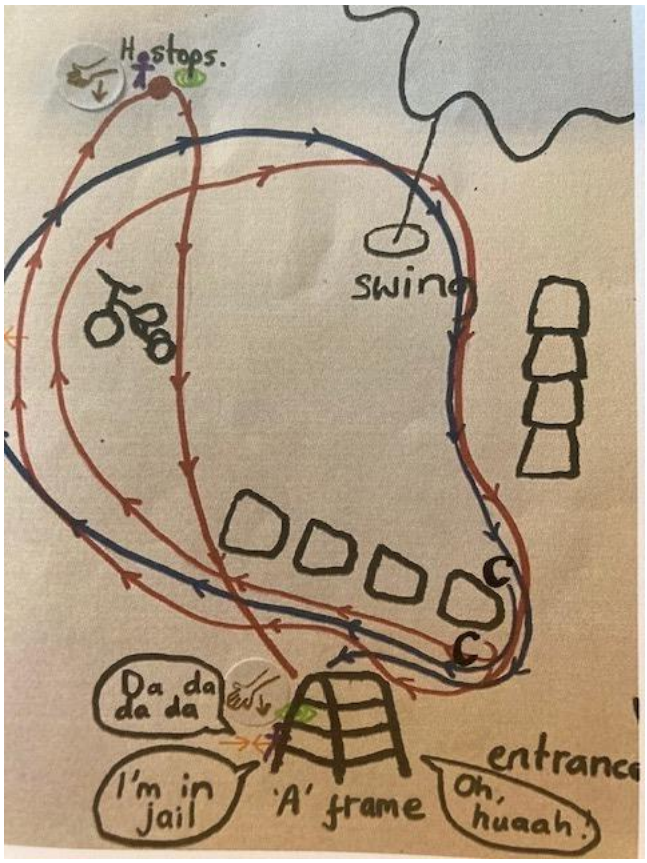
After this episode, Hamza appeared to invite more running play by running near Emir, but Emir rode off on a scooter and then Hamza went to find a football. Shortly after this Hamza, Emir and Fateehah played with a football together but this required considerable adult support. The episode I have presented seems self-contained but was also a part of the continuous play in the nursery playground. It represented one of Hamza's first successful social encounters with another child in the setting and led to others.

The children communicated continually through movement. Movement was the primary means through which chasing play was maintained. The play was cooperative and shared and the mode of movement was central to this. Hamza controlled the chasing through changes of direction and Emir used changes of speed to stay behind Hamza and to occasionally catch up with him. At particular moments the children orchestrated a variety of modes as 'multimodal ensembles' (Kress, 2010, p. 160) as represented in the maps below.

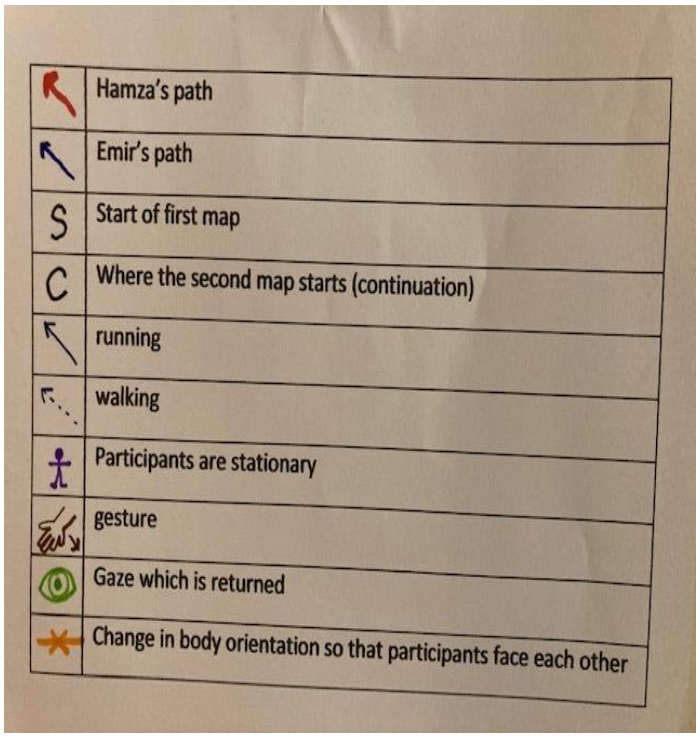
Map 2. The first part of the chasing play.



Map 3. The second part of the chasing game.



Key to maps 2 and 3.



	Hamza's path
	Emir's path
S	Start of first map
C	Where the second map starts (continuation)
	running
	walking
	Participants are stationary
	gesture
	Gaze which is returned
	Change in body orientation so that participants face each other

Maps are an appropriate way to transcribe this play because movement through space and around objects was a predominant mode through which children constructed their play in this

episode. To provide a multimodal analysis, speech, gaze, orientation and gesture were added to the map.

The way in which modes are combined in interactions is important in understanding how meaning is constructed (Bezemer, 2012). The combinations of gaze, orientation, gesture and sometimes speech which can be seen on the map reflect the material interdependence of these modes. Gaze is not possible unless participants are oriented towards one another and gesture is dependent on gaze in order to be seen. The chasing play meant that the participants faced forward and the chaser mostly saw the back of the chased. Emir seemed to engineer moments when the players faced each other fleetingly and he used gesture, facial expression and sometimes speech at these times. In one confrontation at the end of Map 2, for example, Hamza responded to the confrontation with a combination of a gaze, a smile and a change of direction and Emir gestured with his hands as though he was going to grasp him.

Mapping does not adequately describe facial expression and Hamza's smile was continuous which would also be difficult to indicate on the map. The continuity of this smile raised questions about why Hamza smiled so much when Emir could not see him. This is an example of the analytical function of transcription because struggling to represent combinations of modes led to deeper consideration of the reasons for their combination at different times.

The smiling facial expression used by Hamza may have been an expression of excitement, but I argue below that it was a way of signalling to the participants, to adults, and possibly to other children, that this was a playful chase, and was an important communication, in this setting, in enabling chasing play to be sustained. A 'play face' (Reed, 2005 p. 61) was noted in explorations of rough and tumble play (Reed, 2005; Tovey, 2007) as a way of signalling that play, which might be seen as aggressive, is in fact safe and enjoyed by both partners.

One of the reasons I could identify Hamza's smile as a successful play face was because of a previous observation. Earlier in the morning, before episode 1, I observed Jordan initiating play with Emir by jumping about near him. Emir picked up a plastic dinosaur and began to chase him. Jordan ran in loops around the 'stepping stones' and climbing frame. He smiled at first but then his facial expression looked neutral to me. A practitioner stopped Jordan and said, 'Say stop it. I don't like it' When he continued running she held on to Jordan and said to Emir, 'Stop it. I don't like it', using her hand to sign stop. Emir threw the dinosaur to the

ground and his body slumped. Jordan followed him as he walked to the swing where another practitioner said 'Emir, I think he might have been a little bit scared'.

I had a different perspective on the play because I had watched the play from the beginning and had spent long periods watching the children play outside. It was also informed by my multimodal analysis of the children's play. My view was that Jordan was probably enjoying the play and would be able to express his dislike if needed. I thought he enjoyed the play based on his clear invitation to Emir to play with him. However, he did not use the 'play face' and this may have led to the end of the play.

The interruption of this chase by a practitioner suggested that the practitioner saw Jordan (and possibly other two-year-olds) as unable to communicate that he wanted to stop the chase and was in need of protection from the frightening play of four-year-olds. The same interaction suggested that the practitioner saw the four-year-old as frightening and lacking in sensitivity in relation to the two-year-old. It is also an example of a practitioner instructing a child to use speech, and at the same time modelling speech and gesture for use in communicating with other children. Instructing a child to use speech and conventional gestures to communicate with peers is imposing an adult understanding of communication during play. It does not fit with my observation of successful communications where two-year-olds refuse or accept invitations of play.

I believed that Jordan would be able to refuse play because on another day I had seen him vehemently repelling a three-year-old who invaded his space in the climbing frame. He used speech and gesture to do this. Chasing was arranged between children through the mode of movement, facial expression, speech and manipulation of objects (such as dinosaurs). The only time I saw a child refuse a chasing game was when Fateehah refused an adult who moved a dinosaur towards her. She frowned at the adult and walked away. Children communicated differently between each other than with adults and not running seemed to be the main way in which children refused chasing games.

In my interpretation, Jordan and Emir's chasing play was stopped for three reasons. It was stopped because practitioners did not always pay attention to communications in modes other than speech and facial expression; it was stopped because of constructions of the two- and four-year-olds as vulnerable and dangerous respectively; and it was stopped because chasing play was not valued as learning.

This episode and its analysis show how the chasing play involved complex meaning making. Children combined modes to make meaning according to the social and cultural affordances of the modes. They also made meanings in different modes for different audiences. Most of the children's communication in this episode is addressed to each other. Their movements, gestures, speech and gaze maintained the play by making the chase exciting, by varying it, and by continuing it. However, Hamza's smile was addressed to practitioners. Hamza was communicating different messages to different audiences using different modes. He was communicating with Emir, through movement, to maintain the play and he was communicating to practitioners, through facial expression, that this was play so that they did not need to intervene.

There did seem to be differences between the way practitioners and children used different modes. The children used all modes to communicate with each other but making signs using movement was particularly prevalent. In episode 1, Hamza used facial expression to communicate with practitioners and I have suggested that this is a widespread method of signalling play by children to practitioners. I also noted that adults sometimes try to encourage children to use speech and conventional gestures to communicate with each other.

Communication during play is also inherently complex because it involves inventing and negotiating rules which apply in particular play scenarios or frames (Ruesch and Bateson, 1951). A play frame is a system that 'reframes physical reality' as 'pretend scenarios that generate fluid ambiguous meanings' (Wohlwend, 2018, p.302). During play, children simultaneously exist in a play world (where Emir is going to eat Hamza and is then imprisoned) and the 'real' world (where adults are in control). The negotiation of the play world and its maintenance in the face of the real world is achieved through the 'meta-communicative efforts of the players' (Rosen, 2014, p.38).

This section presented an example of the importance of outside play in the relationship between a two-year-old and a four-year-old at nursery. The episode began a developing bond which enabled Hamza's relationships with other children in the group who had witnessed the chase. This play was co-constructed by the two-year-old and four-year-old participants with both players leading and following. Without this close observation and multimodal analysis, practitioners might see the play as initiated and led by the four-year-old. The episode also revealed how children and practitioners created a shared culture which supported the ability of a two-year-old and a four-year-old to co-construct meaning.

Both children brought an interest in running and chasing from other parts of their lives and the nursery space encouraged them to do this. The practitioner was telling the story of 'the three little pigs' near the climbing frame which involves chasing and apparently inspired Emir to say 'I'm going to eat you' while chasing Hamza. The 'three little pigs' story had been told, by another practitioner, with puppets, and made available to parents online and the puppets were sent to parents as part of outreach to families during the lockdown, so this may have also made it part of this group's culture.

6.2 'We can play in house': two-year-olds walking to the playhouse

This section is about two-year-olds using the mode of manipulating objects to make meaning. It shows how they combine this with other modes such as gaze, gesture, speech and movement. Along with movement, making meaning with objects is a mode which is highly developed in this group. This section also explores how different parts of the playground have meaning for two-year-olds and elicit different play and interactions. These two-year-olds leave the open part of the nursery playground to spend time in the enclosed and more 'private' space of the playhouse. The playhouse is shown in picture 4 p. 84

Episode 2 shows two-year-olds playing together. It affords insights into how two-year-olds maintain relationships. This play happens at a slower pace and takes place in a different part of the outside space, but is also typical of much of the play I observed which by no means always involved running. The use of the play food and the presentation of the cups are another example of the way in which the meaning making of two-year-olds is based on culture which is brought from home and becomes part of the shared culture in the nursery.

