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**Experience shapes perceptions and
perceptions shape practice: how different
experiences shifted the practitioners'
perceptions and practice of outdoor play**

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the
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Abstract

This dissertation is an investigation of childcare practitioners' experiences of outdoor play and what role these experiences play in shaping practitioners' perceptions and practice of outdoor play within the early years. The current Scottish Government's focus on outdoor play offered evidence of the inherent value of outdoor play to children's learning and development within the early years. The policy and guidance documents introduced by the Scottish Government on advocating for and supporting outdoor play in the early years (see Appendix A) additionally spoke on the adult's role in supporting and delivering the outdoor play and learning provision. Regardless of this vast amount of documentation on the issue and the study findings, also as I have experienced first-hand, and as a practitioner working in a busy early education setting, it became clear that while practitioners can list the benefits of outdoor play and learning, which is not always reflected within their practice. Through adopting the interpretivist paradigm, this project challenged the participants to reflect on their childhood and professional experiences and make links between experiences and perceptions, and then perceptions and practice. Interestingly, this project found that again, while practitioners could offer sound examples of effective practice (Moyle et al, 2002), they struggled to make connections, which then suggested that early years practitioners would benefit from more specific training opportunities as well as having the time to engage in collaborative reflection that would challenge their perceptions and could also potentially improve their practice that in hand would help to improve outcomes for children in their care in the context of outdoor play.

Contents

Abstract	0
Contents	2
Figures	4
Acknowledgements	5
List of abbreviations	6
Chapter 1 – Introduction and rationale	7
1.1. Rationale	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 2 – Literature review	9
2.1. Outdoor Play and Learning in Early Years	9
2.1.1. Contact with nature	10
2.1.2. Importance of Risk	11
2.1.3. Socialisation	12
2.1.4. Adult Role	13
2.2. Perceptions and their impact on practice	14
2.2.1. Defining Perception	14
2.2.2. Experiences Shape Perceptions	15
2.2.3. Perceptions Influence Practice	17
2.3. Conclusion	18
Chapter 3 – Methodology, methods, and analysis	20
3.1. Introduction	20
3.2. The paradigm	20
3.2.1. Positivism	21
3.2.2. Interpretivism	22
3.2.3. Positioning the research	23
3.3. Data Collection and Analysis	24
3.3.1. Participant Selection	25
3.3.2. Data collection methods	26
3.4. Limitations and potential problems	28
3.4.1. Relationships	28
3.4.2. Confidentiality	28
3.5. Ethical considerations	29
3.5.1. Ethics as compliance	29
3.5.2. Ethics as ‘goodness’	30
3.6. Conclusion	31
Chapter 4 – Findings and discussion	33

4.1. Introduction	33
4.2. Role of the Practitioner	34
4.2.1. Past Experiences	34
4.2.2. Pedagogy.....	36
4.2.3. Safety and Supervision	38
4.3. Benefits of Outdoor Play	40
4.3.1. Holistic Child Development	40
4.3.2. Environmental Consciousness.....	42
4.4. Conclusion	43
Chapter 5 – Implications.....	44
5.1. Introduction	44
5.2. Key findings.....	44
5.3. Links to previous research	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.4. Limitations	46
5.5. Recommendations and Implications.....	47
5.6. Conclusion	48
Chapter 6 – Reference List	48
Appendix A – List of Guidance Documents	49
Appendix B – Plain Language Statement.....	51
Appendix C – Consent Form	54
Appendix D – Reflective Writing Prompts for Notes	57
Appendix E – Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	58
Appendix F – Extract of transcript analysis: Role of the Practitioner	59
Appendix G – Extract of transcript analysis: Benefits of Outdoor Play	62

Figures

Figure 3.1	The relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. (Adapted from Waring, 2012:135).....	20
Figure 4.1	Thematic analysis of interview and reflective writing data.....	32

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List of abbreviations

CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
ELCC	Early Learning and Child Care
EYP	Early Years Practitioner
HSCS	Health and Social Care Standards
PLS	Plain Language Statement
UNCRC	United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Chapter 1 – Introduction and rationale

All people are innately curious creatures, and as such, we display information-seeking behaviours to feed our thirst for knowledge (Loewenstein, 1994). Regardless of our varying attitudes and beliefs that lead us to search for diverse types of knowledge, we all engage in research to a degree. In fact, Livio (2017) highlighted that curiosity continues to be the main driver for all scientific research and philosophical enquiry in the academic field. This study is no exception. Reflecting on my practice I have witnessed how my experiences influenced my perceptions, and then the practice of outdoor play. Now, as a researcher, I am curious to explore my colleagues' perceptions on this matter in the context of outdoor play.

In recent years, outdoor play and learning within the early years sector has increasingly been on the Scottish Government's focus due to its many benefits to young children (Scottish Government, 2020). Furthermore, in 2018 Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition was introduced that highlighted the shared responsibilities of all stakeholders to ensure access to outdoor places for all children describing the outdoors as 'fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development' (Inspiring Scotland, 2018: online). Researchers also described the outdoors as a constantly changing and rich learning environment that lends itself to experiences that could not be repeated indoors (Bento and Dias, 2017; Kettle and Ross, 2018). Following this and in consideration of the significant value of outdoor play to children's learning and development, early years practitioners play a significant role in ensuring access to outdoor environments for children in their care. However, despite the many policy documents listed in Appendix A that advocate the importance of the outdoors and seek to support adults to develop an effective outdoor provision (Moyle et al, 2002), while some practitioners treat outdoors as an extension of the classroom, others do not give it the same value (Waite, 2011). This begs the question whether these varying beliefs impact the delivery of outdoor provision?

Babad et al (1991) studied the relationship between adult perceptions and their impact on children and discovered that adult perceptions shape their behaviours. This was also later supported by McClintic and Petty's (2015) study which reiterated

similar findings, suggesting that practitioners with positive attitudes towards outdoors are more likely to create positive outdoor experiences to children in their care.

Following this, my research project intends to examine what role, if any, practitioners' experiences play in shaping their perceptions and their practice of outdoor play in the early years. This project aims to encourage practitioners to reflect on their childhood and adulthood experiences and challenge them to make links between their experiences, perceptions, and practice which I hope will improve the learning outcomes for the children in their care.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a background for the study and to establish the context within which the study is situated, identifying the existing body of research and any gaps in this research issue. As the research title suggests, this project is concerned with outdoor play and practitioner's perceptions, meaning that both must be considered equally. Following this, the first half of this section will explore the key themes of outdoor play and learning, whereas the second part will focus on the phenomenon of perception, and in particular how practitioners' perceptions are formed and what role do they play when delivering outdoor play provision within the early years.

2.1. Outdoor Play and Learning in Early Years

The Scottish Government enshrined the right to play, learn and rest as a fundamental children's right in its Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) (Scottish Government, 2017: HSCS 1.32), as manifested in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1990). Moreover, this right has inspired Scottish Government's vision to give its children the best start in life possible (Scottish Government, 2008). Play, in a general sense, is crucial to a healthy children's development as it provides opportunities for children to gain a deeper knowledge of themselves and the world around them through experimentation, problem-solving, thinking creatively, and engaging with others (Pellegrini et al, 2007). Outdoor play and learning in particular has been increasingly on the Scottish Government's agenda due to its many benefits that include increased physical health and wellbeing, improved holistic child development and enhanced learning for sustainability (Scottish Government, 2020).

Within the early years, the learning environment is perceived to play a role of a third teacher (the others being parents and practitioners) as suggested by researchers including Strong-Wilson and Ellis (2009) and Santin and Torruella (2017). Bento and Dias (2017) took this idea further and applied it to the context of outdoor play

describing the outdoors as an open and everchanging environment which creates play opportunities that could hardly be recreated indoors. Following Maynard and Waters (2007), outdoor play creates opportunities to experience natural elements, freedom, and large and boisterous movements. Bilton (2010) has also strongly advocated for outdoor play explaining that being exposed to natural elements, sunlight and fresh air not only creates more opportunities to be more physically active but also aids in healthy bone development and a stronger immune system. Bento and Dias's (2017) study concluded that outdoor play consists of three key components that support children's learning and development: contact with nature, the importance of risk, and socialisation opportunities. However, the study argued that these can only be fully developed if there is an attentive and responsive practitioner who follows children's interests and needs. In order to provide a better understanding of the benefits of outdoor play to children, I will examine the mentioned components in greater detail in the following section but before I go on, it is important to note that although this study was small scale and conducted in Portugal, it was an up to date account in the context of my research that explored a wide ranging literature, and as such it was deemed as important account for my research.

2.1.1. Contact with nature

Kettle and Ross (2018) state that children are naturally curious and inquisitive about the world around them, and the outdoors has the capacity to extend that curiosity and inquisitiveness further. Natural materials such as flowers, stones, soil, and water are open-ended and therefore responsive to children's imagination and needs. The process of finding new meanings and uses for natural objects (for instance a stick can become a magic wand, a pen, or a boat) encourages children to practice skills such as creativity, problem-solving and divergent thinking (Bundy et al, 2009). Bilton et al. (2017) added that the use of natural resources could aid in developing a more sustainable provision since they are easy to find, cheap, and unlike conventional toys, they are open-ended, meaning they encourage children to construct new meanings and find new uses for them. Moreover, engaging with nature and its elements can help to add breadth and depth to children's learning and development.

As an example, engaging with water and soil will provide opportunities for children to develop their understanding of science, early numeracy, and language in an integrated way. Observing properties of soil and water independently, experimenting with mixing them, and filling and emptying containers help to explore the notions of textures, volume, weight, and time, and discussing these observations and experiences can lead to acquiring new vocabulary.

In addition to learning opportunities, further benefits of contact with nature have also been identified. McClintic and Petty (2015) pointed out the benefits of outdoor play to emotional children's development explaining that interacting with nature helps to build confidence, encourages to express feelings, helps to regulate behaviours, reduces stress, and increases attention span. Furthermore, Haathela (2017) suggests that when children engage with natural elements, soil, in particular, the microbes residing within those elements engage with children's immunity system helping to build better protection against various diseases. Hendricks (2017) further explains that children who have the opportunities to play outside in all kinds of weather will have fewer days of sickness and allergic reactions in comparison to children who spend more time indoors.

Finally, Chawla (2020) suggests that childhood experiences affect adult behaviours which in hand suggests that outdoor play can lead to developing a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Developing an emotional attachment to nature from an early age promotes a sense of belonging and familiarity with nature and builds a foundation of ecological and sustainable behaviours throughout life (Ives et al, 2018).

2.1.2. Importance of Risk

As noted earlier, all children have a right to play. This right has been established by the Children's Rights Convention which was ratified by the UK Government in 1992 (UNICEF, 1990). This suggests that for over four decades play has been recognised as a tool for children's learning and development (UNICEF, 2018). However, here it is important to remember that having a right does not automatically mean accessing that right. The play that was experienced by older generations is different from the

play experienced by children in contemporary societies. In reality, the nature of play has changed drastically (Bundy et al, 2009). While many adults recall outdoor play being a big part of their childhood, children in contemporary societies experience diminishing opportunities to engage in unrestrictive outdoor play (McClintic and Petty, 2015). Singer et al.'s (2009) study examined spontaneous play opportunities and found that urban growth, dangers in the neighbourhood, the increased popularity of structured activities (sports, after-school activities), busy parent schedules and rapid technological advancement contributed to a growing culture of fear. As explained by Tranter and Sharpe (2007), adults in contemporary societies view children as vulnerable and in need of protection from the dangers of the modern world. As a result, and in order to protect children from those dangers, children's play is 'more likely to be adult -organised or -supervised and indoors' (Bundy et al, 2009, p. 34). Furthermore, Bento and Dias (2017) exclaimed that such protective discourse leads adults to underestimate the capabilities of children and therefore are even more dangerous since they prevent children to learn how to keep themselves safe. Risk-taking is a natural part of children's learning and development (Sandseter, 2011). The outdoor environment, being open and everchanging, provides many opportunities (for example climbing a tree, or using a tool) for children to test their own personal limits and encourage them to assess and manage risks (Stephenson, 2003). This process of experiencing failure and success through trial and error is essential in supporting children to develop lifelong skills such as confidence, perseverance, problem-solving and self-knowing (Sandseter, 2011).

