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### **Montessori Education in nurseries in England: Two case studies.**

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**Montessori Education in nurseries in England: Two case studies.**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted as part of the requirements for the Degree of**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study explored Montessori education in nursery schools in England. A case study strategy was employed to gain in – depth knowledge of the Montessori Method of Education practiced in two nursery schools with a small purposive sample of teachers, parents, nursery owner, Montessori governing board member and children. A qualitative approach was utilised and involved semi structured interviews with teachers, parents, nursery owner and Montessori governing board member as well as the observation of children and document interrogation. The collection of these qualitative data focused on how the teachers conceptualised best practice in Montessori education, how children learn, the role of the teacher, the nature of teacher – children interactions that occur and how the prepared learning environment in the nursery aligns with Montessori philosophy.

The major findings were that the teachers’ conceptualisation of best practice revealed a measured understanding and this appeared based on the teachers not having attained certified Montessori trained teacher status. Further to this, the children’s learning was underpinned by Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and Montessori principles mainly achieved through teacher –led/ initiated activities and group activities. Fewer opportunities were afforded for either child initiated activities, individual paced learning and independent access to materials. The role of the directress in the settings, which mainly focused on fulfilling routine nursery duties, did not appear to differ significantly from the teacher’s role in other early years settings. Their roles did not mirror the Montessori teacher role description which lays premium on observing children, preparation of the learning environment and acting as a crucial link between the children and the prepared environment. Again, the nature of directress (teacher) – child interactions that occurred in the settings evidenced respect for the child to some extent and was underpinned by a combination of autonomy support and control. The prepared environment in both nursery exhibited some level of conformity to the Montessori ethos but more evidently, in Nursery A than Nursery B.

The findings suggested that important consideration be given to staff training to enable attainment of formal Montessori certification and the Early Years Professional Status to ensure proper interpretation and implementation of the EYFS guidelines in Montessori contexts. Similarly, resolving identified areas of seeming mismatch between Montessori principles and the EYFS provision should be prioritised at Montessori governing level.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Montessori Education is a “child centred educational approach based on scientific observations of children from birth to adulthood” (Damore & Moody – Frazier 2011, p.4). It was pioneered by foremost female Italian doctor, Maria Montessori (1870-1952) as an offshoot of her academic research regarding the intellectual development of “mentally retarded children.” Montessori based her educational system of education on earlier pedagogical interactions and experiences with children who were considered “abnormal” (Montessori 1964) and discovered that children are “naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared environment” (Damore & Moody – Frazier 2011, p.4). As an assistant doctor at the University of Rome clinic, she had opportunity on her visits to the asylum for the insane to both study and pick patients for the university’s clinic. These visits and her study of children’s diseases led to a growing interest in the “idiot” children kept in the same asylum. Consequently, Montessori gave attention to the educational system employed for children categorised as idiots. The emergent idea about such diseases like “deafness, paralysis, idiocy, rickets etc” (Montessori 1964, p.31) amongst practitioners of the time was that treatment of these should involve both pedagogy and medicine. However, she differed with this line of thinking and argued “...that mental deficiency presented chiefly a pedagogical, rather than mainly a medical problem” (ibid: p.31).

Opportunity to test this theory was provided by The National League for Retarded Children in 1900 with the establishment of “... the medical-pedagogical institute, a school for what we call today children with special needs. Montessori became the director with twenty two children attending” (Isaacs 2010, p.7). This signalled the beginning of two years of practical studying and teaching of these mentally deficient children in addition to training and directing other teachers in her charge. Montessori concluded during this time that the methods she employed could be extended to the education of normal children because they contained principles which could be proved empirically and she deemed these principles capable of causing the feeblest of minds to both develop and grow. These

principles were education through the senses and introduction to abstraction using concrete materials which children could see and handle (Isaacs 2010; Montessori, 1964). Pursuance of her conviction led to engagement in further in-depth academic study at the University of Rome in the field of philosophy as she went to build on the works of Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (1775-1838), a French physician who worked with deaf children and also sought to validate his educational theories with the much published case of Victor (also known as the wild boy of Aveyron) who was abandoned in a forest where he was left for dead by his assassins. He survived many years living by basic instincts in the wild without human interactions. Victor was mute and his condition regarded as “idiotic” (Montessori 1964, p.149). Furthermore, Montessori built on the work of Edward Seguin (1812-1880), a student of Jean Marc Gaspard, another French physician, whose work majored on the education of the mentally challenged and is pinpointed as the pioneer of a comprehensive system of education for mentally deficient children, using as his foundation the methods of Gaspard Itard, which he modified, applied and adapted in his work in the Rue Pigalle school with children from the insane asylum. More significantly, the conception and design of didactic materials which became an important cornerstone of Montessori’s method of education was also initially developed by Edouard Seguin for the teaching of deficient children (Montessori, 1964). Again, Montessori was also influenced by Giuseppe Sergi, who founded the institute of Experimental Psychology in 1876 as well as being a professor of Anthropology at the University of Rome from 1884 - 1916. As O’Donnell (2007, p. 6) noted:

“He was convinced that educational methods urgently needed to be reconstructed to bring about a desirable human regeneration...he encouraged teachers to join the new movement.”

Subsequently, the establishment of the first children’s home (Casa dei bambini) in 1907 for the education of normal children in San Lorenzo provided Maria Montessori with the much desired opportunity to develop her educational philosophy in this real life environment. The resultant success led to a lifelong career in teaching, writing and disseminating the ideas of her philosophy on the global stage (Lillard 1972; Montessori 1964; 1965b; Standing, 1957). It was out of these diverse research backgrounds that Montessori developed her Method, which was seen as education for life, advocating a system of learning whereby children were placed at the centre of the learning process, encouraged to

develop at their individual pace in a carefully prepared environment without pressure of performance from other pupils or teachers (Lillard 1972; Montessori 1964; 1965a; 1965b O'Donnell, 2007; Standing, 1957).

## **1.2 A GLOBAL PICTURE OF MONTESSORI SCHOOLS ACROSS THE WORLD**

Montessori nursery schools can be found on every continent of the world, indicative of the proliferation of this method of education. Establishing a comprehensive inventory of all Montessori nursery schools worldwide is not only a daunting task but virtually impossible. The overview below is an attempt to give a global snapshot of the distribution of nursery schools underpinned by the Montessori approach. In the United Kingdom, the Montessori Schools Association (MSA) which is an umbrella organisation for the support of schools and individuals involved in Montessori noted on its website that Montessori schools and nurseries in UK numbered around 700 with 73 of them fully Montessori Schools Association (MSA) accredited ( [www.montessori.org.uk/msaandschools](http://www.montessori.org.uk/msaandschools)). Similarly, The North American Montessori Teachers' Association (NAMTA), an organization open to teachers, parents and individuals interested in Montessori education in United States of America in its Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section “estimates that there are about 4,000 Montessori schools in the United States...” ([www.montessorinamta.org/NAMTA/geninfo/faqmontessori.html](http://www.montessorinamta.org/NAMTA/geninfo/faqmontessori.html)).

The South African Montessori Association (SAMA) lists the number of Montessori accredited schools in South Africa as 82 while many other unaccredited Montessori schools operating in South African are excluded from its official list ([www.samontessori.org.za/](http://www.samontessori.org.za/)). Furthermore, Montessori Asia, which is a website dedicated to Montessori education portal in Asia records the presence of Montessori method of education in virtually all the Asian nations such as Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mongolia, India and Pakistan ([www.montessori.asia/](http://www.montessori.asia/)). The foregoing does provide some evidence of the popularity of Montessori education as an educational approach which is widely practiced.

## **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The Montessori method has received worldwide acclaim as an approach to education that has been seen as tremendously successful with children of all abilities, cultures, economic and social backgrounds (Bresler & David, 2008). So successful has it been that the benefit

of Montessori education has been trumpeted across the globe. The Education Guardian, September 2006 reported that:

“A method of schooling that focuses on personal development, rather than exams produces more mature, creative and socially adept children, scientists have found. Psychologists in the U.S. found that across a range of abilities, children at Montessori schools outperformed those given a traditional education.”

Dr Angeline Lillard and Nicole Else-Quest from the University of Virginia who conducted a study to compare the outcomes of children between the ages of 3-12 years in a Montessori school and a traditional school discovered that children from the Montessori school exhibited better social and academic skills, concluding that, “we found significant advantages for the Montessori schools in these tests for both age groups” (Lillard & Else-Quest 2006, p.1). Furthermore, the Montessori Connections, a website for the Montessori community summarised the benefits of the Montessori Method as being the mixed age grouping, the self learning equipment with their control of error, the individual learning pace, respect for others, focus on concrete learning, child centred learning, enthusiasm to work, unobtrusive role of teachers and prepared environment that elicits natural sense of discipline and self confidence in individual children ([www.montessoriconnections.com/aboutmontessoried5.html](http://www.montessoriconnections.com/aboutmontessoried5.html)).

While noting some of the benefits of Montessori method of education and the resulting world acclaim it has received, there is yet a great deal to be researched on examining Montessori education with a focus on individual nursery schools. It is important to note that some findings reveal that there are perceived inconsistencies about the description of Montessori method of education in writing and what is found to be the actual practice in Montessori classrooms (Dauost 2004). In line with this, Caldwell (2010, p.2) reported that “Every year the number of parents who contact the Montessori Foundation about the inconsistencies between theory and practice in their children’s schools has grown.” This has led to a situation where Montessori practitioners are alarmed about the different interpretations and practice of Montessori method of education and viewed this development as “...a question of truth in advertising” (Blessington 2004; Caldwell 2010, p.2). Although such governing bodies like the Montessori Education UK Ltd and



Montessori Schools Association (MSA) strive to ensure standardization across individual nurseries/schools, the number of schools who have undergone full accreditation is minimal, numbering only 100 out of 623 schools on the MSA list (<http://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/1006667/Interview-Philip-Bujak-chief-executive-Montessori-St-Nicholsa-Charity/>) compared to the number of schools advertised as Montessori oriented (<http://www.montessorieducation.uk.org/>). This has resulted in a growing concern about the authenticity of the Montessori method of education practiced in individual nurseries and training organisations (Manner 2007). In relation to this development, Caldwell (2007) also noted that in some Montessori schools, as an effort to satisfy the demands of parents about what their children/wards were learning there was the introduction and use of workbooks and pinpointed these workbooks as not being appropriate in the context of what Montessori advocates. Similarly, Rambusch and Stoop (1992) cautioned that it was possible for a school to provide the nomenclature and outlook of Montessori education without the distinctive characteristics and opined that "...the authenticity of Montessori's methods does not derive from an exact replication of every facet of her historical work, or from the work of those who implemented her ideas....it is Montessori's principles rather than her specifically designed artefacts that are central to her pedagogy (p.10)." Rambusch and Stoops (1992, p.36-38) further listed six core qualities that should epitomise authentic Montessori Method of education/practice as:

1. The Montessori learning environment – a child centred environment. A responsive, preparing, adaptive environment, individually construed competence.
2. Montessori's learning activity – first hand experience with materials, spontaneous activity, active learning methods, self – directed activity (auto education), liberty within limits, intrinsic motivation.
3. The Montessori learning relationships – mixed age (family) grouping, social setting as a community, cooperation, collaboration, NOT competition.
4. The Montessori spirituality – child as a spiritual being.
5. What the Montessori teacher is – authoritative, observer, resource/ consultant, model.
6. What the Montessori teacher does – respectfully engaged with the learner, able to facilitate "match" between learner and knowledge, environmental designer/ organiser/ preparer.

With these as indicators of the hallmark of authentic Montessori practice, the researcher decided to undertake an examination of this particular early childhood approach in greater detail in Montessori nursery schools in the UK where she was pursuing her doctoral study.

#### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of these case studies is to explore the theory and practice of Montessori education in nursery schools in England in order to discover the close adherence or otherwise to the Maria Montessori philosophy of education vis-à-vis what is written, described and advertised as Montessori education within the nursery schools. Accordingly, the research aims to bring some understanding to the prevalent debate about the inconsistencies in Montessori practice across individual nurseries and bring to the fore, underlying issues which may possibly have informed the inconsistencies or otherwise.

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The central focus of this research is as follows: Montessori Education in nurseries in England. The research and the data gathering process are guided by the following questions:

- a. What is the directress's notion of best practice in Montessori education?
- b. How do children in this Montessori nursery learn?
- c. What is the role of the directress within the setting?
- d. What is the nature of directress – child interactions that occur in the setting?
- e. How prepared is the learning environment in relation to Montessori philosophy?

The research questions posed are based on the core elements which underpin the Montessori Method of education and practice because as Isaacs (2010, p.12) explains “The Montessori Method of Education has three key components: the child; the favourable environment; the teacher.... The evolving links between all three components and their interaction represent what we know today as the Montessori approach.”

It is necessary to indicate that this research is confined to observing the children in Montessori nurseries. The research uses a qualitative research strategy, employing a case

study design and involves data collection by the use of observation of children, semi – structured interview of staff members, stakeholders such as a nursery owner, parents and a board member of a key Montessori accrediting body in the UK and the examination of nursery documents.

This thesis begins with a brief overview of relevant literature in relation to contemporary early years' educational approaches and their fundamental principles. The review further considers core principles and concepts in Montessori education as well as contemporary issues in relation to the Montessori philosophy and practice. It equally deals with research studies focused on Montessori education. The methodology chapter describes and justifies the methodological approaches, the collection and interpretation of data. The findings of this study are detailed and discussed in the final chapters and relevant conclusions and recommendations are outlined in full.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter considers theory and practice of Montessori education in greater detail while focusing on elements of practice expected in Montessori education to provide a framework for assessing practice. Further discussions on core features and principles which underpin authentic Montessori practice in contemporary times are considered as well as debates on the Method. Research studies relating to Montessori education are also reviewed.

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

##### **2.1.1 EARLY YEARS EDUCATION IN EUROPE**

Early childhood is a time when children grow rapidly and undergo changes quicker than at any other time in life. Therefore the choice of a suitable early years' programme which would accentuate and consolidate the child's development poses a great challenge to parents and educators alike (Walsh & Petty 2007). Europe has been a hub for the development of educational initiatives that have strongly influenced the world at large, the most progressive being the following three approaches in early childhood education: Reggio Emilia, Waldorf and Montessori (Edwards 2002). These approaches have been widely viewed amongst others and considered as alternatives to the known traditional methods of education (Edwards 2002). It is noteworthy that all three approaches:

“...represent an explicit idealism and turn way from war and violence toward peace and reconstruction. They are built on coherent visions of how to improve human society by helping children realize their full potential as intelligent, creative, whole persons. In each approach, children are viewed as active authors of their own development, strongly influenced by natural, dynamic, self-righting forces within themselves, opening the way toward growth and learning (Edwards 2002, p.1).

In sum therefore, Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia approaches afford the opportunity for self construction as a result of the provision of specially enabling environment working with instinctive personal urges to propel the children in their growth, development and education (Abbott & Nutbrown 2001; Edwards 2002; Nicol 2007; Isaacs 2010).

Waldorf education views child development as evolving through three cycles, each having seven year stages and creating unique learning opportunities for the child (Steiner, 1995 in Edwards 2002; Nicol 2007). Prior to the age of seven, children are deemed to learn via imitation and doing. At this time, premium is placed on imaginative play as a medium through which the child experiences multifaceted development. The attention during this period is on oral work in the use of language, storytelling, singing and plays which is a combination of creativity, constructiveness and physical exploration. Through these activities, children are regarded as developing the ability to be motivated, engage and grow in concentration. A cyclical schedule of activities (daily, weekly, yearly) is created by the teacher for children (Edwards 2002; Nicol 2007). Whereas, the Reggio Emilia approach is influenced by socio-constructivists like Vygotsky who reinforced that imitation in the context of social learning was cardinal in aiding the young learner to learn (Abbott & Nutbrown 2001; Philip & Soltis 2004;). The child is promoted in Reggio Emilia as capably orchestrating his learning through mediation with others such as teachers, family members, community and the environment (Malaguzzi, 1993 in Edwards 2002). As noted by Edwards, in the Reggio Emilia setting:

“Children grow in competence to symbolically represent ideas and feelings through any of their “hundreds of languages” (expressive, communicative, and cognitive) –words ,movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, music, to name a few – that they systemically explore and combine”(Edwards 2002, p.3).

Children take the lead in their own learning with the teachers playing a supportive role. There is negotiation in aspects of teaching and learning with a deliberate lack of emphasis on reading and writing (Abbott & Nutbrown 2011; Edwards 2002; Loh 2006). However, support is available and provided when children exhibit desire for literacy in expressing their work and communicating with others. There is ample provision of time for sustained interaction between children/ teacher and amongst children as peers. Opportunities for collaboration on activities and projects exist in a specially prepared, beautiful and enabling environment which fosters wholeness in the child. In corroboration, Wood and Attfield (2005, p.101) reinforce that the interactions that will prove productive for scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as implicit in the Vygotskian model of learning includes:

“high – quality interactions, a richly resourced learning environment, effective ongoing diagnosis to ensure an accurate match between the task and the learner, responsiveness to the learner’s own interests, ideas and preferences, reciprocity between teacher and learner, mutual contributions by the teacher and learner to the activity, overt modelling of thinking and learning strategies.”

In recognition of the foregoing, Isaacs (2010, p.18) acknowledges that in the Montessori Method of Education “Adults as well as the child’s peers, act to some extent as catalyst in the maturation process while the materials, objects and occupations within the environment scaffold the child’s learning...” Nonetheless, the greater emphasis in the Montessori approach is on the uniqueness of the child as an individual learner. Thus, the focus of this research project is on the Montessori method of education and for this reason the subsequent sections opens up with a detailed consideration of this educational model.

## **2.2 THE MONTESSORI METHOD OF EDUCATION EXPLAINED**

O’Donnell (2007, p.14) notes that:

“At the bottom of all Montessori theory and practice was the simple notion that understanding the way children developed was the key to successful education.”

It is important to understand that the Montessori method and philosophy is described as a child centred approach to educating the young child, with every encouragement for the child to learn and develop holistically in an appropriately prepared environment using a carefully structured curriculum (Lillard 1972; Montessori 1965b; O’Donnell 2007; Standing, 1957). It is a total education for the total child, allowing individual children to reach their greatest potential in every sense without the pressure of competition while moving at an individual pace. Montessori specially designed and prepared all the resources used in her method of education. All materials are child sized, attractive and properly crafted with a built in control of error which allowed the child to self correct a mistake when using any equipment. In this way their esteem was developed, along with self-confidence (Montessori 1964; 1965b, Standing 1957; O’Donnell 2007). Interestingly, McMullen (in Tzuo 2007, p.35) argued that the Montessori Method of education is viewed by some people as not actually child centred due to “the limitations of the didactic

apparatus. These materials are believed to restrict children's imagination." Contrastingly, however, Tzuo (2007) clarified that Montessori emphasised children's freedom to initiate their learning through free choice. In further consideration of the notion of child – centeredness, Oslon and Brunner (in Chung and Walsh 2000) cautioned on the vagueness of the word 'child – centred' as a term that has implied political undertones which serves to enable certain groups of people to be commonly affiliated with a common identity. They further opined that the term undermines the complexity and contradictions in the understanding about children, how they learn and develop. Chung and Walsh (2000) observed that the concept of child centeredness has reflected three key meanings across time, explaining these meanings as "Frobel's putting the child at the centre, smack dab in the middle, of her world; the developmentalist notion that the child is the centre of schooling; and finally, the progressive notion that the children should direct their activities (ibid: p.229)." Tzuo (2007) equally noted that child centred philosophy is usually viewed in opposition to teacher directed learning and explained the difference between both approaches as dependent on the emphasis in freedom accorded children with regard to their learning and the type of control exercised by the teacher over them.

In sum therefore, "A child- centred curriculum focuses more on the importance of children's individual interests and their freedom to create their own learning through choosing various classroom activities. In contrast, teacher- directed curriculum places more stress on the teacher's control over children's exploration of learning" (Tzuo 2007, p.33). However the role of the teacher is noted as being relevant even in a child – centred curriculum and should be viewed in relation to the ability to introduce a balance between creating a secure and enabling learning environment where the interests of individual children are protected and respected and ensuring that there is progress in the attainment of academic goals (Tzuo 2007).

### **2.3 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF MONTESSORI EDUCATION**

The Montessori Method of education aims to develop both the cognitive and sensory abilities in the child as well as developing character and practical life skills (Gisolo 2005). As an educational approach, the theoretical underpinnings of Montessori education lie in the following concepts; absorbent mind/sensitive periods, prepared environment, the Montessori directress, independence/freedom, observation and normalization (Lillard 1972; Montessori 1964; 1965b; O, Donnell 2007; Standing 1957). An overview of

these concepts, alongside other contemporary educational concepts will serve to provide introductory insight into this research study, which is an examination of Montessori education with a case study focus. Pickering (2003) noted Montessori as declaring that it is necessary to provide a child with a prepared environment that is rich in mental stimulation with didactic materials to train the child's mind and body. The prepared environment in the Montessori nursery is not just the physical environment but a sum total of the child's social, intellectual, spiritual, cultural and physical environment, serving to further the child along the path of self development because as Montessori explains "The 'Children's House' is the environment which is offered to the child that he may be given the opportunity of developing his activities" (Montessori 1965b, p.37). This illustrates how the Montessori curriculum provides the child with opportunities for activities that will aid this blueprint for self development, give the child ample freedom to follow own pace and rhythm, choice of work, time and opportunity to use materials as long as he has the need (Standing 1957). This concept of providing an environment where children can have a conducive environment for learning is supported by Communication Friendly Spaces (CFS) which has as its main thrust, a focus on the all important role of the learning environment as an essential factor affecting pedagogy and seeks to establish an understanding of the criticality of the link between the learning environment as perceived from the learners' point of view and its effect on learning and therefore advocates educational practices based on three key areas ; resources, physical environment and adult input, as having equal impact on practice. Thus, CFS focuses on creating an optimum learning environment for children because "it is really important to observe, reflect and then make informed decisions about the way that children interact with the environment..." (<http://www.elizabethjarmanltd.co.uk>).

Furthermore, the concept of observation in Montessori education is intrinsically tied to the role of the teacher. The teacher (directress) in a Montessori nursery has an unobtrusive role in the classroom and this de-emphasis of the teacher's role is expected to foster self-discipline in the children which would occasion self construction and peer teaching with the child exercising liberty in choosing his work and pace of learning. This unobtrusive role is deliberately designed to ensure the directress better serves the child by diligently observing the individual child, remaining sensitive to the developmental level at which he is and ensuring that the materials available for the child's development are accurate, suitable for his use and relevant to aid personal construction (Lillard 1972; Montessori



1964; 1967; 1950; O'Donnell,2007). The directress therefore prepares the environment in such a way that the child can develop with a minimum of error. The directress ensures that the child does not pass over a material/apparatus to another child nor exchange materials but must complete the cycle of activity, waiting patiently for a new material if in use by another child. The directress is the vital link between the child and the learning environment and is therefore expected to explain the use of the materials to the child either as individual presentation or group exercise (Montessori 1964; 1965b; 1967; O' Donnell, 2007; Standing 1957). Though not at the centre stage of the child's learning, the directress plays a critical role in ensuring that all obstacles to the child's learning are removed and the environment is intellectually stimulating to aid this goal of self learning which is seen in the reversal of adult/child roles as "the teacher ...does so little actual teaching, with the child the centre of activity, learning by himself, left free in his choice of occupation and in his movements" (Montessori 1950, p.140).

Again, the ability to exercise self discipline and concentration was to Montessori, an indication that the child was developing conscious thought. All of these were pointers that the child was on the path to 'normalisation.' Normalisation is a description of the state of transformation experienced by a child as a result of concentration on a freely chosen activity provided within a carefully prepared environment that challenged and engaged the mind and body, with the outcome being the exhibition of self discipline and a sense of peace and self-fulfilment (Douglas 2007; Futrell 1970; Montessori, 1950; 1967). Hence, when a didactic material captures a child's interest gradually leading them to repeat their interactions with a material/activity in the environment over and over again until concentration begins to grow, then Montessori observed a change in those children such that passivity gave way to activity, disorderliness to order, and tiredness to a growing feeling of enthusiasm (Montessori 1950). All these would herald the fading away and disappearance of deviations – which means "A defense created when development cannot proceed in a normal way" (Zener 2006, p.1) and the birth of a "new child"- the normalised child (Montessori, 1950; 1964; 1965a; O'Donnell 2007; Standing 1957). Normalisation as explained in Montessori Education does appear similar to the concept of Involvement espoused by Laevers (1994) and corroborated by Betram and Pascal (1995) who explained that an involved child concentrates on a particular activity with sustained interest giving no room for distraction. They further highlighted motivation as one of the main features of involvement, noting that:

“An involved child is fascinated and is totally absorbed in the activity, the time passes quickly for the child. An involved child is extremely alert and sensitive to the relevant stimuli, releases an immense amount of energy and experiences a feeling of satisfaction. The source of this satisfaction is an inbuilt desire for the child to gain a better understanding of reality” (1995, p.2).