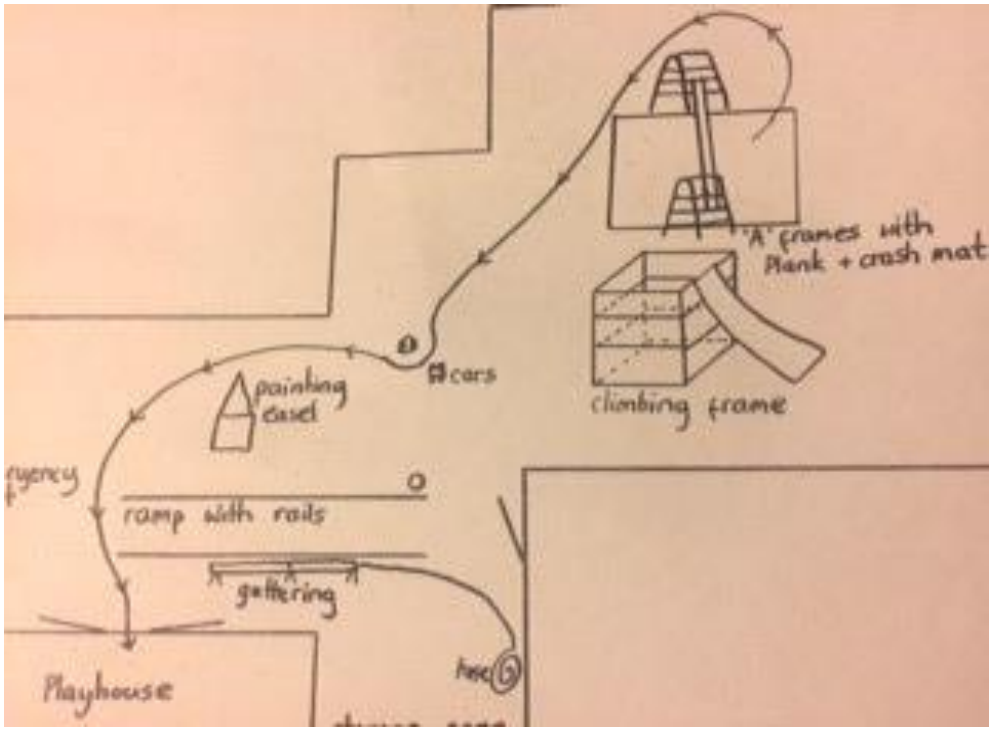
The episode was selected because it is an example of two of the two-year-olds in the group playing together without much interaction with an older child. This was relatively rare in this bubble. Ibrahim (two years and ten months) and Jordan (two years and seven months) sometimes spoke in sentences but at other times their speech could be quiet, unclear, and infrequent, which made their communication less noticeable to adults. Both children had English as an additional language, although they had different first languages to each other.

Jordan and Ibrahim had been on the crashmat with a practitioner who had been directing and physically supporting Jordan to climb the 'A' frame. Ibrahim had made it clear, through avoidance (moving away from the adult and focusing on the edge of the crashmat), that he would not participate in this and Jordan also expressed some anxiety about it. I started

recording when the children moved away from the practitioner. This episode of play lasted 2 minutes and 17 seconds.

Ibrahim and Jordan stood with their bodies oriented to face one another and made eye contact. Ibrahim said, ‘we can play in house’. Jordan made a sigh, which might be a whispered ‘yes’, stepped off the crashmat and walked towards the playhouse. After a few moments Jordan glanced back as if to check that Ibrahim was following. They both walked to the playhouse with Ibrahim following at a short distance (see Map 4).

Map 4. Ibrahim and Jordan walk to the playhouse. Ibrahim follows Jordan so their path is depicted as one line.



The time Jordan and Ibrahim spent in the playhouse is described below and depicted below in photo sequence 1. The playhouse is a shed where domestic role-play furniture and equipment are provided.

When they got to the playhouse, they looked around and Ibrahim smiled, raised his eyebrows and said ‘seat’ in a quiet voice (picture 15). He made several rapid gestures with his splayed hands swirling them in the direction of the seat, as though indicating it at the same time as speaking (picture 16). Once in the playhouse they walked around it, orienting their bodies towards the first chair and then the second. Jordan sat in a chair at the back of the playhouse then stood up and moved to the door. Emir entered and asked me to close the door which I

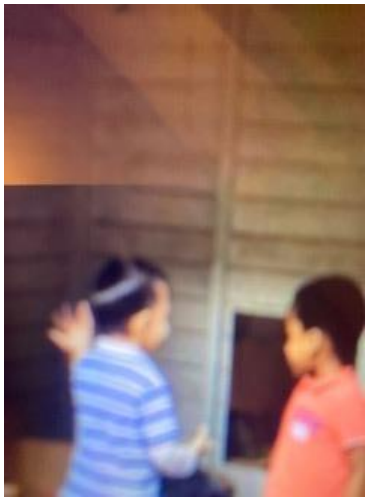
refused to do (picture 17). Jordan sat in a chair at the back of the playhouse (picture 18). He then moved to the middle of the playhouse, paused, and then walked to the doorway of the playhouse. He stood still for a few seconds looking out of the playhouse door. His brow was furrowed and he bit his lip (picture 19). He then went back to the seat at the back of the playhouse and sat down, exchanging greetings with me and making eye contact on the way (pictures 20 and 21).

Ibrahim went to the table, moved some food into a bowl, and took it to the pretend kitchen which used to be in the two-year-olds' base (pictures 19, 20, 21). Ibrahim moved plastic food and bowls from place to place in a corner of the playhouse. His gaze was intently focused on the kitchen equipment. He murmured very quietly 'making food… first the bread then the banana', put food in the microwave and pressed some buttons, which are not really there (picture 22). After a while Ibrahim came and sat next to Jordan. They sat together for two seconds then Ibrahim moved closer to Jordan and they sat next to each other for seven seconds (picture 23).

Ibrahim got up, went to the table, selected two cups (picture 24), and turned back to the chair, as though to present one cup to Jordan. While his back was turned, Jordan rose and walked to the door. Ibrahim turned back to the table, replaced the cups (picture 25), and followed Jordan out of the house, walking past him and stopping at the nearby guttering. Jordan reached to lift the large block which was keeping the door open and said, 'This door…this door…is stuck,' (picture 26). A practitioner prevented Jordan from closing the playhouse door and I ended the focus on Jordan and Ibrahim's interaction here because continuing to record would have exposed the practitioner to a stressful situation where she might have felt criticised.

Photo sequence 1. The second part of the playhouse episode.

15.



16.

17.

18.

19.

20.

21.

22.

23.

24.

25.

26.

This 'comic strip' way of representing Ibrahim and Jordan's play in the playhouse was selected as preserving some aspects of the small movements, gesture, gaze and manipulation of objects which were important in their meaning making during this episode. This is reduced when I have covered the children's features to preserve anonymity, and is also incomplete as this way of representing the play does not show what happened between the stills. However, the description provides some of this information.

Ibrahim and Jordan's walk to the playhouse was achieved through the mode of movement, coordinated through gaze and changes of pace. In this episode and others, I observed that Jordan and Ibrahim used movement to maintain proximity which expressed and facilitated the development of their relationship. Jordan and Ibrahim spent time together in their chosen activities through their use of movement. I often saw Jordan approaching other children who he seemed to want to play with, smiling and moving near them. This seemed to be a common and successful way for young children to initiate play with others.

Another mode which was used extensively in this play was manipulation of objects. This was another mode that was highly developed in this group. The placement of domestic role play artefacts in the playhouse, and the practitioners' modelling of the play, both signal ways in which they are expected to be used. However, the way Ibrahim used the objects was original. This is evident in the way he uses the imaginary microwave buttons, but social semiotic multimodal analysis asserts that every sign is newly made and transformative (Gualberto and Kress, 2018), even if it seems like a predictable or repeated sign.

There were times when one mode was predominant and then moments when a number of modes were combined. In the playhouse, as in the chasing play speech, gaze, and gesture tended to occur simultaneously with particular uses of movement. These are movement so that bodies are oriented towards each other; movement so that participants are physically close; and moments of stillness. For example, when the children entered the playhouse they were momentarily standing close to each other and Ibrahim spoke at the same time as gesturing and changing his facial expression (picture 16). This contrasts with the walk across the playground when they communicated almost exclusively through movement. This is an example of children making the most appropriate signs in the light of the material affordances of different modes. Movement so that bodies are oriented towards each other, and close, has material affordances for making signs with gaze and gesture.

When children designed signs using objects they also drew on the material features of the objects and the social and cultural history of their use (Kress, 1997; Wohlwend, 2011). When Ibrahim picked up the plastic cups in the playhouse he used their material aspects of being portable and shaped like cups to make his gesture of offering a pretend drink to Jordan. Offering drinks has a cultural and communicative meaning in homes, and in the nursery, which involves being friends and spending time together. Offering pretend food and drinks in the playhouse (and pretending to drink and eat) was a very common gesture among the two-year-olds and practitioners and so its meaning making potential had been developed over time. Ibrahim therefore also uses this socio-cultural feature of the objects to make meaning.

This episode showed two-year-olds making meaning by manipulating objects. They combined this with other modes such as movement, gaze, gesture, facial expression and speech. Movement was used to maintain proximity or alter orientation to one another and gaze, gesture, facial expression and speech were used less frequently. The two-year-olds used different modes to those favoured by adults such as speech. An example of an adult's preferring speech was given in episode 1 where Jordan was told to speak and to use a conventional gesture.

These children developed their friendship through proximity. Spending long periods in outside play enabled them to do this. Children's relationships are important to them (Engdahl, 2012) and this section has shown how multimodal observations of outside play offer insights into children's friendships and how they are maintained.

6.3 ‘A shark is coming’−an episode of chasing play on and around the climbing frame

This section is about the rich learning in a chasing game between a two-year-old a three-year-old and a four-year-old. I foreground the two-year-old’s meaning making and learning. The section demonstrates how the two-year-old combined modes, and used modes for different purposes, and how the children develop their ways of meaning making through movement and gesture.

Episode 3 shows children using the different levels of the climbing frame to make meaning through the modes of movement and posture. The children played on and around the climbing frame and also manipulated objects to make meaning in combination with movement, gaze, facial expression and speech. Like the previous episodes, it highlights children drawing on culture from inside and outside the nursery to make meaning during play. Like episode 1, this episode is an instance where a two-year-old can be seen learning from the older children about ways in which they make meaning.

Episode 3 was important to the children involved because they were developing a relationship. Emir (four years and seven months) and Naeem (two years and eight months) were very excited to play with Aston (three years and five months) who had not attended nursery very frequently. Aston was another child who preferred to play outside and rarely went inside. He showed great enthusiasm for chasing and climbing. Emir and Aston had played a game where they were superheroes, especially Spiderman. Naeem, Emir and Aston had also played with the water together on several afternoons.

This play took place over four minutes. It began shortly after Aston arrived at nursery and I stopped recording when Naeem left the play to look at the water and prepare food for an adult. Naeem has EAL but speaks English fairly fluently and confidently, and Aston is a monolingual English speaker.

The play started with the children following each other on the ‘stepping stones’ and climbing frame. The position of the climbing frame and ‘stepping stones’ are indicated in Map 5 (the ‘stepping stones’ are shown as two lines of multicoloured shapes), and the climbing frame can be seen in the grid below. Then Aston communicated that he had become a dinosaur through roaring and holding his arms in a pose representing a T rex. He caught Emir and then chased Emir and Naeem across the playground towards the inside space several times. Immediately after this, the threat was a shark. This is an example of the fluidity of play. It was quite hard for adults to follow and understand these changes and yet children accepted

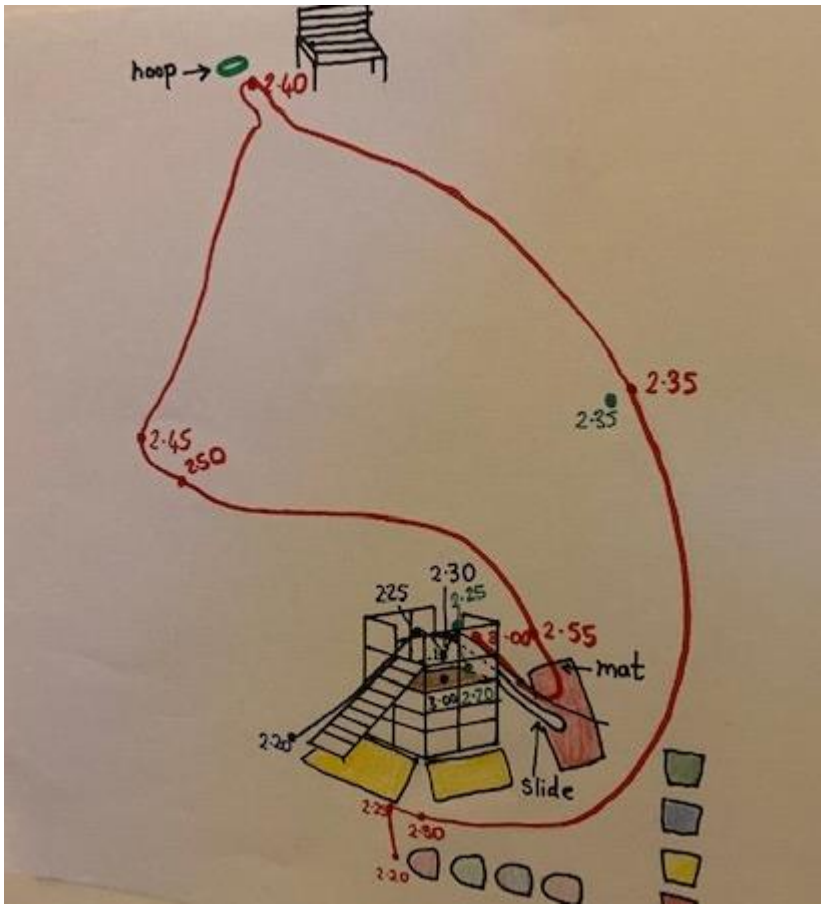
them quickly. In fact, Naeem does not accept the shark proposed by the older children; it is not the sudden appearance of a shark that he disputes, but the way they choose to represent it.