2.1.3. Socialisation

Bento and Dias (2017) argued that the outdoor environment creates the conditions for children and adults to discover different aspects of their personalities that would not emerge indoors. Following this idea, the outdoor environment and play encourage adults and children, and children and their peers, to build positive interactions with each other and with nature while empowering children to explore independently and take appropriate risks (Chawla, 2020). Green (2018) described this process as natural world socialisation. Outdoor play offers a unique opportunity to gain a better insight into the children, enabling the practitioner to provide a more

tailored response regarding their care, learning and development (Maynard et al., 2013). White (2011) points out that there are fewer conflicts outdoors, hence children are more likely to cooperate. Moreover, the unpredictability of the outdoor environment creates opportunities for children to develop shared goals and engage in the process of sharing their knowledge and skills in order to achieve mentioned shared goals (Thomas and Harding, 2011). Unsurprisingly, this process leads to developing friendships, but also it supports children to develop empathy as they begin to understand each other's feelings and needs (Bento and Dias, 2017). That said, the process of socialisation outdoors allows children to gradually build interactions and ensures that children have the agency to choose when and how it happens, as opposed to indoor socialisation which often happens in closed rooms (Maynard et al, 2013).

2.1.4. Adult Role

With a continuously growing body of research advocating for outdoor play and highlighting its importance to healthy children's development, the Scottish Government is committed to promoting and improving the quality of outdoor play for all children (Care Inspectorate, 2016). Many different policies and guidance documents including the Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2008), Out to Play (Scottish Government, 2020) and were introduced to advocate for outdoor play and support educators to deliver high-quality outdoor provision. These and other similar documents (see Appendix A) in the field of education highlight the benefits of outdoor play to children's learning and development and offer guidance on how practitioners could increase high-quality outdoor play opportunities for children, allowing the flexibility for practitioners to use their creativity on how this guidance can be put into practice. As a result, the early years' practitioners, and other stakeholders within the field, have developed a good understanding of the benefits of outdoor play to children's learning and development but also initiated the debate on what the outdoor play should be like within the early years (Hunter et al, 2019).

Two opposing beliefs have emerged: one regards outdoor play as a means for children to let off steam and take a break (Waite, 2011), while the second challenges

this idea and argues that outdoor play is an extension of the indoor classroom and as such, it is a place for learning and adult's role is to facilitate that learning (Thomas and Harding, 2011). In order to understand what role these contrasting practitioners' perspectives play in shaping practice, it is essential, to begin with the definition of the phenomenon of perception.

2.2. Perceptions and their impact on practice

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, practitioners' perceptions are a significant focus of this project. In order to understand what role practitioners' perceptions, play in shaping their practice in the context of outdoor play, it is important to begin with the definition of the phenomenon of perception.

2.2.1. Defining Perception

In general terminology, perception is defined as 'the process of becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things in general; the state of being aware; consciousness; understanding' (Oxford University Press). In order to understand this phenomenon of the perception better, I will look at its three stages - selection, organisation, and interpretation as proposed by Qiong (2017).

The human brain is continuously bombarded with numerous environmental stimuli. To prevent an overload of information the brain processes only a small part of the environmental stimuli which is determined in the selective stage (Qiong, 2017). Singer (1987, p. 9) further explains that 'we experience everything in the world not as it is—but only as the world comes to us through our sensory receptors'. Hence, this stage is concerned with selecting the stimuli. The organisation stage comes next. This stage is concerned with structuring the information and providing coherence to our general knowledge (Cantor, 1982). Finally, the interpretation stage attaches meaning to the selected stimuli. In this stage, our brain looks at the patterns established in earlier stages and attempts to make meaning of them. However, different people may have different interpretations of the same stimuli. A fitting

example of this is a kiss, which in some cultures has the function of greeting another, while in others it is perceived to be inappropriate behaviour. Samovar (2000, p. 57) adds that 'culture provides us with a perceptual lens that greatly influences how we interpret and evaluate what we receive from the outside world'. When being exposed to environmental stimuli, people generally agree on the objective part of the meaning, however, meaning-attribution on an individual level varies due to the individual's past experiences and cultural background (Qiong, 2017). Furthermore, people who share similar experiences and knowledge are more likely to attribute similar meanings to the same stimuli, and thus will have similar perceptions which are an essential part of effective communication (Qiong, 2017). During the data analysis stage, it became evident that practitioners who shared similar childhood outdoor play experiences, became the practitioners with shared general perceptions of outdoor play having a significant role in children's learning and development, which is further discussed in Chapter 4.

2.2.2. Experiences Shape Perceptions

John Locke (1693) argued that people enter this world as 'blank slates', and then adults play a vital role in moulding the children to fit societal expectations. Now, while this theory is criticised, mainly because Locke did not acknowledge the individuality of children, his theory was based on adult perceptions (Gianoutsos, 2006). Since early childhood, children are a part of a society that they interact with using all of their senses. This sensory information, as explained above, is then sent to the brain where it begins to form a perception (Mitchell and Greening, 2012). Fundamentally, perception is how an individual organises, interprets sensory information, and defines it as reality, despite the fact that an individual reality may or may not be true (Qiong, 2017). Finally, when it comes to behaviours, the perceived reality takes precedence over the true world, leading to the conclusion that behaviours are the results of individuals perceiving the world. In line with these ideas, Boerma et al. (2016) also suggested that practitioners' perceptions influence their behaviours and added that practitioners unknowingly display those perceptions to children too. Blachet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011) study found that many practitioners lack

understanding of how to use the outdoor environment and lack awareness of how their own beliefs about nature, play and physical activity influence the outdoor play experience to the children in their care. The researchers argued that practitioners' childhood and adulthood experiences with the outdoors shape their perceptions about outdoor play and its provision (Blachet-Cohen and Elliot, 2011). As practitioners develop personally and professionally, they construct and reconstruct their knowledge, and in turn their perceptions (Wood and Bennett, 2000).

McLachlan-Smith and St. George (2000) suggest that perceptions of the early year's practitioners can be categorised into theories of development and theories of practice and explained that while there is a gap between the two, practitioners are consistent in ensuring to do what is best for the children in their care based on their previous personal and practical experiences. David et al. (2000) also pointed out the discrepancies between perceptions and practice while practitioners advocated for learning through play, they would sometimes remove children from their play to perform adult-directed activities, but this study found that this is due to practitioners' expectations of the inspection of their practice and in relation to curriculum guidance documents. Additionally, Vartuli (1999) argued that practitioners' perceptions are shaped by their experiences and are congruent with their practice. Miller and Smith (2004) further explained that practitioners make decisions based not on their technical, but rather their personal and practical knowledge, and noted that additional training would help to develop of a more developmentally appropriate practice.

The contemporary world has introduced many new challenges to the early years' practitioners such as increasing diversity of children within Early Years Centres (ELCs) and increasing expectations from stakeholders including policy makers, setting managers and parents (Smedley and Hoskins, 2020) and the need for additional training to support practitioners to deal with these new challenges has been recognised not only in research but also by the government (Education Scotland, online). However, low regard of the early years practitioners, as well as low pay and poor working conditions, have obstructed the growth of professionalism within the sector (Miller and Smith, 2004). Abbot and Hevey (2002) claim that this resulted in the majority of early years practitioners being poorly qualified with limited

opportunities for career advancement. Scottish Government in its Scottish Childcare review (2015) outlined that while there is unmistakable evidence that qualified staff provide better quality provision for children, some practitioners regard natural aptitude for working with children as important (if not more) as training. Penn's research also (2000) noted that the early year's workforce will remain 'narrow and gendered' without further intervention and suggested that better support and more access to training opportunities could help to achieve the professionalisation of the sector.

2.2.3. Perceptions Influence Practice

Babad et al. (1991) studied adults' perceptions and their impact on students and found that practitioners' perceptions play a powerful role in impacting children's learning and development. Thompson et al. (2008) explain that childhood experiences with the outdoors are significant as they shape adult perceptions and behaviours regarding outdoors. Following this idea, each person creates their own reality based on their experiences and how they perceive those experiences. Therefore, it is safe to say that practitioners' perceptions of the outdoor environment influence their actions and behaviours in the outdoor play environment (McClintic and Petty, 2015). This echoes the research issue suggesting that practitioners with positive perceptions towards outdoor play will be more likely to deliver positive experiences of outdoors to children in their care.

At the beginning of this chapter, I have introduced the environment as a third teacher, and while children will be curious to engage with natural environments, it is important to consider the adult's role in creating a rich and engaging outdoor environment within the ELC (Brown et al., 2009). VanArsdell (1994, p. 89) argued that the environment is at the centre of the early years' curriculum and beautifully suggested that 'planning and preparing the environment is like setting the bait'. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the outdoors has a capacity to provide a greater variety of learning experiences compared to indoor play (White, 2011). Despite that, literature shows that many early years practitioners still perceive outdoor environment as requiring less attention than indoor environments, and that

during outdoor play practitioners have an opportunity to take a break while only providing a safety and supervision while children burn off extra energy (Dowdell et al, 2011). Additionally, Kemp and Josephidou (2021) also highlighted that it is not enough to be outside, and practitioners must assume a more active role as young children require a balanced mix of child led and adult led learning outdoors. Brown et al. (2009) suggests that many practitioners still do not understand the full potential of outdoor play to children's learning and development, and it is often not considered a priority. In addition, the practitioners spend less time and attention assessing outdoor environments, play and learning than they do indoors (Wellhousen, 2002). Thomas and Harding (2011) and White (2011) suggest that the first step in acknowledging the significance of outdoor play is recognising it as an extension of the early years setting. Blachet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) further exclaims children can only access effective outdoor learning opportunities if the practitioners provide them with time, space, materials, and a varied range of learning experiences. Moreover, to ensure that outdoor play and learning are positive and enjoyable experiences to the children, the practitioners must display genuine interest and enthusiasm (Kernan, 2010).