Equally, Laevers (2000) further elaborating on ‘Involvement’ also listed the indices fostering this condition as “Strong motivation, fascination, and total implication: there is no distance between person and activity, no calculation of possible benefits” (p.4). The concept of involvement noted by Laevers (1994) proposes a child involvement scale consisting basically of two key parts which are (1) a list of child involvement signals: concentration, energy, complexity, creativity, facial expression and posture, persistence, precision, reaction time, language and satisfaction. (2) A 5 point scale of levels of child involvement (Betram and Pascal, 1995). Importantly however, Laevers (2000) identified that Involvement would only take place when there is a match between an activity engaged in and the capability of the individual concerned, noting this sphere where Involvement takes place as ‘the zone of proximal development’ (Laevers 2000). Thus, the zone of proximal development provides an opportunity for the learners to further progress in their learning through the support of an adult or a capable peer as a result of joint collaboration on an activity. The teacher’s recognition of a learner’s zone of proximal development is vital in providing guidance that will aid the learner along the path of development (Wood & Attfield 2005). Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) a proponent of the social nature of learning proposed the zone of proximal development as a pointer of the possibilities hidden in a child that could be stimulated to increase a child’s capacity for greater achievement (Philip & Soltis 2004). According to Vygotsky, this zone of proximal development is the gap between what a child is capable of learning independently as against what he can learn if he is assisted by his peers, parents or teachers. He also advocated learning environments that placed priority on the child as an active protagonist in his learning, with the teacher as a collaborator to facilitate the child’s learning (Howe & Prochner 2000).

Another important principle in Montessori education is the understanding that the young child between 0 – 6years is experiencing a mind that works differently from that of the adult, in that it draws totally and directly from the environment into the core of his being,

to construct himself, aided by impulses that require him to do certain things at particular times, thus attaining self development of his body and mind together (Montessori 1967; O'Donnell 2007; Standing 1957). This is consistent with Piaget's constructivist theory of learning which argued that children were not passive in their development but were systematically building cognitive structures as they engaged in their environment. He noted that development in children is a function of successful progression through different stages and levels (Piaget 1976). At every point of development, children were seen to be personally engaged in constructing a schema for different complex activities while moving through Piaget's identified four stages of development:

- Sensorimotor (birth to 2 years) – infants use sensory and motor capabilities to explore and gain a basic understanding of the environment.
- Preoperational (2 to 7 years) – children use symbolism (images and language) to represent and understand various aspects of the environment. They respond to objects and events according to the way things appear to be.
- Concrete operation (7 to 11 – 12 years) – children acquire and use cognitive operations (mental activities that are components of logical thinking).
- Formal operation (11 – 12 years and beyond) Adolescents' cognitive operations are reorganized in a way that permits them to operate on operations (thinking about thinking). Thought is now systematic and abstract (Shaffer & Kipp 2009, p.55).

Wood & Attfield (2005, p.78) defined schemas "...as repeating patterns and actions that lead to the coordination of cognitive structures through connections and interconnections." Additionally, Piaget, in order to further explain how cognitive structures develop, "... borrowed the biological notions of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium" (Philip & Soltis 2004, p.45). In relation to the above notions, Wood & Attfield (2005, p.40) further explains that:

" Accommodation is the child's ability to adapt to the environment, whereas assimilation is the child's ability to change the environment to suit the imagination. When children encounter new experiences, concepts or knowledge, their existing internal schemas have to adjust causing a state of disequilibrium or cognitive conflict. Disequilibrium motivates learning until a state of equilibrium is reached."

It is interesting to note that the stages of development outlined by Piaget appear linked to the concept of sensitive periods espoused by Montessori who noted the universality of sensitive periods in all children and argued that sensitive periods are critical periods which signals readiness for learning and acquisition of new ability, skill or knowledge.

Montessori identified “sensitive periods for movement, language, order, small detail, refinement of senses, social aspects of life” (Isaacs 2010, p.15; Wood & Attfield 2005).

In the Montessori ethos, great premium is placed on the child’s independence, freedom and dignity because Montessori opined that “By the age of three, however, the child should have been able to render himself to a great extent independent and free” (Montessori 1964, p.96). However, independence offered in the prepared environment is explained to be within limits such as the collective interest of the entire group placing a limit on the freedom/ independence of one particular child. Further limitation of independence occurs when a child ceases to work with the learning material in the right way or if the child takes on a material not out of choice but curiosity, which will not lead to a sustained interest in the material (Lillard 1972; Montessori 1964; Standing 1957). In Montessori classrooms, “Teachers promote inner discipline in children by letting students direct their own learning instead of upholding an outer discipline where teachers act as authoritarians, dictating to students how to behave and what to do” (Harris & Callender 1995, p. 134). Children are trusted to choose activities that are appropriate to their different developmental stages. As they interact with these materials, they are said to intrinsically develop problem solving skill, develop leadership qualities and take on intellectual challenges as presented by the learning materials (Oswald & Schulz-Benesch 1997). With the foregone overview of the principles underpinning the Montessori Method of education, one also needs to examine them as they relate to both theory and practice in two Montessori nurseries in England.

## **2.4 AREAS OF LEARNING IN MONTESSORI EDUCATION**

Drummond (2006; [www.montessoricentenary.org](http://www.montessoricentenary.org)) explains that the Montessori curriculum offers the following areas of learning:

### **• 2.4.1 Practical life**

Maria Montessori emphasized practical life as the foundation for all future work and learning beyond the nursery, into the wider world and it therefore provides the platform upon which all other levels of learning should be placed. Practical life activities like

sweeping, dusting, washing, ironing, polishing shoes, dressing, undressing, learning to say thank you, sorry, greeting, folding clothes amongst many other activities. Standing (1957, p.5) explaining the importance of practical life activities opined that “...no other occupation which could be more important for their whole developments – physical, mental, and moral – than these “exercises of practical life” as they are called.”

#### • 2.4.2 Cultural Extension

Maria Montessori developed the area of cultural extension to expand the child’s knowledge of the wider world. Cultural extension as an area of learning covers subjects such as history, biology, geography and science, affording the children an opportunity to learn extensively about the world they live in. This makes cultural extension an integral part of the Montessori curriculum. It serves as an extension of both the practical life, sensorial areas and has language elements. Children begin to discover that the needs of man are the same worldwide and as such learn about respect for other cultures through studying about different lands, their features and customs of the people who live there. Atlanta Montessori Teachers’ Education (AMTE) student handbook (2004, p.59) concludes that the cultural curriculum which involves subjects like”... music, science, geography, history, zoology and botany are ...included for the enrichment of vocabulary and awaken the child to nature and our world.”

#### • 2.4.3 Language

Montessori (1967, p.98) describes language as “... an instrument of collective thought.” The activities in the Montessori nursery therefore provide skills for the young child to master reading, writing, love for poetry and books. Language learning in Montessori education is achieved through the use of phonics and this involves children learning the sounds of the different letters and their shapes as well as familiarising themselves with the sandpaper letters(Isaacs 2010). In teaching sounds, the Montessori teacher is very careful to accurately, clearly and slowly pronounce all the individual sounds in a word when talking with a child. Isaacs (2010) explains the sequence of language learning through phonics as:

- Learning to build words with the use of letters that have been cut out and then listening to the sounds of individual letters.
- Subsequent introduction of more challenging words through consonant blends like pr-(prom), fr-(from) and st-(stop, step).
- Doing language boxes which deal with blends, digraphs, trigraphs, phonograms.

- Engaging in reading exercises using wordlists, sentence strips, phrases and books which are complementary to the different activities for each level.
- Introduction to grammar through the use of parts of speech which are colour coded and sentence building with the aid of objects.

The use of children's songs also provided a suitable avenue for teaching children how to make exact pronunciation of words. Furthermore, use of the three period lessons is especially important in teaching language skills (Montessori 1965). Activities in the language curriculum include sand paper letters, movable alphabets, metal insets, matching and classified picture cards, phonetic object games and phonogram cards (Lillard 1972). Importantly, as cautioned by Isaacs (2010 p.46) "...not all children will be ready or interested in being introduced to letters and writing at the age of three or four; the key to identifying the child's readiness remains the adult's observations and conversations with the child."

#### • **2.4.4 Mathematics**

Montessori mathematics activities in the nursery would reveal that they are all carefully sequenced to build upon each other, with concrete materials guiding the child to a firm foundation of addition, multiplication, subtraction, division and then on to abstract concepts and memorising mathematics facts. The mathematics curriculum includes the following concepts; number introduction, basic operations in the decimal system in adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing and learning their basic facts, counting and numbers, introduction to abstraction, fractions, money systems, algebra, problem solving, measurements (AMTE 2004,p.57 – 58).

#### • **2.4.5 Sensorial**

Young children have heightened senses which they use to expand their knowledge of the internal world. Sensorial education therefore seeks to educate and develop all the five senses of the child so as to make his senses a natural tool for teaching the child, suggesting then that sensorial education is education through the senses. Montessori declared that the didactic materials are the main tools for sensory education in the Montessori Method of education (Montessori, 1965). Since the young child basically learns through the use of his senses, the Montessori nursery provides opportunity to learn through the senses using "...smells, sounds, textures, colours and taste" (Malloy 1974, p.11).

## **2.5 SOME OTHER FEATURES OF MONTESSORI EDUCATION**

Haines (2001) described some other Montessori features:

**2.5.1 Cycle of Activity** involving children repeatedly going over a particular activity for an extended period of time without distraction and the child stops only when satisfied. The cycle of activity in Montessori education allows for an uninterrupted work cycle. The child in Montessori education is described as displaying an important characteristic of repeating an activity from start to finish, if not externally interrupted. This process of repetition reveals that the child is undergoing "...a process of psychic maturation, which has ...come full circle. A need has been satisfied; and he stops because that "cycle of work" has been completed" (Standing 1957, p.150)

**2.5.2 Control of Error** that refers to self – correcting mechanisms inbuilt in Montessori materials to aid the child evaluate his progress and make necessary learning adjustments. The control of error assists the child in the proper use of any Montessori material and allows him to identify when he has made a mistake. It is the interaction between the child and the materials that enable the child take control of the whole process of learning (Lillard 1972).

**2.5.3 Three Period Lessons** involving naming, recognition and pronunciation of the word. These three steps capture the entire learning process and aid language development in children (Standing, 1957). Larrow (2009, p.1) clarifies that "the first period of this lesson can be compared to direct teaching. The words, "This is – / are" used to give the name of the object. The second period is a practice time in which the individual explores the object to learn its characteristics. After this exploration, the phrase "show me –" is used to recall the object. After additional practice, the third period, the evaluation period, "What is this?" is used to assess understanding."

Thus, (Edwards, 2002, p.4) notes that:

"The Montessori curriculum is highly individualized but with scope and sequence and clear cut domains. The individualization results in some young children mastering reading and writing before age 6 following Montessori 'writing to read' methods."

Notwithstanding, from its earliest beginnings, the Montessori Method has not been without criticism as an approach and it is pertinent at this point to discuss criticisms of Montessori's thinking and practice.

## **2.6 DEBATES ON MONTESSORI EDUCATION**

There are criticisms that the emphasis in Montessori Education lies too heavily in the technical rather than the social, on the physical environment and structured learning materials, rather than the social relationships fostered between the children and the directress and among the children themselves (Beck 1961; Emuang 2009). It was also argued that the method did not encourage children to express themselves creatively nor did it make provision for play (Isaacs 2010). Santer, Griffiths & Goodall (2007, p.7) note however that, "Montessori...did not believe in play or toys. Children in her Kindergartens experienced real household tasks." Interestingly, play in Montessori education is expressed in terms of the 'work' which children engage in as they independently and actively explore the learning materials and environment. Montessori upheld this perspective from her observation and understanding of the difference between the nature of children's work and adults, noting that children focused on the process involved in their work while adults were concerned with the outcome of work. Montessori further explained that all children's work centred on the ultimate task of self development. Thus, she opined that "A child is also a worker and producer. Although he cannot share in the work of adults, he has his own difficult and important task to perform that of producing a man" (Isaacs 2010; Montessori 1950, p.13). Through both exploration and his active engagement, the child ultimately learns and develops. In the active learning environment of the Montessori nursery, there is said to be freedom in this play for either collaboration with other children or individual play as the child feels the need (Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d). Contemporary arguments insist on the importance of play in learning and argue that there is a link between play and learning because one may give rise to the other (Langston and Abbott in Moyles 2005). Interestingly however, the gap between what is viewed as rhetoric and actual practice of play by early childhood practitioners has been highlighted by Bennet and Kell (in Wood & Attfield 2005, p.10) who conclude that "The view that the education of young children is founded on play has attained the status of a commandment, but it is a commandment far more observed in the telling than in the doing." Significantly however, Isaacs (2010, p.35) clarifies that "...many of today's Montessori practitioners would acknowledge the importance of play in the lives of children. The present day training of



Montessori teachers explores the issues relating to the nature of the child's work and play.” Conclusively, although Stephen (2006) highlighted that the notion of play having an additive effect on young children's learning is a recurrent theme in early years' education, she however noted the paucity of research evidence of play as a principle which underpins learning and argued that there is little understanding about how play progresses in early years.

On the lack of creative opportunities afforded the child in this approach, Montessori Education UK Ltd (n.d), the umbrella organisation for quality control argues that “Presentations are designed to inspire independent exploration and curiosity. Teachers are conscious never to present all possibilities leaving the child free to make his own discoveries.” The entire Montessori school environment is said to foster creativity as children have liberty to extend their learning experience through imaginative use of the materials without restriction. Examples of activities such as ‘Grace and Courtesy’ provide the tools for children to creatively engage in conflict resolution and problem solving. Different subject areas such as cultural extension and sensorial activities afford ample opportunity for creative exploration of language usage and learning materials (Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d).

With regard to the lack of emphasis on social interactions within the Montessori nursery, the following key features in Montessori nursery are explained as directly influential and key in fostering social interactions. There is the mixed age grouping and peer teaching which serves to benefit children in the nursery as they share their learning experiences and the older children support the younger ones in learning simply by having the opportunity to observe older children at work or work alongside in a group activity. Collaboration during such activities like storytelling, sing – alongs, rhyme recitation and play games reinforce social skills as children work together to achieve a set objective. Spontaneous opportunities like the snack table where ‘Grace and Courtesy’ exercises are worked out are also instrumental for children learning respect for others through turn taking and showing consideration for others (Isaacs 2010;Montessori Education UK Ltd).

## **2.7 MONTESSORI EDUCATION INTO PRACTICE**

It is necessary to begin this section by considering the characteristics of an authentic Montessori school program given that the name ‘Montessori’ is not patented and is very

much in the public domain and therefore any nursery/ preschool can exercise the liberty of describing and advertising their early years practice as being Montessori based (Dorner 2007 ;Seldin 2006). Corroboratively, Manner (2007) also decried the common use of the term ‘Montessori’ to describe a school and the fact that there is no attendant control against this appropriation, opining that a vast majority of schools could be bearing the label ‘Montessori’ without proper authorisation from organisations which accredit and provide oversight functions to ensure authenticity of the method. She explained that it would serve to give unsubstantiated conclusions to studies which seek to compare the traditional method of education and those of Montessori schools. Further to this, Murray (2008) equally noted in her research study on public perceptions of Montessori Education that whereas there was a significantly high awareness in the public domain of the term ‘Montessori’, there was conversely a noticeably lower knowledge of what the specifics of Montessori Education are. In order to clarify the concern and focus of this research project, this section is focused on exploring frameworks which should exemplify authentic Montessori programs as practiced in individual nursery schools from some others that may have veered from the principles and philosophy of Montessori method and may be practicing a compromised model which could undermine the authenticity of this educational model.

While it is plausible to conclude that Maria Montessori was the one true Montessorian and the rest of the practitioners of this educational model are merely interpreting her philosophy through individual lenses and this may well have occasioned differences in interpretation and consequently variations in practice, it is however imperative to note that Montessori had extensively detailed the underpinning principles and features of her method through her books and lectures as well as having protégées like Miss Homfray, Miss Child amongst others, to carry forward the task of disseminating her Method on the global stage (Isaacs 2010; Seldin 2006, [www.leesburgmontessori.com](http://www.leesburgmontessori.com)). Additionally, Montessori scholars like Tim Seldin, President, Montessori Foundation, Dr Nancy Rambush, co – founder of the Montessori Foundation and Founder of American Montessori Society and Dr Stoops as well as the International Montessori Council and Montessori Education (UK) Ltd have all articulated identical theoretical frameworks which should serve as bench marks for authentic Montessori programs and hence, best practice. (Rambusch & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2010; [www.montessorieducationuk.org](http://www.montessorieducationuk.org))

## **2.8 FRAMEWORK FOR AUTHENTIC MONTESSORI EDUCATION**

The framework subsequently discussed draws upon the three components of Montessori education which are: the child, the teacher and the environment (Isaacs 2010; Shilt, 2009) and this section further goes on to delineate the standards for best practice and characteristics of authentic Montessori education and the consideration of some contemporary issues that may reflect on Montessori practice in individual nursery schools. With regard to research on Montessori education, Lopata, Wallace & Finn (2005, p.2) report that "...little research has been conducted with elementary and latency age children." Beyond this age category, it is also worth noting the general paucity of research studies on Montessori Education especially those undertaken by non – Montessorians with most of the available studies largely not peer reviewed and the majority of them mainly published on Montessori affiliated websites and in two Montessori journals; Montessori Life and NAMTA. Recent developments indicate that the NAMTA Journal has recently been indexed on the ERIC database ([www.montessori-namta.org](http://www.montessori-namta.org)). Importantly, the lack of systematic research into this educational model which has spanned decades with enduring global recognition as an educational model reflecting effective instructional strategies does pose considerable concern (Shilt,2009). In this vein, Whitescarver & Cossentino (2008, p.2591) revealed that " while a rich collection of "insider" literature has existed since the start of the movement, the first century of Montessori witnessed only a handful of studies conducted by scholars in the mainstream educational establishment." However, effort has been made within the context of readily available sources to examine contemporary research /theoretical work and their findings to see what bearing they may have on the present study.

### **2.8.1 Conceptualisation of best practice in Montessori Education**

Conceptualising best practice in Montessori Education appears to be a challenging task as a result of the divide between what is deemed as pure, traditional Montessori practice and liberal, pragmatic and progressive practice (Whitescaver & Cossentino 2008). What is more, Daoust (2004) in her PhD thesis sought to examine the extent to which Montessori preschools in a particular geographical region in United States of America can be categorised into homogenous clusters on the basis of how teachers practiced Montessori education. It also sought to discover if teachers were deliberate in making modifications in their practice (in five areas: mixed aged grouping, work period, choice, materials,

presentation format) and what informed these modifications. The sample group involved 66 Montessori preschools. The research methodology basically involved the use of semi structured interview by telephone. Four subgroups of Montessori practices were found using cluster analysis. These were the traditional subgroup who exhibited complete adherence to the way Montessori is authentically practiced. The contemporary cluster showed authenticity in their Montessori practice but to a limited extent in comparison to the first subgroup and the final two clusters was the blended and explorative group, both of which combined the Montessori Method with other early childhood programmes. The findings showed that three clusters revealed significant differences in work length, whole group presentation of lessons and the use of mixed age grouping. Two clusters differed on what they agreed about Montessori practices. Significantly, there was no difference on modifications, suggestive of teachers' ignorance about the fact that the way they implemented their practice was not in line with Maria Montessori philosophy. These findings appear as exemplar to Cossentino's (2005, p.215) observation that:

“Montessori culture is not monolithic. There are palpable distinctions from school to school as well as among larger segments of the movement. Montessorians vary in the degree to which they adhere to both the doctrinal and the traditional elements of the method. Where some insist on a strict interpretation of Montessori's writings, others favor a more liberal treatment of the rubrics, calling for wide latitude to innovate and greater involvement with non-Montessori approaches to education.”

For instance therefore, in the United States of America which boasts the second largest number of Montessori schools (Shilt,2009), The American Montessori Internationale (AMI) an accrediting body representing the pure and authentic model as handed down by Montessori and the American Montessori Society, a liberal Montessori movement founded by Nancy Rambusch, have both published standards having similar fundamental elements such as long uninterrupted work periods and three year age span grouping. However, these two accrediting bodies are known to have differences in actual practice with regard to these fundamental elements as Whitescaver and Cossentino (2008, p.2588) revealed in their historical case study that:

“ trained observers report significant differences with regard to the length of work periods (AMI periods tend to be longer), the grouping of students (AMS practice is

more favourable to, for instance, setting up free standing programs for five – year – olds ), classroom apparatus (AMI stipulates the need for a “complete set” of “AMI approved” materials while AMS encourages teachers to expand beyond Montessori materials) and student – teacher ratios, (AMI classrooms are more likely to have larger student – teacher ratios”).

In relation to the variations in practice, Seldin (2010) acknowledged that in spite of the determination of schools to adhere faithfully to their understanding and application of the Montessori philosophy, there has been the influence of both culture and technology on strict adherence to authentic practice in some Montessori schools. In this vein, a possible influence on Montessori Education in England for instance, is The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), an initiative which derives from the Childcare Act 2006 and provides the framework for all early years’ providers in England to ensure the delivery of quality child care service at this important stage where a child begins to give expression to blossoming talents and abilities. The main objective of the EYFS

“...is to help young children achieve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making positive contribution, and achieving economic wellbeing” (DCSF,2008 p.7).

The provision of the Childcare Act 2006 stipulates that the EYFS learning and development requirements should have the following core elements:

- The early learning goals – the knowledge, skills and understanding which young children should have acquired by the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of five;
- The educational programmes – the matters, skills and processes which are required to be taught to young children;
- The assessment arrangements – the arrangements for assessing young children to ascertain their achievements (DCSF 2008, p.11).

As a distinctive ethos and principle, the Early Years Foundation Stage embraces the uniqueness of individual children, the importance of forming positive relationships as vital in supporting learning, the cruciality of the learning environment as key to the extension of learning/development and the understanding that children vary in the way they develop and

learn (DCSF 2008a). As argued by Montessori Education UK Ltd (n.d) this ethos is central to the Montessori philosophy of education and underpins the practice of Montessori method of education in its operating nurseries. What is more, although Isaacs (2010) equally opines that the EYFS espouses initiatives that are identifiable in Montessori education as a child centred approach to learning, it is however important to observe that certain elements of the guidance provision in the EYFS may pose a challenge in philosophy and practice for a nursery school with intent to deliver an authentic Montessori program. For instance, the DCSF (2008b p.7) stipulates that “play underpins the delivery of all the EYFS.” This appears as an overarching declaration which any nursery school seeking to negotiate national standards and still practice authentic Montessori education must grapple with because contrastingly, play is not considered as the underpinning means of learning in Montessori education, rather “Montessorians use the word “work” to describe everything the child does, because the child’s “work” is to learn about the world and find his or her place within it” (McTamamey 2004, p.6). Moreover, play is a broad category that captures a wide range of varied activities which may or may not be helpful to learning. Similarly, it may also be misleading to classify all activities which children are involved in as play (Hutt et al; Garvey in Wood & Attfield 2005). Furthermore, the characteristics of play may include children exhibiting heightened levels of motivation, being creative and learning or disregarded with a negative view as nothing more than children aimlessly loitering and messing about the environment (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Importantly, Schmidt and Schmidt (2009) further argued that children in Montessori Classrooms do make any distinctions between work and play because of the satisfying nature of their self directed work/ activity which they have chosen. While, Montessori (1967, p.69) admonishes the teacher to:

“ Let the children be free; encourage them; let them run outside when it is raining; let them remove their shoes when they find a puddle of water; and when the grass of the meadows is damp with dew, let them run on it and let them trample it with their bare feet; let them rest peacefully when a tree invites them to sleep beneath its shade; let them shout and laugh when the sun wakes them in the morning as it wakes every living creature that divides its day between waking and sleeping.”

It remains clear that she was unaccepting of fantasy/ pretend play. This is because of her belief in the all important nature of work in the development of a child and rather aimed to

emphasize young children's need to comprehend the real world. As such there are no provisions for toys or role play in Montessori nurseries (Murray 2008). Interestingly however, these are all recommended as avenues for achieving EYFS outcomes (Palaiologou 2010).

Again, the approach to assessment in the EYFS which focuses on achievement of set goals (DCSF 2008) appears at variance with the Montessori approach which gives recognition to the holistic and integrated nature of children's learning. It therefore prescribes assessment that uses observation which is both daily and in depth to bring to light the choices and important activities children engage in as an indication of what their interests are and capability (Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d; Isaacs 2010). Thus, Palaiologou (2010, p.13) cautions that " a concern exists that the EYFS assessment scales will overtake practice, and the Early Years workforce may feel the need to tick boxes rather than create the innovative practice so important in the Early Years." In line with this, Rawstrone (2012) also highlighted the argument against EYFS stipulation of set goals that must be achieved by children and reported that this has resulted in situation where "practitioners are so driven by what the children are expected to achieve, that they have lost the art of seeing the unique child in front of them; they are just matching things to a grid" (p.7). This action by practitioners was perceived as a reaction to the statutory nature of EYFS and evidenced the need of practitioners to be seen as compliant. This practice was however noted as being in obvious conflict with the Montessori idea of auto education (Gueterbock 2012; Montessori Society AMI n.d).

Furthermore, another area of difference between the EYFS and Montessori Education is reflected in the framework document which mandated that "All areas must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult –led and child – initiated activities" (DCSF 2008a, p.11). This mandate does not align with the ethos of Montessori learning where the decision regarding the daily activities of the child in the nursery is the established prerogative of the child. This shifts the balance of decision making from the teacher to the child in opposition to the EYFS stipulation that the teacher has the prerogative on placing emphasis either on teacher-led or child initiated activities (DFE, 2012; Gueterbock, 2012). Evidently, the premium in the Montessori approach is on the ethos of auto-education because:

“Here instead it is the work of the child, the auto-correction, the auto-education which acts, for the teacher must not interfere in the slightest way. No teacher can furnish the child with the agility which he requires through gymnastics exercises: it is necessary that the pupil perfect himself through his own efforts (Montessori 1964, p.172).