For reasons of brevity I have not included transcription of the dinosaur part of the play here. The transcription which follows continues from the end of the dinosaur play (2.20 seconds into the episode). The extract that I have transcribed is both typical and atypical of the rest of the episode of play. It is typical because its themes and the way modes are used are broadly consistent although there is less running and more speech in this part of the play. It is atypical because it involves Naeem moving in and out of the play frame in an attempt to repair a disagreement about the representation of the shark.

I selected this extract from the longer episode because it epitomises the ability, confidence and agency of a two-year-old making meaning with older children. Naeem challenged the older children, communicated his idea and then assimilated the ideas of the older children in his play. It is also an example of a different use of objects for meaning making which will be returned to in the discussion.

The transcription consists of Map 5 showing where the children moved during this part of the play and a grid describing other modes used. The map, when read alongside the grid, represents the way movement is connected with the other modes and with time.

Map 5. Showing where children moved during the 40 second episode in grid 1.



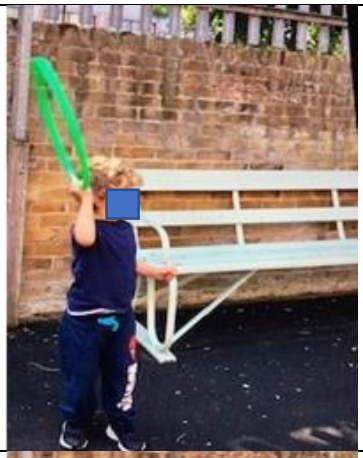
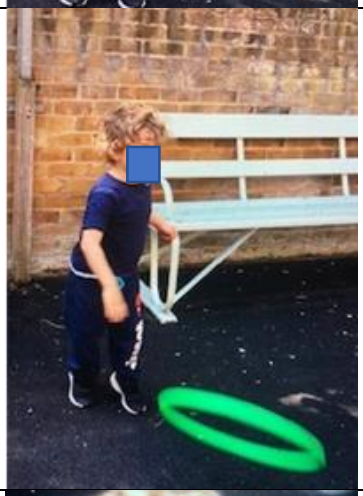
Key to map

Child	Colour used to map movement
Naeem	
Aston	
Emir	

NB. Seconds into the episode are recorded as figures. Where paths are not continuous it is because the child was out of shot.

Grid 1. showing some of the modes used in the play around the climbing frame.

Seconds into episode	**Still from video (shows gesture, posture, gaze, movement of body to alter orientation to other players, manipulation of objects)**	**Comments on modes in time frame represented by still**	**speech**
2.20 - 2.25		E has come up the slide. E looks at A and A climbs up the ladder of the climbing frame.	N. 'Stop Aston you can't make a shark, that's wrong' (spoken loudly) E. 'Yes, Shark, shark' (shouted)
2.25 - 2.30		A. Raises his arms as he jumps across the platform of the climbing frame. He turns to look at A. then turns again and continues to chase E N. Holds his elbows as though crossing arms. N meets A's gaze and when A turns away he looks at a nearby practitioner E. is out of shot	N. 'You can't make a shark' (spoken) A.'Wow' E. 'Wow Shark is coming, run' (shouted)
2.30 - 2.35		N. runs around the climbing frame past A who pauses at the bottom of the slide and past E who is standing in the middle of the playground. E's gaze is moving from A to N.	N. 'Aston' E. 'Uh oh, shark' (shouted)

2.35 - 2.40		N. runs to a corner where there is a hoop which he lifts up	N. 'Aston, look shark, watch out!' (shouted)
2.40 - 2.45		N. Throws hoop then crosses his arms in front of him and runs towards me and the climbing frame. He makes eye contact with me, furrows his brow and puts his hand to his ear.	N. What is that sound? (spoken) I explain that the sound is a truck going backwards outside E. 'Aston' (shouted)
2.45 - 2.50		N. stands and rotates looking around the playground A. is in the climbing frame and has put his leg through the bars	N. 'I'm going, bye' (spoken) 6. 'a shark, it's got my leg' (Screamed) E. 'Uh oh, shark' (shouted)

2.50 - 2.55		N. walks towards the climbing frame A. is inside the climbing frame and so is E.	**6.** 'Shark!' (shouted)
2.55 - 3.00		N. runs to the slide and walks up it without holding the sides. His arms are spread in a balancing position. When he gets to the top he holds the rails at the top of the slide. He looks down at A. A. climbs onto the platform of the climbing frame and N reaches his hand down to him as though to help him up.	E. 'A shark's coming' N. 'Aston, Aston, give me your hand'

Naeem wanted to use an object to stand for the shark, and, from his gaze and the timing of his speech, he included its movement, when he threw it, as part of his idea of signifying a shark. This is transcribed in the map and the grid and occurs at 2.35 to 2.45 seconds into the episode. A few days prior to this episode, Naeem had used a stick that he had found as a shark, but he was not happy with the idea of a shark which was entirely imaginary and was communicated through speech, gaze, gesture, posture, movement, and positioning on the climbing frame. Naeem overcame his reluctance to engage with this way of representing a shark, as is illustrated in picture 41 below.

Picture 27 is a line drawing taken from a video still showing Naeem (left standing at the top of the slide) and Aston attacking a shark at the bottom of the climbing frame. Aston says 'Bully bully aaah, I'll step on you.' This image supplements description to depict how the children's positioning on the climbing frame was used by Naeem and Aston (simultaneously with speech, gaze, and gesture) to communicate the existence and position of an imaginary shark.

Picture 27. Naeem and Aston communicating the existence of a shark at the bottom of the climbing frame.

Next in this play, Aston led in attacking the shark with some plastic balls that were lying around the playground. These were coloured balls which had been used in the water play. Sometime later, Naeem, who had been to the water to collect balls, asked 'Aston you want play paint?' Aston replied 'No, it's too late, I already woke up, I need to rub my back' and rubbed his legs with a ball as though he was applying some kind of lotion with it. Naeem left to play with the water.

When I looked at the video to analyse and transcribe it, I realised that there were some problems with the recording. Because there were three players and they were often distant from one another I could not follow all the children. I was using the nursery iPad, which has a relatively narrow view when holding it in a 'portrait' orientation, and moving to stay close to the action to capture facial expression and speech.

Because of my focus on two-year-olds, I recorded Naeem when it was not possible to have all the children in the shot. This meant there were times in the recording where Emir or Aston were not in shot and there were no moments when all three children are in shot and not obscured by the climbing frame. This raises questions about the difficulties of recording group play with nursery equipment. It draws attention to choices made when I recorded and about what is or can be recorded in nurseries. The subject of what can and should be recorded is revisited in the conclusions and implications chapter.

The gaps in this recording were particularly evident when I transcribed it. This reiterates the value of transcription as a part of analysis because I thought I had understood what happened in the play. This reminded me that practitioners often think they know what is happening but that re-watching events, as in analysis of videos, can often reveal something different.

The mode which was used most in this play was movement, but speech, manipulation of objects, gesture, posture and gaze were also used. Children were sometimes distant from one another and sometimes close. Distance and proximity were part of the play and were varied through the mode of movement. Movement was used to make contact and to communicate changes in the play as well as to make meaning about chasing. Distance and proximity have affordances for the way modes are used. An example of this is where voices were raised both to communicate over distance and to convey urgency and drama.

Speech offers material and social possibilities of raised pitch and volume to express drama, to cross distance and to make contact when practitioners cannot see each other. This made speech significant in this episode, where players were moving and sometimes distant. Some communication was in the play, such as 'bully bully'; some is outside it, e.g. 'what is that sound?'; and some is about the play, such as 'Stop Aston, you can't make a shark, that's wrong'. The speech used to maintain the play was often squeals, brief exclamations such as 'bully bully', 'wow' or repeated announcements, e.g. 'a shark is coming', while longer sentences were sometimes used to repair perceived breaks in play, to organise a change in the play or to address practitioners.

Speed and jumping movements also created drama and were a significant part of this play. Going down the slide added speed to the chase, but running up the slide and jumping onto the climbing frame and moving fast across the platform were also important to the chasing. Movements such as jumping, climbing, and sliding intensified the excitement of the narrative and these are suggested and made possible by the structure of the climbing frame.

The threat of the dinosaur materialising on the climbing frame was exacerbated by the limited exits that Emir had, and by the position of the dinosaur at the top of the climbing frame. The shark was made possible by the affordance offered by the climbing frame to look downwards from height. In this way Naeem, Aston and Emir used the properties of the climbing frame to make meaning in their play.

During the fieldwork, I observed two-year-olds using the different levels of the climbing frame or its potential as an enclosed space to make meaning. They used the climbing frame in

unconventional ways by climbing up the slide, entering in different ways, inhabiting it, using it as a vantage point to watch others or by putting objects down the slide. Ibrahim pressed some circular fastenings on it as though they were switches.

Sometimes practitioners enforced conventional use of the climbing frame. They asked children to go up the ladder, move across the platform and go down the slide. Practitioners instruct children to use the slide conventionally because when the climbing frame is used by lots of children at once it is safer to go in one direction. In this bubble it was seldom necessary to direct children on the climbing frame because of the low numbers of children and the amount of space available to them. This is an example of the low group size, the space and the way the resources were arranged, enabling the children to make meaning. Staff were available to respond to the children and offer support where it was needed but did not need to direct children in order to maintain safety and this enabled the children to make meaning using the climbing frame.

This episode demonstrated how these two, three and four-year-olds jointly negotiated their complex chasing play. The episode shows the two-year-old learning from the older children about ways of representing a shark during play but it is clear in this episode that the learning involves the two-year-old challenging and struggling with these ideas. It is not a passive receipt of their knowledge and Naeem learns because he is very highly motivated during this play and in this relationship.

The children used the levels of the climbing frame and objects in the playground to make meaning. Their meaning making is based on their previous experiences of chasing, and their ideas about dinosaurs, sharks and weapons from both inside and outside the nursery. Some of these ideas are likely to have come from popular culture given that this is the only way dinosaurs can be experienced and that all the children in the nursery knew the song ‘baby shark’ from YouTube (Pinkfong, 2016).

6.4 Discussion

The data analysis reveals that the two-year-olds were all different and had different ideas and interests just like any other group of people of a similar age. This finding contrasts with discourses in the two-year-olds offer and the curriculum for children aged birth to three. Discourses about two-year-olds permeating the two-year-old offer (DfE, 2014) and the curriculum (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2021b) suggest that children of the same age are a homogeneous group. The curriculum gives this impression by describing behaviours which

are expected of children at different ages and by providing 'observation points' which encourage practitioners to check if each individual child is achieving these expectations at the expected age. These ideas derive from a developmental view of childhood which permeates education and 'everyday understanding of children in western societies' (James and Prout, 2014, p. 10).

The findings in my research show that two-year-olds are 'already social actors rather than beings in the process of becoming such' (James and Prout, 2015, p. xi). The children's play arose from their interests and relationships and they made meaning agentically, using the semiotic resources that best expressed them. They formed their own social groups and created their own worlds in a way that is sometimes unfamiliar to adults.