2.3. Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to demonstrate current trends in regard to outdoor play within the early year's establishments as well as explore what role do the first-hand experiences of the early year's practitioners play in shaping their perceptions and provision of outdoor play. As suggested by the literature, outdoor play is increasingly on the government's agenda due to its many benefits to children's and development. Moreover, outdoor environment is unique in its ability to offer learning opportunities that would be difficult to replicate indoors. Following Bento and Dias (2017) study I have introduced the three components of outdoor play namely contact with nature, importance of risk and socialisation. The second part offered a definition of the phenomenon of the perception and an explanation on how we form perceptions. It then explained how practitioners' perceptions influence their practice. This review suggests that practitioners' past experiences shape their

perceptions which then have a major influence of their practice. I have found that while outdoor environment offers itself to learning, adult's role is just as important as children require a balance of children and adult initiated experiences as proposed by Kemp and Josephidou (2021). This literature review suggests that practitioners' past experiences shape their perceptions which then have a major influence of their practice. This leads to conclude that in order to raise the quality of outdoor provision, it is essential to understand differing views and challenge practitioners' perceptions. Interestingly, while this literature review suggested that many practitioners treat outdoors as downtime allowing children to use up some of their energy, the participants of my research all expressed the belief that outdoors is an extension of the indoor environment, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 – Methodology, methods, and analysis

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the methods employed to explore early years practitioners' experiences, perceptions, and practice of outdoor provision. It will include details of the data collection methods and analysis, the selection process of the participants, as well as the discussion of limitations and ethical considerations relating to the research. However, before engaging in this study, it was fundamental to determine that the methodology adopted was congruent with the reason and circumstances of this research (Weaver and Olson, 2006). For this purpose, I will first discuss methodological frameworks that will enable me to situate my research project.

3.2. The paradigm

As was mentioned earlier, all people have different attitudes and beliefs. In research, this means that all researchers come from different perspectives and therefore have their individual views about research and how to undertake it. This has led to the development of many diverse types of research frameworks – paradigms (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

To put simply, a paradigm is a philosophical worldview and as such it significantly influences and guides research action methodology (Morgan, 2007). No one paradigm is better than the other (Hairston, 1982) instead, the choice of the paradigm helps to determine the selection of compatible methods and in hand suggest approaches for the research design which will be further explored in the following sections. Moreover, it also guides the selection of the appropriate data collection and analysis methods (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Waring (2012) further explains that all research is framed around four key questions, as identified in Figure

3.1., and all researchers should recognise the interrelationship of these elements to situate their research.

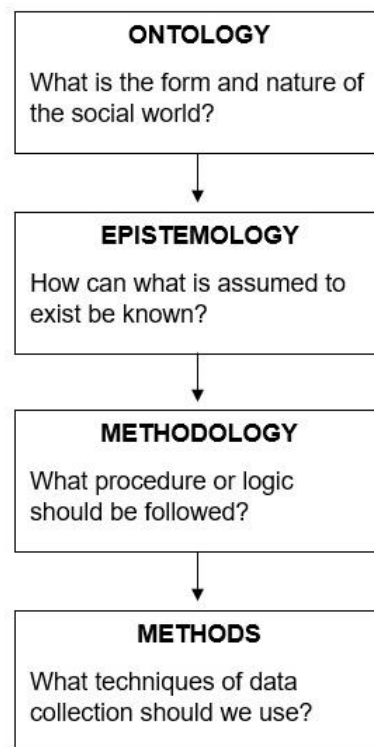


FIGURE 3.1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS. (ADAPTED FROM WARING, 2012:135)

I will now present two prevalent paradigms namely positivism and interpretivism that in educational research influence the questions that we ask and the approaches that we take during the research process (Mukherji and Albon, 2010:10). In order to situate my research enquiry, I will consider these paradigms at the levels of ontology, epistemology, and axiology, as suggested by Burrell and Morgan (1979).

3.2.1. Positivism

Positivism, also known as a scientific paradigm, in a broad sense could be described as a scientific worldview (Cohen et al, 2018). Positivist ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions further explain this idea. Positivist research is grounded in natural science philosophy where research is expected to produce generalisable

findings that could be adapted within different contexts (Saunders et al., 2009). Following this, the epistemological position suggests that the researcher and the world are independent entities, and therefore the world exists regardless of the researcher (Healy & Perry, 2000). The ontological position assumes that there is a single apprehensible reality that can be observed and measured (Baronov, 2004). Finally, the axiological view is that of an objective researcher (Scotland et al., 2012). To minimise bias and promote objectivity, the researcher must detach themselves from the respondents of the study to remain emotionally neutral (Park et al, 2020).

Positivist research advocates that the world operates by the laws of 'cause and effect' which could be explained by adopting a "scientific" approach (Krauss, 2005:760) which involves experimental testing of the hypothesis through adopting deductive reasoning (Cohen et al, 2018). Following this, positivist research often adopts quantitative data collection methods such as closed questionnaires and standardised tests that help to produce a "valid and reliable" research study (Campbell et al., 2004). In this sense, validity refers to generalisable findings that can be adapted to other contexts while reliability signifies the ability to produce transferable findings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

3.2.2. Interpretivism

Due to its' objective stance, positivist research garnered much criticism (Straub et al, 2004). Campbell et al. (2004) highlighted that in the landscape of education, interpersonal relationships are at the heart of education, and argued that positivism downplays their importance. Through such criticisms, and in opposition to positivism, a new interpretivist paradigm emerged. Interpretivist researchers contend that research in the context of social sciences such as education, is 'uniquely qualitative' because it is mostly focused on the quality and nature of interpersonal relationships (Campbell et al., 2004:2).

The interpretivist paradigm rejects the positivist idea of one truth and instead assumes an ontological position that reality is relative and subjective, as well as culturally and historically situated (Scotland, 2012). While the positivist reality is objectively determined, the interpretivist ideology argues that reality is shaped by

values and experiences, and for this reason, multiple realities emerge that are different from person to person (Neuman, 1997). To gain a better understanding, the researcher must explore the socially constructed meanings of the participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The epistemological position of interpretivism further clarifies that these meanings cannot be separated from individuals (Grix, 2004). Therefore, the researcher must engage in social interactions with the participants of the study to construct new meanings and produce new knowledge (Punch, 2015). Following this, the interpretivist studies, tend to adopt qualitative data collection methods, such as open-ended interviews and focus groups, which are designed to rely on the participants as much as possible (Creswell, 2009). Such methods generate a considerable amount of dialogue data which then needs to be interpreted by a researcher to gain a better understanding that is the reality of the research project's context (Krauss, 2000). From this, the axiological position assumes that research data is never free of interpretation and values, and these should be reflected within the report of findings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Moreover, an interpretivist researcher accepts that it is impossible to completely separate their research from their values and beliefs, thus it will inevitably affect various stages of the study (Edge & Richards, 1998). While interpretivist research is not seeking generalisations, it is expected to provide rich and justifiable accounts that could be applied in similar situations so as to be recognised as valid and reliable (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.2.3. Positioning the research

The design of this research project was led by the research question and the subsidiary questions introduced in the rationale (Grix 2002:180). It was based on constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology suggesting that practitioners' perceptions are influenced by their past experiences and highlighted that, as a researcher, I must engage in social interactions with the practitioners to be able to understand their perceptions and create new knowledge through interpretation (Punch, 2015). The axiological position aimed to conduct an authentic and trustworthy study that reflects the values of the researcher and the participants alike in hopes to create new knowledge that is specific to the participating nursery's

practitioners (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Having identified that I, as a researcher, value the interpersonal relations with the participants and recognises the importance of challenging their perceptions in order to improve outdoor learning, further that I understand that the interpretivist research is considered optimal for looking to gain a better understanding of the relationship between practitioners' perspectives and practices in the context of outdoor play within the early years it can be concluded that this study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. This is further confirmed by the research ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions outlined above in section 3.2.2.

Finally, it is evident that in order to make meaning of practitioners' experiences and create new knowledge the researcher had to adopt exploratory methodology and methods that are open-ended and focused on individual's experience (Cohen et al, 2018), which will be discussed in the next section.

3.3. Data collection and Analysis

Data is a crucial research component to all research (Furseth & Everett, 2013). Academics often distinguish data to primary and secondary, where primary data refers to data collected by the researcher first-hand (interviews, observations) and secondary data is collected from secondary sources (academic texts, government documents) (Rabianski, 2003). The collected data must be analysed and critiqued to produce reliable and valid research evidence (Barnes, 2005). While Borgman (2012) agrees that there is a wealth of strategies for data analysis, Guba and Lincoln (1989) remind that data is dependent on the beholder since every person may interpret it differently. Over the next few paragraphs, I will detail the participant selection process, and the choice of data collection and analysis methods adopted in this study.

3.3.1. Participant Selection

This research project was conducted within my placement nursery. The sample group of four practitioners were self-selecting. While the practitioners in question were a typical-case sample (Cohen et al., 2018): aged over 20 years old, working full-time, with professional responsibilities in their workplace and caring responsibilities at home (Eide, 2008). Three participants were female, and one participant was a male, all with at least 3 years of work experience within the early years' sector.

Since this project aimed to explore the links between experiences, perceptions, and practice rather than to generalise findings, a small sample was not inappropriate, however, the limitations created by focusing on volunteer accounts had to be considered (Cohen et al, 2018). While this represents a convenience sample, considering the nature of this research which is to gain a better understanding of the research issue, four practitioners with over 3 years of field experience were an appropriate group to recruit as they had accrued a substantial number of experiences and had a chance to participate and live through various scenarios during their career. Moreover, the practitioners in question, being from the same establishment, have lived through similar experiences within their establishment which could offer greater insight and understanding on how certain experiences affect different practitioners, their perceptions and practice. These considerations suggest that this was a purposive sample (Patton, 2001).

On receipt of ethical approval and permission from the Head of the Nursery and Local Authority, everyone in the staff team who meet the selection criteria were invited to participate in the research via e-mail. Those interested were asked to e-mail me and were then supplied with a plain language statement (PLS) (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C) (Creswell, 2007). On confirming their willingness to participate, the participants were sent the details of the reflective writing prompts, and interview questions. Soon after, the interview dates were arranged with each participant, and data collection process, detailed in the next paragraph, has commenced.

3.3.2. Data collection methods

In earlier sections, it was established that this research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm because of its focus on the participants, their experiences, perceptions, and practice of outdoor play provision within the early years (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As a researcher, I have embraced the ideology of interpretivism and thus it guided my choice for data collection methods. Hence, the selection included reflective writing and semi-structured interviews.

First, the participants were asked to complete a reflective writing piece challenging them to reflect on their experiences and what role did they play in shaping their perceptions and practice in the context of outdoor play in the early years. Reflective writing is grounded in the centrality of the writer and therefore is subjective (Jasper, 2005). It raises the writer's self-awareness and prompts an 'internal dialogue for analysing and understanding principal issues' (Smith, 1999:360). Following that, the writing process enables the writer to reorganise their thoughts, feelings, and emotions into numerous combinations that could lead to action (Jasper, 2005). For the purpose of this research, the participants were encouraged to take 15-30 minutes, or longer if desired, to make notes based on the reflective writing prompts I have provided (Appendix D). The participants were suggested to use their notes during their interviews. After the interview, the participants were encouraged to come back and edit these reflective writings. After that, I have asked the participants if they would be willing to share these notes with me for data analysis as a primary data source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following these ideas, the intended benefits of these reflective notes included to alleviate possible stress and uncertainty of the interviews and empower the participants through giving them time and space to collect their thoughts. Moreover, following Gibbs (1988) ideas, reflective notes could also encourage a personally meaningful reflection which is at the core of the effective practice as suggested by Moyles et al. (2002). The participants were assured that engaging in such reflective process will build on existing reflection skills and potentially will benefit their individual practice, however they had the ownership to decide how detailed their reflective writing notes are going to be. Unfortunately, only two of the participants chose to share their reflective notes which led me to a decision to exclude these from the data analysis.