Corroboratively, Murray and Peyton (2008) identified in their study that Montessori elementary schools in the public domain faced two main challenges; striving to maintain a Montessori environment that is child centered and meeting state and federal requirements such as standardized assessment tests which have been put in place for school settings that are traditional and noted in their findings that “a number of the school leaders believed that standardized tests conflict with Montessori theory” (p.28). Hence, for Montessori practitioners in England, the challenge of conforming to the EYFS statutory guidance for assessment means adherence to The EYFS Profile scales booklet because “...[Teachers] must undertake the EYFS profile for all children of an appropriate age and assess them through observational assessment against the 13 scales and report 13 scores for each child (DFES 2008b, p.13). This EYFS mandate appears to justify Rathunde’s (2003) alarm when he posited that “current education trends are emphasizing students’ performance with little regard for their quality of experience” (p.45). Arguably therefore, emphasis on assessment may therefore prove to be another challenge to the adherence to best practice because as noted by Damore (2004), Montessori practitioners have succumbed to the emphasis on assessment as a result of pressure from local school authorities and parents and therefore advocated that Montessori schools needed to properly articulate both the measuring and reporting of the achievements of students. Damore who argued for assessments that are authentic in cognition and social/emotional development, however opined that “Describing a child’s performance deserves measures that are authentic, performance based, real- life, and reflective of multiple intelligences (Damoreb 2004, p.5).

Additionally, the case study by Bunnag (2010) which sought to discover how the Montessori philosophy was adapted by two teachers in a Montessori school and what elements were added to the principles of Montessori, discovered that both teachers whilst being fully trained/certified Montessori practitioners and having their core notion of best practice as children’s freedom in the environment, multi age class grouping, the child’s ability to teach himself and imbibe knowledge, the role of teachers as facilitators, self



directed/chosen activity, still advocated and implemented adaptations to the original method along two lines; personal adaptations which had to do with the teachers' personal belief of what needed to be incorporated into the curriculum in the best interest of the children such as the introduction of paper based academic workbooks, fantasy play, hugging/kissing of children and music. The introduction of external adaptation like unit studies had its origin in external pressure from the community (i.e. parents) and the school policy because it desired incorporation of traditional system of education to conform to societal expectations. Further acknowledgement of adaptation issues facing Montessori practitioners is the unrelenting pressure to give greater focus to academic attainment as also confirmed by Caldwell (2007, p.19) who reported on the responses given by Montessori practitioners on the introduction and use of workbooks in Montessori schools, noting from respondents' comments that "seeing completed pages of math workbooks, albeit at a very low level, may be more comforting to a parent than being told that 'Johnny did the full layout of the square of the decanomial in one sitting.'" This pressure is reflected across parents, teachers and education authorities. Thus, the findings of the Bunnag study indicate that although both teachers showed clear understanding and commitment to upholding the principles and philosophy of Montessori Education, the apparent deviations and partial adherence in implementation of the essence of this educational model further suggests the existence of a gap between theory and practice, exposing the reality of how best practice in Montessori is truly conceptualized.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it stands to reason that the conceptualisation of best practice in Montessori Education cannot be divorced from the frameworks subsequently outlined because as Dorer (2007, p.28) delineates, a general picture of Montessori must reflect the following essentials "mixed classes, prepared environment, Montessori materials, repetition, movement, freedom of choice, independence, respect, the Montessori view of the child, the trained adult." In alignment with this, Schmidt and Schmidt (2009) similarly argued that while there will be variations in the size and scope of Montessori schools, there are however distinct components that should encapsulate the notion of best practice in Montessori education and noted these as:

1. Adults professionally trained in Montessori philosophy, methods and materials for the group they are teaching.
2. Prepared environments based on three year age groups.
3. Children's free choice of activity within a three – hour cycle (p.10).

It is thus hoped that the present research may provide an opportunity through observations and conversations with the nursery staff to shed further light on conceptualisation of best practice in Montessori education. Further to this, it is useful to point out that the framework subsequently discussed in the below sections is based on the above literature reviewed.

### **2.8.2 Framework for learning in a Montessori nursery**

‘Active learners’ was the sustained view of Montessori of children and this perception was enabled by classroom practices which eschewed whole group activities and rather provided for a surplus of child directed activities (Isaac,2010; Shilt,2009; Standing, 1957).

Accordingly, Schmidt and Schmidt (2009) also explained that “Dr Montessori discovered that children love to be engaged in self directed, purposeful activities and learn best when involved in their self – chosen pursuits” (p.23). Additionally, Montessori opined that learning should commence with the concrete and move onto abstraction and therefore understanding how a child learns should be viewed in the context of the concrete tasks undertaken. This has important implication for observation in order to answer the important question of what it is the child is showing an interest in learning. In this way there develops an important relationship between the teacher as observer and the child as the observed (Montessori 1964; Signert & Marton, 2007). Hence, learning in a Montessori nursery as a child centred approach is predicated on individual interest exhibited by the child and freedom to direct their own learning via the choice of available activities and materials in the classroom (Tzuo 2007). This is further illustrated by Douglas (2007) who explained that children learnt principally from doing than from teacher instruction and therefore have their learning contextualised by both actions taken and objects used.

In further delineation, Lindon (in Featherstone & Featherstone 2008,p.10) corroborated that “ child-initiated activities and events arise when children choose freely from their learning environment – indoors and out – and select and organise resources, picking their own companions on the way.” Lindon further cited Langston (2007) as also defining child – initiated activity as “when a child (of any age) engages in self chosen pursuit we describe this as a child – initiated activity, valuing the child’s choice and recognising and respecting the child’s purpose” (p.10). Conversely, a misinterpretation of child – initiated activity is practised when opportunities are created within available time slot in a structured school

timetable and children are allowed to play with available resources in the environment. This suggests an attempt to introduce an element of play in the curriculum of a school. This practice when carried into Early years' settings is viewed as contradictory to the understanding of child – initiated activity as it provides for substantial adult control and input and does not give young children ownership of the activities (Lindon in Featherstone & Featherstone 2008). Lindon also noted the ability of young children to exercise ownership and make genuine and important decisions about their learning activities when the practitioner in the setting has prioritised making the learning environment highly resourceful by creating ample learning opportunities. Notwithstanding, adult initiated activities are also highly recommended and Lindon (in Featherstone & Featherstone, 2008, p.18) reminds us that:

“Good quality early learning requires adults who have plenty of ideas of their own, but who are sensitive to what enthuses or puzzles an individual child on a particular day. Adult initiated activities are preplanned (but not over planned) and started by adults. But the experience planned by the practitioner is offered to children along with real choice about their degree of involvement and how the experiences will unfold.”

Citing the findings by the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) research, Lindon surmised that a significant finding from this research emphasised that best practice in aiding young children to learn, had to do with striking a balance between adult and child – initiated activities, with the greater weight resting however on favouring more child – initiated activities over those initiated by adults (Featherstone & Featherstone 2008). Furthermore, since children are viewed as individually unique and at different mental levels, they are given the opportunity to choose their individual activities with the expectation that “...the child's sensitive periods will guide him to choose work for which he is ready” (Pickering 1992, p.92). In clarification, Bullock (1990) explains that in child – initiated settings the teachers carefully plan and set up the learning environment and then, provide the opportunity for children to get involved in self chosen activities. Such initiated activities by children are said to occasion a strong sense of exploration, experimenting and fostering of interaction with others. In addition, Bullock (ibid:p.2) equally noted that “The fact that children learn best through direct interaction and

encounter is supported by several early childhood experts, such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Jean Piaget.”

Montessori’s observations and work with young children led her to the conclusion that learning is enhanced when there is the opportunity for manual manipulation of objects and she thus contended that there exists a strong link between the hand and the mind of young children. The result was her production of carefully designed materials to facilitate this intercourse of hand and mind. This is instructive for contemporary practitioners in ensuring that Montessori nurseries provide abundant opportunities and freedom for hands on activity (Isaacs 2010; Montessori 1950; O’Donnell 2007; Shilt 2009; Standing 1957,). Interestingly, Daoust’s (2004) study revealed that Montessori teachers have been known to differ with regard to both the proportion of time allotted for free choice in relation to self initiated activity and whether or not permission should be granted for freedom of interaction among children in the nursery as well as the fact that a significant modification in Montessori education was the increasing teacher – initiated instruction which focused on giving whole group lessons and presentation rather than individual presentation as prescribed by Montessori and the issue of not affording children sufficient opportunity for choosing materials. Arguably, this observation by Dauost (2004) may well reflect the reality of practice in some Montessori nurseries working to conform to external agendas such as the EYFS and necessitates a pointer to the correct framework for learning in Montessori education as highlighted by Mieztis (1971, p.41):

“ The teaching – learning situation is highly individualised by virtue of the fact that children are encouraged to select their own activities while the teacher, called ‘directress’ observes the children and assists them when they truly need help. Little didactic group teaching occurs except for regular demonstrations in the use of the teaching materials to small groups of children.”

Mieztis’ opinion is thus in agreement with Montessori’s specification that lessons should not only be given individually but more importantly, it should be marked by its brevity because “the more carefully we cut away useless words, the more perfect the lesson” (Montessori 1964, p.108). In further confirmation, the study by Barber (2005) on ‘Joining the ‘mainstream’: Transferring from a Montessori Nursery School to a State Reception Class’ was informed by concerns of perception of discontinuity in the experiences of

children who attended Montessori nursery schools and were due to move on to a state maintained primary school. The Montessori school used for this study (Sunnybank) was a recipient of Government nursery funding and prepared the children towards the attainment of the Early Learning Goals of the Foundation which were considered complementary to what is obtainable in Montessori. The sample involved six Montessori practitioners at Sunnybank, 4 reception teachers at the state maintained primary schools, the Local Early Years Adviser and parents. The study noted that all the Montessori practitioners were unanimous in their opinion about the possibility of a discontinuity of practice with regard to the fact that children were used to practitioners working individually with them to introduce new concepts/ideas by giving presentation as against the new culture of whole group instruction and age dependent workload in the primary schools. Two of the mothers interviewed were clear in identifying the same issue of adjustment from working individually with one practitioner to whole group instruction as a difficulty experienced by their children who transited from Montessori setting to Mainstream primary school. Hence, Barber (2005) concluded that increased exchange of information between the Montessori settings and the mainstream schools was crucial in order to acquaint the reception teachers with the prior learning experiences of children from Montessori settings and thus, equip the teachers to adequately prepare for the entry of these children into mainstream schools. It is therefore clear that learning in Montessori education is adjudged at its best to be at the individual pace of each child, working with self chosen manipulative materials/activities that are appropriate to their different stages of development. Consequently such attributes as the child's independence, self discipline and willingness to take initiative, which are very important ingredients for learning and motivation are developed.

The assumption is that motivation is facilitated by the child's interaction with materials/objects in the prepared environment (Kendall 1993). Such motivation which springs from within the child as a result of normal interest in various learning material available in the environment and his interaction with them in a constructive manner will bring about polarisation of the child's attention and cause learning to occur. Hence, Shilt (2009, p.30) advanced that

“Intrinsic motivation, rather than extrinsic motivation, serves a critical role in development. She [Montessori] believed that children are motivated, either consciously or unconsciously, to seek experiences that optimally promote their

development and that by engaging in such experiences, children advance their powers of concentration, which drives their overall development.”

Subsequently, there is no need for any kind of outside inducement to either make the child learn and to further try to sustain such learning (Miezitis 1971). Indeed, Montessori eliminated all forms of rewards and punishments from children’s education (Montessori 1950). Lillard (1972, p.22) concludes that Montessori “had established a classroom procedure based on this inner motivation, wholly discarding the gold stars, special privileges, grades etc., which are still common practice in classrooms today as inducements to learning.” Equally as argued by Douglas (2007) research evidence exists to the effect that children maintain continued interest in chosen activities when there is no external motivation such as rewards which serve to disrupt a child’s concentration. This leads directly to the issue of inner motivation in learning and appears to tie in with the concept of self-regulation which Blair ( in Ervin et al. 2010, p.1) defined as the ability of a child “...to take steps to meet a goal, control emotions, plan strategies, monitor progress, persist at a task, and self – correct error.” Equally, Ervin et al. (2010, p.1) clarified that “self regulation” as term although never used by Montessori appeared closely related in description to the concept of normalisation or inner discipline espoused in the writing of Montessori.

Ervin, Wash & Mecca (2010) under the auspices of Lander University’s Montessori Teacher Education Program conducted a 3 year study on self regulation in 127 Montessori and 129 non Montessori classrooms, comprising 33 teachers and 256 children in kindergarten, first and second grade student from three South Carolina schools and one private Montessori school. It involved child interviews, parent and teacher surveys. The study considered whether in Montessori and non Montessori classrooms, there is a difference in self regulation in children, whether there is an association between children’s academic achievement and their level of self regulation in both types of classroom. It further looked at the association between levels of teachers’ beliefs of self – efficacy and children’s achievement and self regulation and also the association between the levels of self regulation and parental views of child discipline in Montessori and non Montessori classrooms. Interest in this research was chiefly triggered by one key research question which sought to find out if there is a difference in self regulation between Montessori and non Montessori classrooms. In addressing this key question, the findings of the

research revealed that both the parents survey and rating scale showed that the mean of children in the Montessori classrooms were significantly better in contrast to their peers in the non Montessori settings. The children from the Montessori classrooms in their interview responses exhibited a greater degree of self responsibility in their measurement of how well they performed at a task as well as revealing greater understanding of the effort which needed to be applied in learning while they also gave evidence of being more self directed than the children in non Montessori classrooms. Similarly, across the 18 point items on the rating scale of which 9 were statistically important for the Montessori classrooms, the children in the Montessori classrooms fared significantly better with particular note that the item which was stated thus “can solve everyday problems without always depending upon others...” recorded much greater statistical significance for children in Montessori classrooms in both parent survey and the rating scale than children from non Montessori classrooms (Ervin et al. 2010, p.9). The research concluded therefore that there was a difference in levels of self regulation between the children from both classrooms as the data supported the findings “Montessori children have a higher level of self regulation and a consistent growth in self regulation skills over the 3-year period of the study than non Montessori children” (Ervin et al. 2010, p.10). Suffice it to say that the findings so indicated appear to tally with the conclusions drawn from Rathunde’s (2003) study which compared Montessori and traditional middle school students on their motivation, quality of experience, and social context. The sample involved five Montessori schools of 150 students and 160 traditional middle school students, all of whom were 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Rathunde’s interest was triggered by his opinion that there exists a similarity between flow theory and Montessori focus on normalization as being predicated on spontaneous activity. He defined flow theory as “ an intrinsically motivated, task focused state, characterized by full concentration, a change in the awareness of time, feelings of clarity and control, a merging of action and awareness, and a lack of self – consciousness. The experience is triggered by a good fit between a person’s skills in an activity and the challenges afforded by the environment” (2003, p.1). Montessori’s description of a child experiencing normalisation evidenced by strong desire for work, concentration, exercise of self – discipline and sociability (Zener 2006) were in Rathunde’s opinion identical to the signs of flow and were viewed as precursors to intrinsic motivation. The findings of the study showed all round positive significance differences for the Montessori schools with notably higher percentages of motivation, having undivided interest and strong importance associated with school work. Hence the conclusion by Rathunde (2003) that the distinct culture found in Montessori schools is

underpinned by the principle of intrinsic motivation and may well provide the argument for departure from the increasing parochial view of education, further opining that “ task focused students are intrinsically motivated, they are drawn to novelty and the desire to master challenging tasks” (p.7). How far these assertions are a reality in the Montessori schools involved in the present study remains to be seen in relation to how children learn as summarised below:

- Through active, hands on learning
- Through spontaneous activity.
- Through self chosen/directed activity.
- Through intrinsic motivation.
- Through independent work either in small self selected groups or individually (Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d; Rambusch & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2006).

### **2.8.3 Framework for the role of the teacher in the Montessori nursery**

Whilst Montessori argued for substantial child directed activity in the classroom, she correspondingly opined that direct interaction between the teacher and children was equally beneficial, mandating that the individualised learning pace of children should occasion the matching of instruction to meet the individual child (Shilt, 2009). This stance is of interest in this research project as it may serve as one explanation of why the Montessori teacher is called “directress”, a term that defines her role not as one who teaches but rather as one who has the responsibility of directing children’s natural energy as Montessori herself explained:

“With my method the teacher teaches little and observes much; it is her function to direct the psychic activity of the children and their physiological development. For this reason, I have changed the name of teacher to that of Directress” (Montessori 1964, p.173).

Accordingly, Lillard (2005) also posited that good Montessori teaching is predicated on the teacher’s ability not only to observe but to also discover the needs of children. Conversely, in considering the teacher in traditional schooling, Entwistle (1974, p.61) opined that the teacher’s role emanates “...from his recognition as an authority who must impose



discipline in the interests of sound and efficient learning”. This view is diametrically opposed to what is prescribed in Montessori education. Here, the teacher’s role is rather summarised as provision of guidance, giving of direction and assistance as well as needed clarification as a result of the teacher’s observation or upon request by the children in the nursery (Hanson 2009). Thus, the ability of the Montessori teacher to link a child with suitable materials to work with in the nursery setting is thus predicated on her role of observation (Goffin 2001). Considered responsible for the general ambience and orderliness of the nursery, the directress must further work to ensure the maintenance of the materials, their display position in the classroom, the way the programme of activities in the nursery are planned and handling whatever challenges and change of tempo needed to be introduced to match the individual needs of the children (Isaacs 2010; Montessori, 1964; Shilt 2009). She is therefore “...the link that puts the child in touch with the environment. The child is totally dependent on this help from the teacher....In particular; he cannot gain full benefit from the learning material in the environment without the teacher’s inspiration and guidance (Lillard 1972, p.84). The Montessori teacher, thus plays a key role in the overall learning environment as facilitator in the involvement of the child through the employment of such techniques like asking children questions that are open ended, introducing possible alternative ideas and suggestions, making choices available and providing guidance for children in areas where their interests/curiosity would be awakened (Bredekamp in Bullock 1990). Similarly, while stressing the necessity of proper study, guidance and training as an important prerequisite for the directress’s role as a teacher of young children, Montessori however placed premium on the inner preparation of the teacher as being critical in removing personal defects which would become obstacles in understanding the child and hence, hinder the serving of his interests (Montessori, 1965).

Additionally, Macoby and Martin ( in Douglas 2007) noted that when adults display authoritative style of handling children as opposed to being neglectful, authoritarian or permissive, children stand to benefit because of the high premium placed on discussing, expectation, warmth and control. This, they argued leads to a situation where there is freedom within limits and rules are clearly defined, understood and implemented. Macoby & Martin (1983) further posited that children under authoritative adults exhibit motivation that leads to achievement, self confidence and popularity above other children. This argument accurately highlights the issue of the Montessori teacher’s role which is viewed as authoritative on the checklist for the framework for teachers in an authentic Montessori

programme as stipulated by Rambush & Stoops (1992), Seldin 2010 and Montessori Education UK Ltd (n.d) and may have some bearing on this research project which seeks to discover the role of the teachers in two Montessori nursery schools as summarised below:

- The teacher should be involved in sustained observation of children to inform assessment and planning for children's learning.
- The teacher should operate as a resource person to facilitate children's learning by providing information, giving opportunities and other challenges to extend children's learning.
- Serve as a 'link' between the child and the environment by bringing the child into close interaction with the learning materials/activities.
- Be a role model by modelling attitudes and traits that are desirable for children to emulate especially traits such as politeness, kindness, calmness and warmth.
- Be authoritative by giving clear instructions and setting appropriate and consistent limits for children to follow.
- Be a preparer of the environment to ensure that the classroom is designed to offer children opportunities that appropriate for their learning and development.
- Work with individual child or two children at any given time to give presentation lessons (International Montessori Council n.d.; Rambush & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2006).

#### **2.8.4 Framework for the interaction between Montessori teacher and child in the setting**

Adult – child interaction in Montessori education is based on respect for the child's work of self education, advocating the autonomy – support approach (Dauost 2004) and therefore the teacher should primarily work to protect the child who is absorbed in his task and does not surrender her authority as this will lead to chaos in the environment but is expected to think through an instruction or command before giving it (Lillard 2007; Standing 1957). Additionally, the North American Montessori Centre in its website stated that Montessori education aimed at ensuring that learners in this educational model become autonomous and competent with the long term view of producing citizens who are

responsible, adept at problem solving and able to adapt in society. It further cited three types of autonomy which fosters the development of an integrated personality as intellectual, physical and emotional autonomy (NAMC 2007). Further to this, Tzuo (2007, p.38) opined that "... high teacher control and high children's freedom seems necessary in order to illustrate Montessori's remark upon children's innate motivation to learn, as well as teachers' guidance to remove obstacles in the way of children's development." The above statement reflects the position of the Sylvia, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj – Blatchford, Taggart & Elliot (2003) study on *The Effective Provision of Pre School Education (EPPE)* which argued that premium was also placed on 'sustained shared thinking' as a prerequisite for adult – child interaction in any preschool setting that could be termed effective and therefore suggests that for the adult – child interaction obtainable in a Montessori nursery, the control exercised by the teacher and the freedom exhibited by children should not be in opposition to each other but rather viewed as a co –existent and highly valuable balance to the entire process of teaching. Consequently, the free participation of children is essential to "... the teacher who adjusts her vision and adapts her guidance to help them develop based on their individual needs" (Tzuo 2007, p.34). In concordance with Tzuo, Lillard (2007) equally argued that children achieve better outcomes in classroom settings where they have a sense of control. She further clarified that the aim of the teacher should be to "endorse their autonomy" (p.282).

Furthermore, a case study carried out by Koh and Frick (2010) explored the strategies employed by teachers for autonomy support and intrinsic motivation in students in a Montessori upper elementary classroom in Indiana, USA. The research questions focused on the characteristics of teacher autonomy support in a Montessori classroom and the extent to which students were motivated intrinsically to do school work. The participants in this research study were the head teacher, two assistant teachers and a Montessori classroom of 28 multi-age students between 9-11 years. Data collection involved classroom observations, teacher and student surveys, teacher interviews and questionnaires.

Although, the age range of students involved in this study are beyond the scope of the present research, the issue of autonomy support is viewed as cardinal in the adult – child interaction in Montessori education (Daoust 2004), thus justifying its inclusion. The research report noted that though autonomy is usually synonymous with choice, it however delineated three types of autonomy support which teachers may employ with students. These are "(1) organizational autonomy – ownership of learning environment (2)

procedural autonomy – ownership of the form of their work, and (3) cognitive autonomy – ownership of learning” (Koh & Frick 2010, p. 3). Whilst Stefanou et al. (in Koh & Frick, 2010) pinpointed cognitive autonomy support as being the greatest influence in the development of intrinsic motivation in children, “controlling events” was contrasted as undermining a person’s autonomy through external events noting “ when students perceived teachers to be “directly controlling” by giving them frequent directives, interfering with their preferred pace of learning and not allowing independent opinions, it predicted higher levels of anger and anxiety (Assor, Kaplan, Kanat – Maymon and Roth in Koh & Frick 2010, p.3). The results on the motivation styles of the teachers revealed that all the three teachers recorded ratings that were exceptionally high which was the highly autonomy supportive motivation style. Again, the research noted the postulation by Deci et al. ( in Koh & Frick 2010, p.10) that intrinsic motivation is best achieved through the use of autonomy support and revealed that the two types of autonomy support employed in the Montessori classrooms in this research study were – organizational autonomy support and cognitive autonomy support with the explanation that “ the former was aimed at developing their mastery for organizing work, while the latter fostered independent thinking” (Koh & Frick 2010, p. 10). Conclusion was thus drawn that “Autonomy support in the Montessori classroom studied was anchored upon an educational philosophy that emphasizes self-mastery and independence in students” (Koh & Frick 2010, p.12). The conclusion reached in the above study resonates with the argument posed by Formankova (2007) that lack of harmony in adult – child interaction is as a result of the tendency of adults to uphold a distorted view of the child as “grossly inadequate” and hence in the misplaced attempts to assist children, adults disregard the importance of what children discern as necessary to their needs/ interests during early childhood. A possible implication of Formankova’s view in relation to adult – child interaction in the nursery setting is that the teacher must exercise patience, remain respectful, watchful and most importantly, withhold judgment with regard to the child’s spontaneous approach to the didactic materials because of the understanding that there will be differences in the approach of each child to the learning materials, as well as in their interest level and concentration span (Rambusch 1965). Akin to this view point, Lillard (2009) argued for teachers to ensure their interaction with children is based on dignity for the child. This she noted was an uncommon perspective of relating with children. Lillard advanced that viewing a child with dignity meant visualising the child in a futuristic way as he will be and not as he is.

Consequently, this research project seeks to discover teacher interaction with children in two Montessori nursery schools based on the below checklist:

- To be mutually respectful.
- Respectfully engaging with the child as a learner since the task of learning belongs to the child and the teacher is only a guide and must be aware of the main role of helping the child reach full potential (International Montessori council (IMC) n.d; Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d; Rambusch & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2006).

### **2.8.5 Framework for preparing the learning environment according to Montessori philosophy**

Klein (n.d) opined that an important marker of a school offering a credible Montessori programme is the presence of staff with certification from accrediting Montessori body such as AMS or AMI in the United States and Montessori Education UK Ltd or Montessori schools Association in the United Kingdom, with a caution that some schools with the Montessori label still operate with uncertified/untrained teachers. Accordingly, in a longitudinal study carried out by Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj – Blatchford, Taggart & Elliot (2003) on The Effective Provision of Pre School Education (EPPE) Project aimed at investigating how preschool education affects children of 3 and 4 years and the characteristics of an effective practice and their underpinning pedagogies with a sample consisting of over 3,000 children including their parents, their home environments and preschools and covering different types of nurseries (private, mainstream, local authority) reported some findings which may have some implications for Montessori method of education and its underpinning pedagogy. The EPPE concluded that having qualified trained teachers working with children was noted as the single most important characteristic that impacted on the quality of a school setting and served to impact on how children performed in areas like pre reading /social development and equally highlighted the importance of workers in preschools being knowledgeable in the requisite curriculum area. This assertion by the EPPE raises further queries about the employment and use of non qualified teachers in some Montessori nurseries and provides plausible doubts about the quality of practice on offer in such settings.