The ideas and interests that the children and practitioners brought to nursery, made up a shared culture in the nursery which underpinned play. I suggested in the introduction that this culture is made from 'the stuff of everyday life' for a particular group (Marsh, 2010, p. 13). The episodes I have described, where shared interests in chasing or the cultural practice of sharing drinks were drawn upon in the construction of play, are evidence of the expression of this kind of culture.

The children are also using 'popular culture', which is defined as 'the range of texts, artefacts and practices that are popular with large numbers of children' Marsh (2010, p. 13). The data analysis showed how children used ideas and motifs from popular culture to construct play. Examples of these include the 'three little pigs' story and the 'baby shark' video (Pinkfong, 2016).

The two-year-olds represented their ideas through combinations of modes. These included movement; manipulation of objects; gesture; posture; facial expression; gaze and speech. The two-year-olds used movement and manipulation of objects extensively to make meaning in their outside play and used speech much less. This resonates with findings from research with three and four-year-olds (Corsaro, 1979; Flewitt, 2005; Cowan, 2018;) and research with two-year olds in museums (Hackett, 2014) and children under two in Swedish nursery settings (Engdahl, 2012).

My research, and the research cited above, suggest that young children communicate differently from adults. 'Children make meaning in an absolute plethora of ways' (Kress 1997 p.37). They switch between modes translating meanings into different modes and transforming meanings and modes as they do so (Ibid.). I saw children switching between

modes, combining modes and using the modes of movement and manipulation of objects in a way that was well developed in this group. Kress argued that schools encourage the use of language in preference to other modes (Ibid. p. 36), and the curriculum for children aged 0-5 (DfE, 2021) exemplifies this. The nursery playground, however, is a place where children are free to use whatever modes are best fitted to their purposes and to switch between modes.

The children could use the modes of movement and manipulation of objects because of the affordances of the playground, the objects that were provided, and the way the playground was organised. My research revealed that the mode of movement in space was important in the meaning making of two-year-olds. This meant that the space available and the duration for which they were able to use it was important to their meaning making. Spaces have different affordances for movement and the playground has affordances for movements at different speeds and levels.

The way children were allowed to use the space and the objects meant that they could use them to make meanings using movement and the manipulation of objects. The previous chapter noted that children used objects in unpredictable ways and this chapter has given further evidence of this. Children used objects and space to make meaning multimodally and the freedom they were given to use them in their own unconventional ways enabled them to do this. Practitioners allowed the children to go up and down the slide and ladder on the climbing frame or to use the hoop as a shark. This enabled the children to represent their ideas multimodally.

Children used the affordances of modes to make meaning. They used the material and cultural affordances of modes. Examples of this included the play described in section 6.1 where Hamza and Emir drew on the material affordances of movement in space (varying speed and direction to maintain proximity and sometimes orienting their bodies to each other). They also drew on the social and cultural affordances of running to construct their play, they were making meaning from their previous experiences of chasing and of monsters.

The children also used the material and cultural affordances of objects to make meaning during their play. In the same extract the material affordance of the A frame (its size, shape weight and bars which mean that it can contain children) is used. This is alongside the cultural affordance the A frame has in the light of cultural understandings of what a ‘jail’ is, and possibly a previous use of the A frame as a jail.

My research reveals how the nursery playground and the way it was organised supported children who were learning English. It showed how the speech during play was embedded in motivating and meaningful context including the meaning made in other modes. Children could learn English as part of their shared meaning making which was motivated by their own interests.

I have illustrated how the children made meaning multimodally during their outside play. They used the objects and space available in unpredictable ways and the way the playground was organised and managed by the adults enabled them to do this. I cited research and literature which suggests that making meaning using objects and movement is characteristic of young children (Wohlwend, 2011; Engdahl, 2012; Hackett, 2014). Other research with older children suggests that children use particular modes for different activities at nursery and that some children who seldom speak at nursery speak freely at home (Flewitt, 2005).

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

This thesis describes a study of two-year-olds in the playground at an inner London nursery. I made video recordings of children's play over 6 weeks in June and July 2020. I was able to observe children's experiences and gain some understanding of their feelings about them by using an ethnographic approach and a hybrid theoretical framework combining childhood studies and social semiotic multimodal theory.

Ethnographic methodology enabled me to understand the context of the setting and get to know the children. Participating in the setting over time meant that I was able to gather and represent detailed data about the setting. This included data from documents and data from informal conversations with practitioners and the management of the centre. Ethnography enabled me to foreground the meanings children made during their everyday lives in the playground at nursery.

Drawing on childhood studies and social semiotic multimodal analysis promoted an understanding of children as people with voices which are seldom heard and provided a theory and method with which to make visible the meanings they made. Social semiotic multimodal analysis sees children as sign makers designing signs using the material and socio-cultural resources available. Social semiotic multimodal analysis ensured a focus on the ways in which the two-year-olds made meaning during outside play. It made me attend to and represent all the ways in which young children used semiotic modes, such as movement, posture and manipulation of objects rather than foregrounding the ones which seem most obvious to adults such as speech and facial expression.

Childhood studies conceptualises children as agents and places emphasis on the meanings that children make, and how they make them in specific contexts. Childhood studies draws attention to discourses which conceal their 'voices' Throughout the thesis I have drawn attention to discourses which influence the way these two-year-olds are understood. I conclude here that when two-year-olds are understood only through a discourse which evaluates them in terms of their future attainment it causes their existence as people in the present to be obscured. By separating out and investigating some of the discourses pertaining to the two-year-olds in my study I was able to examine the influence of the discourses and select a lens which could enable the participants' 'voices' to be 'heard'.

My work contributes to the theoretical advancements in childhood studies by combining social semiotic multimodal analysis and childhood studies. There are indications that both theoretical approaches are open to being combined with others. Kress and Jewitt suggested that the scope of social semiotic multimodal analysis studies can be expanded by conversation with other theoretical approaches (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2017, p.29) and Prout stated interest in the engagement of different theories with childhood studies (Prout, 2005). Social semiotic multimodal analysis ensured a focus on what child participants did in the moment, and interpreting this as agentic meaning making, while childhood studies provided a rationale for recognising children's agency and their existence as people in the present. This focus on children as agentic meaning makers in the present enabled me to understand and document how two-year-olds constructed outdoor play against the policy backdrop of the two-year-olds offer and in the context of an inner London nursery during the global pandemic. It enabled me to see how their outside play was learning and to contrast the way children learnt with the way learning was conceptualised in the two-year-olds offer.

Reflections on answering the research questions

Discourses in the two-year-olds offer conceptualise learning in terms of measurable and predetermined outcomes. Two-year-olds are seen in terms of their future outcomes and this is prioritised over what is of value and meaning to children in the present. I assert that these discourses play a part in the lack of 'voice' young children have in matters which affect them such as the two-year-olds offer. The young children in my study showed a preference for embodied modes such as movement and manipulation of objects over speech and I suggest that adults may not always recognise or value the meanings young children make through these modes. This thesis has illustrated how very young children express preferences and are social actors and I make the case that they should be 'listened to'. Analysing the outdoor play of 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds during the pandemic has shown that they were skilful and motivated meaning makers. The findings suggest that this is how children learn, a view that is not reflected in 'the two-year-olds offer' (DfE, 2014).

7.1 What was the context for the outside play of two-year-olds at nursery during the pandemic and how did it shape their experiences?

The context for children's outside play was changed during the pandemic. The two-year-olds were returning to nursery after being at home for two months and the nursery was different to how it was before the lockdown. Chapter 5 considers the new space, the different ways that objects were made available and arranged outside and the changed social, pedagogic and

curricular context in the nursery. In my analysis, I have argued that the changes enhanced children's outside play.

Specifically, I explained how the two-year olds spent more time playing outside during this period. Outside play is important because it has affordances for children's meaning making through movement that are not readily available inside. The playground was organised into several distinct, linked, spaces, which enabled two-year-olds to play in a variety of ways. The large open space suggested running play to children and was an arena where connections could be made with other children while the smaller more enclosed spaces, such as the playhouse and the area where the water play was positioned, facilitated more private play and quieter interactions. Different spaces have affordances for various kinds of outside play. This leads me to recommend that two year-olds-should have free access to different kinds of spaces.

The way objects were organised enabled children to use them for meaning making. It was important that they were allowed to use them in the ways that they chose and move them from place to place. The two-year-olds used objects that directly simulated living things or objects (like the giraffe or the cups that Hamza and Ibrahim played with), and objects which lend themselves to various interpretations (such as the balls and the hoop played with by Aston and Naeem). Their different affordances for meaning making suggest that both kinds of objects should be provided for two-year-olds.

The smaller group size, the higher adult to child ratios and the changed balance of younger and older children in the bubble meant that children knew one another, got more attention from practitioners and played with children of different ages. This resonates with other research (Howes et al., 1992; Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003; Fagan, 2009; Speight et al., 2020) and is also reflected in research carried out by Ofsted (2020a) by consulting practitioners during the pandemic. This finding implies that small groups, high adult-child ratios and equal numbers of two-year-olds and older children support the meaning making of two-year-olds.

The changes described in chapter 5 also shaped how time was experienced and used by children in the nursery. The two-year-olds played outside for much of their nursery sessions. They played alone, with other two-year-olds and with three and four-year-olds. Children were usually able to play for as long as they liked without interruptions. Practitioners paid close attention to their meaning making and supported their play so that it could continue

undisturbed. This meant that the two-year-olds chose how to use time in their play and could continue or change play according to their interests. Enabling young children to use extended periods of time in their own way rather than conforming to adults' timetables is explored and recommended by a number of researchers (for example, cf. Clark, 2020), and the analysis of my data supports this view.

7.2 How do two-year-olds multimodally construct their outdoor play?

The children in my study showed that they were social actors and skilled communicators who used modes in ways which were well developed in the group. They used the spaces, objects and time to make meaning multimodally in their interactions with practitioners and peers. The two-year-olds used the modes of movement and manipulation of objects in their meaning making more than adults usually do, and used speech less. Because they are not so constrained by conventions they are more able to switch between modes and to use the available semiotic resources creatively to fit immediate needs and interests.

Kress (1997) suggested that children are more flexible and fluent in their sign making than adults. In my observations, the two-year-olds switched between modes fluidly and combined them innovatively and aptly. They used objects creatively according to their own interests and the material and socio-cultural affordances of the objects. The children's play was shaped by the social-political structure of the two-year-olds offer through the material and social context. Using this structure children showed their agency by making original and unpredictable meanings. A clear example of an unexpected meaning was Naeem's use of a hoop to represent a shark (chapter 6, episode 3).

Children's multimodal play is important because it is learning. This research understands play *as* meaning making (Cowan, 2018) and meaning making *as* learning. This idea that learning is co-created between people is not a new discovery but is part of a tradition of early years education (Cameron and Moss, 2020 p. 231), although the focus on semiotic principles and the materiality of the resources involved in learning processes has been overlooked in the past. This thesis has shown how two-year-olds are agentic in their learning and that they co-create learning multimodally through their outside play. However multimodal learning is not always recognised (Cowan and Flewitt 2020).

The curriculum does not recognise young children's multimodal communication except as a stage to grow out of (DfE, 2021b, p. 26). It emphasises spoken language to the exclusion of other modes stating that 'The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven

areas of learning and development' (DfE, 2021a, p. 8). I observed that for the two-year-olds speech was a small part of their communicative repertoire and all the modes they used underpinned their learning. The lack of recognition of multimodal communication in the curriculum is problematic because it might mean children's 'voices' go unheard. It means that children who do not use speech much are likely to be seen as unable to communicate, practitioners may not engage with their multimodal meaning making, and their learning may not be recognised. This has been indicated by multimodal research on older children (Flewitt, 2005; Cowan, 2020).

This lack of recognition of children's meaning making in education, however, is not solely an issue concerning the modes that children use. It is also an issue about how learning is understood. This is exemplified in the differences between the model of learning in the two-year-olds offer (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2014b) and the one that is proposed by social semiotic multimodality (Kress, 2013). The two-year-olds offer is based on a view of education as measurable against predetermined norms while social semiotic multimodality understands learning as co-constructed around participants' interests. Kress argued that the current 'metrics of success and failure' (Kress, 2013, p. 121) misrepresent learning. They assess conformity to a canon rather than recognising the agency of the learner. Kress asserted that this view of learning cannot recognise learning that arises from the interest of the learner, or is expressed in 'non-canonical' modes.