The second data collection method chosen for this study was semi-structured interviews. Silverman (2017) suggested that through the use of interviews, the participants are enabled to become co-constructors of the new knowledge as they use this opportunity to share and reflect on their knowledge, and in the process co-construct new meanings with the researcher. The use of the interview also allows the researcher to position themselves as equal to the participants which can encourage the participants to be more open and relaxed to share their knowledge (Affleck et al., 2012). The interviews with the participants of the study were scheduled after the completion of the reflective writing piece. Taking into account the busy schedules of the participants, the interviews were planned online and scheduled to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Participants were encouraged to request a break if required, and a comfort break was offered after 30 minutes of the interviews. Just as with the reflective piece, the participants were provided with the interview questions (Appendix E) prior to the interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask additional questions asking to provide more narrative information on the research subject and supported me to build rapport with the participants through the use of active listening (Ayres, 2008). For the interviews, positioning myself as a practitioner-researcher proved to be most helpful as it helped to reassure the participants of the judgement-free and safe environment. This approach enabled active participation for the research participants which resulted in collaborative new knowledge construction in the context of the study (Affleck et al., 2012). All interviews were video recorded to aid transcription. The recordings and transcriptions were then returned to the participants for validation. This also gave ownership to the participants which in hand promoted collaborative working and increased the overall transparency and trustworthiness of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Reflective writing and semi-structured interviews' biggest strength was that both of these methods acknowledged the importance of participants for this study and gave them a platform to freely discuss their experiences and perceptions in the context of the study. These methods encouraged the participants to reflect on their thoughts and feelings from their practice and experiences and in hand generated a lot of data that was extremely useful for this study (Morgan, 2007). Furthermore, these methods allowed the flexibility that is essential given the considerable time demands and ongoing covid-19 challenges faced by the practitioners.

The data, collected through reflective writing and interviews, were analysed using thematic analysis which helped to identify key themes around practitioners' experiences, perceptions, and practice in regard to outdoor play. Coded information was then interpreted to construct new knowledge on the research issue which is further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4. Limitations and potential problems

This section will discuss several potential methodological limitations of this study.

3.4.1. Relationships

As a researcher, I was anticipating the possibility that the staff team may view me as an outsider and will be hesitant to participate in the study which could result in insufficient data to draw conclusions. However, I found that working as a practitioner alongside them, helped to build trusting relationships where my colleagues saw me not as a researcher, but as an equal and therefore were eager to participate. Moreover, being transparent about the study and its nature, through the use of plain language statements and consent forms, as well as my openness to discussing the project, have further helped to encourage participation and support for my research.

3.4.2. Confidentiality

Considering that the research was conducted in a single setting where everyone knows each other and everyone is aware of what is happening within the setting, I knew that it might prove impossible to ensure complete confidentiality of the participants (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). To minimise this limitation, I have ensured to be transparent about it from the very beginning by including this information in the plain language statement. I have also reiterated this to all practitioners who displayed interest to participate in the study. Additionally, I have encouraged all participants to assume pseudonyms to further aid in supporting their confidentiality.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations refer to a set of moral principles that guide people's actions (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007). Because morality is shaped by personal values, it is unique to each person and thus subject to interpretation (Furseth & Everett, 2013). However, research is not dependent on the individual, and rightfully so, since it has the potential to impact not only the researcher but also the research participants. To address this Tobin and Begley (2004) therefore suggest that ethics could be divided into compliance and 'goodness'.

3.5.1. Ethics as compliance

Compliance refers to the expectation that all researchers will adhere to ethical regulations introduced by ethics committees throughout the duration of their project because that will help prevent or minimise the harm to those, directly and indirectly, involved with the study (Furseth & Everett, 2013). Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) also stress that ethics could go beyond compliance and instead serve as a framework for quality for the whole project. They proposed the following five elements that were adapted to guide my research project: observing ethical protocols, transparent processes, collaborative nature, transformative in intent and action and justifiable to the community of practice (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007, pp.205-206). I will now explain how I adapted this in my research.

Following ethical procedures, I have first obtained ethical approval from the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow. Permissions were sought from the local authority as well as the head of the nursery, in that specific order, before starting data collection. Upon receiving approval from all organisations, I have started the participant selection process (refer to 1.3.2. chapter). As Halcomb and Peters (2016:6) highlighted, the study 'would not be possible without the participants,' therefore I adopted a variety of strategies to reassure the participants that I will conduct this study with their best interest in mind. A commitment to 'do no harm' interlinked with Tobin and Begley's (2004) idea of ethics as 'goodness' was

reflected throughout the whole project; this will also be explained in more detail in the following section 3.5.2.

All selected participants were adults, over 18 years old and competent to give consent. In order to obtain informed consent, the participants were provided with the PLS that described the nature of the study and explained the storing, using, and disposing of the data acquired in line with University of Glasgow ethical procedures. Informed consent here played a key part in establishing trust between myself as a researcher and the research participants (O'Neill, 2002).

Perpetually I was transparent about the purpose of the project, positioning myself as a practitioner-researcher. I have ensured that the PLS made the participants aware of the limitations to confidentiality caused by the small sample size and encouraged the participants to choose pseudonyms that were used in any written reports of the research (Allen and Wiles, 2015). Interviews were video-recorded and transcribed, and returned to participants to support accuracy in transcription (Halcomb & Peters, 2016; Alamri, 2019). Data collection was timed to take place outside the working hours, and it was re-emphasised that participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without any repercussions to their position or general employment within the nursery. These considerations, combined with the flexibility of schedule afforded by remote interviews, recognised the busy lives and multiple demands of the participants, and helped to minimise the potential pressures of participation in the study.

In line with data protection laws, and to ensure the confidentiality of the research participants, I was using my University OneDrive to store data as much as possible). The interview recordings were made to the cloud and then uploaded to University OneDrive as soon as possible after completion allowing for greater data security.

3.5.2. Ethics as 'goodness'

In interpretivist research, goodness, as suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Arminio and Hultgren (2002), helps to establish trustworthiness and authenticity. However, before exploring goodness in more detail, it is crucial to note that there is

an ongoing debate about assessing the legitimacy of the interpretivist study (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivist research, often referred to as qualitative, explores 'human data', such as voices and experiences which are fused with emotions and therefore subjective (Whittemore et al, 2001). Following this, Hamberg & Johansson (1999) suggested that the validity criteria should not be transferable between the paradigms. Whittemore et al (2001:527) disagreed and argued that the term validity on its own does not add to new knowledge construction; instead, it 'offers immediate recognition and understanding within scientific community', whereas the rejection of the term could further confuse researchers and the research consumers alike.

Following Guba and Lincoln (2005), this research does not support validity in a positivist sense that advocates the idea of one unassailable truth. Instead, this project offers a more ethnomethodological approach to provide evidence of goodness (Tobin and Begley, 2004). As a researcher, I have a responsibility to my participants to ensure that I present accurate and authentic accounts. As suggested by Silverman (2017), accurate evidence of participants expressing their feelings and ideas helps to build authenticity (Hopwood et al, 2021). Encouraging the participants to read, modify or clarify their accounts not only allowed them to validate their contributions but also gave them ownership over this project. This approach to data collection promoted collaborative working and reflection, and in hand increased the overall transparency and trustworthiness of the study (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007). Providing a platform, where the participants can freely speak about and reflect on their experiences without worrying about repercussions, has also supported the happiness aspect (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002).

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified positivist and interpretivist paradigms as the prevalent paradigms in the context of research. Exploring their differing ontological and epistemological positions that enabled me to situate my research project within an interpretivist paradigm. I have then introduced the research methods in the chronological order of each step from participant selection to pieces of reflective writing and semi-structured interviews. Potential limitations to the study were

discussed to ensure that I am transparent about data collection methods and potential biases. Then I discussed ethical considerations and their impact on the research and participants. The next chapter will present the main findings that arose from the data collection.

Chapter 4 – Findings and discussion

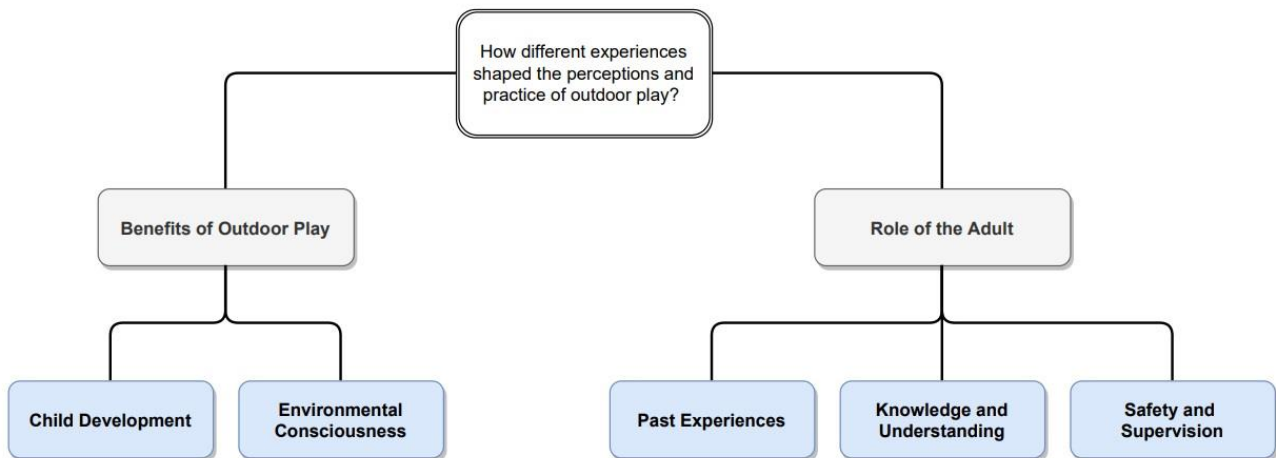


FIGURE 4.2. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW AND REFLECTIVE WRITING DATA

4.1. Introduction

In the following chapter I will present and analyse the data collected during the interviews with the early years practitioners (EYPs), thus allowing me to discuss the research topic: *Experience shapes perceptions and perceptions shape practice: how different experiences shaped the practitioners' perceptions and practice of outdoor play*. Using interviews for data collection within an interpretive paradigm allowed to explore participants' individual experiences and perceptions on outdoor play and gain a deeper understanding how those perceptions reflect in their practice (Gill et al., 2008). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach on thematic analysis, the data was scrutinised in the context of the literature on outdoor play and adult perceptions discussed in Chapter 2. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, preliminary literature review proved to be helpful in data collection stage of this project and in construction of a thematic map. However, due to iterative nature of the research process and the interpretative paradigm, I have revisited and refined my understanding of the literature during the analysis, similarly refining the thematic map presented in its final version above (Figure 4.1.) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I will now present and discuss the key themes that emerged during the data collection stage

namely the benefits of outdoor play and the role of the adult. I will now go on to discuss these further.