Again, the classroom environment in Montessori education is expected to be scaled to a child sized world in both a physical and conceptual way in order to ensure the child's need for constructing his world through ordering his experiences and attaching meaning to them

is met (Montessori 1950; Mieztis 1971; Standing 1957). Montessori classrooms typically operate open space concepts with furniture sparsely arranged to ensure ample promotion of individualised learning and small group instructions. The ages of children in the setting usually span a three year age range. On a daily basis, the nursery structure should provide for three – four hours of individual self chosen or small group instruction and about less than an hour of general group learning (Barnes & Snortum 1973; Lopata, Wallace & Finn 2005). Further to this, Shilt (2009) reported that the provision of this long uninterrupted work period was to afford children opportunity for total concentration without interruption because Montessori (1950) viewed concentration as an important state in the learning experience of the developing child because it involves complete engrossment in an activity or a didactic material and yields personal satisfaction and fulfilment when the child finally emerges from it and not fatigue because as Douglas (2007, p.21) revealed “sustained, intense periods of concentration are central to [Montessori education].... It is not unusual for older children to work on a project for several days at a time and even young children can be seen concentrating for thirty minutes, or more, at the same task.” Therefore, a related study by Stari & Banta (1966) focused on the uses of didactic materials schedule (UDMS) to discover the numbers of hours during a nursery school day in which Montessori didactic materials were properly used. The sample involved two Montessori classrooms – one rated highly structured classroom and the other, unstructured. The research methodology/design basically entailed 42 hours of classroom observations. The results of the study revealed that the average time children from both classrooms spent on working with didactic materials were 1% - 21% during a school day. However, results specific to the structured classroom with limits established prior to freedom being granted, revealed a higher proportion of time spent on didactic materials (10- 20%). The unstructured classroom where freedom was granted before structure and children participated in setting limits, showed only 1-7% of the school day was spent working on didactic materials. Furthermore, a greater percentage (90%) self initiated activity was observed in children from the structured classroom while in the unstructured classroom, only 56% self initiated activity was recorded. This report is very telling given that the learning materials are a key component of the Montessori classroom because Montessori herself declared that “our didactic materials renders auto education possible and permits a methodical education of the senses” (Montessori 1964, p.171). Furthermore, these didactic materials were said to be the outcome of Maria Montessori’s observation of children and their developmental needs and as such she designed, revised learning materials suitable for

them until they were appropriate for particular needs. It was obvious that the choice of materials in Montessori education were very specific and intentional with detailed descriptions (Lillard, 2008; Standing, 1957). However, Lillard (2008, p.2) notes that the evolution in Montessori education has given rise to two sets of approach

“One has been to keep very much to Dr. Montessori’s set of materials (at each classroom level), with few changes; for lack of a better word, I will call this the traditional approach. The second, which I will call the modified Montessori approach, has been to adopt modifications in a democratic fashion, with each teacher trainer and teacher making decisions about new materials to add to the set (or, at times, what to take out)... The result, after some 50 years is a wealth of alternative materials in many Montessori classrooms, materials in which...Dr. Montessori did not have a hand.”

The above scenario raises issues about the consequences of including these materials in Montessori classrooms, the preference of children for these materials and their impact on the children using these materials other than Montessori materials. Lillard (2008) lists the following categories of modifications in some Montessori schools:

- Introduction of puzzles, games, and craft projects.
- Putting higher learning materials into a classroom where they do not belong.
- Use of learning materials for other purposes than originally intended.
- Introducing alternative practical life activities/ materials.

In addition, Lillard (2008, p.5) opined that “certain of the modified materials obscure what is unique about a Montessori classroom, since most preschool classrooms offer puzzles, games, and crafts.” Interestingly, with regard to Montessori didactic materials, Hunt (in Montessori, 1964) cautioned that they should not be treated as sacred materials, without room for evaluation and further improvement of the original design through innovation. Of equal concern was the possible ‘standardization’ of procedure for the individual child to work through a particular set of materials as this insistence may lead to the children losing “...the growth – fostering pleasure of following their own predilections in their informational interactions with the environment” (Hunt, in Montessori 1964,p.xxxiii).

Hunt further recommended possible modifications of existing didactic materials and inventions of other pedagogic materials suited to meet the child's developmental intentions, based on the teacher's observation and close monitoring of the growth and development of the child. This ability is cited as the distinguishing characteristic that set Maria Montessori apart (Hunt, in Montessori 1964, p.xxxiii). Interestingly, the preceding discussions do appear to mirror the interest of this research project on whether the prepared environments in the participating nursery schools reflect the Montessori ethos.

The nursery classroom as described by Montessori is "a nourishing place for the child. It is designed to meet his needs of self construction and to reveal his personality and growth patterns to us.... The basic components to the classroom in a Montessori setting are "freedom, structure and order, reality and nature, beauty and atmosphere, the Montessori materials, and the development of community life" (Lillard 1972, p. 50/51). For Montessori, the school is a place for the child to live in freedom (Montessori 1965b). She further noted that "The principle of free choice made it possible to observe the tendencies and psychic needs of the children" (Montessori 1950, p.155). The children in a Montessori classroom are free to both move about at will as well as to select their activities and Wolf (in Sanden 2007) gives an important reminder to the effect that the child's natural way of learning is through exploration of the environment. Therefore the availability of freedom of movement needs to be guaranteed to ensure children's interaction with their environment (Lillard, in Sanden 2007). The final component of the Montessori classroom is the development of community life which is fostered by the heterogeneous multi-age grouping of children across a three year age span. This setting occasioned peer teaching and the building of social skills. Good interpersonal relationship is naturally forged with children mutually benefitting from each other (Lillard, 1972; Montessori 1965, O'Donnell 2007; Standing 1957). Malloy (1972, p.54) opined that "...such contacts with other children assist ...intellectual growth and are essential for their social development." It is thus prudent to engage in examining the actual prepared environment in the two nurseries involved in this research without the assumption that the practice in these nurseries will reflect the Montessori learning environment as summarily outlined as:

- Qualified and credentialed Montessori teacher leading the classroom.
- Child sized furnishing in the nursery environment.
- Mixed age grouping, spanning a three year period.



- Full complement of Montessori learning materials.
- Freedom for children to move about, choose their learning materials and work with them.
- Flexible work period – usually a three hour uninterrupted period in the morning for children to engage with materials.
- Environment that provide for learning activities/materials which focus are child centred and not on teacher instruction.
- Organisation of environment into the different curriculum areas with self/cabinet units for display of learning materials with the core curriculum reflecting elements of true Montessori education.
- Promotion of collaboration and cooperation among children.
- Learning program focused on the progress of the individual child in the different curriculum areas and his development because each child is seen as a unique individual (International Montessori Council n.d.; Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d.; Rambusch & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2006).

It is therefore against the afore discussed frameworks that this research project is underpinned as it seeks to examine the theory and practice of Montessori Education in the two nursery schools involved in this research by considering their practice against the above determined frameworks which serve as indicators for best practice and consequently, authentic Montessori Education. It is therefore the aim of this present study to go beyond the discussion of the aforementioned frameworks to actually examine whether or not there is a true bridge between theory and practice in these Montessori nursery schools by answering the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The following chapter outlines the methodology adopted in order to gather the necessary evidence to answer these research questions.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study explores the Montessori Method of Education in two nursery schools in cities A and B, using a qualitative paradigm with a case study design. It first of all considers how children in the nursery learn and how the role of the teacher in the setting is defined. It further examines the nature of the interaction between the teachers and children in the setting as well as how the nursery environment is prepared. Montessori education is a century old movement with global proliferation and advocates an approach which “...offers a broad vision of education as an aid to life. It is designed to help children with their task of inner construction as they grow from childhood to maturity. It succeeds because it draws its principles from the natural development of the child. Its flexibility provides a matrix within which each individual child's inner directives freely guide the child toward wholesome growth.” ([www.montessoricentenary.org](http://www.montessoricentenary.org)). With the above elucidation, it is equally important to note that there are many schools worldwide which claim to be adherents and practitioners of this educational model with the added challenge that the label ‘Montessori’ is in the public domain, thus creating the difficulty of substantiating the claim of schools which advertise as subscribing to this approach. As a result, the practice of Montessori Education in such schools remains to be examined as to its adherence or otherwise to philosophy and practice of Montessori education. It is on this premise therefore that this research project seeks to explore in depth Montessori Education in two nursery schools in North East England by posing the following research questions:

1. What is the directress’s notion of best practice in Montessori Method of Education?
2. How do children learn in this Montessori nursery?
3. What is the role of the directress within the setting?
4. What is the nature of directress – child interaction in the setting?
5. How prepared is the learning environment in relation to Montessori philosophy?

This methodology chapter therefore provides a description of the research strategy and design, population and sample used in this study, collection of data and the data analysis procedures. To identify the best methodology, it was necessary to proceed on this study by focusing on the above listed research questions which "...deal with actual problems at the level of practice and lead to an improvement in the teaching and learning process (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen 2006, p.36). Hart (2005) noted that at the onset of every research, there is usually the all important issue of topic formulation and a necessary part of this process includes considerations of methodological issues, which takes its bearing from an individual's belief system. For instance, the belief about the importance of facts as being strictly what is observable and measurable with objectivity as a certainty, added to the opinion that there is universal reality, truth or falsehood and no reference to cultural values, points an individual researcher to the positivist approach to research. If however, the individual's view is that the aim of research is to interpret, give explanation and aid understanding of people and events, with the opinion that truth and falsehood are relative concepts and belief about the nature of human behaviour as being subjective, then the researcher is clearly inclined to an interpretivist approach to research. It is necessary at this point to explain that:

'... Methodologies produce different research designs, because they follow in their theoretical structure different ontological and epistemological prescriptions  
(Sarantakos 2005, p.29)

We therefore deduce that ontology and epistemology drive methodology which subsequently influences the choice of research designs and the instruments used. Ontology guides methodology as to what the nature of reality is, while epistemology guides methodology as to the nature of knowledge (Sarantakos 2005). Sarantakos therefore explains that the positivist paradigm embraces realist/objectivist ontology, holding an empiricist epistemology and advocates the strategies of quantitative methodology which uses fixed design with quantitative methods. On the other hand, the paradigms of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology embraces constructionist ontology, upholding an interpretivist epistemology and advocates the strategies of qualitative methodology which uses mainly flexible designs with qualitative methods.

There were thus several research strategies employable for the purpose of providing a suitable framework which would serve as a platform for the formulation of a methodology

that was appropriate for the investigation of the topic under consideration. It is worth indicating that the crucial thrust of determining the research strategy used was whether the focus was on a post positivist world view that primarily holds true for the quantitative research and is referred to as 'scientific method' or the social constructivist world view incorporating interpretivism and is an approach that lends itself to qualitative research or the pragmatic world view which is the philosophy which underpins the mixed methods and seeks the best available methods drawn from other approaches to employ (Denscombe 2009). Since the main focus of this research is on examining Montessori education through obtaining the perceptions of different stakeholders, articulation of classroom practices and examining documents relating to theory and practice in two nursery schools, it was necessary that an appropriate research strategy which ensured data collection in such a manner as to facilitate the answering of the research questions as well as providing clear insight into the adherence or otherwise to the theory and practice on Montessori education within the chosen schools was employed.

Importantly therefore, the research design allowed for sufficient flexibility to enable the researcher to employ a strategy which promoted the collection of data using a variety of techniques which ensured rigour at the levels of data collection, analysis and writing of the report. To this end, the qualitative research strategy seemed most suitable as a vehicle to explore and understand the meanings attached to social or human problems by individuals or groups of people (Denscombe 2009).

### **3.2 Research strategy**

The qualitative paradigm was most appropriate and suitable for this research because it enabled the researcher not only to integrate herself into the very life of the research site but more importantly, it afforded the opportunity to thoroughly understand a phenomenon as a result of focusing on the total picture instead of concentrating on breaking the phenomenon down into variables. The end goal of this research was therefore to obtain a "...holistic picture and depth of understanding, rather than a numeric analysis of data" (Ary et al 2006). Importantly, qualitative study is concerned with understanding human behaviour from an insider perspective as experienced by specific participants in their peculiar setting such as a school, community or culture (Ary et.al 2006; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). As a result, the researcher was able to thoroughly discover, understand and explore the specific activities of the group by immersion into 'their' world, seeking access to the perspectives of the participants and the interplays, interrelationships and process involved.

It is necessary to point out that qualitative studies occur in normal, natural settings, as evident in this research and unfolds as the study progresses. This was significant because it enabled the researcher to draw her conclusions from her understanding and interpretation of the different interplays observed in the research. Again, in qualitative research, the researcher is an important instrument in the collection of data because this method of inquiry entails the study of human behaviours, experiences, situations and cultures. Thus, the researcher is able to capture the complexity of these different situations, with the corresponding ability to make necessary responses and adjustments to the environment as needed (Ary et al. 2006; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). Furthermore, qualitative studies provide the researcher with the opportunity to position herself in the study, reflecting on how her background may shape the study (Thomas 2009). This implies that she realised that the inquiry may not be considered value free and as such the researcher was realistically prepared to confront the issues of bias which may inadvertently cloud the findings (Ary et al 2006; Thomas 2009).

In contrast, the quantitative paradigm whilst also an equally valid and robust research approach emphasizes "...the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). However, this emphasis which quantitative research stresses was not the underpinning focus of this study because the researcher was rather concerned with "...the socially constructed nature of reality...and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Quantitative strategies of inquiry include survey and experimental research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.205) explain that "...Surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events." Survey as an approach varies in complexity from providing simple complexity to presenting relational analysis. Denscombe (2007, p.8) clarifies that "The survey approach is a research strategy, not a research method." Data collection techniques in survey strategy involve structured and unstructured interviews, questionnaires (postal and self-administered), standardized tests of attainment and attitude scales (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). Survey strategy was ruled out for this research project due to its leanings specifically towards questionnaires and interviews alone without the opportunity of another method like the observation method to aid triangulation and validation. Again, experimental research was equally not feasible as a strategy for this

project because “The active role of the experimenter, and the tight control of the situation needed to run a successful experiment, is controversial in some areas and difficult or even impossible to achieve in many fields of social research” (Robson 2007, p.37). Again, it is to be noted that experiments are usually carried out in a laboratory, to maximise control over some variables which may be difficult to achieve outside the laboratory. These conditions can obviously not be applied to this research study which took place in the natural setting of the nursery without control of any variable.

Qualitative studies are known to employ several research strategies such as ethnography, case study, action research, phenomenology, grounded theory and evaluation (Thomas 2009). Action research had been ruled out as a strategy given that the focus of this research is not to introduce changes to the theory and practice of Montessori Method of education in the two nursery schools because an action research “... involves a feedback loop in which initial findings generate possibilities for change which are then implemented and evaluated as a prelude to further investigation” (Denscombe 2007, p.23). Phenomenology was also ruled out as its focus is on how life is experienced. This was not however the concern of this study. Ethnography, with its emphasis on understanding the life and culture of people by immersion into that culture is also not a viable strategy. It requires considerable time being spent in the field. The timeline for this research study and the financial constraints cannot accommodate this requirement (Robson 2007). Equally, evaluative research is concerned with accountability and improvement of services rendered. This research study did not however concern itself with these issues, although it is likely that staff would be further sensitized by the research project to seek to bring improvement to their practice. Opie (2004) noted that grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) on the premise that human beings should be studied scientifically as understood by qualitative researchers. Denscombe (2007) also pointed out that it was both an approach which emphasised theory generation as well as the relevance of empirical field work with a view to linking explanations to practical real world situations. For the purpose of data collection, grounded theory tends toward techniques that produce data in its raw state- such as unstructured interviews, open ended questionnaires and field notes. The reason for using these particular techniques has to do with theory generation. Grounded theory employs theoretical sampling. Although grounded theory could be used with a multiplicity of data collection methods and is beneficial for the generation of theories, it was however discounted for this research project because it does not encourage precision in planning

and also focuses on the specificity of behaviour in certain settings and this may alienate explanations of the situation from taking into account other far reaching factors in the context. Further to this, is the concern about the heavy reliance of grounded theory on empirical data (Denscombe 2007).

### **3.3 Research design – Case study**

In sum, the decision on what appropriate research design to employ rested on the consideration of the type of data that was needed and the available options for the collection and analysis of such data. Accordingly, the qualitative design frame appropriately chosen for this research project was the case study because as Bell (2005, p.10) aptly notes:

“All organizations and individuals have their unique features. Case study researchers aim to identify such features, to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work, to show how they affect the implementation of systems and influence the way an organization functions.

It is also necessary to point out that:

“A case study involves in-depth research into one case or a small set of cases. The case may be a child, a teacher, a class, a school; a social services department....The aim is to gain a rich, detailed understanding of the case by examining aspects of it in detail” (Thomas 2009, p.115).

Whilst noting that several types of case studies abound such as exploratory, descriptive, interpretative, evaluative, ethnographic, historical and psychological, for the purpose of this project however, the classification of the case study types into three major categories – intrinsic case study, instrumental case study and collective case study better highlighted the choice of case study type undertaken. Stake (1994 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) defined the intrinsic case study as one that is undertaken specifically to get understanding of a particular case while the instrumental case study aims to examine a particular case so as to get insight into an issue or theory in question and the collective case is employed to obtain a picture of the situation in a fuller way (Bryman 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007; Thomas 2009). Thus, this research project was undertaken as an instrumental case

study because it aimed at examining two nursery schools in order to gain insight into their theory and practice of Montessori education. It is therefore worth mentioning that the choosing of this research as a case study precludes its findings from being generalised to other schools because the main concern of the project was to understand the theory and practice of Montessori education in these two schools as this design afforded the researcher more detailed insight and understanding of the context of the participating schools. Thus, Thomas (2009, p.109) clarifies that “the extent to which you can generalise hangs on the extent to which your sample is representative of the whole.” The two cases involved in this project may not be representative of the practice of Montessori education in all Montessori schools in the UK, but they are by no means unique. Thus, they may well provide understanding and insight for similar circumstances thereby aiding interpretation in such cases that may be similar (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In conclusion, Bryman (2008, p.55) argued that:

“It is important to appreciate that case study researchers do not delude themselves that it is possible to identify typical cases that can be used to represent a certain class of objects, whether it is factories, mass media reporting, police services, or communities. In other words, they do not think a case study is a sample of one.”

Case study methodology stands to benefit this research project because it gave the researcher the opportunity of using multiple research methods, such that the data can be collected through several means, can be triangulated for validity. Further to this, case study is a phenomenon that is already in existence, not fabricated for the purpose and would remain in existence after the research study is finished and in addition, the case study design ensures attention is given to the relationships that exist in the research setting as this gives a deeper insight as to the interactions and interconnectivity of relationships and how these influence the research context and also allows for detailed and in-depth study of things, allowing the researcher to discover issues that may be glossed over in other studies (Denscombe 2007). However, the researcher was aware that certain disadvantages are associated with case study method such as the matter of credibility in terms of generalisation of findings, its perception as a ‘soft option’ which casts doubt on the rigour expected from social research, the tendency that the researcher’s presence would exert influence on the participants, causing them to alter their behaviour and the flexibility of the



case study posing a challenge in terms of time management as well as creation of boundaries to the studies (Denscombe 2007).

### **3.4 The population and sample**

The target population for this research were two Montessori nursery schools based in cities A and B in North West, England. The first nursery school (A) is based in city A and is located in a purpose built accommodation with a general open plan classroom area, with indications on various corners of the classroom wall showing the different Montessori curriculum subjects. The nursery has six tables and 31 chairs. There are three additional rooms which are used for the under 2yr olds, the kitchen and office. There is a large play area behind the classroom with ample number of play equipment, sand pit, table for snacks, moulding materials, two small sheds, and swings. The school operates a busy routine (open all year round) with options for either full time (8:00am to 6pm) or part time registration (8:00am to 1pm, 1:00pm to 6:00pm, and 8:00am to 4:00pm). There are 8 teachers in the nursery, all females, aged between 25 – 44yrs and of British nationality, six of which are exclusively assigned to the 2.5 to 5 year olds. Interestingly, there is only one fully certified Montessori teacher in the nursery; three are undergoing long distance part time Montessori training and the other two teachers are not involved in any form of formal training. The children participating in this research range from 2.5 to 5years and approximately 20 – 25 pupils are in attendance each day with more girls than boys. The nursery is not multicultural as the children are all of British nationality.

The second nursery school (B) involved in this research is located in city B and is accommodated in a grade 11 listed building. The school is open (7.30am – 6.00pm) all round the year except on public holidays. The main nursery area is open planned in out lay but demarcated into two classroom sections. One room has three tables and twelve chairs and the other room has four tables and eighteen chairs. There are also two separate rooms, which serve as staff room and kitchen. A play area is located behind the main nursery building with few play equipment and adjacent to it, is the purpose built baby unit. There is a combination of Montessori and EYFS indicated subject/activity areas. The teachers are 8 in number, females, aged between 23 - 35 and all of British nationality. Only two teachers are in long distance part time Montessori training, all the other 6 teachers have no Montessori training.

Children in the nursery are approximately 20- 25 in number per day in attendance, all British nationals and there are more girls than boys.

Also included as participants in this research are 3 parents, and 1 school owner, all from nursery school (B), and 1 board member from Montessori Education UK Ltd. The three categories of people are all British nationals and reside in England, UK.

### **3.5 Sample**

Jupp (2006, p.244) defined purposive sampling as:

“A form of non – probability sampling in which decisions concerning individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research.”

Thus, the non – random design selected for this research project was the purposive sampling as the researcher was very keen to obtain the best information from participants that were capable and willing to share such information. These criteria were instrumental to the choice of the nursery managers and two senior teachers as both capable and willing participants who gave relevant in-depth and rich information for this research study. However, the researcher was eventually unable to interview the other two senior teachers from nursery (A) due to the constraints in the nursery’s operational schedule and the absence of one of the teachers as a result of prolonged ill health. The choice of the senior teachers to be interviewed was predicated on the assumption of their being Montessori trained/qualified. Of the 4 teachers interviewed from both nursery schools, only one was Montessori certified, with 2 others engaged in long distance part time training and the remaining one teacher qualified as a Wales Foundation Phase teacher but untrained in Montessori education. Again, the children who participated in the research exercise were principally the morning session pupils and included only the children from ages 2.5 – 5 yrs. In both nurseries, the number of children at the morning session totalled approximately 20 – 25 daily. The selection of the morning session (9am – 12pm) was due to the fact that it provided the unique opportunity of obtaining the best information as this time of day showcased the children at their best as they were full of energy and enthusiastic. The advantage of this was the opportunity of observing children during the time of day when

their energy levels were not yet depleted. Additionally, the morning session was appropriate given that several of the children were picked up after 12pm and thereafter the nursery schools operated a more casual schedule during the afternoon sessions. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007, p.115) state that although a purposive sample "...may not be representative and their comments may not be generalizable, this is not the primary concern in such sampling; rather the concern is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it." This explanation further fuelled the addition of other stakeholders who participated in this project to include 3 parents and the school owner from nursery (B) and 1 board member of Montessori UK Education Ltd. The parents, school owner and board member were handpicked as people who would be willing and capable of giving the needed information (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison 2007).

### **3.6 Instrumentation**

It should be pointed out that data collection methods for qualitative research are essentially the same with the researcher determining the preference of one method over the other, based on the research strategy chosen. These methods are observation, interview, questionnaire, document analysis (Thomas, 2009). This research project used data from observations, interviews and documents obtained from the research exercise undertaken from the 7<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011 at two Montessori nursery schools in England. Obtaining access to both the data and participants was undertaken through formal written consent obtained from the gatekeepers of the two nursery schools, namely the Management of the Montessori nurseries and permission of the parents/ caregivers of the pupils because as noted by Lee (1993 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007, p.123) "Access might be gained through gatekeepers, that is those who control access."

#### **3.6.1 Interview**

Interviews basically involve discussion with selected persons on a particular topic to elicit answers to a research question (Hart 2005). Interviews could be face-to face-, by telephone or by e-mail. Structured interview involves more formality, is less flexible, with the researcher more in control. It is also easy to analyse data from structured interview. It however is too restrictive and does not give opportunity to elicit in-depth information from the participants in this study. Also, the unstructured interview employs a more flexible approach with open ended questions but has no boundaries and may raise unexpected issues. It also has the challenge of difficulty in analysis. The direction of the interview may

drift into uncharted areas and prove difficult to manage (Opie 2004). Additionally, with regard to the possibility of using focus group interview in this research project, Hart (2005, p.357) noted that “a focus group is a carefully selected group of people brought together in the same place to discuss a particular topic or issue relevant to them.” However, Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003, p.108) cautions that “... ironically the greatest strength of focus groups –their group dynamics and interactions –can also be the source of their greatest weakness.” This means that participants would respond in a way to please other members of the focus group and are not willing to express opinions that differ from that of the main view of the group. They are equally not likely to reveal highly personal or sensitive information. Attention is on the members of the focus group who are dominating the interview and the views of these people become influential (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003).