In summary, the research emphasises children's agency and learning that arises from their interests and is expressed through modes chosen by children. I observed that two-year-olds constructed their outdoor play socially and using embodied modes. This is important in nursery education because it is learning, but the way learning is understood in the curriculum does not recognise this.

7.3 How do two-year-olds experience outdoor play as part of the government's two-year-olds offer and what are the implications for policy and practice?

Discourses that underpin the two-year-olds offer and the curriculum for children from birth to five (DfE, 2021a) conceptualise learning as acquisition of predetermined facts and skills which are transmitted to children and can then be measured. The emphasis on measurement and on linear progress through age-related stages in the curriculum (DfE, 2021b), provides evidence of a fusion between developmentalism and what Freire (2005, p. 72) described as a 'banking' concept of education. Freire (ibid.) explained this as an understanding of education as a process where predetermined facts are deposited into children who are conceptualised for

this purpose as empty containers. The belief that learning can and should be measured contributes to a discourse where learning is understood as a race to acquire measurable predetermined knowledge and some children are understood to have a deficit

Discourses about measurement and high-stakes deficits have the effect of defining two-year-olds primarily as 'becomings' (Qvortrup, 2005, p. 5), so that they are seen in terms of their future potential (or lack of it). The two-year-olds offer is aimed at reducing the deficit two-year-olds are expected to have at age five. The policy and research around the two-year-olds offer (such as Melhuish et al. 2017; Teager and McBride 2018; Hutchinson et al. 2019), which were discussed in the literature review, omit their experiences because this discourse makes it difficult to see them as people in the present. These documents are about what is done to children and how predetermined facts can be imparted, rather than about what children do or think.

I found that two-year-olds are social actors, with their own emotions and ideas, which they communicate. Other research and literature has noted how very young children, and those who cannot speak, are able to communicate, and those who are familiar with them, interested in their ideas and prepared to spend time observing and interacting with them, are able to understand their meanings (Alderson, 2000; Flewitt 2005; Gallacher 2005; Flewitt, Nind and Payler, 2009). My research sees children as people in the present and therefore emphasises their ideas and focuses on the meanings they make in the present. It suggests ways for nursery practitioners and researchers to better understand the meaning making of children during their outside play. I was able to understand some aspects of their experiences in the playground at nursery which they attended because of the two-year-olds offer. I observed children choosing to play outside and selecting play ideas according to their own interests and those available in the shared culture of the nursery. The two-year-olds chose to play with one another, with the older children and sometimes with practitioners. The children almost always came into nursery eagerly and played immediately and continually. These observations indicate that their experience of outside play in the two-year-olds offer was engaging, playful and positive.

7.4 Strengths, limitations and directions for future research

I carried out a small-scale research study in my workplace with a reduced sample in comparison to my plans. This was because it became impossible to visit other settings due to restrictions due to COVID-19. I was relatively new to the setting and did not work directly

with the two-year-olds prior to the research so I was not familiar with the practitioners who worked with the two-year-olds. This meant that there were fewer of the preconceptions or conflicts between researcher and professional roles than might be expected in insider research.

I see it as an advantage that the two-year-olds did not know me before the research. This meant that they did not engage with me very much initially. They became familiar with me because I was there every day and I observed that usually their play was not changed by my presence or by my use of the iPad. The two-year-olds appeared to view me as 'that teacher who works with the older children and often uses the iPad'. This made it easier to observe them, as did the high adult to child ratio because there were always adults available if two-year-olds wanted them. For example, if a two-year-old called for help while I was videoing, this did not cause a dilemma for me because a member of staff would always be close by and could address the problem.

It was sometimes difficult to observe, usually due to my feeling of responsibility towards parents, children, staff, and the setting in general, because of my position in the setting. It was also challenging to put aside understandings about children that arise from my professional life and to understand them from the perspective of childhood studies and multimodality. Reading and discussion with my supervisors enabled me to do this. MacNaughton (2000) influenced me to look more widely at interactions rather than at individuals, and childhood studies enabled me to understand different ways of looking at children (e.g. Prout, 2005). As discussed in the methodology chapter, reflecting on the positionality and background of the researcher is a strength in qualitative research (Mosselson, 2010) and acknowledging it establishes the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The features of this small sample and the unusual circumstances bring opportunities and restrictions regarding what can be concluded about outside play for two-year-olds. I have provided information to enable readers to judge its applicability to different educational settings. The setting and the circumstances are unusual and I have used the opportunity to make some suggestions about what conditions might be particularly supportive to children's experiences of outside play. I have used detailed description and images so that it is possible for readers to consider the extent to which findings can be transferable to other similar settings (Bryman, 2016). An example of this is the number of children with EAL.

My sample includes children who have differing experiences of learning English as an additional language, as well as one monolingual English speaker. This is typical of nursery schools in this area and others where I have worked in inner London. Observing how children with EAL communicated multimodally during outside play suggested that this kind of play enabled them to learn and make relationships. Further research into how outside play supports these learners could inform future policy and practice for young children with EAL.

The small sample, and the relatively short timescale, limit what can be said about differences between two-year-olds in relation to their outside play. The observations are mainly of boys because there were more boys in the bubble and they attended nursery more frequently than girls. I suspect that over a longer period some children spend more time outside than others and future research into their experiences would be interesting especially in relation to literature that suggests that children's learning during outside play is not fully recognised as this means that some children's interests are less supported (Cowan, 2020 and see also chapter 3 and comments below).

My sampling approach was to video two-year-olds playing in groups. I had anticipated that these would be groups of two-year-olds but because of the change in circumstances, due to the pandemic, two-year-olds usually played with older children or adults. This limits the transferability of the findings to settings where two-year-olds are cared for separately but enables me to make some observations about the extent to which mixing age groups in the particular circumstances of the bubble (such as high adult-child ratios, increased space and balanced ratios of two-year-old and older children) enabled the learning of two-year-olds.

Nursery settings are different and choosing a different setting would have led to different findings. I described some relevant features of this nursery school in section 4.5.2, As a nursery school this setting has exceptional resources in terms of staff qualifications and experience and this applies to the staff who work with the two-year-olds. Two of the staff who worked with this bubble were graduates (not including myself) and all but one of the practitioners had years of experience working with two-year-olds along with a level 3 qualification. This is unusual as the majority of children who are in receipt of the two-year-olds offer are in private or voluntary settings which are less well resourced (Pacey, 2019). My selection of this nursery school, rather than another setting enables me to present evidence for the effectiveness of settings like this nursery school. This is congruent with other literature

that that advocates for more generous resources for young children (e.g Cameron and Moss 2020)

A further limitation arises from a temporal aspect of my sampling. All the two-year-olds spent most of their time in the outside space but it is probable that this would not be the case in December. Further research about how weather affects participation in outside play, why this is and how outside play can be enabled at other times of year would increase understanding about how opportunities for learning can be maximised. My fieldwork took place over a short period and does not give a full picture of outside play for two-year-olds. The fieldwork took place in June and July when the weather was warm and dry and there are likely to be seasonal variations in outside play in the UK (Maynard and Waters, 2007; Bilton, 2014).

A final limitation of this research is that it does not explore the emotions of children during outside play. Feelings can be seen as internal and individual and my research does not claim to access them. My research is focussed on interactions between people rather than on individuals. I have used the theoretical framework to examine how two-year-olds construct outdoor play as part of the two-year-olds offer and to make claims about the what this means.

The decision not to research children's emotions is reflected in the research questions and was reinforced through the methodology. I did not analyse the videos with the aim of recognising different emotions. Occasionally children showed some distress or annoyance but with very few exceptions these emotional expressions were either a response to adult interventions or were swiftly ameliorated by them. This meant that I would not be videoing them because I was observing interactions during play, between children rather than those between adults.

Although I was not exploring children's feelings I was keenly aware of them. I noticed children's expressions of emotion when I was transcribing videos and sometimes wrote observations about them in the research journal. I gained the impression that the children usually showed a high level of wellbeing and engagement throughout most of their outside play. of them in the research journal and observed that they were almost always happy to come to nursery' (section 5.4). Some research suggests this is not always the case and calls for more research which directly explores the perspective and emotions of young children (Leavitt 1994).

Young children's feelings are important because children's happiness is important in its own right (DfE 2017 p. 5; Cousins and Cunnah 2018). Policies and curriculum for two year olds should therefore pay attention to effects on young children's feelings in the present and should be informed by research which takes these into account. Children express their feelings multimodally and therefore social semiotic multimodality is well placed to explore emotion. The place of affect is recognized from its inception. Kress saw affect as both a motivation for sign making and a part of the meaning that is made (Kress, 2009).

7.5 Contribution to knowledge

Contribution to policy and practice around two-year-olds

This research adds to a body of work which challenges predominant policy discourses about education young children and disadvantage (e.g. Cameron and Moss, 2020). My research applies this critique specifically to the two-year-olds offer. The two-year-olds offer provides nursery education for two-year-olds as a cure for the deficit that proponents understand to arise from 'disadvantage'. This is problematic because it defines families and children negatively and because of the suggestion that nurseries can alleviate this deficit. The two-year-olds I researched were 'disadvantaged' in the terms of the two-year-olds offer because they were from families with low income.

Describing children as 'disadvantaged' is a negative comment about parents and masks the families' many strengths and advantages. I foregrounded the children's strengths as meaning-makers and argued that these should be recognised because the strengths of disadvantaged two-year-olds are very rarely acknowledged. The two-year-olds from low income families were motivated and agentic learners who brought knowledge, skills and dispositions to nursery which they shared during their outside play. Alderson (2000) is one of the few writers who have suggested that 'disadvantaged' children who experience challenges often develop understanding and competencies that others do not. Their strengths however are not amenable to measurement and may not relate to the things that are valued at school (Alderson, 2000, p. 209). The culture and languages that the two-year-olds in my research bring to nursery can be seen as an example of this.

The idea that low income is a failing of families (implied in the suggestion that education is the answer) is an example of a discourse which suggests that low income is associated with personal flaws. Shildrick (2018) emphasises that low income is largely caused by social and structural conditions over which the government has power. It is not caused by the attitudes

and behaviours of those who experience it. Low income will therefore be alleviated by different social and structural conditions and not by addressing perceived personal shortcomings. Free places for two-year-olds may, or may not, be good for children and families, but early education is not a cure for the limiting and stigmatising effects of low income.

My research also questions some of the ideas in the EYFS. (DfE 2021a). It suggests that the special affordances outside play has for learning should be recognised in the EYFS. I found that the affordances of space for the mode of movement promoted meaning making. This is not reflected in policy, outside play is only mentioned in the statutory framework as a resource for physical development (DfE, 2021a, p. 9). The documents which guide practice do not recognise the importance of outside play for the meaning-making of two-year olds. My findings also indicate that the affordances of time for outside play should be better reflected in the Curriculum (DfE 2021a; DfE 2021b.). The two-year-olds I observed were capable of making choices, they were sociable and considerate to others and did not engage in rages that were unreasonable. This contrasts with perceptions of two-year olds in the curriculum and elsewhere.

The emphasis on spoken language in the EYFS is misplaced. More emphasis should be placed on young children's multimodal communication. Rather than spoken language underpinning all areas of learning, multimodal meaning making is young children's way of learning. These findings reflect other multimodal research and literature (e.g. Kress, 1997; Flewitt, 2005; Cowan, 2018) and also influential literature for practitioners which is focused on young children's meaning-making (e.g. Athey, 2006; Cagliari et al., 2016). My research accords with this body of research in that they all see children as learning through their meaning making in various modes.

Contribution to empirical research during the pandemic

There has been very little research on the lived experience and play of very young children during the pandemic (Pascal and Bertram, 2021; Rogers, 2022). This is particularly marked in the case of ethnically diverse children from low income families. In the few cases where very young children's experiences have been studied, it has been either through consulting parents or practitioners (for example, see Pascal *et al*., 2020 p.2; Ofsted, 2020a), through asking parents or practitioners to solicit children's comments and pictures, or facilitate interviews online (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021; Potter *et al*., 2021). This mediation by

parents and technology affects which children are researched so that the views of white middle class children are over-represented (Willet, 2022). I was able to look closely at the experiences of 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds with EAL at nursery during the pandemic. I found that they continued to play and learn through their outside play with peers and adults.