4.2. Role of the Practitioner

...I think it's so important that the adult has the passion, because if they've not, if they don't want to be outside, then it doesn't encourage these children to engage in their play. They need to have somebody that's going have a vision and be creative and add an aim and a value for these children... (D)

(Appendix F)

The use of semi-structured and open-ended interviews (Appendix E) as discussed in Chapter 3, allowed participants to explore and share their beliefs and attitudes in regard to outdoor play (Cohen et al, 2018). Four participants were interviewed for this project, of whom three had more than ten years' experience. The first major theme that emerged from the interview data was the role of the adult. This theme focuses on participants' individual experiences of outdoor play during their childhood and as practitioners, and how these experiences impacted their perceptions and pedagogical practices. In keeping with my belief that practitioners' experiences shape their perceptions of the outdoor play influence their perceptions and practice in the context of outdoor play, as discussed in section 2.2.3., this theme will be presented through three sub-themes: past experiences, pedagogy and safety and supervision, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

4.2.1. Past Experiences

The first sub-theme focuses on practitioners' childhood experiences. Dewey (2020) suggests that childhood experiences play a significant role in shaping the perceptions in particular regarding to outdoor environments. During the interview process, all participants, regardless their age, spoke fondly of the outdoor experiences in their childhood, reminiscing spending a lot of time outdoors, engaging in various physical play opportunities and learning about the world around them

through exploring a variety of different outdoor environments such as woods, parks, countryside, as evident in the quotes below:

...we used to go have picnics, pick flowers, climb the trees, run about, learn names of things...that's how I learned... (A)

...my childhood was mostly outdoors. I played with bikes, played kick the can, rounders. We used to go out all day, explored countryside, we went to parks... (C)

... We were always outdoors to play, making every experience enjoyable... (D)

Following this, during the interview process, the practitioners were asked to reflect what role their childhood experiences played in the construction of their perceptions of outdoor play. The interpretation that practitioners' who had opportunities to explore and engage with natural environments, have become EYPs with positive attitudes towards natural world and, in this particular context, outdoor play is apparent in the examples below:

...what I learned when I was young, I brought into my environment ...what I have learned and knew and wanted the children to know as well. Teach them what I knew ... (A)

... if you are passionate about outdoors then you'll give the best time to children... (D)

Interestingly, all practitioners have also expressed feeling confident in delivering outdoor provision stating:

...I'd say I am confident enough... (A)

...In the early years, definitely still a bit confident, because you know you can learn with the kids... (B)

... I would probably say I'm confident, right, because... that's only because I feel I know what the children need and what they deserve... (C)

These findings led me to back to the literature review (section 2.2.3.), which initially suggested that practitioners' who experienced positive involvement with outdoors are more likely to develop positive perceptions regarding it. Following this and the examples above, it is evident that childhood and adulthood experiences of the outdoor play have a significant role in shaping adults' perceptions and practice (Blachet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011). Additionally, Moyles et al. (2002:123) highlighted that EYPs' past experiences support the construction of pedagogical knowledge which as

a result influences and informs their pedagogical practices which will be discussed in the next section.

4.2.2. Pedagogy

The second sub-theme is concerned with pedagogy. In order to discuss this sub-theme further, it is important to start with the definition of the phenomenon. Moyles et al. (2002:5), defines pedagogy as “*the behaviour of teaching and being able to talk about and reflect on teaching*”, which to put simply means that pedagogy is everything that practitioners think and do. Hence this sub-theme is focused on practitioners’ pedagogical beliefs and practices in the context of the outdoor play within the early years. Comments made by the participants of this project demonstrated child-centred pedagogical beliefs mentioning things such as providing safe and stimulating environments, following child’s interest, adopting reflective and responsive practices, for example:

...sometimes you do have to put some things, ideas in their head. Yeah, I do that. But a lot of it comes from a lot of children... (A)

...reflective practice – how an experience and situations you dealt with, how it went and how you can improve... (B)

...I know every child learns differently and every child is a wee individual... (C)

As discussed in section 2.1., Scottish Government has been increasingly advocating for the outdoor play in the early years. In fact, as pointed out by Higgins (2002:149), Scotland was ‘one of the first countries in the world to formalise outdoor education’. In order to support practitioners to deliver an effective outdoor play provision, there have been released numerous guidance documents as listed Appendix A. With such big local and national focus on outdoor play within the early years, it came as a surprise that the participants of the study failed to mention any of the guidance documents. This could be attributed to the lack of training opportunities around the outdoor play and its provision (Spencer et al., 2021). Copeland et al.’s study (2012, cited in Wishart & Rouse, 2019:2295) further explain that ‘time, space and immersive experience’ are the three key elements in challenging practitioners’ perceptions and values and redefining their role in order to provide a more effective outdoor play

provision, and as such they must be taken into account when seeking to improve practitioners practice.

When EYP's were asked what outdoor play should be like, my expectation was that the practitioners will mention pedagogical concepts (i.e., free-play, child-centred, risk taking, accessible). However, through interview process it became evident that most participants found it difficult to articulate their perceptions of the pedagogical concepts of outdoor play and instead provided specific examples of outdoor play activities, as is evident from the examples below:

...show children growing things and planting things, and doing different experiences... (A)

...providing walks into the community, allowing children to experience these walks... (D)

Following Moyles et al. (2002), this could have stemmed from lack of time spent reflecting on and discussing their understandings and practice of outdoor play and education. This was further supported during the interviews, as there was a general consensus in terms of lack of training opportunities needed to improve the delivery of outdoor provision, for example:

...I am the biodiversity champion. I've not done anything with it yet, so I am learning currently, because in my training there was no training about outdoors... (B)

One of the participants also spoke about how sharing knowledge and practice with other practitioners, especially practitioners from other settings, challenged their perceptions through reflecting and comparing practice which led them to develop their professional practice, as evidenced below:

...visit other centres for a day and work there ... because then you get new ideas and you see different things ... have I not seen other people, their ideas and how they use and benefit children, I just thought that was their break time... (B)

Following this example, it is also important to note that all participants have noticed a change in perceptions regarding the outdoor play pedagogy where EYPs recognise the outdoor play as more than just getting fresh air and letting off steam (Waite, 2011). Such change in perceptions led to developing of a more child-centred approach to outdoor play provision.

4.2.3. Safety and Supervision

The final sub-theme is concerned with safety and supervision aspect. As mentioned in section 2.1.2., although risk-taking is an essential part of children's learning and development, children of today are experiencing fewer and fewer opportunities to engage in unsupervised play leading to diminishing opportunities to take-risks in general (Sandseter, 2011). Unsurprisingly, this has also been recognised by the participants of the study. The participants made references to outdoor play pedagogy noting that the role of the practitioner is to support children to manage and assess their own risks:

... if you say 'right, if you want, if you try, I'm here, I'll get you, you won't fall', so when you given that kind of security, then they will try it ... that's how you get them to assess the risk or manage the risk... (A)

...sometimes you need to step in more just to make sure that the safety is like the biggest thing outside, that we are being sensible, we're risk assessing constantly... (B)

...standing back and ... interacting when needed... (D)

Considering that children's outdoor play changed significantly due to various reasons such as urban growth and rapid technological advancement (see 2.1.2.), it is crucial to challenge practitioners' perspectives in order to raise the quality of outdoor provision in Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC).

Participants argued that children should be able to risk assess within the nursery environment as it is purposely designed for children, and practitioners, as responsible adults, should carry out the risk assessment prior to children entering the garden to ensure they have access to a safe space where they are encouraged and supported to risk-assess and risk-manage individually:

... risk is usually quite low considering you're in a garden that's in a purposely built place for children...(B)

...having a safe environment to go and play without thinking 'there's broken glass' or anything like that... (C)

Similarly, McFarland and Laird (2018) pronounce that practitioners' role is to provide children with opportunities to safely engage in risk assessment and management

opportunities where they would be able to construct their own learning and develop important life skills namely confidence and resourcefulness.

One participant pointed to varying attitudes among staff, explaining that:

... some people were like 'oh no, don't you go on that' and then other people were like 'no, it's fine, we'll hold their hand the first time'... (B)

Just like this participant, Bilton (2020:13) questions why one practitioner would allow something, where another would not. The author then explains that our attitudes are influenced by our 'value position' that is shaped by our experiences but is also everchanging and can be influenced by our colleagues. Waller et al. (2010:441) further explain that EYPs' perceptions of the children dictate what a child can or cannot do when playing.

Another participant spoke about her changing attitudes towards risk assessment saying:

...I used to be quite scared and tell them 'no, you can't do that', but now this risk assessment (course) has allowed me to stand back and allow child to risk assess... (D)

Following this quote, the suggestion is that challenging practitioners' value position is likely to lead EYPs to developing a more effective practice with a more consistent approach to safety and supervision within ELCC (McClintic and Petty, 2015).

During the interviews, practitioners have also spoke about COVID-19 pandemic implications on children's learning and development. Participants mentioned that the pandemic resulted in the introduction of many restrictions in the nursery environment, including introducing the bubbles that limited free play opportunities that are crucial for promoting children's agency and choice. This also diminished children's socialisation opportunities as children were restricted to interactions within their bubbles. Moreover, although practitioners and children were spending more time outdoors, they were not allowed to explore their local community which again meant that the children are missing out on valuable learning opportunities outdoors. Despite having said that, all participants have agreed that the pandemic had a number of positive outcomes too. Most of the participants mentioned that the pandemic allowed practitioners to explore and engage in professional learning

opportunities (CPD). One practitioner in particular expressed that due to pandemic she had the time to attend many different CPD courses, which in normal circumstances would be impossible due to time and staffing constraints.

Finally, through analysing the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006), it became evident that the EYPs of the study were aware of the benefits of the outdoor play to children's learning and development. As such, the benefits of outdoor play have developed as a major theme of the study and will be discussed in the next section.

4.3. Benefits of Outdoor Play

...it made me reflect on the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for young children: good for the health, physical and develop reflect in so many benefits – improve wellbeing, resilience, increases good health and allows children to use natural world to develop curiosity and science skills. It enhances a sense of happiness and freedom... (D)

(Appendix G)

During the interviews, the participants were asked directly to articulate their perceptions of the outdoor play. This enabled the participants to express their understanding of outdoor play in their own words. An interesting discovery was that all participants of the study, similarly to Perlman et al. (2020), recognised and advocated for the many benefits of the outdoor play provision. Following this, two minor themes emerged within this theme namely holistic child development and environmental consciousness, that will be discussed in the following sections.

4.3.1. Holistic Child Development

Unique aspect of outdoor play, as discussed in section 2.1., is that it offers a diverse range of learning opportunities supporting all areas of children's learning and development (Perlman et al., 2020). EYPs perspectives on outdoor play provision

were extremely positive with all participants in the study recognising endless benefits of outdoor play to children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing. These were evident throughout the whole interview process:

...you are learning friendships, making friends... (A)

...you find the children calm down when they're outside. And they seem to feel a wee bit more relaxed when they're outside, so get more out of them, communication, and language, and they become engaged and enthusiastic... (C)

...being outside helps children to develop the health and wellbeing... (D)

From these examples it is evident that EYPs recognised that outdoor play supports holistic children's learning and development. The key word here being holistic that in simpler terms refers to an integrated approach to learning as it emphasises children's whole round physical, emotional and psychological welfare while undermining conventional developmental benchmarks (UNESCO, 2014). As such, holistic approach to education recognises that every child is an individual and progresses developmentally at their own pace. According to Varun (2015), holistic approach places the child at the heart of EYPs pedagogical practice and ensures opportunities for open-ended exploration which links back to the literature review (section 2.1.1.) where it was highlighted that the outdoor environment is generally open-ended and encourages children to find new meanings and ways to interact with it (Bundy et al., 2009). Similar ideas have emerged during the interviews, with participants noting:

...you obviously want to develop children as a whole... (A)

...giving children the opportunity of every aspect of the curriculum for children to build their imagination, curiosity, physical development, maths, wider world... (C)
reflective notes

Leading on, all of the practitioners spoke highly about the forest school approach to outdoor learning, expressing their admiration for adopting the forest school approach within the ELCC (Constable and Green, 2014). The participants mentioned that this approach to teaching and learning focuses on a whole range of skills including physical, social, sensory and life skills such as resilience, confidence, creativity and many more. Interestingly, despite having a high regard for forest school, the participants had no experience participating in or leading it and spoke about their

perceived benefits to children's learning and development from their colleagues leading a forest school point of view. Additionally, the same participants expressed a wish to attend forest school training but all expressed time and staffing barriers to achieving it. This resonates with my findings in section 4.2.2. about the lack of training opportunities for staff which, if averted, could lead to developing a more professional and skilled workforce able to deliver a higher quality outdoor play provision, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.2.