As for the semi structured interview, it incorporates elements of both structured and unstructured interviews depending on the topic, purposes and other preferences of the researcher (Denscombe 2007; Sarantakos 2005). This is because the semi structured interview is more flexible and gives more opportunity to respondents to freely express their opinion while still adhering to the researcher’s questions. One pitfall of the semi-structured interview, however, is the probability of the researcher’s prejudice reflecting in the interview. Importantly, the focus of case study design on the in-depth study of a matter/issue, necessitated the use of semi structured interview in this study because it gave the researcher opportunity to explore in detail the experiences, understanding and motivations of the participants as well as giving room for clarifications and further expansion of their answers as a result of freedom to express their opinion and give voice to their individual perceptions. This potentially played a critical role in helping the researcher discover important issues related to the matter of Montessori education in the nursery, which may otherwise, not have been possible. The employment of multiple data collection techniques by the case study design proved advantageous to this project and added to its strength as a qualitative study as further steps were taken to examine and interrogate all accessed documents in the nursery to see whether or not its policies reflected the Montessori philosophy. Thus, data gathering involved the use of non participant observation; semi structured interview and document collection because these techniques provided maximum opportunity for the collection of rich and relevant data to provide insight on Montessori education in the two nursery schools.

### **3.6.1.1 Semi – structured interview**

The semi structured interview was particularly useful for this research as it provided a balance, since it lies between two extremes, which are the structured and unstructured interview techniques and also entailed setting up a general structure on grounds to be covered in the interview as well as questions to be put forward. The respondents had the opportunity to answer questions using their own words and any necessary length while the interviewer responded with appropriate prompts, nudges, and probes or if suitable, follow up questions to gain further clarification or expansion of answers given. Thus, the semi structured interview was useful for obtaining in – depth insight into the interview questions which were intended to address the issues raised by the research questions. All the respondents were informed ahead of the scheduled date of interview and confirmation obtained prior to the actual interview day.

Three teachers from one nursery school (B) were interviewed on the second, third and fourth days of the research, immediately following the morning observation session. One teacher alone was interviewed in nursery school (A) as the other two teachers to be interviewed withdrew from the research at the last minute. Reasons given for this withdrawal were ill health and time constraint due to the busyness of the nursery. All subsequent attempts to interview teachers from this nursery were rebuffed. Again, an e-mail interview was undertaken with a board member of Montessori Education UK, a governing body saddled with providing oversight functions for the standardization of Montessori education as well as some parents and a school owner from the nursery school (B) in order to get the view of other stakeholders. Due to such constraining factors as distance and the reported busy schedule of operation in nursery school (A), it was impossible to get any e- mail interviews done with either the parents or school owner. As a researcher, I respected the rights of the school (A) not to be pressurised to submit their staff, parents and nursery owner to further data collection and informed my supervisors of this situation.

The semi structured interview format adopted for both the teachers, parents, school owner was with open ended questions, so as to enable participants to fully express their thoughts. The interviews for teachers took place in a secluded and quiet area of the nursery, with the researcher and a teacher in attendance and lasted approximately 5 – 10 minutes each time. Tape recording of interviews was also undertaken. The use of a tape recording device was

strongly preferred because as Denscombe (2007, p.175) explains “Audio tape – recording offers a permanent record and one that is complete in terms of the speech that occurs. It lends itself to being checked by other researchers.” Again, this instrument was particularly useful because it allowed the researcher to give full attention to the interviewee and also ensured accurate documentation of the information received. It was also very helpful in the analysis of data when listening to identify categories or themes which emerged as well as for noting important comments during the course of the interview, thereby minimising distractions (Bell 2007). At the end of each interview session; the researcher went over the notes with the staff member interviewed to ensure their agreement with the notes taken. The semi – structured interview questions for teachers contained 19 open ended questions covering the theory and practice of Montessori education. The first three questions focused on obtaining information about the teacher themselves (training, qualifications, and employment). This information was used to gain understanding of the professional background of each teacher. One question examined the role of the teacher in the setting and a further set of three questions elicited information about learning in the nursery. The next two questions ask about the interactions between teacher and children in the nursery and the teacher’s notion of best practice. The subsequent five questions examined the nursery’s prepared environment (see appendix 8 – copy of the interview schedule). All the teachers interviewed appeared at ease with me and freely gave their comments on all questions raised and further elaborated as the need arose to give greater clarification to their answers.

Although, the idea initially was that interview data would be obtained from only teachers, it however became clear from the literature review and from consultation with my supervisors that in order to get a broader picture on Montessori education at the level of this research project, it was necessary to include the perspective of other stakeholders – parents, Montessori Education UK Ltd board member and a nursery owner. This inclusion served to broaden the evidence base from which data was collected. Thus, the interview schedule for these stakeholders was duly prepared and emailed. The responses were returned and stored carefully along with the transcripts of other respondents. The email interview for the board member of Montessori Education Ltd had 18 questions. The first three questions aimed at obtaining professional background information on the respondent (training, qualifications, and board membership tenure). The role of Montessori Education Ltd UK was also examined and the next set of questions sought answers on learning in a

Montessori nursery, the interactions between teachers and children, the role of the teacher in the setting and what the notion of best practice in Montessori education is. A further set of questions elicited information on the prepared environment in a Montessori nursery, the use of other non-Montessori materials, the practice of the 3 hour work cycle and the final question involved the EYFS and its influence on Montessori practice (see appendix 10 – copy of interview schedule)

Email interview questions for parents contained 10 questions intended to obtain their perspectives on Montessori education as important stake holders. The first two questions focused on the children's attendance in nursery B. Subsequent questions examined their understanding of Montessori theory (see appendix 9 – copy of interview schedule). The email interview questions for the nursery owner covered 12 questions. The first three questions aimed at eliciting background information about the nursery owner (training, time span of ownership, origin of Montessori awareness, underpinning early years' model used in the nursery). Other questions focused on his understanding of Montessori theory and practice. The final question aimed at the issue of EYFS and its influence on Montessori practice. (see appendix 11 – copy of interview schedule).

### **3.6.2 Observation**

One basic method for obtaining data in qualitative research is observation (Ary et al 2006). Denscombe (2007, p.206) further explains that "Observation offers the social researcher a distinct way of collecting data. It does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think....it draws on the direct evidence of the eye witness events first hand." Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) identified that there were basically two types of observation; the participant observation which entails that the researcher is fully immersed in the activities of the researcher setting and is a team player. One benefit of participant observation is the fact that the very act of the researcher's immersion into the research environment, affords the opportunity of recording observations as it occurs. However, the disadvantage of participant observation is that the involvement in the activities of the research setting casts serious doubts about the researcher's judgement, based on the issue of role conflict, occasioned by immersion in the setting. As a result, the researcher opted for the choice of non- participant observation whereby the researcher is detached and aloof from the activities of the researcher setting and is not involved in any way in the activities of the research setting (Sarantakos 2005). The non-participant observation technique used

in the natural setting of the nursery enabled the researcher to gather first-hand information about the nursery environment and record the interplays and processes in behaviour observed in the staff and pupils as a vital means of ensuring a holistic picture for interpreting the research puzzle. Using the observation technique provided opportunity to observe the children and staff in the two nurseries in the normal settings and record the events as they naturally unfolded without stimulation or alteration to the environment /settings in any way. This research involved the observation of children in two nursery schools (A) and (B) for two weeks from the 7<sup>th</sup> March – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2011 using the non-participant observation technique which was useful in order to draw conclusions by watching and listening to the various activities in the nurseries. It is necessary to point out that the researcher decided on the unstructured observation approach without the use of an observation checklist which accords with a structured observation because it was the intention of the researcher to go into the nursery settings and allow the context of the nursery situations to speak for themselves because the unstructured observation approach as explained by Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2007):

“...operates within the agenda of the participants, i.e. it is responsive to what it finds and therefore, by definition, is honest to the situation as it unfolds. Here selectivity derives from the situation rather than from the researcher in the sense that key issues emerge from the observation rather than the researcher knowing in advance what those key issues will be...unstructured observation provides a rich description of a situation which in turn, can lead to the subsequent generation of hypotheses (p.378).

Thus, because the main focus of this research was not primarily about charting of behaviours and the frequency with which elements occurred in the nursery context but rather about examining and gaining insight into the perception and notion of Montessori education and its practice within the two nurseries, the structured observation approach appeared inappropriate as a data collection technique (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). Approximately twenty five pupils of mixed aged group ranging from 2.5 – 5 years, attending the morning sessions of both nurseries were closely observed in the normal school environment without tampering with the nursery situations for five school days (Monday – Friday) from 9am – 12 noon. The observation of children/staff captured their normal interactions on different activities in the nursery. The unstructured observation



commenced typically from 9am each morning with the researcher taking a vantage but unobtrusive sitting position in a corner of the nursery to allow for both clear view and minimisation of 'observer effect'. The researcher then described individual learning situations as she observed by capturing all the necessary details of such situation – the name of the activity, the number of children or teacher involved, the time the activity started and finished (the issue of time for starting/ finishing recorded against each activity varied as children spent more or less time as the activity/situation demanded) and what the child was actually did. The observation stopped for each learning situation when it was clear that the activity has ended.

In the absence of clear cut subject areas for children to work within due to the cramped nature of both nursery schools, it was necessary to determine how learning incidents would be observed as several activities were happening simultaneously. The decision of the researcher was to commence a unit of observation by noting any learning situation that was starting and observe it using a narrative format which captures the elements of time, activity name, involvement of teacher /child, the interactions between them and detailed description of the actual activity and at the conclusion of observing a particular situation, the researcher would subsequently turn her attention to another new learning incident. The researcher equally carried a field note with which she trapped her reflections and thoughts and perceptions as journal entries throughout the observation exercise, starting at 9am each day. Specifying what part of the classroom an activity was taking place was impossible as children did not work within specific Montessori subject areas but rather used whatever available spaces there were, both on the floor and on the table to work. Observing the activity the child was doing rather than the part of the classroom where it was taking place became the relevant focus. Observation would have been made easier if there were room enough to have children working in clearly apportioned Montessori subject areas as indicated on several corners of the classroom as this would have afforded the researcher the opportunity to observe the children and their interactions in each of the subject areas of the nursery using a fixed time period across the various activities occurring in different subject areas in an attempt to fully capture the range of activities and interactions in carried out on different activities in the nursery namely; practical life, mathematics, language, sensorial, cultural extension and the play. Additionally, photographs of different parts of the two nurseries and children's activities were taken as part of the field notes to complement information from other sources.

### **3.6.3 Document interrogation**

Robson (2007, p.88) identifies “Documentary analysis... as an overall approach to social research. However, it is commonly used as an additional data collection method in a project using a different main data collection method.” Documents to be analysed are regarded as secondary data and include official (bulletins, minutes, newsletters, reports) and private documents (diaries, letters) as well as other forms of writing like e-mails, posters, etc ( Hart 2005; Robson 2007). Ary et al (2006, p.482) further opines that “document analysis can be of written or text based artifacts (textbooks, novels, newspapers, transcripts, birth certificates, letters, etc.) or of non-written records (photographs, audiotapes, videotapes).” Documentary analysis is beneficial because it is economical and accessible and exists in a permanent form making it possible for crosschecking for validity/reliability. It is also open to quantitative and qualitative analysis. However, one major disadvantage is that the documents were produced for other purposes other than the research study and as such there is the possibility of bias already existing in the document as a function of purpose for which it has been originally produced. It is therefore recommended that documentary analysis be combined with other methods where possible to handle the issue of bias (Robson 2007). For the purpose of this research project, the researcher obtained privileged access to documents relating to the policy and stance of both nurseries on their philosophy and practice of Montessori education. These documents were keenly examined for authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaningfulness (Ary et al 2006; Bell 2007). In this research project, all documents which guide the practice of Montessori education in both nursery schools were accessed in order to gain additional insight to supplement the other data collection techniques. The documents interrogated for this purpose included the following:

#### **Nursery A**

- School prospectus (web version and hard copy)

Web version – The school prospectus contained detailed information about the nursery’s date of establishment, it also described its underpinning approach as Montessori education with a brief explanation of the aims. It highlighted the importance and need for parents’ partnership. It also explained that children in the nursery will subsequently be observed, planned for and evaluated against the statutory government framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The prospectus emphasised the nursery’s commitment to

recruiting qualified staff and ensuring further professional development to ensure that high quality child care is provided for children in its setting and cited The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research which reported that higher qualified staff ultimately provide better quality of care. Furthermore, it detailed policy statements on behaviour, healthy eating, safeguarding children, fire regulations, illness, medication, recruitment of staff and training, equal opportunity. It also contained a section explaining that the nursery is special because it offers Montessori education. Another section contained a fact sheet that explained “why Montessori” the Montessori education and further detailed the Montessori curriculum as practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, cultural subjects and creative.

Hard copy – This version of nursery school (A) prospectus, again detailed information of the nursery settings, schedule of operation of operation, governing body, contact information, fees chargeable, parents’ involvement and equality of opportunity and noted its governing body as the OFSTED. The prospectus explained that it is working towards the EYFS as required by the Department for Education and Employment in conjunction with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. There was a section dedicated to a brief history of Maria Montessori, another section on what makes Montessori special and gives detail of the Montessori curriculum as practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, cultural subjects and creativity. Also indicated was the nursery’s commitment to recruitment of good quality staff and continued professional development of staff. Readers were directed to see the full set of nursery policies as pasted in the nursery.

- School newsletters for January – March, 2011

These were monthly newsletters prepared by the school to give parents latest update about news and other events in the school. The newsletters accessed cover the two months preceding this research project and the month during the research exercise was undertaken at this site. These were the only newsletters available in the nursery at the time.

- School nursery policies

The policy was very detailed and covered all policy statements on the following; safeguarding children policy/procedure, the nursery’s personal code of conduct, parents/carers as partners policy/procedure, admissions policy/procedure, confidentiality policy/procedure, parent responsibility policy/procedure, environmental policy/procedure/, complaints policy/procedure, visitors policy/procedure, late or

uncollected child policy/procedure, beginning/end of day routine, visit outing policy/procedure, equality of opportunities policy/procedure, illness & administration of medication policy/procedure, sick child policy/procedure, health policy/procedure, spillage & soiling policy/ procedure, staff hygiene/ procedure, nappy changing policy/procedure, accident & emergency policy, first aid box/ policy/procedure, animal policy/procedure, meal provisions/procedure, food hygiene policy, smoking policy, behaviour management policy/procedure, staff recruitment policy/procedure, personnel policy/procedure, staff absence policy/procedure, staff disciplinary policy, alcohol /other substance policy, staff training policy/procedure, student/volunteer policy/procedure, risk assessment policy/procedure, safety policy health& safety responsibility, safety for staff procedures, control of substances hazardous to health procedure, RIDDOR '95' procedure, safety for children procedure, fire policy/procedure/precautions, car park policy/procedure, missing child policy/procedure, arrival & departure policy/procedure, equipment policy, outdoor play – garden policy/procedure, outdoor play – field policy/ procedure, maintenance policy/procedure, our policies & procedures, policies & procedures issue & maintenance procedure, notification of changes

- Job description for teacher

The job description accessed for this research was for Nursery/Montessori teachers and contained five headings as follows; purpose of post, key areas, responsible to, duties and responsibilities (specific to child care and general duties).

## **Nursery B**

- School prospectus (web version and hard copy).

Web version – the nursery prospectus highlighted its underpinning approach as both Montessori and EYFS. It further indicated an overview of the Montessori philosophy. The structure of the nursery is also explained through the different classrooms; 0 – 2 years, 2 – 3 years, 3 – 5 years. Also indicated was that every child has a key worker and children's development were recorded through learning journeys with the promise of a six monthly report produced for parents and hosting of parents' evening.

Hard copy – this version of the prospectus provided information about the nursery's location, accommodation, contact details, staffing and schedule of operations. A section of the prospectus discussed the Montessori philosophy and how children learn in this educational model. Further detail of the Montessori curriculum is included as

practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, cultural subjects and creativity. The meal policy of the nursery is also emphasised as promoting independence and responsibility and offers a variety of meal options to children in the nursery. Further detailed breakdown of children into different age groups and hence, separate classrooms was highlighted in the prospectus. All the children in the nursery are divided into different age brackets and accommodated in separate rooms as follows: 0 – 2 years, the 2 – 3 year olds and the 3 – 5 year olds.

- School newsletter (July/August 2010, autumn/winter 2010 and winter/ /spring, 2011).

These newsletters provide updates, news and events for parents' attention. In the case of this nursery, the news letters accessed are from the period immediately following the purchase of the nursery by the current owner to the time of the research exercise at this site.

- Job description for teacher

The job description accessed for a teacher in this nursery is titled – teacher/ EYFS co-ordinator and contains the following headings; job title, location, reports to, level/grade, type of position, hours and general responsibilities detailed as – manage the day to day routine and staff in 3 – 4 years, acting 3<sup>rd</sup> in charge, EYFS co-ordinator, Ofsted/Council, viewings, manage complaints using standard processes, any other duties as reasonably requested by owner/manager. The educational experience required for a teacher in this nursery capacity is a BA Hons with PGCE/QTS.

- School nursery policies

The nursery has policy statements which has detailed information covering the indicated issues; accident & emergency, admissions, allergies, animal policy, behaviour/ground rules for the classroom, confidentiality, code of conduct, complaints, developments records, documentation, equal opportunities, fire procedure, health & Safety, HIV, inclusion, informing Ofsted, key person system, maintenance & risk assessment, meals & menu, medicines, missing child, no smoking, out door play, outings, parental involvement, personnel, planning for children's development, recruitment & selection, safeguarding, SEN, sun protection, student placement, settling in, staff inductions & students, transition, uncollected child, visitors.

- Nursery literature on Montessori education – there was no literature on Montessori education available at this nursery to be accessed.

In this research project, document interrogation was employed to complement data collected through interviews and non-participant observation. The selection of documents included in this research was based on the understanding of how relevant they appeared to the aims of the project. Notwithstanding, caution was exercised in the analysis of the documents for the purpose of ensuring their validity and relevance because of the researcher's recognition that the documents have been produced for other reasons which did not include this investigation.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that qualitative data provide for "...well grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts....they help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks." (p.1). Therefore, in order to achieve proper and thorough analysis of qualitative data, Miles and Huberman (1994, p9) identified common features which are used for qualitative data analysis procedure:

- Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews.
- Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins.
- Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences.
- Isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection
- Gradually elaborating a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discovered in the database
- Confronting those generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.

The data analysis employed for this research project was thematic analysis. As a result of the volume of data generated through the instrumentation of observation notes, interview transcripts and document interrogated, it was necessary to pare down data collected to give an accurate representation of the main themes /categories which give a proper description of Montessori education as examined in the two nursery schools involved in this research project. Citing the National Centre for Social Research in the UK, Bryman (2008, p.554)

explained that there was one strategy generally employed for carrying out thematic data analysis and described this as involving the following steps:

1. The construction of codes representing the central /subthemes which are then represented on a matrix.
2. The aforementioned themes/subthemes are ideas, words, and phrases in the text that recur and are applied to the data, after several careful reading of transcripts, field notes, documents, etc which make up the data.
3. The framework is then applied to the data, which are organized initially into core themes, and the data are then displayed in terms of subthemes within the matrix and for each case.

For this investigation, analysis of data needed to be done for the three different sources; interview transcripts, observation notes, document content. These three types of data were analysed using the afore described thematic analysis method prescribed by the National Centre for Social Research UK as detailed in Bryman (2008), thus facilitating an understanding of how this project provided answers to the research questions in Chapter 1. The raw data from interviews were obtained in a recorded form which were subsequently transcribed by the researcher and several printed copies produced. In line with Bryman's (2008) prescription, subsequent data reduction involved creating clear themes based on the responses of the interviewees to questions as contained in the interview transcript, while noting other comments and reflections in the margin. Using the same approach, data reduction for observation notes and documents also entailed careful reading of the data severally to extract of themes based on recurring ideas, words, subject or phrases in the form of ideas which reflected the features, objectives and activities of the Montessori practice in the nurseries.

Actual data analysis was then enabled through the display of data in an effective format to facilitate thorough understanding. Consequently, the achievement of data analysis was based on seven data activities which were developed directly from the concept of thematic analysis highlighted by Bryman (2008). Although, this research project had clear research questions as well as theoretical frameworks /checklists from the literature review against which this project was bounded, it was necessary to allow the findings to emerge and be coded as themes from the data to enable the researcher identify whether or not the data

agreed with or challenged the existing literature on the theory/practice of Montessori education. The seven analysis events/activities were as follows:

- Data analysis activity 1 – reading through data to identify recurring ideas, words, phrases, sentences which mirrored the features activities, and objectives of the Montessori practice in the nurseries and as such were as reflected themes in the texts.
- Data analysis activity 2 – manually coding the text of the interview transcripts, documents and observation notes based on identified themes, with other remarks and reflections noted on the margins.
- Data activity 3 – Representing data to reflect themes under the heading of each research question.
- Data activity 4 – Provision of supporting snippets from data under each cell.
- Data activity 5 – linking supporting snippets with researcher’s journal entries.
- Data activity 6 – Confronting the themes obtained from the data under each research question with the Montessori frameworks/checklists from literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and presenting the findings from the data alongside the Montessori’s framework/checklists as to see how far the findings of this research project agree with or discount these checklists from literature review.
- Data activity 7 – Generation of interim summary for each research question.

### **3.8 Verification**

Denscombe (2007, p. 297) defines validity as referring to “the extent to which qualitative researchers can demonstrate that their data are accurate and appropriate.” It is important to ensure the validity of this research using the following procedures:

- Triangulation: methodological triangulation was employed in this study through the use of the observation, interviews and document analysis to ensure both corroboration in findings and valid, reliable conclusions.
- Member checking: records of the interviews conducted were made available to Management of the nurseries to ensure that information documented was accurate.



### **3.9 Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research as opined by Denscombe (2007) relates to the achievement of the same results if the research was conducted by another person and noted the difficulty of obtaining such replication. Nonetheless, Denscombe explained that checking reliability in qualitative research would necessitate that “the research process must be open to audit” (p.298). For this research, in order to ensure a greater level of reliability, the researcher has consciously maintained an audit trail that carefully delineates all the key decisions and processes undertaken by the researcher from the point of the research’s conception to the findings and subsequently to the conclusions drawn from the research.

### **3.10 Ethical issues**

Several ethical considerations are employed to drive this research project. This is because: “Research ethics is about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts....Ethical research involves getting the informed consent of those you are going to interview, question, observe or take materials from....It is about keeping to such agreements when they have been reached (Baxter et al, 2001 in Bell 2005, p.44).Similarly, ethical considerations in social research as noted by Denscombe (2002, p.177) also clarifies that:

“Most codes of ethics include reference to the need for researchers to act professionally in the pursuit of truth. Researchers should be committed to discovery and reporting things as faithfully and as honestly as possible, without allowing their investigations to be influenced by considerations other than what is the truth.”

Consequently, for this research project, the following ethical steps were undertaken:

- Written ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the Department of Education/Lifelong learning, Bangor University, Wales.
- Informed consent – “This is the procedure in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decision. This decision involves ...competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension” (Diener and Crandall in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007, p.52). For this research project, formal and informed consent/assent

was obtained from the Nursery management and parents of the two participating Montessori nurseries in England.

- Enhanced disclosure for England /Wales was obtained.
- The purpose of the research was communicated to staff of the nurseries and the children.
- Member checking – this refers to opportunity for validation by the respondent such that participants have opportunity to check for errors in facts, give additional information (if necessary), provide any needed summary, check to see that adequate analysis is done as well as assess the level of intentionality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). In keeping with this understanding, the Nursery management and staff of both nurseries were given opportunity to see the written interpretations of interviews.
- Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007,p.64) argue that “the principal means of ensuring anonymity, then, is not using the names of participants or any other personal means of identification.” Therefore, for the research project, anonymity and confidentiality, integrity as well as privacy of all participants and information collected in the two nurseries was maintained all through the research exercise using pseudonyms.

### **3.11 Limitation**

The greatest limitation to this research project is that its findings as a case study of two schools may not necessarily be generalisable to the philosophy and practice of Montessori Method of education in other Montessori nurseries not even in the UK. However, as Ary et al (2006, p.507) note:

“ Although the qualitative researcher typically does not have generalizability as a goal, it is his/her responsibility to provide sufficiently rich, detailed, thick descriptions of the context so that potential users can make the necessary comparisons and judgements about similarity and hence transferability. This is referred to as descriptive adequacy.”

Also, the possible use of an electronic form of observation such as video recording is preferable to the study given that footages can be viewed several times and a more holistic

picture captured. However, the refusal of the nursery management and the more important need of remaining unobtrusive in order not to risk creating an observer effect, which can alter the natural setting of the nursery, thereby impacting negatively on the data collection is another reason for the elimination of this useful observation instrument. Equally, time and financial constraints were also limiting factors to spending extended periods of time at these research sites.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings relating to the data collection which involved observations, semi structured interviews and documents on Montessori Education in two nursery schools in England and ultimately linking these to the research questions.

1. What is the directress' notion of best practice in Montessori education?
2. How do children learn in this Montessori nursery?
3. What is the role of the directress within the setting?
4. What is the nature of directress – child interactions that occur in the setting?
5. How prepared is the learning environment in relation to Montessori philosophy?

As a logical step, the findings from this study will be presented in five sections representing the research questions, beginning first with the findings on the directress' notion of best practice in Montessori education. It is worth noting that the main purpose of the chapter is to focus on the presentation of facts, quotes and observations and to make sense of them through data analysis. In depth discussion of these findings will be done in chapter 5 and relevant conclusions subsequently drawn.