My findings challenge discourses about 'learning loss' during the pandemic (EIF, 2021; DfE, 2021c; Campbell, 2021; Hall, 2022) and 'catch-up' (EIF, 2021; Ofsted, 2022) which have been particularly applied to 'disadvantaged' children (e.g. EIF, 2021). These ideas resemble those underpinning the two-year-olds offer in their understanding of learning as measurable, and as a race where learners are ranked. They also assume that children only learn at school and in the context of teacher-led indoor activities. The two-year-olds I researched enjoyed playing and learning outside at nursery during this phase of the pandemic. Positive as well as negative experiences of play during the pandemic have been noted in other research (Ofsted, 2020a; Pascal *et al*., 2020; Potter *et al*., 2021; Mantovani *et al*., 2021). Different groups of children and individuals experienced the pandemic differently as did adults in different circumstances and family income was not the only variable. This more nuanced understanding of the pandemic was expressed in a press report by Ofsted (2020b):

> Inspectors found children's experiences weren't necessarily determined by privilege or deprivation. Rather, those who are coping well have good support structures around them and have benefited from quality time spent with families and carers (Ofsted, 2020b).

This finding resonates with my findings about the children I observed during the pandemic but it did not fit the predominant discourses about the vulnerability of children from low income families. It was absent from later reports and was soon obscured by a narrative that all 'disadvantaged' young children experienced learning loss (e.g. Hall, 2022). Although the two-year-olds would not have told me about their experiences, I was able to understand them through observations whilst playing outdoors and employing a combination of childhood studies and social semiotic multimodal analysis.

Combining multimodality & childhood studies

The combination of childhood studies and multimodality is a contribution to the theoretical and methodological advancements in childhood studies. Other multimodal studies of young children (Flewitt, 2005; Wohlwend, 2011; Hackett, 2014 Cowan, 2018) use childhood studies and social constructionist approaches when explaining the context of play and early years education, and have an ethnographic approach, but do not explicitly combine the two

approaches throughout the research. Furthermore, theoretically and methodologically the combination of childhood studies and social semiotic multimodal analysis was found to be a suitable approach to understand and represent the meanings made by very young children.

I found that young children are social actors with views and opinions which they communicate. 'Giving children a voice' is a popular slogan, but children have voices, it is adults who need to listen.' (Alderson, 2000, p. 211). When Alderson talks about voice she means all the ways in which young children communicate and 'hearing children's voices' involves paying attention to their multimodal meaning making and engaging with the cultural worlds they create. I have argued that two-year-olds should play outside at nursery to promote their learning but attending to their multimodal meaning making gives rise to another rationale for outside play. In line with my perspective, that children are people, and that their perspectives should be heard, children's outside play should be seen as important because they choose it. The two-year-olds I observed were capable of making choices, they were sociable and considerate to others and this element of my research provides evidence for ways in which education for two-year-olds can be democratic and support their participation. It makes the case that children's perspectives in the present should be paid attention to. This connects with literature promoting democracy in education such as (Moate et al., 2017; Cameron and Moss, 2020).

7.6 Recommendations

I was able to explore how some changes that were made to the organisation of the nursery due to COVID-19 enhanced children's play. As a result of this I found that different organisations of space, resources, people and time have varying affordances for the outside play of two-year-olds. This has implications for nursery provision. Two-year-olds should have access to a range of outside spaces so that they can use their affordances for different kinds of play and interactions. A selection of objects should be provided, which children can easily access and move for use in their meaning making. Based on this research I recommend that children are given long periods of time where they can choose the pace and duration of their activities. This enabled two-year-olds to use time as a meaning making resource. This aligns with Clark's ideas about 'slow pedagogy' (Clark, 2020, p.134) and Archer's assertion that 'unregulated spaces in the curriculum' (and by this Archer is referring to time as well as space) are important in enabling children to express themselves using their preferred modes (Archer, 2017, p. 191).

Small group size and a high staff to child ratio was found to be supportive to the play and learning of two-year-olds. I noted other research which comes to similar conclusions regarding older children. The balance of younger and older children in this group promoted their play together and I observed how this supported the learning of the two-year-olds. I therefore recommend that two-year-olds are taught in small groups where they are able to play with a similar number of older children and where there are high ratios of staff to children. The small group size and high adult to child ratio enabled social play between children with different experience of English and meant that the two-year-olds participated in one-to-one and small group interactions with adults where language was modelled in motivating and contextualised situations. Drury (2013) suggested that these kinds of interactions were critical in supporting young learners of English.

Paying attention to children's multimodal meaning making through using video could enable practitioners to understand children's interests and to recognise their learning. Nurseries increasingly use video equipment and my findings show how it can be used to make visible children's multimodal meaning making. Kress suggested that: 'The theoretical and descriptive 'tools for recognition' do not yet exist'. Therefore, Kress maintained it will need to be an urgent task of research and practice to 'develop 'tools for recognition' of the agency of learners, for the modes, genres, and media used by them' (Kress, 2013, p. 126). My research advocates that multimodal analysis of video could be such a tool. Video recording children's outside play is particularly apposite for making visible the learning of groups of children that are missed by current observation methods.

Cowan and Flewitt (2020) carried out research with practitioners using video to record children's signs of learning. It was difficult, however, for the practitioners in Cowan's research to give attention to children's interest and learning because observations had to record children's achievement against predetermined objectives (Cowan and Flewitt, 2020). The curriculum has changed since Cowan completed this research and there is arguably more scope for flexibility, and for nurseries to follow children's interests in the more recent guidance:

> There's more room for professional judgement. You can make more judgements based on your knowledge and experience, instead of using the early learning goals or age bands in the framework to track children's progress. (DfE, 2021d)

Given the reduced record-keeping required in the recent EYFS (DfE, 2021b, p. 5) I recommend that nurseries spend time engaging with children's interests and play. Video can

be a way of doing this and revealing the learning in children's outside play and their interests. Further research into how video can be used to recognise, document, and share, young children's signs of learning within the practical constraints of nurseries would be fruitful because it would enable children's play and meaning making to be more widely valued and enable young children's strengths to be made visible. Making and sharing video takes time however, and it is important that nursery practitioners are free to respond to children and are not overstretched so this would need to be carefully prioritised if it was to have value.

7.7 Final thoughts

In conclusion my findings contradict dominant discourses about two-year-olds, learning and 'disadvantage', and offer alternatives. The two-year-olds offer constructs the 'disadvantaged' children as lacking and it conceptualises education as the filling of empty containers with predefined learning. (Cameron and Moss, 2020, p. 223). My research offers evidence for a model of children who are agentic, better equipped, more talented, stronger and more intelligent than we can suppose' (Cagliari et al. 2016, p.397) and capable of constructing knowledge through interactions and expressing their understanding 'in a hundred languages' (Cameron and Moss, 2020, p. 223). I demonstrated that children were learning during their outside play, but that this was through playing and following their own interests rather than through being taught predetermined skills. I conclude that children should be seen as avid and resourceful learners. Learning should be understood as a shared endeavour where adults and children collaboratively produce knowledge and meaning that pertains to their interests.

In order to do this nursery practitioners would need to be freed from observations and recording which track children's progress against predetermined norms or are aimed at recording nursery activities for inspectors. They would need to be able to spend long periods of time paying attention to children and planning ways to address children's interests with children, parents and other practitioners. Video recording could be a way of understanding and sharing children's meaning-making. This is possible to some extent, because many settings already have the resources and are beginning to use video to explore children's learning (e.g. Rowell and Pullen 2010) but nurseries need to be resourced so that there was sufficient space, resources, time, training and staffing for this kind of reflective practice.

If learning is understood as interacting with the material and social world, and communicating about it, then it could happen at home or in any place where there is opportunity to play and communicate with others. 'Disadvantaged' parents and children are

diverse and will have different needs and opportunities. Staying at home with parents or others will be the best option for some two-year-olds and their families while other families will benefit from choosing nursery provision. My research showed two-year-olds benefitting from the opportunities that they were presented with as a result of the two-year-old offer. The research also revealed discourses in the two-year-olds offer that are potentially damaging to the children and families it applies to. If I was asked to recommend that parents put two-year-olds in nursery today I would still be unable to say that it would mean the children would do better at school. I would want to know about the nursery I was recommending and I would maintain the importance of the views, culture and interests of families in children's education.

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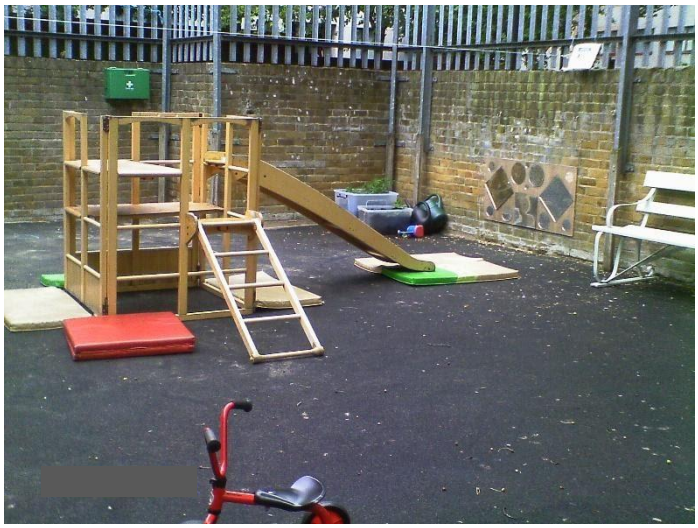
Appendix 1. Information sheet

Information sheet: Two-year-olds outside at nursery.

- About the project. As more two-year olds now attend nursery settings I have been interested in what it is like for them. I have been particularly interested in outside play and what their experiences are like outside at nursery. I plan to observe two-year olds who choose to play outside at nursery for two or three half days a week over two months. I would like to video them and show them the videos in order to explore their responses.
- Aims. My aims are to find out more about what two-year olds do in the garden at nursery, to understand what they think about it and how they express this.
- The benefits of this research will be greater understanding of the experiences of two-year olds at nursery and how they feel about them. It is possible that this will lead to changes in attitudes to outside play or provision for it. I am a very experienced, qualified, and dedicated nursery

teacher, a parent and grandparent and am genuinely interested in children's play I would not do anything that annoyed the children. If I complete my research successfully I will give parents, staff, and children some feedback. I will then take about a year writing about it. The information in the study will be used only for research purposes and in ways that will not reveal the identity of any participants. Notes and digital information will be stored securely.

- I am studying at London Metropolitan University and my tutor's email is r.perez-del-aguila@londonmet.ac.uk



Appendix 2. Consent letter for parents (given with information sheet)

If you give consent for your child to participate, please indicate this by signing and returning the attached form. I will be available for questions or please email me on hjr003@my.londonmet.ac.uk

Dear parent,

I want to research how two-year olds use space and move in the garden at xxxxxx nursery and what they think about this.

This letter is to ask your permission for me to observe your child. This is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your permission (by talking to me or emailing me at hjr003@my.londonmet.ac.uk)

I give permission for Helen to observe and video my child for her research.

I understand that:

- The aim of this project is to gather information about two-year olds' movement and use of space at nursery
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time.

- The information I provide will be anonymised and used only for Helen's research

Signed……. Date……

I will be available at the setting and am happy to answer questions or you can email me on hjr003@my.londonmet.ac.uk

Appendix 3. Consent letter for head of setting

Dear xxxxxx,

This letter is to ask permission for me to carry out some research in the nursery as part of my doctorate in social justice in education.

The overall aim of this research is to contribute to understanding of the physicality and use of space of a group of two-year olds in the garden at nursery.

Towards this I plan to observe two-year olds in the garden for two or three sessions a week for two months. I aim to video short (10 minute) sessions of children's activity in the garden so that I can look more closely at these. Notes and video clips will be kept securely, and participants and the setting will be anonymised. I will obtain written permission from parents before observing the children.

I hope that I will be able to help with some chores around the nursery to make up for any inconvenience my presence might cause.

Please ask if there's anything else you want to know about the project. I can be contacted on hjr003@my.londonmet.ac.uk

I give permission for Helen to observe children at xxxxx nursery for her research.

I understand that:

- The aim of this project is to gather information about two-year olds' movement and use of space at nursery
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time.
- The information gained from the observations will be anonymised and used for Helen's research

Signed……. Date……

Appendix 4. Consent letter for member of staff in two-year olds room

Dear xxxxx,

I am planning to do some research here as part of my doctorate in education. My research will be about children's physicality and use of space in the garden at nursery.