4.3.2. Environmental Consciousness

I have placed environmental consciousness as a category as most participants recognised that engaging with outdoor play in childhood could lead to develop love for natural environment, which is also reflected in the literature review section 2.1.1., and more importantly referring these ideas to their own childhood experiences, as exemplified below:

...I have been brought up to respect things not destroy things, like pull flowers out for the sake of pulling them ... that's given me guidance how to be respectful of what's in our world... (A)

...through this experience then, you know the love of outdoors... (D)

These examples also reflect the ideas of the Realising the Ambition guidance document (Scottish Government, 2020) which proposed that regular contact with natural environments can instil an appreciation and respect to our environment. Similarly, Chawla (2007) highlighted that that being exposed to outdoor play experiences in early childhood are likely to result in developing pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours such as recycling, "green" voting, and participation in programs like Earth Day. One of the participants appeared to have a particularly high regard for their role in supporting children to develop their environmental consciousness, advocating for the need to speak to children about environmentally friendly behaviours and support them to develop environmental consciousness:

...use your local community to go out and get things that are reusable and not single use plastic, and learning about that – why don't we want to use single use plastics?...
(B)

...I've been talking to them what compost is, what we put in it, what we would not put in it... (B)

Following this, another participant claimed that:

...children don't need bought toys to learn. They have so many opportunities with all the natural materials... (C)

Again, this coincides with the literature review (2.1.1.), that children should be provided with and encouraged to use natural resources because them being open-ended supports children to search for new meanings which in hand supports them to develop skills such as problem-solving, creativity, and divergent thinking (Bundy et al., 2009). Moreover, and as outlined in section 2.1.1., natural resources are cheap and easy to find in various outdoor environments, hence incorporating them in our outdoor provision could help to make it more sustainable and environmentally friendly (Bilton et al., 2017).

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings, analysis and discussion of the data collected during the interviews. I have applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to scrutinise the data collected. Through this process two key themes emerged – role of the adult and benefits of outdoor play – have emerged, that were presented with a thematic map. Each theme was then discussed in more detail with links to literature review presented in chapter 2. The next chapter will now present the implications of the study.

Chapter 5 – Implications

5.1. Introduction

This dissertation presented the research project topic - *Experiences shape perceptions and perceptions shape practice: how different experiences shifted the practitioners' perceptions and practice of outdoor play*. In this final part of the dissertation, I will review and conclude the findings of this project taking into account the previous research in this field. Next, I will examine the limitations of this study as well as professional implications to myself and my colleagues. Finally, I will identify the areas for improvement and potential lines for future research concerning practitioners' perspectives and outdoor play.

5.2. Key findings

This research project, as discussed in Chapter 3, was a small-scale study with only four participants. Initially, I had hoped that all of the participants would return the reflective notes for my data analysis, but since only two participants chose to do so, I have decided to exclude these from the data analysis. Regardless, the use of open-ended questions during the interviews encouraged the freedom of expression which ensured that data collected was plentiful, useful, and valuable (Geer, 1988).

Following Thorne (2000), I will now present the summary of the data collected in relation to previous research.

The purpose of this research project was to explore the relation between early years Practitioners' experiences and their perceptions in the context of outdoor play. The intention of the study was to improve my understanding of what role past experiences play in shaping the perceptions and practice of the early years' practitioners in relation to outdoor play. The assumption is that the findings of this study will influence both my own and others' practice in the future, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013). The participants demonstrated positive attitudes towards

outdoor play in ELCC and spoke of the many benefits of it to children's learning and development. Similarly to Thompson (2008), the participants of this study all agreed that their past experiences played a role in shaping their perceptions and then practice of outdoor play within the ELCC. The project was also looking at how past experiences shaped the perceptions and practice of outdoor play; however, it became evident that participants, despite being able to provide examples of effective practice, struggled to articulate aspects of what shaped their perceptions, which was discussed in Chapter 4.2.2. Additionally, all of the participants mentioned barriers to undertaking specialised training to deepen their knowledge of the outdoor provision. The tentative conclusion from this was that the EYPs lack time to engage in self and collaborative reflection which could potentially lead to developing a better understanding of pedagogical concepts of outdoor play and, in hand, would raise the quality of outdoor provision within ELCC (Clara et al., 2019). Finally, this research project shows the significance of providing positive and varied outdoor play experiences for children, as this leads to adults that are healthier and happier, have a deeper connection to the outdoors, and an appreciation of nature as is evident from section 4.2.1. (Bento & Dias, 2017). To put simply, investment in future generations raises a generation of adults who have a deep connection, appreciation, and passion for the outdoors, carry it through their lives and teach the same to their children as well. Again, considering this research was situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the findings are not generalisable and must be taken with caution (Saunders et al., 2009).

This project investigated the experiences and perceptions of EYPs within the context of outdoor play within ELCC. All participants of the study discussed their professional views of outdoor play and its benefits to children's learning and development, with some mentioning the benefits of the outdoors to practitioners too. The practitioners' argued that outdoor play encourages children to learn about the world around them, and develop creative thinking, problem-solving and social skills through exploring their environment, as reflected by significant theory and research in this field, such as Pellegrini (2006), Bento and Dias (2017), and Bilton (2020). Moreover, similarly to Chawla (2020: 637), and in reflection on their own past experiences, the practitioners noted that early experiences with nature are extremely important in building the connectedness with nature, encouraging children to become

involved in nature protection and restoration. Whilst the participants did not specifically mention any of the guidance documents introduced by the Scottish Government such as *Realising the Ambition: Being Me 2020*, *Out to Play 2018*, *My World Outdoors 2016*, the benefits discussed by the participants resonated with the benefits outlined across these documents. On the other hand, it was a surprising discovery that none of the practitioners made references to Scottish policy considering a big focus placed on these documents across different ELCC settings. As discussed in Chapter 4.2.2., this could indicate the need for specialised training, especially in the context of outdoor play (Howe et al., 2020).

5.3. Limitations

This project has a number of limitations which will be discussed in this section. Firstly, the findings of this study were limited to one setting with a sample of four practitioners in total. The sample was small, non-representative OF EYPs in general and self-selecting. Due to the small and non-representative sample size, the findings cannot be generalised to every practitioner within the early years sector. Additionally, a self-selecting sample can indicate the potential bias among the practitioners suggesting that practitioners who chose to participate in the study not only matched the criteria, but also were already passionate about and interested in outdoor play, hence presenting biased views on the subject. The use of qualitative data collection instruments emanates that, although I was striving to accurately reflect participants' views, it cannot be guaranteed for certain that I have achieved this (Kvale, 1995). This limitation was minimised through following Kitzinger (1995); I have asked the participants to review the transcripts of the data collected prior to data analysis. This permitted the participants to supplement, refute, and clarify the data and their positions further (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007). Finally, despite the limitations considered, the findings of the study are noteworthy as they will influence my practice and may contribute to the existing discussions surrounding outdoor play pedagogy.

5.4. Recommendations and Implications

To conclude this study, recommendations and implications for practice must be considered. Although the findings of the research study represent only a small sample, they still contribute to the discussion concerned with practitioners' perspectives and practice of outdoor play in the ELCC, as outlined in the preceding section. Writing a dissertation provided me with an opportunity to take on a researcher's role and encouraged me to let go of my predispositions about outdoor play, listen to my participants, and construct new knowledge in collaboration with them (Williamson and Burns, 2014). Additionally, as a result of the discussions I had with the participants, I was able to formulate recommendations for practice which I will discuss in the following section.

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) assert that sharing research with the communities of practice leads to improved practice. Following this idea, I would like to share my research with the participants of the study. I believe that reviewing and discussing the findings could potentially lead to developing a shared understanding of the importance of providing varied and positive outdoor experiences to children in our care. Furthermore, as suggested in Chapter 2.2.3., having a better understanding of the importance of outdoor play could also lead to developing more effective practice. Also, since all participants suggested the need for further training in regard to outdoor play, I would consider sharing this study with stakeholders, the senior staff team including the head of the centre as well as all practitioners within the setting, and the local authority to obtain more professional training opportunities. All four practitioners also briefly mentioned the forest school approach to outdoor play, all noting the significant impact they observed on children in their care and wishing to gain better understanding of this approach as well as more opportunities to facilitate such learning for children. Following this discovery, another recommendation would be for all stakeholders and policymakers to look into introducing forest schools in early education as a norm (Constable & Green, 2014).

Given the small scale of this research project, further research could provide added value to these findings. Within the context of my workplace, organising a discussion group with the same participants would provide a more detailed representation of

practitioners' perspectives on outdoor play and practice within the Early Years (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). Additionally, broadening the scope by including other early years practitioners, potentially from other settings, would cross-check the themes that emerged during the data analysis process and help solidify the study's findings by identifying whether the study is relevant outside my workplace setting. Finally, I believe that conducting this research enabled me to reflect on my own outdoor play experiences and how they shaped my perceptions and practice. This made me more aware of the way I approach outdoor play and what experiences do I provide to children in my care urging me to strive to improve my pedagogical practices.

5.5. Conclusion

This project set out to explore the links between practitioners' experiences, perceptions, and practice in regard to outdoor play. The initial suggestions outlined in Chapter 2, indicated the research suggesting that EYPs perceptions are heavily influenced by their past experiences. Furthermore, practitioners continuously construct and reconstruct their knowledge as they go through different experiences (Wood & Bennett, 2000). Conducting data analysis further reinforced this idea as practitioners made links between their past experiences of outdoor play and their outdoor play perceptions and practices. An interesting finding of the study, however, was that the practitioners, although able to speak about effective practice, found it difficult to articulate specific aspects that significantly influenced their perceptions, leading to believe that there is a need for outdoor training which would lead to improved understanding on how experiences shape perceptions and ultimately practice of outdoor play. Additionally, following Moyles et al. (2002) ideas, the practitioners would benefit from more opportunities to engage in self and collaborative reflection and discussions of outdoor play pedagogy which would develop their understanding of outdoor play pedagogy principles but also would raise the quality and effectiveness of practice in terms of outdoor play within the early years.

Appendix A – List of Guidance Documents

Alphabetic list of some of the guidance documents and policies advocating for outdoor play.