#### **4.1 'It is all about the child' – Directress' notion of best practice**

As stated in 2.8.1, the framework to analyse the interview data in order to draw out benchmarks for best practice in the Montessori nursery schools is detailed as the availability of mixed classes, having adults who are professionally trained in Montessori philosophy, methods and materials for the group they are teaching. Furthermore, there should be a prepared environment based on a three year age grouping as well as the promotion of children's free choice of activity within the prescribed three hour uninterrupted work cycle with unlimited and unhindered free access to a full complement of Montessori materials. Opportunities for repetition, movement, independence and respect for the child should be evident. Written observation of children and the implementation of Montessori principles by the school management along with support for staff development are also advocated (Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d; Rambusch &Stoops 1992; Schmidt & Schmidt 2009).

Against this list of features, the findings relating to the directress' notion of best practice is presented. It is also worth noting that the data for answering this research question is principally obtained from interview manuscripts with teachers from the two nursery schools (A and B) for the reason that other research instruments are unlikely to be effective to elicit their perceptions.

#### 4. 1.1 Evidence drawn from interview data (Nursery A and B)

All the teachers from both nursery schools were unanimous in their conceptualisation of best practice in Montessori Education as entailing **independence**, “we try to get the children to work as independently as they can” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*), “there’s always independence for the children to and get [materials] and put back” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*), “for the children, the independence” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*), “I think we are trying to develop independent learner” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*). Two teachers also mentioned **free access** in the classroom and **freedom of choice** as other indicators of best practice.

“**Free access** of the classroom, they are not forced to do anything they don’t want to ...they can do it at their own time” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*).

“All our shelves are **open and accessible** for the children to get to” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

Of the four teachers interviewed, only one teacher mentioned **observation by the teacher, mixed age grouping and a strong sense of community** as further indicators of best practice:

“The adults to be a good **observer** in the classroom ...to have the **mixed age groups, strong sense of community**” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

Teacher 1, nursery A’s reference to other salient indicators of best practice is noteworthy in the light of her professional background as the only fully qualified Montessori personnel across both nursery schools and brings to the fore her comment on **untrained staff** and the attainment of best practice in a Montessori nursery:

“We aim to achieve best practice but it is difficult when we’ve got staff

who are **not Montessori qualified or experienced**” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

In line with the above comment, Teacher 3, nursery B, a staff who is **untrained** in Montessori practice noted that “there are staff that have been trained like myself in other practices, therefore we’re trying to learn” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*) and as such her concept of best practice is based on:

“What **I’ve seen and I’ve read and looking at the practice of** teacher XX and teacher YY...I think it’s very much about developing the **child individually and really looking at their learning needs**” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

It is clear that Teacher 3, nursery B’s perception of best practice in Montessori education is not rooted in formal Montessori training and is based on her observation of two teachers who serve as models from whom Teacher 3, nursery B appears willing to learn. This is commendable because it reflects an openness to professional development, albeit informal, to enhance her understanding of Montessori Education.

#### **4.1.2 Professional training to enhance best practice**

Whilst their collective answers may reveal some understanding of best practice in Montessori education, it may be worth noting that these teachers come from a range of different early years training backgrounds as cited in 3.4 but are all open to further training to improve their Montessori practice through part time formal Montessori training courses and informal teacher modelling in the nursery:

“I’ve done a practical exam in Montessori...and then I’ve got the first part but I haven’t done my teaching assessment yet, so I’ve just got the first part of Montessori qualification and also an NVQ level 3 in Childcare...” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*).

“... I am training to be a Montessori teacher but I am not fully qualified yet, it should be in the next ...well I finish in September” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

“... I trained in Wales with the Foundation Phase...and I am now...learning about Montessori here from teacher XX and Teacher YY...” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

The above reiterated effort by the teachers to be professionally enhanced is worthy of note because it exemplifies a commitment to conform to Montessori best practice framework which stipulates that

“The school is led by a Montessori – qualified teacher; there is evidence that non – Montessori qualified staff are undertaking Montessori professional development” (*Montessori Education UK Ltd, n.d*).

While, there is no evidence from interrogated documents from nursery B regarding support for formal professional training for its staff to achieve qualified Montessori teacher status, the nursery document from nursery A highlights the fact that commitment to ensuring professional enhancement is strongly supported by this nursery as a benchmark for quality assurance to its clientele:

“Through staff development and training we ensure we are providing the best in childcare and education. As an employer we seek to empower and assist our staff in achieving further qualifications, we require hard working and dedicated professional who want to achieve their absolute best to enable them to provide the best care for your child”(*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Accordingly, the above commitment by this individual nursery and the teachers’ openness to professional enhancement vis – a – vis their knowledge of the Montessori philosophy of education may positively impact on their conceptualisation of best practice in the future. Furthermore, two of the teachers from nursery B in their interview sessions raised the issue of **blending Montessori principles and the EYFS provision** in their nursery practice as a reality to be grappled when seeking to conceptualise best practice:

“**Because of the EYFS**, we tried to add other things like the role play, which is fantasy I suppose, which I know Maria Montessori was not really a fan of” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

“But obviously **we do plan as well to the EYFS**, we do daily planning, and it’s there” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*).

Additionally, one of the teachers expanded her notion of best practice in Montessori education to include **teaching responsibility and offering support and care for children**, which may have been more suitable if answered in the context of describing a teacher’s role:

“To...**teach children to be responsible**, to be able to do certain things they won’t be able to do, **to be there for them, to be caring...**” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

#### **4.1.3 Interim summary**

The teachers revealed varied notions of best practice in Montessori Education. From the interview data, it is apparent that most of the informants were aware of the feature of free access and freedom of choice in the classroom. Additionally, all the informants showed strong awareness of the feature of independence. Furthermore, two of the informants also demonstrated that being observant is good practice for a Montessori educator. When analysed individually, it would appear that teacher 1, nursery A exhibited deeper understanding in her conceptualisation of best practice as she was able to personally mention five features that mark out best practice (**independence, observation by the teacher, mixed age grouping, strong sense of community and the need for formally trained Montessori teachers**) and these matched some of the features in the Montessori framework. The input by teacher 1, nursery A revealed a depth of understanding which may have been made possible because of her status as a fully trained and qualified Montessori directress. Interestingly, the other three teachers though not qualified Montessori teachers did also exhibit some understanding of Montessori’s philosophy of education as revealed by their answers which collectively enumerated the features of best practice as **independence, free access, freedom of choice, teaching responsibility and offering support to children**. Again, these mentioned features do match to a small number of the Montessori checklist on benchmarks for best practice. Additionally, the teachers’ notion of best practice was also affected by the reality of maintaining a Montessori perspective in their nursery



practice and simultaneously recognising the **EYFS** as a statutory governmental provision that must be accommodated in the nursery. Hence, as expressed by two of the teachers, best practice in Montessori Education will need to be perceived with the recognition of this statutory requirement. This scenario has introduced some conflict in the teachers' conceptualisation of best practice as it pertains to Montessori Education because of the reality of having to work with both the **EYFS** statutory requirement and Montessori principles in the nursery.

To sum up, **Table 4.1** gives a snapshot of the teachers' perception on best practice as drawn against the Montessori framework from the literature reviewed. This table shows what was frequently emphasised based on the researcher's analysis of interviews with the directresses.

**Table 4.1 Teachers' perception of best practice in Montessori Education**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Least emphasised</b>	<b>Somewhat emphasised</b>	<b>Most emphasised</b>
<b>Mixed classes</b>	*		
<b>Professionally trained Montessori staff</b>	*		
<b>Mixed age grouping</b>	*		
<b>Freedom of choice</b>		*	
<b>Observation by adult</b>	*		
<b>Independence</b>			*

The following components were not mentioned at all:

- Full range of Montessori materials in the classroom
- 3 hour work cycle
- Repetition
- Movement
- Support for professional staff development
- Implementation of Montessori principles by management
- Respect

A comparison between the Montessori checklist obtained from literature reviewed and the findings of this research question as summarised in **Table 4.1** reveals that the notion of best practice as explained by the teachers in these two nursery schools appear to show some understanding when considered against the entirety of the Montessori framework. This limited understanding should be considered against the fact that three out of the four teachers interviewed possess early years' training backgrounds that are non Montessorian. Additionally; there is also the overarching statutory requirement for compliance to the **EYFS** provision. The result of this emphasis appears to be a conceptualisation of best practice which also incorporates the **EYFS** focus.

#### **4.2 'It's premised on a blend of the EYFS and Montessori principles' – How children learn**

The framework for learning in Montessori schools that epitomises adherence to the philosophy and ethos of Montessori method of education is outlined in **2.8.2** as: active 'hands on' learning, spontaneous activities, self-chosen/directed activity, independent work either individually or with self-chosen small group and intrinsic motivation (Isaacs 2010 Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d.; Rambusch & Stoop 1992; Schmidt & Schmidt 2009). Consequently, data analysis of how children learn from both nursery schools will be considered against the above delineated features. Unlike the first question which asks for teachers' perception, the general nature of this research question requires that the analysis in this section be done using multiple sources of information and thus, data will be drawn from the observation exercise, researcher journal diary, interviews with teachers, parents and nursery owner and from relevant nursery documents obtained from both nursery A and B.

##### **4.2.1 Learning through adult initiated/led activity and child initiated activity**

The responses of all four interviewed teachers and the nursery prospectuses interrogated showed unanimity in citing the combination of **adult led** and **child initiated activities** as two ways that children in both nurseries learn:

“Mainly through **child initiated**, the majority of their work will be **child initiated** but there would be **adult led activities** as well” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

“We have a **mixture**. Most of the small group time... I suppose I choose what I would like them to learn to have possible outcomes” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

The above statements from teachers in nursery (A and B) reflect the fact that children’s learning is achieved through a **combination** of **adult led and child initiated activities**.

Furthermore, the below indicated comments by teacher 1 and 2, nursery B suggests that **adult initiated/led activities** are on occasion informed by the teacher’s observation of a child’s response to a learning material/situation in the nursery:

“We do observe the children on a daily basis, so obviously if there is an area that we feel the children aren’t accessing independently, then **we’ll introduce them** to that area and **take them** in there” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*).

“Sometimes with the EYFS, you have to **encourage them** to do certain aspects per day but you would do that for your observations if you see them not ...you know picking up certain learning aspects that you want them to... depending on what we again **observed...**but it’s **50 – 50[ adult led and child initiated]**” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

Thus, observation by the teacher and the subsequent action of drawing the children’s interest into learning situations which they may not have ventured was equally pinpointed by an interviewed parent and corroborated by the Montessori board member as underpinning the strategy used for children’s learning:

“The teachers will **observe** them and play with them and help them to move onto more complicated tasks to aid their learning” (*Parent 2*).

“The adult **observes** the child and **provides** a prepared environment where every individual unique child can find purposeful work. This is based on the understanding that children are intrinsically motivated to self construct. Dr Montessori created activities that the child can use as purposeful work. The adult is the dynamic link between the environment and the child” (*board member, Montessori Education UK Ltd*)

Similarly, the school prospectus from nursery B equally suggests that the need to ensure children are well engaged with learning materials in the nursery as well as receiving appropriate support from the teachers are the basis for **adult led activities**:

“**Adult led activities** also ensure they are appropriately challenged and supported in their progress towards the Early Learning Goals” (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

Corroboratively, a document from nursery A gives an example of an **adult led activity** which will showcase children’s engagement with a learning activity with corresponding support from the teachers:

“In the big room, this month **we will be making** Chinese New Year cards, the older children will be practising writing cards themselves. **We will be using** Chinese symbols using different techniques” (*February newsletter, 2011, nursery A*).

Additionally, there were a total of 80 recorded learning activities within the observation exercise carried out in nursery A and B from 7<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011 from which to draw data. There were 54 recorded incidents of children learning through **adult initiated activities** while only 26 out of the 80 learning activities were **child initiated**. Across the observation exercise in both nursery schools, there were more incidents of the teachers deciding the learning activity children were involved with and for how long. During **observation 21 9/3/2011** (nursery A) the teacher initiated a lesson from 9.15 – 9.21am with a child on drawing of insets. This activity was chosen by the teacher and the child was asked to draw different shapes with the inset. After a few minutes of drawing, the teacher brought the lesson to a close and asked the child to take all he had drawn into his drawer where his other school work is stored. Again, in another instance in **observation 23 9/3/2011** (nursery A), a teacher chose a buttoning activity to do with a child from 9.50 – 9.54am. She did not sit down neither did she invite the child to be seated but laid the frames on the table and enquired from the child if he could do the activity. The boy easily did all the button frames and the teacher applauded and went on to fill in the child’s record book.

Analysis of the context of these **adult led activities** highlight an interesting finding which was the keenness of the teachers to ensure documentation of the activities they had initiated with children and this is captured in the researcher's journal diary:

I have had a look at a child's record of achievement and it does appear that much of the record keeping by the teachers is geared towards ensuring that there is an updated record for each child in order to fulfil the **EYFS** documentation requirement. The record of achievement shows how the work that the child has done in the nursery is linked to the **EYFS** and evidenced by photographs and other work record. The reason for the focus on documentation is obvious (*Journal entry, 8/3/2011*).

Further illustration of **adult initiated activity** and the underlining pressure for record keeping was also seen in **observation 44 11/3/2011**(nursery B), when a teacher chose an activity on colours to do with a child from 9.30 – 9.45am. The teacher introduced the child to four different colours of pencils and on each occasion, she mentioned the colour and asks the child to repeat after her. This was done with all four colours of pencil after which she required the child to identify a particular pencil by its colour. A right answer earned the child an opportunity to colour his palm which was traced by the teacher. With the end of the lesson, the teacher requests a colleague to take a photograph of the child tracing his palm. This action is again instructive about the bane of teacher initiated activities because as noted in the researcher journal entry:

...the habit of immediately photographing children's activities as soon as they are done is suggestive of the pressure to show evidence of children's work(*Journal entry 11/3/2011*).

This is in contrast to what was observed during **child initiated activities** in both nurseries. As earlier highlighted, **child initiated activities** is another way children learn and as described by the nursery documents:

“The children are encouraged to work on **self-chosen tasks** as well as **working together on larger activities**” (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

“Children work at **self-chosen tasks** as well as **collaborating on major projects**. The emphasis is on striving for ones personal best, or good of all, rather than on competing against one another” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Despite the emphasis on child initiated activities in the policy document, it is noteworthy that there were fewer occurrences of these **activities** in both nursery schools. Similarly, there was no noted instance of a teacher photographing an activity initiated by a child even when it showcased a child totally engrossed in her chosen activity. During **observation 59 15/3/2011** (nursery B), a child had chosen an activity at the sandpit where she was filling a long funnel with sand. She was totally engrossed in this activity as she filled the funnel with sand and emptied it out, repeating the process over and over. This child was at this activity from 9.30 – 10.05am. This scenario is what is expected in a Montessori nursery, when children are given opportunity to choose their own activity and take as much time as they need. However, this may not often be the case with child initiated activity because teachers are under pressure to work to a nursery agenda as seen during **observation 74 17/3/2011** (nursery B) 10.40 – 10.48am, where a child had chosen an art activity with a palm stencil for tracing her palm and colouring it. She later got a foot stencil for tracing and colouring. The child was completely oblivious to the entire class until a teacher told her to tidy up. The child informed the teacher of her desire to still continue her drawing but the teacher pulled away her work, although the child put up some resistance. This action could undermine spontaneous self directed action in a child because as analysed in the researcher journal entry:

It is unimaginable in a Montessori nursery that a teacher would stipulate on when and for how long a child should work on an activity (*Journal entry, 17/3/2011*).

Further to this, the teachers equally highlighted the **blending of the EYFS provision and Montessori education** as a reason for combining adult led and child initiated activities as ways of learning in the nursery:

“I suppose to wrap it up, it is a **mixture** and we try and make sure it’s a **mixture**...because it fits with **Montessori and the EYFS**...”

(*Teacher 3, nursery B*)

“Sometimes with **EYFS** you have to encourage them to do certain aspects per day but you would do that for your observations if you see them not...picking up certain aspects that you want them to, then you’ll encourage them, maybe to do the colour tablets or to the maths shelf but...they tend to do their own...” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

In corroboration with the teachers’ responses that **child initiated and adult led activities** in the nursery is underpinned by a combination of **EYFS and Montessori principles**, the school owner echoed the way children learn in the nursery as:

“[Through] **Montessori and EYFS principles**” (*school owner*).

Further light is shed on the above attestation by the fact that the nursery prospectus from nursery (A and B) clearly indicated that the operation of the nurseries is underpinned by both **Montessori principles and the EYFS**:

“The principles of our school are based on the philosophies of **Dr Maria Montessori**...From September 2008 we will be observing, planning and evaluating your children’s achievements against the **Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**. This new document brings together the care and education of children aged 0 -5 years” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

“Through the use of the **EYFS and Montessori principles** we aim to develop your child to their true potential” (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

The above statements tie in with both the teachers’ and school owner’s admission that learning in the nursery is premised on a **blend** of the **EYFS provision and Montessori principles**.

#### **4.2.2 Learning through individual activity and group activity**

Again, data from the nursery prospectuses and teacher interviews noted other ways children learn as being through a combination of individual **work** and **group activity** with one of the teachers highlighting the occurrence of **peer teaching** during these activities:

“The Montessori approach recognises and addresses different learning styles, and follows each **individual** pace of learning” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

“The Montessori approach recognises the different learning styles and allows each **individual** to learn at their own pace” (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

“I guess they work **one to one and in group with adults**...they learn from older children, the older ones teach the younger children how to do their specific activities but also how to be in the classroom...” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

“we do **group tasks**... which are developed out of the children’s interests and developed...from where we can see that some things they can do unto the next step...it’s a **mixture of individual tasks**, they get to choose what they do, some of those are **group things like**...I suppose in the role play area, they work more as a group...but most of the Montessori activities are more independent and individual...” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

The above statement by teacher 3, nursery B about the individual and independent nature of Montessori activities in the nursery may infer that using the Montessori Method of education as the underpinning principle in the nursery could promote more engagement in individual tasks than group activities as a way that children learn in the nursery. However, several of the learning activities in nursery A and B are undertaken as **group activities** involving two or more children. Almost all **group activities** are also **teacher initiated** and a significant length of the time is sometimes taken for these lessons. In **observation 71 17/3/2011** (nursery B) 9.45 – 10.15am, a teacher led six children in a group activity to make rainbow shakers. The children were given different colour sparkles to add to the mixture and shake together and then asked to pick a bottle to fill with the mixed rainbow shakers. In another example, from **observation 27 9/3/2011** (nursery A) 10.30 – 10.45am, a teacher is reading to a group of eight children. She engaged the children who listened attentively and took part in sing along activities from the book. The children were engrossed in the reading and at the end another book was brought for the teacher to continue reading. There was participation and discussion of each page of the book until the end of the activity.



The finding about learning through group activities is summated by the analysis in the researcher journal diary which revealed that:

The teachers in this nursery focused so much more on **group activities** which were all **teacher initiated** but none of these activities had to do with the Montessori materials. The children mainly worked in groups and at other times individually but again, hardly with the Montessori materials except in a few instances (*Journal entry 18/3/2011*).

In contrast, **individual activities** in the nursery schools as a way that children learn appeared to have less prominence than group activities but on every occasion in which a child was observed as being engaged in an individual activity, it was marked with concentration, deep engrossment and a desire to keep repeating the activity. An illustration from **observation 18 9/3/2011** (nursery A) 10.00 – 10.05am showed a child who chose an activity with the sand tray and played quietly by herself. She was fully engrossed in her activity and oblivious to her environment until she tired of it and returned it to the shelf before rejoining the rest of the class at another activity. Again, **observation 69 16/3/2011** (nursery B) 10.00 – 10.30am, also depicted a child engaged in an individual activity which she chose by herself. She got the number beads to work with and hung all the beads on the counting racks and began counting them. She talked to herself as she did the activity and repeated the whole counting process all over again. She again decided to use the beads to do an entirely different activity. After about 30 minutes, she finally finished with the material and sought to return it to the shelf.

One striking difference between the group activity and the individual activity is the fact that these activities were primarily chosen by the individual children and showed children happily at work alone or with a small group of self-chosen companions and so the element of personal interest is highly present as well as freedom to work with the materials as long as they wished. From the observation exercise, the freedom and opportunity to work with a material for as long as a child wished was sometimes stifled by a teacher's desire to move the child onto other nursery routines undermining the spirit of discovery and enquiry that drives such individual activities. An illustration of the stifling of a child's desire to continue with an individual activity was noted in **observation 53 14/3/2011** (nursery B) 10.18 – 10.30am, where a child chose to work with the dressing frames. A teacher came

along to instruct the child to pack up the activity and go for a snack but the child said no. The teacher informed the child that they all needed to go for a snack because they would be going outside soon. The child didn't respond but continued to work with the dressing frames and later got another dressing frame activity to complete.

It is apparent from the context of the above observation which depicts an individual activity engaged in by a child in the nursery that:

The teacher ought to allow the child finish her work with the dressing frame before interrupting to suggest a new activity. The teacher may have needed to wait a few minutes to see how long the child will work with her chosen activity and if she is still working, then she shouldn't be interrupted to do another activity (*Journal entry, 14/3/2011*).

In addition, it is also worth noting that with regard to snack time activity

The teachers in this nursery are very particular about following the nursery routine about snack time. Children are made to leave whatever activity they are involved with and go for snack rather than preparing the snack table and allowing children to have a snack when they need to. It should not be a rigid structure to which children must respond as is evident in the nursery (*Journal diary, 18/3/2011*).

#### **4.2.3 Learning through independent access to materials in the nursery**

Learning through **independent access** in the nursery received particular mention across the respondents as well as in the two nursery documents and its reiteration may suggest it is viewed as significant to how children learn “The children learn through...**independently** accessing the Montessori equipment off the shelves” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*) “Directress links the child at the start of the process and is aiming that the child will then **independently** choose purposeful work” (*Board member, Montessori UK Ltd*) “Sometimes they'll just access things **independently**” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*) “[Through] **independent approach**” (*school owner*) “they can come in each day and **don't have to work with a teacher at all that day**; they can **choose** what they want to do that day” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*) “The children are shown how to use the equipment but are **free to access** the equipment from the shelves **as they wish**” (*Parent 2*).

Corroboratively, both school prospectuses also delineated that children learn through an **independent access** in the classrooms:

“Children have opportunities to **independently access** play experiences which help them to progress in their learning and development” (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

“The child **selects** what to learn, and is helped to find the most effective way of learning. The focus is on developing and understanding, not on mere memorisation or mechanical imitation” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Since the view of **independent access** to materials is identified across the respondents and interrogated nursery documents, it may be seen as being very significant in the consideration of how children learn. However, **Independent access to materials** as a way that children learn was not sufficiently afforded to children in the nurseries and had the least recorded instances (19) in the observation exercise across both nursery schools. One explanation may be the greater focus on **teacher initiated and group activities** which appeared to be the basis of how children learn in both nurseries because they appear to reflect the **EYFS** ethos (DCSF 2008). However, analysis of some of the contexts in which they occurred in the nursery revealed that most instances of learning through **independent access** happened primarily when children were outside on the playground. An example is during **observation 79 18/3/2011** (nursery B) 11.00 – 11.40am, when children were sent out to the playground. The children were enthusiastic and happy to choose their activities and play companions. They played a lot in small groups and decided which friends to play with. Most of the individual activities were bicycle riding, climbing and running. Similarly, in **observation 29 9/3/2011** (nursery A) 11.00 – 11.30am, children were outdoors with four teachers. There was a lot of enthusiasm as the children ran around and chose their activities and play companions. The outside nursery environment offered a large variety of interesting resources. The children did not seem to lack activity to occupy them.

However, this playground activity gave the staff a break as “the teachers seem to use the time on the playground to do personal chit – chat at the expense of meaningfully interacting /engaging the children at play” (*Journal entry, 9/3/2011*). Still, there were a

few noted instances of independent access to materials in the classroom such as in **observation 45 11/3/2011** (nursery A) 9.50- 9.56am, where a child chose a bolt and chain material to work with. She was seated alone and engrossed in doing the activity by herself. After, a few minutes, she returned this material to the shelf and collected another material to quietly work with. The context gives evidence to the fact that children would actually choose what they want to do and for how long when given the freedom. Similarly, in **observation 67 16/3/2011** (nursery B) 9.30 – 9.40am, a group of children were working at the sand tray and were pretending to cook with the sand as they turned one container into another. They maintained ongoing conversations as they worked. After a while, they were tired of the activity and all went to the snack table. Again, it may appear that when there is **independent access** as in the above cited instances, the children’s learning extends into learning through different **skills** as noted by (*parent 1, teacher 2, nursery B*) **and through play** as noted by (*teacher 1, nursery B*) and evidenced in **observation 40 11/3/2011** (nursery A) where two children played on the sand pit with sand in their containers which they described as dinner being made ready. Both were very engrossed in their play and then change again to another imaginative game with one girl addressing the other, saying “look, madam, your birthday cake is amazing.” she further remarked “your birthday cake is ready.”

In addition, opportunities for learning through **self-correction** will also be occasioned by **independent access** in the classroom since as noted in the school documents:

“There is a culture of self-correction which means that children persevere until they have achieved the desired outcome (*school prospectus, nursery B*)  
Children in Montessori schools are not afraid of making mistakes. They are encouraged to see them as natural steps in the learning process. The culture of self-correction leads to a healthy enjoyment of challenges and sense of perseverance”  
(*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Contrary however to the above policy statements, the observation exercise in both nurseries suggests that the focus on adult led activities and group activities does strongly minimise the opportunities for children to freely engage with a learning material without the imposition of time constraint in some instances as well as adult intervention.

Interestingly, one nursery document further explains that “In the Montessori environment

the materials are designed to be self correcting..." (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

However, the fact remains that the benefits accruable from using these Montessori learning materials as highlighted in the above nursery document may remain insufficiently harnessed by children in the nursery because as highlighted in the journal diary:

The children have hardly chosen any Montessori material to work with. Most of what the children do at this time is play with construction toys, sand tray and dressing clothes at the role play area. No Montessori material has been taken from the shelf by the children or any teacher and worked with... (*Journal entry, 16/3/2011*).