I am studying at London Metropolitan University and the name of my supervisor is Rossana Perez del Aguila. She can be contacted at r.perez-del-aguila@londonmet.ac.uk

I would like to observe the children outside at xxxxx nursery regularly, several times a week over the next two months. I am aware that you might be there and would like to reassure you that I am really focusing on the thoughts and behaviour of the children although your views interests and actions might also influence my research. I also aim to make short videos of children in the garden which I will subsequently share with the children. I will avoid videoing staff. I will change all names when I write it up and ensure that neither you, the children, or the setting can be identified. My findings will be used for my research and not for any other purpose and I will follow the settings' safeguarding procedures.

I hope that I will be able to help with some chores around the nursery to make up for any inconvenience my presence might cause.

Participating is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.

Consent:

I understand that:

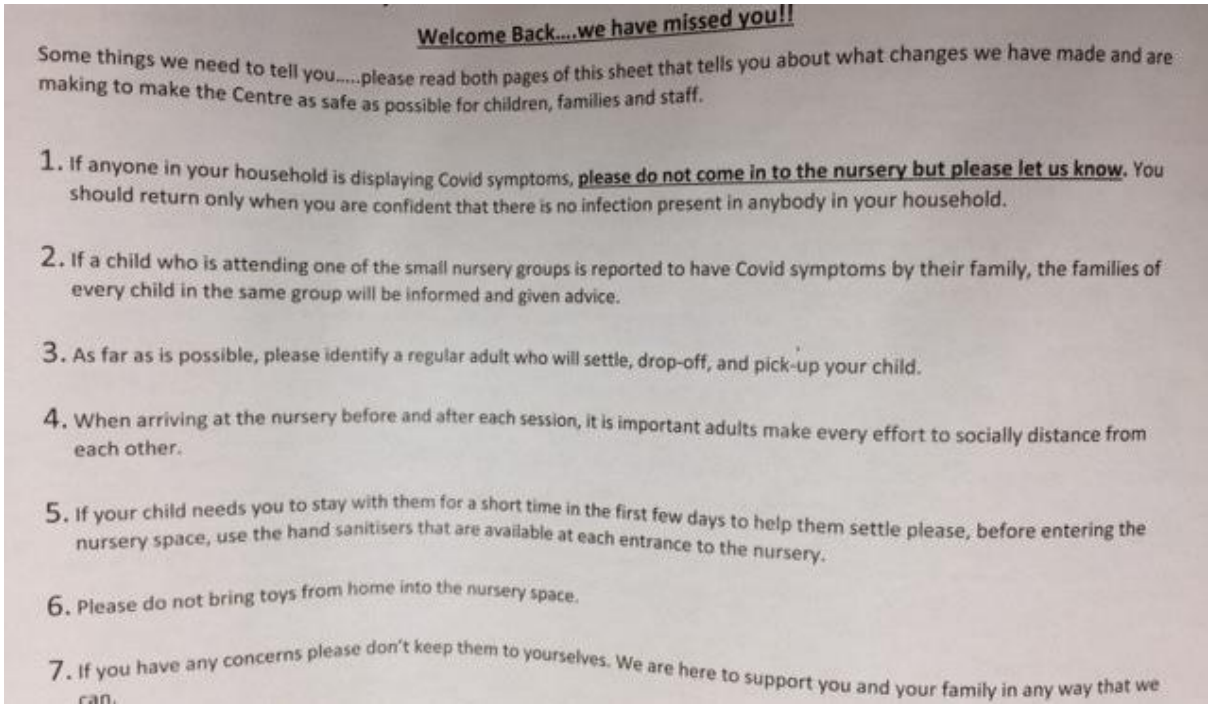
- The aim of this project is to gather information about children's movement and use of space at nursery
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time. (by talking to me or emailing me at hjr003@my.londonmet.ac.uk)
- The information I provide will be anonymised and used for Helen's research

Signed……. Date…….

I will be available at the setting and am happy to answer questions or you can email me on hjr003@my.londonmet.ac.uk

Appendix 5. Information for parents about measures taken to limit infection

This was given out on children's return to the setting in June 2020 and was also translated into Arabic



Welcome Back....we have missed you!!

Some things we need to tell you.....please read both pages of this sheet that tells you about what changes we have made and are making to make the Centre as safe as possible for children, families and staff.

1. If anyone in your household is displaying Covid symptoms, **please do not come in to the nursery but please let us know.** You should return only when you are confident that there is no infection present in anybody in your household.

2. If a child who is attending one of the small nursery groups is reported to have Covid symptoms by their family, the families of every child in the same group will be informed and given advice.

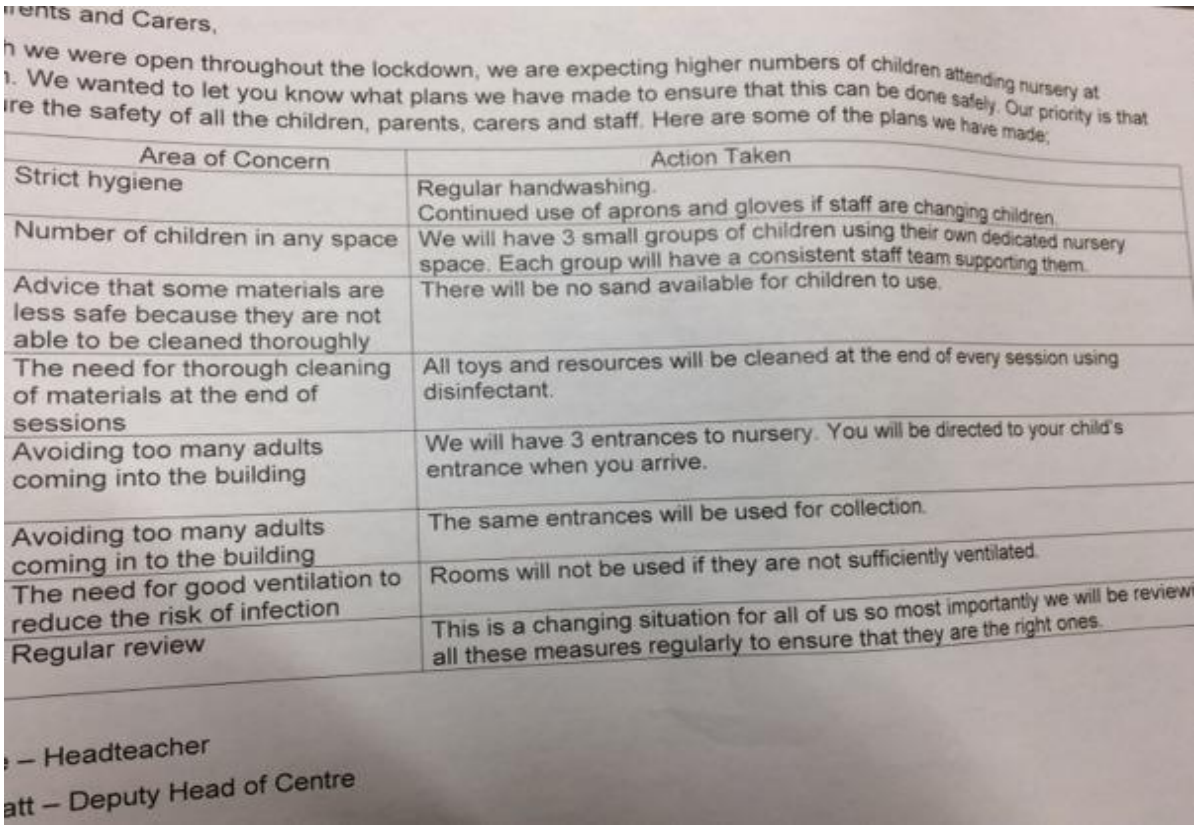
3. As far as is possible, please identify a regular adult who will settle, drop-off, and pick-up your child.

4. When arriving at the nursery before and after each session, it is important adults make every effort to socially distance from each other.

5. If your child needs you to stay with them for a short time in the first few days to help them settle please, before entering the nursery space, use the hand sanitisers that are available at each entrance to the nursery.

6. Please do not bring toys from home into the nursery space.

7. If you have any concerns please don't keep them to yourselves. We are here to support you and your family in any way that we can.



rents and Carers,

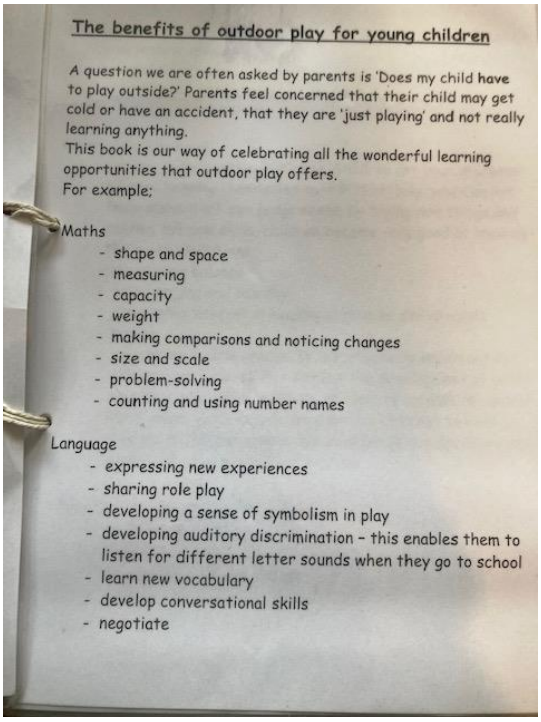
n we were open throughout the lockdown, we are expecting higher numbers of children attending nursery at . We wanted to let you know what plans we have made to ensure that this can be done safely. Our priority is that ire the safety of all the children, parents, carers and staff. Here are some of the plans we have made;

Area of Concern	Action Taken
Strict hygiene	Regular handwashing. Continued use of aprons and gloves if staff are changing children.
Number of children in any space	We will have 3 small groups of children using their own dedicated nursery space. Each group will have a consistent staff team supporting them.
Advice that some materials are less safe because they are not able to be cleaned thoroughly	There will be no sand available for children to use.
The need for thorough cleaning of materials at the end of sessions	All toys and resources will be cleaned at the end of every session using disinfectant.
Avoiding too many adults coming into the building	We will have 3 entrances to nursery. You will be directed to your child's entrance when you arrive.
Avoiding too many adults coming in to the building	The same entrances will be used for collection.
The need for good ventilation to reduce the risk of infection	Rooms will not be used if they are not sufficiently ventilated.
Regular review	This is a changing situation for all of us so most importantly we will be reviewi all these measures regularly to ensure that they are the right ones.