A blueprint for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017) @

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2017/10/blueprint-2020-expansion-early-learning-childcare-scotland-quality-action-plan/documents/00526782-pdf/00526782-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00526782.pdf>

A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare (Care Inspectorate, 2022) @

https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/6585/Quality%20framework%20for%20early%20learning%20and%20childcare%202022_PRINT%20FRIENDLY.pdf

Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2008) – refer to reference list

Going Out There. Scottish Framework for Safe Practice in Off-Site Visits (Scottish Government, 2021) @ <https://www.goingoutthere.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GOING-OUT-THERE-PRINT-V3.pdf>

How Good is Our Learning and Childcare (Education Scotland, 2016) @

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/frameworks_selfevaluation/frwk1_nihe_ditself-evaluationhgjelc/hgioelc020316revised.pdf

Loose Parts Play. A toolkit (Scottish Government, 2016) @

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Loose-Parts-Play-web.pdf>

My World Outdoors (Care Inspectorate, 2016) @

https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3091/My_world_outdoors_-_early_years_good_practice_2016.pdf

Out to Play (Scottish Government, 2020) – refer to reference list

Outdoor Learning. Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in

Scotland (Education Scotland, 2011) @ <https://education.gov.scot/media/0fkIf35p/hwb24-ol-support.pdf>

Practice note. Keeping children safe: supporting trips and outings in early learning and childcare

(ELC) (Care Inspectorate, 2022) @ <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/4858/elc-practice-note-trips-and-outings.pdf>

Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Education Scotland, 2020a) – refer to reference list

Scotland's National Outdoor Play & Learning Position Statement (Inspiring Scotland, 2018) @ <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/National-Position-Statement-Dec-2020.pdf>

Space to Grow (Scottish Government, 2017) @ <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1623/space-to-grow.pdf>

Successful approaches to learning and teaching (Care Inspectorate, 2022) @ <https://education.gov.scot/media/wonmplgv/learning-outdoors-23-02-22.pdf>

Systematic literature review of nature-based Early Learning and Childcare on children's health, wellbeing and development (Scottish Government, 2021) @ <https://www.ltl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/systematic-literature-review-nature-based-early-learning-childcare-childrens-health-wellbeing-development.pdf>

Taking Learning Outdoors: partnership for excellence (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2007) @ http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/education/outdoored/taking_learning_outdoors.pdf

The Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2009) @ <http://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/EYF.pdf>

The Educational Outcomes of Learning for Sustainability: A Brief Review of Literature (Scottish Government, 2020) @ <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/35221/1/educational-outcomes-learning-sustainability-brief-review-literature.pdf>

The Play Strategy (Scottish Government, 2013) @ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/play-strategy-scotland-action-plan/>

Appendix B – Plain Language Statement



Plain Language Statement

Title of project and researcher details

Exploring the early years practitioners' experiences and examining how these experiences influence practitioners' perceptions and practice of outdoor play provision.

Researcher: XXXX

Supervisor: Elizabeth Black

Course: Med Childhood Practice

You are being invited to take part in a research project into the influences of experiences to practitioners' perceptions and practice within the early years sector.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

I hope that this sheet will answer any questions you have about the study.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to find out how different experiences within the early years impact practitioners' perceptions and practice of the outdoor play.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You are being asked to take part because you have over three years of experience of working as an early years practitioner who leads learning indoors and outdoors, and I would like to engage with you into an exploration how different experiences shaped your perceptions and practice of outdoor play.

3. Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study. It is completely voluntary and will not affect your employment in any way. If, after you have started to take part, you change your mind, just let me know and I will not use any information you have given me in my writing.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part, I will ask you some questions about what you think about how you became a practitioner, what experiences shaped your perceptions, and how is this reflected in your practice. I will encourage you to reflect on the impact of various experiences on your perceptions and practice of outdoor play. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. This will take about one hour. The interviews will be carried out online and you will be able to choose the timing to ensure minimal disruption to your life. Our interviews will be recorded and transcribed so that afterwards I can listen carefully to what was said. Prior to interviews, I will also ask you to complete a short reflective writing, which you can complete in your own time. This can take as little as 15 mins (longer if desired), and you are encouraged to write only as much as you are willing to share. This reflective piece will also give you a better idea what to expect from the interviews, which will potentially alleviate the potential pressure of the interview. You will be able to come back to your reflective piece after the interview to edit or add new information.

I will be finished gathering data by May, 2022.

5. Will the information that I give you in this study be kept confidential?

I will keep all the data I collect during the interviews in a locked cabinet or in a locked file on my computer. When I write about what I have found, your name will not be mentioned. You may choose a pseudonym which I will use when writing up the final assignment. It is important to note that due to small sample size there will be limitations of confidentiality as all participants will be from the same establishment but I will strive to protect the confidentiality to my best ability and in line with data protection laws.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

6. What will happen to the results of this study

I will analyse the data I collect from participants and present this in the dissertation which I am writing for my qualification, Med Childhood Practice. All participants will receive a written summary of the findings and I will also present the information to colleagues. I will destroy the data at the end of the project.

7. Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the School of Education Ethics Forum, University of Glasgow.

8. Who can I contact for further Information?

If you have any questions about this study, you can ask me, (XXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk)
or my supervisor, Ms Elizabeth Black (Elizabeth.black.2glasgow.ac.uk).

or the Ethics officer for the School of Education,glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this.

Appendix C – Consent Form



Consent Form

Title of Project: Exploring the early years practitioners' experiences and examining how these experiences influence practitioners' perceptions and practice of outdoor play provision.

Name of Researcher: XXXXXX

Please tick as appropriate

Yes No I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes No I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes No I consent to interviews being video recorded.

Yes No I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification.

Yes No I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

Yes No I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I agree that:

Yes No All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes No The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes No The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Yes No I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Signature Date

Name of Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix D – Reflective Writing Prompts for Notes



Reflective Writing Prompts

1. What is outdoor play to you as a practitioner?
2. Where do you believe these perceptions are coming from?
3. What are the key influences that shaped your perceptions of outdoor play? Think about different experiences - inspirational colleague, book, training session, etc.
4. Do these perceptions impact your practice in regard to outdoor play? How?

Appendix E – Semi-Structured Interview Questions



Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a CDO?
2. Tell me how did you become a CDO?
3. Looking back at the start of your career, what did you perceive outdoor play to be?
4. What kind of outdoor play have you experienced as a child? Do you think this affects your perceptions of outdoor play now? How is this reflected in your practice?
5. Now that you have been a CDO xx years, what do you believe the outdoor play should be like? How is this belief manifested in your practice?
6. How confident are you delivering outdoor provision? Why?
7. Have you undertaken any CPD or additional reading to support the development of your knowledge and skills regarding the outdoor play?
8. Have you been working through lockdown? (If not, were you furloughed?)
9. How did this affect you personally? Professionally? Has this experience changed your perceptions on outdoor play provision? What about your practice?
10. What do you think shaped your perceptions of the outdoor play?
11. Do your perceptions of outdoor play influence your practice? How?

Appendix F – Extract of transcript analysis: Role of the Practitioner

Extracts from the transcripts illustrating analysis

Role of the Practitioner		
Past experiences	Pedagogy	Safety and Supervision
<p>...so we used to go, they have picnics pick flowers climb the trees, run about, learn names of things that's how I learned... (A)</p> <p>... well my childhood was mostly outdoors, I played with bikes, played kick the can, rounders. we used to go out all day, explored in the countryside, we went to parks... (C)</p> <p>... We were always outdoors to play, making every experience, you know, enjoyable. And finding a safe place.. we had... umm... We didn't have the equipment, we couldn't afford the equipment, so we improvised with our own material - ropes and pens and <something???, and, you know, use our imagination, climbing trees... (D)</p>	<p>...I think this is important - if you're passionate about outdoors then you'll give the best time and to children. And you put every effort into making sure that their experiences are enjoyed and having fun... (D)</p> <p>... if a child does not have access to outdoor play when they're very young or as young as our children that we've got... we're doing them a disservice, I mean, we're not educating them then. There's so much to learn outdoors and the health... (C)</p> <p>... Like sometimes like yeah you do have to put some things ideas in their head yeah I do do that, but a lot of it comes from a lot of children and then so if Ellis comes to me and says, I found a spider. I found a spider on my way to nursery there or if she's in nursery and she brings a spider and i'm like right what would you like to learn about the spider. So she'll say to me, you know 'oh what does it eat, what will I, where does it live, like give it and you know what are other spiders like can we can we look at some spiders... (A)</p> <p>... And reflective practice. How an experience and situations you dealt with, how it went and how you can improve on it, it was never about. The outdoors and how to delivered the experiences and what you're looking for that's more now what I'm learning about right now... (B)</p> <p>..., the pedagogy as well, standing back and letting children, you know, experience and getting the best of And then</p>	<p>.... I used to say right give me your hand and we'll jump off, right jump over to jump over a few times and I say you try it, and try and jump over, and then they have that like bit of 'ahh'. Like am I gonna be able to do this, I don't know if I can do it, and then, if you say right, if you want, if you try it i'm here i'll get you, i'll get you, you won't fall so when you, given that kind of security, then they will try it because they usually catch him if they do fall but you're not always going to be there, like you say so. That how you get them to assess the risk or manage the risk... (A)</p> <p>... I think that's where sometimes you kind of need to step in more just to make sure that the safety is like the biggest thing outside that we are being sensible, we're risk assessing constantly... (B)</p> <p>...you don't need to be as all over the top with them, you can let them explore more and the risk is usually quite low considering you're in a garden that's in a purposely built place for children... (B)</p> <p>...I got to see like how different people took a different perspective of the risk assessing side of outside and that kind of built my confidence up cause I did think that right you don't need to be as all over the top with them, you can let them... Let explore more and the risk is usually quite low considering you're in a garden that's in a purposely built place for</p>

	<p>interacting when needed and encouraging them with the, you know, The ideas of use of tools and things like that... (D)</p>	<p>children. There wouldn't be huge risks, there should be space and nothing like sharp lying about because you've risk assessed it before the children are even allowed out... (B)</p> <p>... And just really getting out and having a safe environment to go and play without thinking "there's broken glass" or anything like that... (C)...</p> <p>... I used to be quite scared and tell them "no, you can't do that", but now this risk assessment has allowed me to stand back and allow the child to risk assess... (D)</p>
<p>... I came from a seaside town. So I always, we would always go out with my mum and dad. They did take us to picnics and things in the woods... (A)</p> <p>...played in water streams... (A)</p> <p>...we would still play in the street because it wasn't too dangerous, like cars and things... (B)</p> <p>...there was a wee communal garden, a wee bit of green where we are, we just played in there, like rounders or taking the bikes up and down... (C)</p> <p>...we just wandered the streets till late at night, there was not really cars... (D)</p> <p>...we improvised with our own material – ropes and pens – and, you know, use our imagination, climbing trees... (D)</p>	<p>...these courses do help you and make you more confident as well, to come back and try... (A)</p> <p>...it's responsive learning... (A)</p> <p>...I like children, I like going by their ideas... (A)</p> <p>..how can we research this together, like will we use and ipad, will we read, will we find some books <...> so we can look at it together rather than it just all coming from me.. (B)</p> <p>...different children learn in different ways... (C)</p> <p>...I want the best for children. I can see all the benefits for children. Try to think of new ideas to interest children, to get the best out of them. Seen the results of good outdoor play and provision for the sake of children and their education... (C)</p> <p>...being passionate and reflecting on what I did as a child. Wanting the best for these children that are coming from areas of deprivation... (D)</p> <p>'provide a large variety of experiences for them stimulating creativity and imagination, building their physical development... (D)</p>	<p>... keeping themselves safe out there, of what is safe and what's not safe, and it's like just different things, it's like challenging, it's supporting a child to learn about things or learn about the world around them... (A)</p> <p>...you should be able to give them that bit more freedom where you can go 'look, this is where the boundaries are, if you start being unsafe, stop doing that, if you feel safe – keep going, ask for help if you need'... (B)</p> <p>... an adult goes out and checks before the kids come out and how safe it is. The children then should come out and do the same risk assessment and then they would be looking for the different things, because that means when they're leaving the setting, if they are out and about the community, it's likely they are safety aware... (B)</p>