#### **4.2.4 Learning through teacher presentation/one –to – one activity**

Another highly noted view of how children learn was through **teacher presentations** expressed in the interviews and observation exercise: "Through us **presenting** all the different activities to them" (*Teacher 1, nursery B*) "The children are **shown** how to use the equipment but are free to access the equipment from the shelves as they wish" (*Parent 2*). "Children are **shown** how to use the equipment and then encouraged to use on [their] own" (*Parent 3*). "Directress **links** the child at the start of the process and is aiming that the child will then **independently** choose purposeful work" (*Board member, Montessori UK Ltd*).

Teacher presentations were used to describe how children learn in the nursery when a teacher worked with a child on an activity. They are synonymous with **one – to –one activity** because they both aim to teach a child or a group of children through lesson presentations. Teachers in both nursery schools spent a lot of time doing **teacher presentations/ one – to – one activity** with children. The observation exercises show that teacher presentations align **with teacher initiated activities** in these nursery schools because they were used in several instances to ensure learning targets for children are met. An illustration of this is in **observation 12 8/3/2011** (nursery A) 9.00 – 9.12am, when a teacher engaged a child to do sand paper letters with her. The teacher traced each letter, said its name and the sound it made. She asked the child to repeat the same until the child had gone through all the different sandpaper letters. All the while, the teacher took record of the sounds made by the child and her explanation does shed light on how linked the

**teacher presentations are with teacher initiated activities** as an important avenue to achieving learning targets:

I then ask the teacher why she is recording the work done by the child as soon as it is done. She explains that it is needed for preparing the work plan for the month of March and that she was working with the child to find out how much she knows the sand paper letters so that it will help to plan what activity the teachers will introduce her to next. The teacher further explains that the work plan is followed and ticked off when the child has completed and mastered the activity. This is then put into the child's record of achievement for the purpose of documentation (*Journal entry, 8/3/2011*).

Similarly, during **observation 18 9/3/2011** (nursery A), a teacher chose an activity with sand paper letters for a child. She held up each letter and asked the boy what the name and sounds of the letter was. After a while, the child was distracted and no longer interested in the activity and the teacher let him go. The context of this lesson gives a real insight into the possible agenda of this teacher presentation/ one –to –one activity as captured in the researcher journal entry:

I overhear the same teacher say to the child at the end of the lesson, “alright, I will tell teacher XX that you have done most of your letters....then the teacher gets Teacher XX and says “ is there anything specific you wanted him to do?” (*Journal entry, 9/3/2011*)

These instances support the view from most of the respondents that teacher presentations are one of the major ways perceived to be effective in helping children learn in the nursery.

#### **4.2.5 Learning through hands – on activities**

Again, documents interrogated from both nursery schools indicated that “Children learn through **hands on** experience, investigation and questioning” (*school prospectus, nursery A*), “The Montessori approach facilitates learning by **discovery** rather than instruction (*school prospectus, nursery B*). This was the view indicated in these nursery documents. Furthermore, of all the informants, only teacher 1, nursery (A) cited the feature of **hands ‘on’** learning to describe how children learn. This is insightful

because it reveals that this teacher is knowledgeable on the ethos of Montessori education because she explains that “All the work is very **hands ‘on’** ...there are no workbooks, they are not sat at desks, there’s lots of floor work on maths and things...with specific pieces of equipment” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

Interestingly, all the learning activities’ across nursery A and B were **hands ‘on’** with only two exceptions where children were made to write in exercises books as seen in **observation 28 9/3/2011** (nursery A ) when a teacher worked with two girls to do maths activities in their exercise books. The teacher made circles in their books with a marker for them to count and circle the right answer. At completion of the activity, she informed the child to put the exercise book in her drawer where her other school work is kept. This work with exercise books is in contradiction to the assertion made by teacher 1 nursery A in the interview session that “all the work is very **hands on**...there are **no work books**, they are not sat at desks...”

In order to understand the reason for this deviation from the norm in the nursery,

I ask the teacher why the children are writing in exercise books and she explains that it is **because they are older children (4.5 year)** and it makes them feel grown up and also **because some parents like to see evidence** of what the children are doing at nursery (*Journal entry, 9/3/2011*).

The conclusion from this statement appears to suggest that external pressure has the potential of impacting nursery practice to such an extent that the strategy underpinning children’s learning is compromised in order to satisfy external expectations.

#### **4.2.6 Interim summary**

Themes drawn from the triangulation of research data from the two nursery schools revealed how children learn as being through a combination of adult led and child initiated activities, individual and group tasks, teacher presentations, independent access to materials and hands ‘on’ experiences. Hence, it is worth stating that there was no striking difference in the range of learning opportunities experienced by children across both nurseries. Importantly, the findings showed that the above listed ways that children learn in both nurseries is predicated on a blending of both the EYFS and Montessori principles

because of the requirement for compliance to statutory regulations governing early years' provision for children between 0-5 years. The Montessori framework on how children learn prescribed hands 'on' experiences, spontaneous activities, self-chosen/ directed activity, intrinsic motivation and independent work. It is imperative to point out that these Montessori features were identified across both nurseries, albeit, in a limited way. This limitation must be understood against the overarching umbrella of the **EYFS** which as seen in the findings can be said to impact greatly on the learning strategies adopted for children. So, whilst these nurseries are described and advertised as following the Montessori principles, the practice in the nurseries have been tailored to operate in a real sense as a blended provision (**Montessori and EYFS**). This reality must therefore remain at the fore when seeking to understand how children learn, without which both nurseries may be dismissed as operating shy of the Montessori ethos and conceived as not providing true Montessori education. The below table gives a summary of identified Montessori features noted across nursery A and B when confronted with the Montessori bench marks on how children learn and was obtained from the three strands of data the researcher accessed.

**Table 4.2 Identified features against Montessori checklist on how children learn**

	Least mentioned/ observed	Somewhat mentioned/observed	Most mentioned/observed
Active hands on learning			*
Spontaneous activity		*	
Self-chosen/directed activity		*	
Independent work	*		

One feature of how children learn not mentioned/observed was

- Intrinsic motivation.

It is interesting to note that both the EYFS and Montessori principles advocate the view that every child is a unique individual and this understanding should be reflected in the **independence** afforded children for individual paced learning. This needed to be more prioritised in both nurseries through the promotion of more **self-chosen activities**.

Similarly, **intrinsic motivation** will occur when opportunities abound in the nurseries for



children to engage in **spontaneous activities**. The current findings do suggest that opportunities for spontaneous activities are not sufficiently afforded in comparison with adult led and group activities which may not always reflect children's interest. Although, the findings revealed that **hands 'on'** learning may generally describe the different activities in the nursery, it would also be necessary to note potential pressures which may be posed by external parties for the nurseries to adopt other learning strategies.

### **4.3 'Fulfilling routine nursery duties' – role of the directress in the setting**

Having set out the checklist underpinning the role of a Montessori directress in **2.8.3**, it is necessary to elucidate that the data analysis to answer this research question will be drawn from a triangulation of the observation data, interviews with staff, parents and other stakeholders as well as document interrogation from the nursery schools.

#### **4.3.1 Job description from nursery document analysis**

The role of the directress as gleaned from the interviews, observations and documents revealed a clear depiction of what the role of a directress (teacher) in these settings were. It is important to highlight the fact that the job descriptions accessed from nursery A and B were titled differently "Teacher EYFS coordinator" (*nursery B*) "Nursery nurse/Montessori teacher (*nursery A*).

The difference in the titles suggests that the job description from nursery A appears more generic to all teachers in the setting while that from nursery B seems to have been specifically produced for a particular teacher as designated above. This is further confirmed by the content of the job description (*nursery B*) which documented the duties of this teacher as follows;

1. Manage the day to day routine and staff in 3 – 4 yrs (Preschool).
2. Acting 3<sup>rd</sup> in charge
3. EYFS coordinator
4. Ofsted/Council
5. Viewings
6. Manage complaints using standard processes
7. Any other duties as reasonably requested by owner/ manager.

(see appendix 15)

Interestingly, it was revealed by the manager (nursery B) that the job description accessed was the only one available in its database. Thus, while the job description from nursery B may provide insight into the role expectation for one of the supervisors in this nursery, it seems that the job description from nursery A appears to provide a more realistic picture of the generic role of a directress (teacher) in the nursery settings as detailed below:

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

### **1. Specific to childcare:**

Adhere to all nursery policies & procedures. Liaise with and support parents and carers. Plan and implement a program of activities, using Birth to Three matters /Foundation stage/Montessori curriculum. The preparation and completion of activities to suit the children's stage of development. Ensure that records of your key children's achievement are kept up to date. Complete accident report, incident and medical records as required. Ensure that the meal times are a time of pleasant social sharing. You are required to carry out washing and changing of children as required. Provide comfort, care and warmth to a child who is unwell.

### **2. General duties**

You are required to assist in ensuring that the nursery provides a high quality and caring environment for all children. Work with the SENCO and parents/carers of children with additional needs to ensure their full integration into the nursery environment. Work closely with all staff in professional and team like manner. You are required to be involved in out of work hour's activities, e.g. training, staff meetings...summer fete, report writing, parents evening, Father's night and other special events organised from time to time by the nursery. You are required to be flexible within the working practices of the nursery and be prepared to help when needed, including but not limited to, preparation of snacks, cleaning nursery equipment, assisting with the cleaning of the nursery (in the event the cook is absent), food preparation. Work alongside the Nursery Manager, Person in Charge and staff team to ensure that the philosophy and ethos of the nursery is upheld. Look upon the nursery as a 'whole' and where you can be of most help or best utilised. Be constantly aware of the needs of the children in the nursery. You are required to develop your role within the team of staff and as a key worker. You are required to respect the confidentiality of all information received, verbal or written

and adhere strictly to the nursery's confidentiality policy. You should always be aware of the high profile and reputation of the nursery.

*(Job description, nursery A. p.2, item 4.0- 4.19)*

Surprisingly, what is contained above in the job description (an internal school document) appears at variance to some degree with the school prospectus (a public document) because of its delineation of a more streamlined role description for a directress in its setting as opposed to the foregoing:

“She is, first of all a very keen **observer** of the individual interests and needs of each child; her daily plan proceeds from her **observation** rather than from a prepared curriculum. She **demonstrates** the correct use of materials as they are individually chosen by the children carefully **watches** the progress and **keeps** a record of the work. Individual children's total development as well as their progress toward self-discipline is carefully **guided** by the directress, who **prepares** the environment, directs the activities and offers each child enticement and stimulation”

*(school prospectus, nursery A).*

This difference in the depiction of role description in both documents is noteworthy. For instance, the school prospectus which is in the public domain and accessible to parents and other visitors, carefully outlines the directress's role to align with the ethos of Montessori education as reflected in the use of these key phrases ‘keen **observer** ... planning of her work with children from **observation, demonstration** of lessons as **individually chosen** by children, **watching children's progress** in order to keep proper record and **guiding** the children and **preparing** the environment.’ Conversely, the job description which is an internal document, accessible to only staff members indicates a shift in focus to encapsulate the directress's role primarily to the fulfilment of nursery duties without any delineation of this role to capture the core essence of what is prescribed by the Montessori philosophy as done in the school prospectus. For example, in relation to specific duties to children, the job description seems vague in this sweeping statement to teacher to ‘**adhere to all nursery policies and procedures.**’ It is therefore possible to speculate that the seeming difference in language usage in both documents may be driven by such factors as the target audience for whom the documents have been produced. Thus, in order to make sense of the information obtained from all documents in both nurseries, an analysis of the observation data and interviews was triangulated to shed further light on the role of the

directress in the two nursery schools. Importantly, it is worth pointing out that other documents (school prospectus, newsletters) accessed from nursery B had little to say on the role of a directress.

Accordingly, an analysis of the context of the documents (job descriptions and school prospectuses), interviews and observations from both nurseries led to the broad categorisation of these **routine nursery duties** as **lesson presentations, provision of support/assistance to children for their development, carrying out oversight functions, documentation of children’s record, observations, networking with other stakeholders and preparation of the learning environment.**

#### **4.3.2 Teaching/ lesson presentation**

Primarily, the majority of the informants described the role of the directress as involving the teaching/ presentation of lessons to the children “ I teach two days a week” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*) “ ...to be a teacher, teach what I need to teach” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*) “EYFS coordinator and Montessori/ EYFS teacher” (*Nursery owner*). In further elaboration of what the role of teaching entails in a Montessori classroom, two of the teachers explain that it involves “... presenting all the Montessori activities and equipment to them...” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*) “...you know, doing presentations one – to – one and group presentations with the children...teaching grace and courtesies, introducing them to the environment, teaching them how are in the classroom” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

Corroboratively, one school document stated that the:

“[The directress] demonstrates the correct use of materials as they are individually chosen by the children carefully watches the progress and keeps a record of work” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Further to this, the nursery observations also highlighted the fact that **lesson presentations** were at the core of how the role of the directress was enacted in the nurseries as seen in **observation 8 7/3/2011** (nursery A) from 10.32 – 10.35am where an activity on colour box was chosen by a directress (teacher) to do with a child. She called out a colour and asked the child to find the matching colour card and place them side by side on the mat. At the end of matching all the colour cards, the teacher and child went over the different colours

as the boy identified each colour. The described activity is an example of a **one – to – one lesson presentation** as seen in **Fig 4.1**.



**Fig 4.1 Lesson Presentation on colour box 2 in Montessori nursery A**

Again, in **observation 11 15/3/2011** (nursery B) from 9.55 – 9.57am, a teacher got the maze activity to work with a child on a table. She got two sets of shape maze; one for herself and one for the child and placed a shape from her basket on her maze. She then invited the child to choose a shape to place on his own maze. After a few minutes, the child said she wanted to put the work away and the teacher consented.

Although the above described observations show lesson presentations in which the teacher and children involved appeared engaged and completed the activities without any form of distraction, this was not the case in many other instances. Across both nurseries, the lesson presentations were often interrupted as teachers left to attend to other nursery chores, sometimes for a prolonged period of time. For instance, in **observation 44, 11/3/2011** (nursery A) from 9.30 – 9.45am where a teacher chose an activity on colours to do with a child using pencils. She lifted each coloured pencil and said its colour with the child repeating after her. The teacher went on to later ask the boy to identify the different

coloured pencils. However, the teacher interrupted the lesson twice to answer the door and then another teacher also stopped at the table and interrupted the teacher and the child with questions to the child on the colour of his tiger. This teacher remained at the table for some time and took over the lesson from the previous teacher before abruptly leaving the table.

The journal diary chronicled this situation by noting that

During the exercise with the coloured pencils, the teacher interrupts the lesson twice by standing up to answer the nursery door. Another teacher also interrupts the lesson by interjecting with comments and taking over the lesson from the teacher working with the child. This is a pattern with several teachers in the nursery – interrupting a lesson by either talking to a teacher working with a child or leaving their lessons to run errands (*Journal entry 11/3/2011*)

#### **4.3.3 Provision of support/assistance to children for their development**

It was also noted from the respondents that the role of the directress (teachers) in the settings involved the provision of support and assistance to children “helping them with their self care, toilet training, toileting, health and hygiene” (*Teacher 1 nursery A*) “ help them through their day...just helping them to develop really” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*)” “ am here to help the children with their independence, learning...am here to help them to be independent, to be there when they need me” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

This view of the teacher’s role as **provision of support / assistance to children for their development** was equally confirmed by other stakeholders “support with early years education” (*Parent 1*) “ To support the children’s learning and to give help when asked for it” (*Parent 2*) “ To support and develop the preschool children with Montessori and EYFS” (*Parent 3*). Further still, another stakeholder explained that the teacher has to “... prepare herself and her environment to welcome the child and treat each child as an individual” (*Montessori UK Education board member*).

It is interesting to note that the stakeholders and three teachers out of four interviewed were unanimous on support/assistance given to children in the nursery as a pointer to what the directress’s role is. This consensus opinion does shed light on the importance attached to this function by teachers and parents. Similarly, the documents from both nurseries

stated that “each child is allocated their own key worker who will help develop the child to reach their full potential” ( *school prospectus nursery B*) “individual children’s total development as well as their progress toward self –discipline is carefully guided by the directress...” ( *school prospectus nursery A*).

**Provision of support /assistance to children for their development** also seemed to underpin this policy statement to “carry out washing and changing of children as required; provide comfort, care and warmth to a child who is unwell” ( *Job description, nursery A*). This statement suggests that providing **support /assistance to children for their development** is a holistic task that should cover the different facets of the nursery experience as can be seen in **observation 37 10/3/2011** (nursery A) from 10.35 – 10.42a.m where a teacher was preparing snacks with the help of a child. The teacher cut the apples with a mini chopper and allowed the child to finish the task of getting the apples sliced. The teacher and the child worked together and sliced up three apples, after which the child got out rice cakes for the snack table as well. The importance of providing children with support in this way was captured in the researcher journal diary which noted that:

This is very positive and a practice to be encouraged in the nursery because it brings the individual child in contact with real life activity which is the foundation of practical life activities ( *Journal entry, 10/3/2011*).

In contrast with the foregoing, other instances drawn from the observation exercise appear to indicate that while there was a measure of **support/ assistance** given to children, it did not appear sufficient across both nurseries. For example in **observation 53 14/3/2011** (nursery B) from 10.15 – 10.28am when a child chose a paper cutting activity. The child struggled to use the scissors and a teacher asked the child if she could manage. The teacher then sat down to show the child how to use the scissors and gave the scissors back to her to try on her own but it proved too difficult for the child to grapple with. The teacher abruptly stood up, leaving the child on her own and went to chat with some staff members. So, the child stood up, returned the material back to the shelf and went in search of another activity to do.

So, although there was evidence that some level of support was given to the child in this situation, it appeared that the teacher needed to have worked further with the child to make sure that the support given was adequate to assist the child overcome the challenge before leaving her or provide an alternative solution as was noted in the journal diary reflecting on this incident:

The teacher should have offered the child another material to work with since the activity of cutting paper was too difficult for her. The teacher does not work with the child to choose another material but rather stands up to talk with other teachers. It would have been good to take advantage of this child's desire to work and introduce her to a more suitable activity. This is the role of a Montessori teacher as a link between the child and the environment (*Journal entry, 14/3.2011*).

#### **4.3.4 Documentation of children's record**

The school prospectuses also emphasised on **documenting children's work** when it pinpointed the directress as being "A key worker... to **track progress and development**, and ensure their needs are being met" (*school prospectus, nursery B*) "Ensure that **records** of your key children's achievements are kept up to date (*Job description, nursery A*) "...carefully watches the progress and keeps **a record** of their work" (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

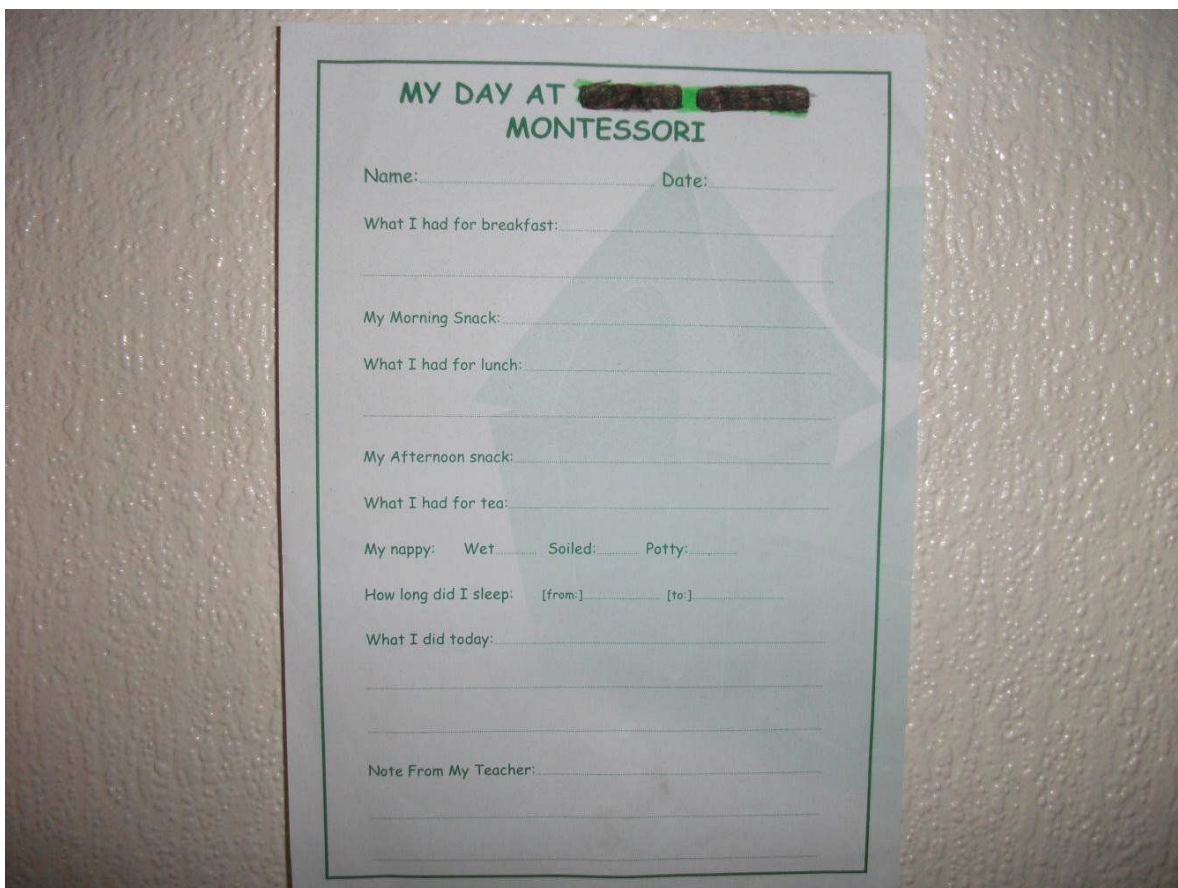
Again, one of the nursery schools also highlighted its focus on **documentation of children's work** by informing parents that "we have a new EYFS board where you can see the regular updates on how children are developing in accordance with the EYFS framework" (*newsletter autumn/winter 2010, nursery B*). This invitation to parents does imply that the teachers need to ensure sustained record keeping backing up this position. Such imperative may be seen in the response of a teacher who explained her role to include "...documenting the children's learning across the whole nursery" (*teacher 3, nursery B*).

So, whilst other interviewed teachers did not specifically mention their role as embracing documentation of children's record, indications from policy statements such as "each child has a learning journey. It is updated by their key person on a regular basis" (*school prospectus, nursery B*) does attest to the need for teachers to ensure up to date record



keeping. This was sufficiently evidenced in the observation exercise as noted in the journal entry:

I also notice that for every child that comes in the morning, there is a new daily record sheet for that day which is put on a shelf area for easy access by the teachers to fill in information through the day. This is another way to keep the documentation and record up to date (Journal entry, 10/3/2011).



The image shows a white record sheet titled "MY DAY AT MONTESSORI" pinned to a wall. The sheet has a green border and contains several sections for documentation. At the top, the title is written in green. Below the title, there are two lines for "Name:" and "Date:". The next section is "What I had for breakfast:" followed by a horizontal line. This is followed by "My Morning Snack:" with a horizontal line. Then "What I had for lunch:" with a horizontal line. Next is "My Afternoon snack:" with a horizontal line. Then "What I had for tea:" with a horizontal line. The next section is "My nappy: Wet: \_\_\_\_\_ Soiled: \_\_\_\_\_ Potty: \_\_\_\_\_". Below that is "How long did I sleep: [from:] \_\_\_\_\_ [to:] \_\_\_\_\_". Then "What I did today:" followed by two horizontal lines. Finally, at the bottom, there is "Note From My Teacher:" followed by two horizontal lines.

**Fig 4.2 A sample record sheet for documentation of a child's work**

Again in **observation 8 7/3/2011** (nursery A) from 10.32 – 10.35am, a teacher worked with a child on the colour box. The teacher and the child match all the different colour cards together and at the end of the activity the teacher made the child enumerate the different colour cards one after the other. Interestingly, the teacher takes a further step to immediately document this activity before letting the child go. The summation of this situation was noted in the journal diary which recorded that

Again, I notice that the teacher immediately leaves the child and goes to fill in the daily record sheet. She returns and asks the child if he wants some snacks or if he

wants to go outside. There is no opportunity for standing back to watch and see if he wants to go on with the activity. He is asked to tidy it up after the teacher has filled in the daily record sheet for this child (*Journal entry, 10/3/2011*).

In further consideration of the issue of documenting child's work, the evidence similarly appeared to confirm the importance attached to this. This is reported as follows in the journal diary:

I have had a look at a child's record of achievement file and it does appear that much of the record keeping by teachers is geared towards ensuring that there is an updated record for each child in order to fulfil the EYFS documentation requirement. The record of achievement shows how the work that the child has done in the nursery linked to the EYFS and evidenced by photographs and other work record. The reason for the focus on documentation is obvious (*Journal entry, 8/3/2011*)

#### **4.3.5 Observation of children**

The role of the teacher as an **observer** received only a minimal mention among the respondents "...observations" (*Teacher 1, nursery A*) "planning and observations for preschool children" (*Nursery owner*). This is rather insightful given that in answering the question on how children learn, one stakeholder clearly noted that "the adult **observes** the child and provides a prepared environment where every individual unique child can find purposeful work" (*Board member Montessori Education UK Ltd*).