– Headteacher

att – Deputy Head of Centre

Appendix 6. Outdoor physical play



The benefits of outdoor play for young children

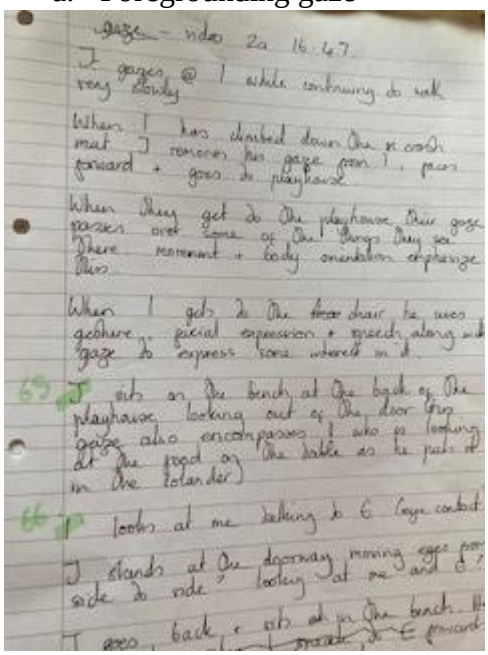
A question we are often asked by parents is 'Does my child **have** to play outside?' Parents feel concerned that their child may get cold or have an accident, that they are 'just playing' and not really learning anything.
This book is our way of celebrating all the wonderful learning opportunities that outdoor play offers.
For example;

Maths
- shape and space
- measuring
- capacity
- weight
- making comparisons and noticing changes
- size and scale
- problem-solving
- counting and using number names

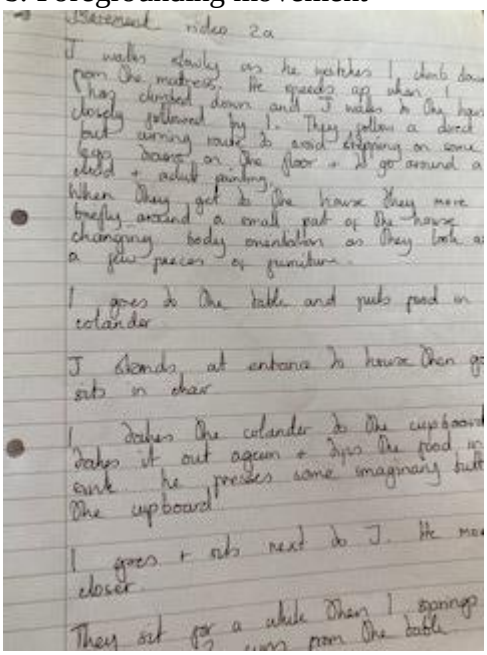
Language
- expressing new experiences
- sharing role play
- developing a sense of symbolism in play
- developing auditory discrimination – this enables them to listen for different letter sounds when they go to school
- learn new vocabulary
- develop conversational skills
- negotiate

Appendix 7. Examples of some initial multimodal analysis of video

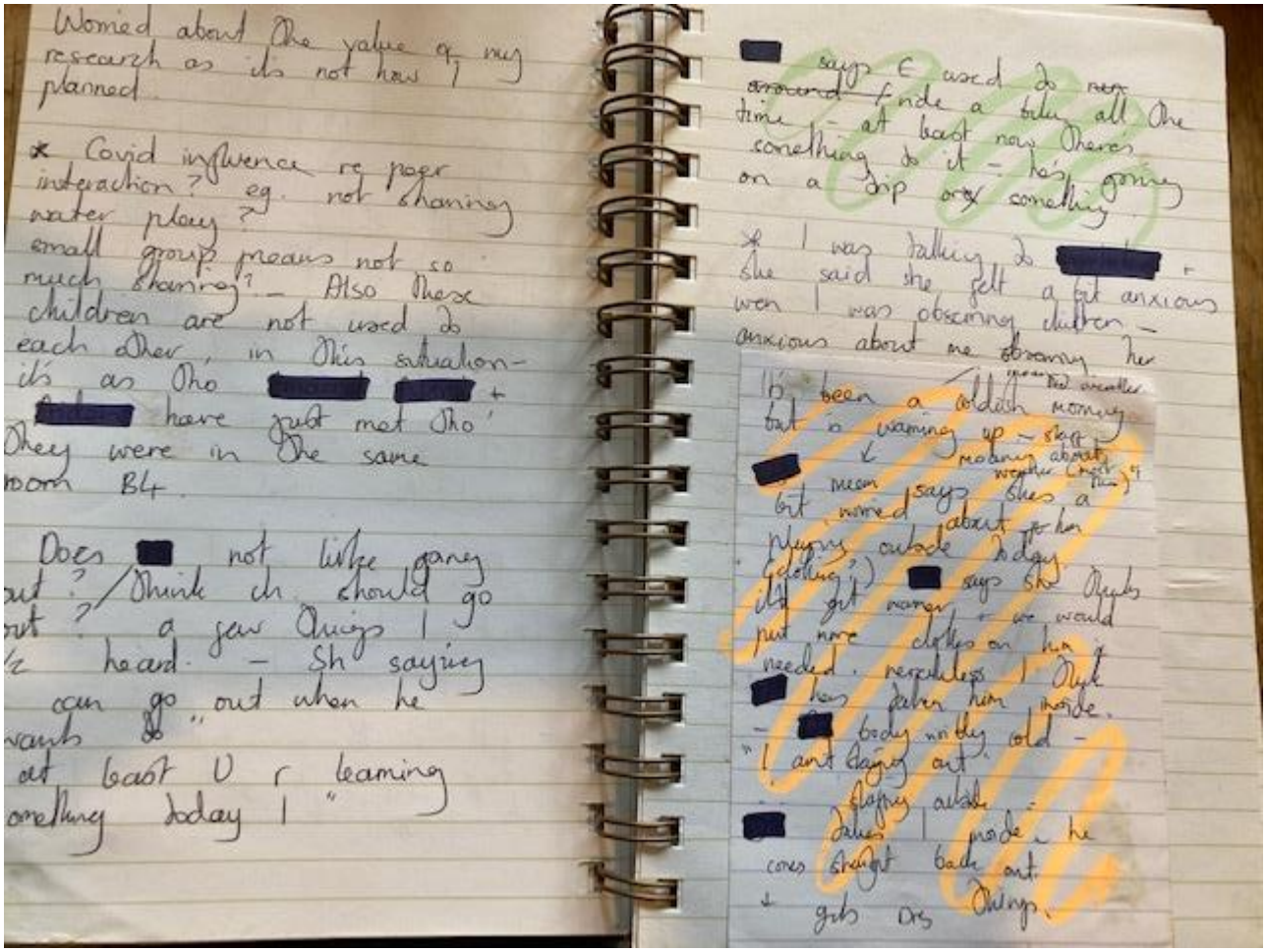
a. Foregrounding gaze



b. Foregrounding movement

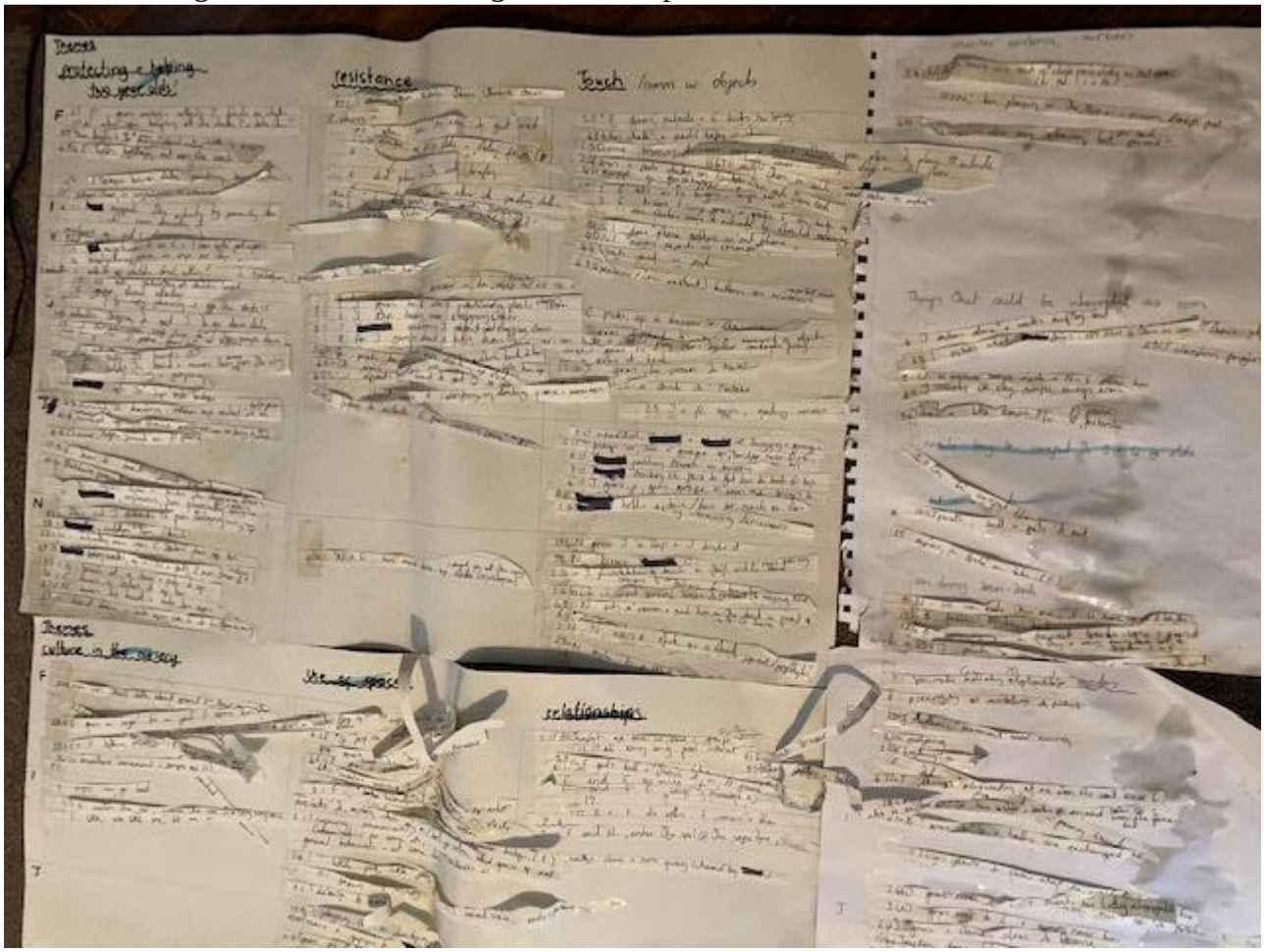


Appendix 8. Example of research journal entries

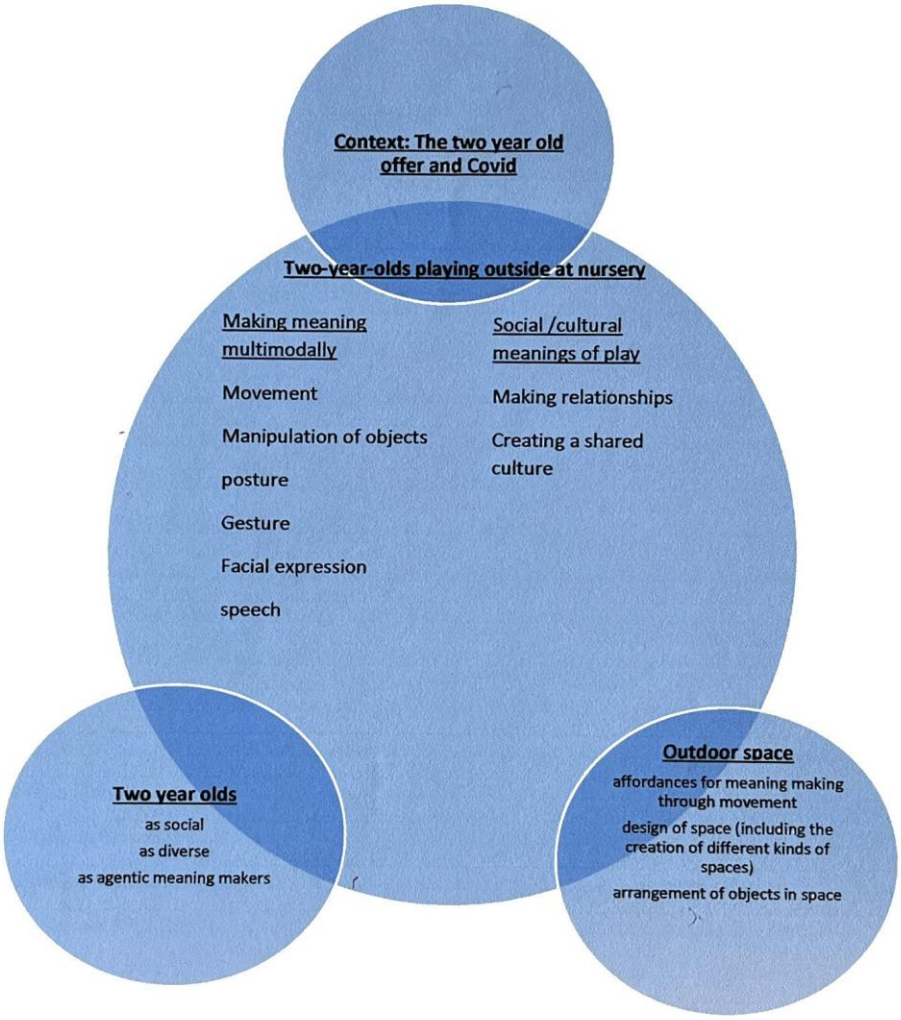


Appendix 9. Example of a stage of thematic analysis

a. Showing coded units of data organised into speculative themes



Appendix 10. Final key themes arising from data analysis



This is a diagram of some of the themes in my data