	<p>...interacting when needed and encouraging them with the, you know, the ideas of use of tools and things like that... (D)</p> <p>...adults must be engaged enthusiastically to provide high quality experiences... (D)</p>	
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Appendix G – Extract of transcript analysis: Benefits of Outdoor Play

Extracts from the transcripts illustrating analysis

1. Child Development

Child development	
Physical Development	“...just even doing things outdoors if you're outside you're you're riding bikes and you're climbing. Up you know, like the if if you've got the path and things like that you've got the roundabout things but in your actual nursery but you've got the assault course and things like climbing frame and the slide and things.” A
	“I found that fascinating because, even though they were playing, but they were learning, because from that play climbing up a claiming frame, they would avail they've obviously developing the lower skills.” A
	“hopefully, one day, you will be able to get even trees, so they can climb. It was things like we don't have very many them, but that would be really good like so that they can build up their own strength while using their gross motor skills and things” B
	“our physical play it was like your large equipment, your chutes, your climbing frame, your bikes, your scooters running around, see when you're doing ring games, kind of lots of games for a using the children's energy and like maybe their spatial awareness.” C
	“Your physical, as I say, no like playing bikes and running around, and you obviously first initially you're happy as a child, and you get... you're healthy” C
	“they're learning physical, I mean, they're actually improving their in their physical - their large physical, their small physical.” C
	“Say their gross motor skills, they've got to do well at them first - you have to learn the basics before you can... the end result is they can hold a pencil and they can write their name” C
	“To develop the physical health and wellbeing. Structured lessons were also on the move, pre-school gymnastics available. The climbing frame actually sat in the playroom and it was used for dens, role play, pirate ships, different celebrations.” D
	“building their physical development providing like an apparatus, like tires or you know, climbing frames...” D
Health and Wellbeing	“Generation of children happier, healthier, more environmentally responsible” (A notes)
	“To encourage children to be more active” (C notes)

	<p>“say their health and well being, do you know what I mean, because if you think of yourself as a child, and you're, well obviously you've got no control over it, but if you're brought up in a flat and you don't have a garden. yeah and i'm not seeing that to be all and end all but just for the fact that they can go out, do you know what I mean, and just release some of that energy and just be happy” C</p>
	<p>“when they come back in and their temperament and everything, then they can sit down and do something” C</p>
	<p>“we know that children are bouncing balls playing with balls how good that is for later in life that they are going to be able to hold a pencil. As as a child then you just feel you're out playing, you're on a scooter, you're jumping you're happy, but you're getting so much even because, obviously, I mean we're adults as well we know if you have a healthy child childhood.” C</p>
	<p>“if you have a kind of active childhood, maybe that's a better word establishing good state, when you're later on in life. Even your health as well. I think basically... i've always just had in my head, you know If children are active and happy” C</p>
	<p>“I just think fresh air's the best thing for a child” C</p>
	<p>“And I know, obviously, that's how we need to say it "oh, do you know what, they're fine, they're happy". I mean, I suppose that's the most important thing for the children” C</p>
	<p>“we have to have hit all kind of targets, like the curriculum and things like that but I also know the health and well being of children. You wanting the children to be happy and as well as like, you look at the curriculum there's things like, you want you built the children's curiosity. You want to build their imagination.” C</p>
	<p>“Physical play was a stress and anxiety reliever.” D</p>
	<p>“health and well being and being outside is certainly enhancing that experience for them” D</p>
	<p>“t made me reflect on, you know, the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for young children. good for the health physical and develop reflect in so many benefits improve well being resilience increases good to do festival and allows children to Use the natural world to develop curiosity and science skills. It enhances a sense of happiness and freedom and that's what I was feeling - I wasn't feeling happy and it didn't feel I had my freedom. Fresh air and space encouraged me to ensure that children play happens every day.” D</p>
	<p>“children are catching a lot of infections just now spreading, so spreading being outside allows that, you know, well it encourages it not to happen - being outdoors, Because you're not very close and you're in the fresh air. So...It impacts on it being outside it also impacts in their behavior outside and so, you know, you find the children calm down when they're outside As well. And they seem to feel a wee bit more relaxed when they're outside so you get more out of them, communication and language and they become engaged and enthusiastic” D</p>
	<p>“you obviously want to develop the children as a whole through the physical develops, providing equipment to develop the gross motor skills and their finer motor skills. The communication and language. And just a whole wellbeing.” D</p>
	<p>“it's building... building resilience...” A</p>

Life skills: confidence, independence, resilience, risk assess	<p>“...you're learning friendships So yes, I would say, making friends is like child is just like different challenges teamwork that that's what I seen like outside...” A</p>
	<p>“They are learning to be resilient that they've got and, obviously, to check, you know, in they got to be aware of the safety as well of how can I get to the top of this, or no maybe not and maybe we need to stay.” A</p>
	<p>“That is another huge thing that I never realized how important it was, like an adult goes out and checks before the kids come out and how safe it is. the children then should come out and do the same risk assessment and then they would be looking for the different things, because that means when they're leaving the setting if they're out and about the community it's likely they're safety aware, they think "right, there's glass there, I need to stay away from that", whereas if we didn't have outdoor play maybe they wouldn't know that that's a safety risk or that fences are there to keep you safe from main roads and to stay close to an adult when there's no gates around or anything like that.” B</p>
	<p>“It kind of gives them that responsibility of taking care of their own resources and so if things are getting broken, well then that needs to go in the bin if it's not safe or if they take care of it and they get to keep it for even longer.” B</p>
	<p>“Dens were being made through inspiration of my own home play as a child. It was influenced this and children to make dens with materials, ropes, pegs, real tools. New skills being developed, communication language extended, team building. Children with behavioural problems at that stage, their behaviour was improving because they were so interested with these real tools that actually engaged them.” D</p>
	<p>“lots of experiences - kitchens, mud kitchens, sand, water, mark??? making, enclosed spaces, stimulating creativity and imagination, building physical development, language was encouraged. This encouraged calm, good sense of well being. Walks into the community local parks, like the ducks, think I've said that. Dense trees, forests, it was all so exciting for them and children seem to speak more when they're outdoors, you get a lot of communication and language” D</p>
	<p>“playing outside allows children to develop self confidence and self esteem and building their independence skills” D</p>
	<p>“improves well being, resilience, increases good health, encourages them to use their natural world to develop curiosity and science skills. Enhances a sense of happiness and freedom. Is paramount to children's health and well being and they need the space to grow.” D</p>
Forest School	<p>“When they introduced the forestry, that was the best thing they ever done because. They were learning going wider into the environment, then. You know of what's out there. I thought that was really good. Because learning them independent skills and how to work as a team and how to survive basically you know, of what they can do what they can't do and in giving them that confidence grows well of what they can do, because I remember, we had a child. And he was in my group as well, and he was so shy, and he would not get involved <...> took him and absolutely thrived he come back, and confident was grown even mum commented on it, how good that he's opened up because he's been able to do all these things with a forestry and learn different things. and try different things so yeah That was a really good experience for him so children do need that that are a little bit more shy and scared of things...” A</p>

	<p>"...the forestry needs to kind of start again. So that there are children out there you know, doing the forestry and then there's children, obviously in, and so you're taking you're taking that a bit further when you're doing the forestry, because you are learning resilience and confidence there, and you're developing your skills, but you cannot develop them, you can also develop them outside because parents value it as well for them being like when take that notice of thomas's mom when she said, or he is just absolutely thrived outside. yeah this forestry so she's seen the difference, Kate seen the difference, she told me about it, and he was a lot more happier." A</p>
	<p>"I know every child learns differently and every child's a wee individual, but see when you think about it, if you took a child that was maybe not doing so well in a nursery setting indoors and outdoors, take them to the forestry, because, I can just remember there was one wee boy like that, And he was like total different wee boy see how much he learned. That was going to show you how much he was learning, but it was in a different environment. Okay, it was an nursery environment, but it was outdoors, it was away from the actual nursery building." C</p>
	<p>"They also had the forest schools and they went into the woodlands, building on key skills and extending play experiences for children, sensory, language, physical skills." D</p>

2. Environmental Consciousness

Environmental Consciousness	
Learning about the world around	<p>"...you're just learning about the world around you about what's safe, what's unsafe..." A</p>
	<p>"...learn about the world as well. You could bring different things, I mean you could like I say you've got all the beasties and then they go and find the different ones if they can find them in so they've got like cards to look at or they've got a sheet if it was a hunt. There's so much." A</p>
	<p>"Giving children the opportunity of every aspect of the curriculum for children built their imagination, curiosity, physical development, maths, wider world, insects, plants, etc." (C notes)</p>
	<p>"Children are encouraged to grow their own gardens which children ain't no helped and appreciate and encouraged and living things to look at living things" D</p>
	<p>"the children were encouraged to look at plans, outdoor plans and the children had the opportunity to play side by side to these builders. They got to observe and look at the skills that are happening within this" D</p>
	<p>"The children observed the workmen and the tools they use and the materials and safety... diggers, the children got to look at and have a look in it and the men came and spoke to the children. This inspired children, using real tools, building bricks, extend their imagination" D</p>

	<p>providing the walks into the community. And you know, Allowing children to experience These walks because maybe their parents can't.." D</p>
	<p>"Provide loose parts for them, interesting loose parts and encourage them to bring in loose parts themselves. Which is planks of wood for imagination And stones and Like large blocks, large wooden blocks, different types of bricks provide The tools that they need and being real tools, because real tools are interesting for them and they might not get the experience of that at home. And the skill, be shown the skill on how to use these tools and especially boys, they just love that experience of real tools being able to... You know, build something that they're interested in making and experiencing the actual finished product, be proud of what they've made" D</p>
Natural Resources	<p>"Within the local community, and you know, they would walk to the nearest forest and a stream and they would collect flowers and nature and look at birds And I would see within this during the walk that they would look at numbers and registrations and look environmental print that was all going on within the community" D</p>
	<p>"consider what natural materials that you're going to provide, like mud kitchen, digging areas, sand, water, provide a large variety of experiences for them, stimulating creativity and imagination." D</p>
	<p>"children don't need bought toys learn. They have so many opportunities, you know, with all the natural materials, which helps to promote children's development raising attainment" D</p>
Looking after our environment	<p>"Generation of children happier, healthier, more environmentally responsible" (A notes)</p>
	<p>"use your local community to go out and get things that are like reusable and not a single plastic use or... and learning about that - why don't we want to use single plastic use?" B</p>
	<p>"And maybe doing like composting and how to learn about that, <mumble>, become like more eco friendly. Because as years go on we know that's gonna be a huge thing. And it should be so hopefully doing that in the early years, and now they would be able to carry that on with them like not littering, using different things for composting" B</p>
	<p>"we want to get a compost bin so I've been kind of talking to them about what compost is - what we would put in it, what we would not put in it and different things like that, like the school next door has one, we've had a look at it, we've discussed if that was something they (children) would be interested in" B</p>
	<p>"The children done the cleaning and outdoor stuff so there was a bucket of water and soap and things so they got their own like wee sponges and things and got to clean their resources they'd used that day outside and even some of the inside stuff they all cleaned, which was really good that they were kind of taking more responsibility on outdoors." B</p>

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