This statement appears to highlight the role of the teacher as involving **observation**. Further to this, an analysis of the above statement suggests that the role of **observing** is prerequisite to the preparation of the learning environment to ensure the child is appropriately engaged. In confirmation, one school document further explained that:

"She is, first of all a very keen **observer** of the individual interests and needs of each child; her daily plan proceeds from her observation rather from a prepared curriculum (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Thus, the summation from the foregoing is that where **observation by the directress** is insufficient or lacking, learning may be hampered. Notwithstanding, the observation exercise across both nursery schools revealed that the role of **observation** by the directresses was not prioritised. For example, in **observation 7 7/3/2011** (nursery A) from 10.30 – 10.32am, a boy was doing an activity with dinosaurs, animals and farm puzzle. He had chosen this activity by himself and was just playing with the puzzles cards after arranging all the dinosaurs on the table. He was soon tired of the activity, left them all on the table and ran off without returning them to the shelf. In consideration of what transpired during this learning activity, the researcher noted in the journal diary that:

Again, there is no directress observing to see what the child is doing with the dinosaur activity. No one notices that he has left it and run off. At this time, there is the one teacher in the entire open plan classroom and she is working with a child. No one else is observing the rest of the children... (*Journal entry, 7/3/2011*).

Similarly, in **observation 73 17/3/2011** (nursery B) from 10.30 – 10.35am, a child had chosen a pouring activity and is working alone on a table. She poured water from a jug into a bowl of water and later poured beads into the water and then attempted to bring out the beads with a sieve. A directress came to work with her briefly and guided her through the activity. Another child watched by the table and as soon as the teacher left, the watching child interrupted the work and took over the activity. The child abandoned the work for the new child and went to tell the teacher that she didn't want to do the activity anymore. The teacher did not notice that another child has not only distracted her but has taken over the work.

With regard to this incident, the researcher reflected in her entry that:

It is useful for the directresses to actually observe the activities that children are involved with, whether it is child – initiated or adult led. Children's work is easily interrupted by the other children as well as some teachers themselves (*Journal entry, 17/3/2011*).

The need to prioritise **observation** in the nursery was also captured in **observation 69 16/3/2011** (nursery B) from 10 – 10.30am. A child got a maths material to work with. She brought out all the number beads from the bead box and hung them on the counting rack.

She counted each line of bead as they are hung, talking to herself as she progressed with the activity. At the end of the activity, she decided to repeat it again. Then she decided to do another activity with the same beads, hanging them all nine lines of bead on one rack peg. She was fully engrossed in the activity and went on to repeat the all process again. No directress is **observing** her throughout this activity. There are two directresses in the classroom; one is clearing up her cooking lesson props and the other teacher had been writing her children's report at a table for about 30minutes. The child finished working with the materials but didn't remember where she got it from. She approached the researcher for guidance and she was redirected to the directress.

The researcher commented on this incident in the journal entry that:

This child working with the maths material is obviously interested in doing more with the material and an **observing** directress would have noticed this and spent some time with her doing a one –to – one presentation to show her the correct way to use the material as it is clear she does not know how to use it. This is an example of when **observing** a child at work is really needed (*Journal entry, 16/3/2011*).

Another role description for directresses was **networking with stakeholders** such as parents. Interestingly, **networking with other stake holders** was not mentioned by any of the informants except the nursery owner who described the directress's role in this regard as a "link to parents and local schools and nurseries" (*nursery owner*). Again, one school document also indicated that directresses in the nursery are to "liaise with and support parents and carers" (*Job description, nursery A*) "work with the SENCO and parents/carers of children with additional needs to ensure their full integration into the nursery environment" (*Job description, nursery A*).

Hence, while it is a forgone conclusion that teachers in the nursery settings encounter certain situations where they have to liaise with parents on the welfare of particular children, it is necessary to point out that there was no recorded instance during the observation exercise across both nursery schools where this was seen.

**4.3.6 Carrying out oversight functions** was equally noted by three informants as involving the roles of directresses. An analysis of the context of the role of **carrying out oversight functions** as described here suggests that these directresses also had supervisory

duties as reflected in the below comments “planning and observations for preschool children” (*nursery owner*):

“am the only qualified Montessori teacher in the nursery, so I help all the other members of staff, the ones that are training to be Montessori teachers,...with the teaching and the planning and observations for the children in the class” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*)

“Am a preschool teacher, so I lead the preschool room. I am also responsible to oversee my children and their development....I plan small group tasks, update the tasks on the shelf, particularly the practical life shelf that obviously needs updating every now and again....I also oversee planning ...documenting the children’s learning across the whole nursery. So my job title is preschool teacher and EYFS coordinator (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

It therefore appears that the directresses who cited **carrying out oversight functions** as part of their role are more than likely combining supervision with other duties.

**4.3.7** Again, **preparing the environment** was also noted as a role played by a directress in the nursery settings “to prepare...the environment to welcome the child and treat each child as an individual” (*Board member, Montessori Education UK Ltd*) “...prepares the environment, directs the activities and offers each child enticement and stimulation” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

However, apart from the above citation of this role in one school document and by a stakeholder, none of the other respondents pinpointed **preparing the environment** as a directress’s role in the settings. This is significant because it tied in with the findings that there appeared to be no particular evidence of directresses **preparing** the learning environment during the observation exercise in both nursery schools. Thus, while the assumption remains that directresses actually prepare the learning environment on a daily basis and perhaps, in the course of the day, it is necessary to reiterate that none of such preparatory activities were seen by the researcher during this period. Additionally, the fact that very little mention is made of this role description across the data collected gives an

insight about the level of importance attached to the directress's role of preparing the environment.

#### **4.3.8 Interim summary**

The empirical data presented below clearly indicate that the directress's role in the nursery settings appeared predicated on the fulfilment of routine duties enacted as lesson presentation, provision of support/assistance to children, documentation of records, observation, carrying out oversight functions, networking with stakeholders and preparing the learning environment. Interestingly, **observation** and **preparation of the environment** which appeared on the Montessori checklist were not prioritised in the nursery settings. One depiction of the directress role which resonated with the checklist was the **presentation of lessons** to children. This particular feature seemed to be the main way the role of a directress in both nurseries was enacted. The directress's role of linking children to the environment is premised on a directress acting in the capacity of a facilitator of the children's learning and these features were also not adequately evidenced because it appeared that children were afforded limited opportunities to initiate their own interaction with their environment. However, the directresses appeared to have their own learning agenda for the children and seemed to engage children from that standpoint. Furthermore, opportunities given to the children to initiate their own interaction with the learning environment would have provided avenue for the directress's role as a **resource person** to be maximised. Again, **documentation of children's record** was also another focus of the directresses and this was traced to the need to meet other external expectations such as parents' need to see evidence of learning and the EYFS statutory requirement for production of children's learning journeys. The directresses' actual practice as evidenced in the settings is contrasted in **Table 4.3** against the Montessori checklist. This table is based on data accessed by the researcher from interviews, documents accessed and observations.

**Table 4.3 – Directress role as evidenced in the settings against the Montessori checklist.**

	<b>Least mentioned</b>	<b>Somewhat Mentioned/observed</b>	<b>Most mentioned/observed</b>
Facilitator of children’s learning		*	
link between children and environment		*	
Lesson presentation			*
Authoritative		*	

The following role descriptors were not mentioned/ observed

- Observer
- Resource person
- Role model
- Preparer of the environment

Again, different issues were noted from the school documents; there was only one job description form available in the nursery B’s database and it did not appear generic to all teachers in the nursery. In nursery (A), while there was a generic job description for teachers, the directress’s role as detailed in the job description appeared premised on the fulfilment of statutory nursery duties as its main concern while its school prospectus emphasised the role of the directress as a guide and support to the children – a perspective that suggests an alignment with the Montessori checklist. There appeared to be a subtle difference in focus in the message passed from this nursery on the same subject matter in two different documents, one internal to staff and the other external to clients.

Furthermore, opportunities that showcased the directresses as authoritative and modelling desirable traits and attributes were not evidenced from data collected.

#### 4.4 ‘Underpinned by respect and autonomy support to some extent’ – The nature of directress – child interactions

The Montessori checklist in 2.8.4 denoted that the relationship between the teacher and children in the nursery setting should be marked by:

- Respect between the teacher and children.
- The need for the teacher to engage with a child respectfully because the work of learning is the child’s prerogative and therefore the teacher has to act with the understanding of being a guide whose chief duty is to ensure that the child attains full potential (Rambusch & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2006).

Considering the above checklist, the evidence to answer this research question was drawn from information which emerged from the different data sources; interviews, observation and document interrogation. Accordingly, evidence from these sources appeared to indicate that the nature of interactions occurring in the nursery settings between the directress and child bordered on **respect for children and autonomy support for children’s learning**.

##### 4.4.1 Respect for children

With regard to **respect** for children, the informants revealed that

“...they’ve all really good relationships. The adults would plan what they’re going to do with the children...but yes, very mutual **respect** for each other,...the adults **respect** the children and their needs and what they want to do and the children **respect** the adults, you know, in a formal way of respect... yes, the adults **respect** what the children want to do their likes and dislikes (*Teacher 1, nursery A*).

The carers and the teachers are always calm towards children, they never...you know we don’t shout at a child...we talk to them in a way that they understand what’s right and wrong...it’s not a wild atmosphere, there’s **respect**...(Teacher 2, nursery B).



We always **go down** to the children's level to interact with them in that way  
(*Teacher 1, nursery B*).

From the foregoing, it does appear that **respect** for children is highly esteemed as a basis for interacting with children in the settings. Corroboratively, some of the stakeholders also opined that the interaction between the teachers and children in the nursery was such that “the children are very independent and the staff are **respectful** of the children's views and the children are allowed to lead and make decisions.” (*Parent 2*) “very good” (*Parent 1*).

Interestingly, the premium which appeared to be placed by the informants on the nature of the interaction between the teacher and child in the settings as being underpinned by **respect** was not sufficiently evidenced as a consistent pattern from the observation exercise across both nursery schools. For instance, in **observation 61 15/3/2011** (nursery B) from 10 – 10.08am, when a child worked with a teacher on a puzzles activity. The teacher and the boy put all the puzzles on the mat and began to sort them out, and then the teacher became distracted and started talking over the boy's head at some other children at the snack table. Another teacher came along and began to talk with the teacher about issues in the nursery while the boy just sat and waited. The teacher later continued the activity but was again distracted by other children. She gave them attention and later returned to continue the activity with the boy. However, she again left the child and began to attend to other chores and children. The boy then packed up the puzzle activity and put it away.

This learning situation was reflected on by the researcher in her journal entry and she summated that:

A child doing an activity should have his work respected by the teacher and other children. When a teacher continues to interrupt a child at work either by talking with other teachers or attending to other children, the teacher is not being sensitive or **respectful** of the child's work (*Journal entry, 15/3/2011*).

Similarly, in a journal entry for **9/3/2011**, (nursery A) 11am, the researcher recorded that:

A girl came inside from the playground and said “I need a wee wee” and she went towards the toilet. A directress called her attention and asked her where she was going with her wellingtons on and the girl repeated “I need a wee wee”. The directress replied “**I don’t care**, we do not wear our wellis in the classroom otherwise we will get all over the floor, you need to get it off.” The child went back and got her wellingtons off before going into the toilet.

Significantly, the researcher highlighted the manner in which the directress interacted with this child:

The choice of words used by the directress may be viewed as strong. I later found out that this directress is not Montessori trained (*Journal entry, 9/3/2011*).

While it may be said that being untrained in Montessori education possibly accounted for the manner of speaking witnessed in the above incident, if there was a consistent culture of **respect** in the nursery setting underpinning the directresses’ interactions with children, it would have reflected across all interactions with children. Thus, it was surprising that none of the documents accessed from both nursery schools contained any policy statements on the nature of directress – child interactions in the settings except for a short statement in one document which mentioned that “mutual **respect** of the student and the teacher – guide is the most important factor in this [learning] process” (*School prospectus, nursery A*). This statement highlighted the criticality of undergirding the interactions between directresses and children in the nursery with **respect** as it appeared cardinal for the achievement of a thriving learning environment. The findings from the foregoing however noted that although no instance of disrespect towards a directress was evidenced among the children across both nursery schools, there appeared to be a need for a **consistent pattern of respect** undergirding the interactions with children on the part of directresses.

#### **4.4.2 Autonomy support**

Some of the informants further opined that teachers’ interaction with children was based on **autonomy support**, which means children taking ownership of their learning “...it’s not all about what we think they should be doing. **It’s all about what they want to do and how we can help them achieve that**” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*)

“...sometimes the children **want to do it on their own; they don’t want that adult interaction**, so the children are **allowed** to choose (*Teacher 1, nursery B*)

Similarly, other stakeholders equally supported this view by noting that “the children are **allowed to have an opinion and decide what to do**. the children are **very independent**” (*Parent 2*) “hands ‘on’ approach when needed otherwise the children are taught to be **independent**” (*nursery owner*).

Contradictorily, it appeared from the response of two other informants that interactions with children were not always based on providing **autonomy support for children’s learning** because there were situations when interactions were premised on **autonomy control**, which means the directress decides what children learn or do at a given time. This is as described below:

“The teacher is called a directress....she is **active at first**, finding work that engages and satisfies the child, then she **becomes passive**, when the child finds his own work (*board member, Montessori Education UK*)

This statement suggests that **autonomy control** appeared as a useful way to initiate interaction with children when seeking an opportunity to engage the child’s attention with an activity. Corroboratively, another informant explained that:

“We have ...kind of group time which I suppose we are **in control of the interaction**...and we try to get the children to take turns so that they are interacting, I suppose with the adults and with the children” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

Therefore, the above comment seemed to indicate that interactions between the teacher and children in the nursery appeared underpinned by **a combination of autonomy support and autonomy control**. Further to this, the observation exercise in the two nursery schools revealed instances of **autonomy control** in the directresses’ interaction with children. For example in **observation 26 9/3/2011** (nursery A) from 10.20 – 10.30am, where a directress got two boys to work with play dough. Another directress came to sit with the directress working with the boys and they were engaged in conversation as they talked over the heads

of the children working with play dough. After sometime, the directress said to the boys “we are finished with play dough now” and she got up, pulling one of the boys up with her but he resisted her and started crying because he still wanted to do the play dough activity. The directress however moved him on to a new activity – threading beads. The boy cried loudly, saying he did not want to thread beads. He was cajoled and he finally consented and reluctantly started threading the beads.

Similarly, in **observation 68, 16/3/2011** (nursery B) from 9.45 – 10am, where a group of four boys were at the construction corner, working with Lego. They were putting the Lego into different containers and after a while, they started building something interesting with the Lego. They were then called away from this activity by a directress to come to the snack table. The children did not initially respond to the directress’s invitation and continued their building activity but she repeatedly called on them and they finally left the activity and went for snacks.

These instances further appear to confirm the view of the respondents who noted that **autonomy control** was also used in interactions with children. An analysis of the context of the cited observations seemed to highlight the fact that the situations in which **autonomy control** was used in the nursery settings demonstrated the directresses’ desire to move the children on to a new agenda, irrespective of the needs expressed by the children at the given time. Thus, the researcher noted in the journal entry that:

The teacher calling away children who are engrossed in an activity to come for snack time is unnecessary and disruptive to the children because the children should have the freedom to go to the snack table when they choose as prescribed in Montessori education (*Journal entry, 16/3/2011*).

Furthermore, the only document across both nurseries which shed some light on the nature of the interaction between the directress and children indicated that

“They [children] will be given **freedom to explore and interact** within a carefully structured environment, **guided** by our qualified teachers towards activities appropriate to their own stage of development” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

Similarly, an analysis of this policy statement appeared to favour the **provision of autonomy support** for children’s learning as well as implying **respect** for children and their work.

#### 4.4.3. Interim summary

The nature of interaction between the directress and the child in the settings was not consistently underpinned by **respect** as seen in the instances of directresses either abandoning a child they were supposed to be working with or engaging in extended discussions with other staff when they were supposed to be working with children. Further to this, **autonomy support** for children as undergirding the interaction between directress and children in both nurseries equally appeared inconsistent as noted in situations where directresses forced children away from an activity because they wanted to move them on to a new activity or decided what children would learn and for how long. The instances of **autonomy support** as captured in both nurseries during the observation exercise were insufficient to substantiate the claims of the informants that the underpinning nature of their interaction with children was always **autonomy support**. It therefore appeared that the Montessori feature of **respectfully engaging with the child as a learner** because the directress understands her role as a guide who recognises that the child has the **prerogative** in his education was not well reflected in the settings as shown in the table below.

**Table 4.4 – nature of interaction between the directress and child as reflected in the settings against the Montessori checklist**

	<b>Least mentioned/ observed</b>	<b>Somewhat reflected</b>
Mutually respectful		*
Respectfully engage with the child as a learner since the task of learning belongs to the child and the teacher is only a guide and must be aware of the main role of helping the child reach his full potential		*

Thus, the nature of the interactions in the settings can not be described as always **respectful** to the children neither can it also be said that it was totally underpinned by **autonomy support** as there were instances of **autonomy control** by directresses. This is because across both nurseries, the directresses seemed to have the prerogative of what children learnt, how they learnt and for how long.

#### **4.5 ‘it’s lacking in certain aspects’ – Prepared learning environment**

In **2.8.5**, the checklist on the features of a Montessori prepared environment as drawn from the literature reviewed stipulated the following;

- Qualified and credentialed Montessori teacher leading the classroom.
- Child sized furnishing in the nursery environment.
- Mixed age grouping spanning a three year period.
- Full complement of Montessori learning materials.
- Freedom for children to move about, choose their learning materials and work with them.
- Flexible work period – usually a three hour uninterrupted period in the morning for children to engage with materials.
- Environment that provide for learning activities/materials which are child centred and not on teacher instruction.
- Organisation of environment into the different curriculum areas with self/cabinet units for display of learning materials with the core curriculum reflecting elements of true Montessori education.
- Promotion of collaboration and cooperation.
- Learning program focused on the progress of the individual child in the different curriculum areas and his development because each child is seen as a unique individual.

(Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d; Rambusch & Stoops 1992; Seldin 2006)

Thus, answering the research question on how prepared is the learning environment in relation to Montessori philosophy was premised on an interrogation of the nursery documents, interviews with informants and observation data. To illustrate the environment more vividly, photographs taken at the settings are also used. The use of this data is due to

the fact that while the physical setting is obviously illustratable with the presentation of photographs, a stimulating academic environment should evidence the provision of important features that will ensure that children are challenged intellectually and stand to benefit from optimising the learning opportunities afforded.

#### **4.5.1 The classroom environment**

One stake holder explained that with regard to the preparation of the learning environment, it was done "...as best as we can but we are **strongly driven by EYFS and Ofsted**" (*Nursery owner*). This comment is suggestive of the fact that the preparation of the learning environment is more geared towards embracing the EYFS requirements and meeting Ofsted regulations. Further to this, the informants also expressed divided opinions in their statements about the adequacy of the classroom set up. Two informants explained that "we've got **all areas of learning** that I described...everything is **child sized**" (*Teacher 1, nursery A*):

"We are trying to put displays down at **children's level** as well, so they can see everything. Everything is seen by them. Everything on the shelf is **available** to them and they are encouraged to clean up spills on their own...so the children put their chairs away, the children clean the tables, the children sweep the floor,...we are kind of teaching them life skills" (*Teacher 3, nursery B*).

#### **4.5.2 Full range of Montessori materials.**

As cited in 2.4, a full range of Montessori materials would include all the practical life, sensorial, mathematics, language and cultural materials. Although the above informants seemed to view the general nursery set up as satisfactory, the statement of other informants appeared to raise some contradictions with specific regard to the availability of **a full range of Montessori materials**:

"we have got **a little way that we need to go and do...a few things within certain classrooms** but we've tried to do our best at the moment with what we've got (*Teacher 1, nursery B*).

“**Certain parts of the curriculum are not there**....there’s not all the maths equipment, there’s not all the cultural equipment....**there is not an awful lot** of that but the ethos is there (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

“All areas are provided for. **Could do with being renewed/ refreshed**” (*parent 1*).

Interestingly, the comments by the above informants coincided with the observation on the state of the Montessori learning materials in nursery B:

The Montessori materials in nursery B were very spare. Some of the few available materials were chipped and needed replacement (Journal entry, 14/3/2011).

However, this observation appeared at variance with the nursery’s information to parents that “ we have **invested** in new furniture and toys and in accordance with EYFS principles and Montessori have designated learning zones (reading corner, **construction**, practical life, **role play** etc)” (*2010 Autumn/winter newsletter, nursery B*). An analysis of this statement suggests that the new furniture and toys invested in by the nursery had more to do with meeting its EYFS interest than the Montessori principles. This is evident from the fact that the only Montessori area mentioned in the above statement was the **practical life**, while construction and role play areas are relevant to EYFS. Significantly, it appears to reveal the nursery’s focus, given that two of the informants had admitted to the inadequacy of Montessori learning materials in the nursery.

Conversely, nursery (A) appeared to have some range of Montessori materials as corroborated from its policy statement which indicated that

“ the Montessori classroom offers children the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of graded materials, the child can grow as their interests leads them to choose from one level of complexity to another” (*School prospectus, nursery A*).

#### **4.5.3 Placement of children in classrooms according to age**

In further confirmation of the statements by the majority of the respondents about the inadequate preparation of the environment, documents from one of the nurseries also revealed that the nursery classrooms have been demarcated into **age brackets**:



“Room 1” – for children aged 2 and up to preschool

“Room 2” – for children between 4 – 5 years

*(School prospectus, Nursery B)*

These classroom demarcations are not prescribed in Montessori education and the researcher noted in her journal diary during the observation exercise that:

This Montessori nursery (B) is surprisingly **demarcated into two rooms; 2 – 3 yrs and 4 -5 years**. The children from the 2 – 3 years room are not allowed to go into the room for the older children. The reason for the demarcation according to one teacher is for safety issues and staff ratio to children. It has a cluttered appearance with some floor space for activities that need to be done on the floor as is the case with most Montessori materials (*Journal entry, 14/3/2011*).

Conversely, in nursery A, the researcher reflected on the classroom set up in the journal diary that:

My first impression about this nursery is that it appears crowded with insufficient room for floor activities. Most Montessori activities need sufficient floor space. The nursery classroom is **open planned** with children of **mixed age group** ranging from 2 – 4.5 years. There are 6 tables and 31 chairs in the big room. Although the classroom is divided into different learning areas, it does not appear possible for children to work within designated learning areas as the nursery open space is constrained (*Journal entry, 7/3/2011*).

In corroboration, figures **4.5.1** and **4.5.2** provide a snapshot of the physical indoor learning environment of both nurseries, the **open plan classroom** (nursery A) and the **demarcated classroom** (nursery B), where children were separated into two different rooms according to age group. These photographs seem to show that both nurseries are constrained in terms of availability of space.



**Fig 4.5.1 – Classroom set up nursery A**



**Fig. 4.5.2 – Classroom set up nursery B**

Further to the above observations, it is important to point out that the document from nursery A equally maintained in its school prospectus that it operates an **ungraded classroom** where

“The greatest possibility for flexibility in permitting individual lessons and progress, while still retaining group sessions at no expense to the individual child exists in the Montessori environment” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

In addition to the finding in nursery A of **ungraded** and **undemarcated** classroom as prescribed in 2.8.5 and in opposition to nursery B, the above policy statement also implied that the group sessions in the nursery classroom did not encroach on the freedom and opportunity afforded children to engage in their own initiated activities. However, a contrary situation where the focus appeared to be more on **group sessions and teacher led activities** was noted in both nurseries.

#### 4.5.4 Greater focus on teacher initiated/led activity

The documents from both nurseries confirm that teacher initiated activities are employed as a way to teach children in the nursery:

“Children have opportunities to independently access play experiences which help them to progress in their learning and development. **Adult led** activities also ensure they are appropriately challenged and supported towards the [EYFS] Early Learning goals (2010, autumn/winter newsletter, nursery B).

Children work on self – chosen tasks as well as **collaborating** on major projects...  
(*School prospectus, nursery A*)

It may appear from the documents cited above that both child initiated and teacher initiated/led activities were used complementarily in the nurseries to foster children’s learning. However, evidence from other sources suggests otherwise and rather revealed greater emphasis on **teacher led activities** in the nurseries. For example in **observation 16 8/3/2011** (nursery B) from 10.50 – 11.10am, a directress called on a child to do some writing with her on the board in the playground (see **Fig. 4.5.3**). The directress wrote three, four and five letter words for the child to read. The child showed some difficulty with reading the four and five letter words. The directress encouraged the child to sound out the words letters and say the word. She also helped the child with the difficult words before she left the child to do more words if she wanted.

The researcher noted her comments on this **teacher led activity** in the journal diary:

This activity with the teacher and child writing on the board is the first time a teacher is actually working with a child this morning in a meaningful way, which is inviting a child and seeking the child’s permission to do an activity with her rather than implementing a preplanned teacher initiated activity on the child (Journal entry, 8/3/2011).



**Fig 4.5.3 – Teacher initiated activity nursery A**

So whilst, teacher led activities in the nurseries certainly benefit the children in terms of scaffolding, the over emphasis on teacher led activities is more likely to impinge upon the natural desire of children to explore and learn from their environment through discovery. It is for this reason that focus needed rather to be placed on promoting self chose and individual learning pace as opposed to group sessions and teacher led activity as detailed in one of the school documents “The most satisfying choice can usually be made only by the children themselves” (*School prospectus, nursery A*).

#### **4.5.5 EYFS provision and Montessori**

Though the foregoing appeared to indicate that some areas of the learning environment were not in compliance with the Montessori philosophy, this could be attributed to some extent on the seeming influence of the EYFS provision on some aspects of the practice in both nursery schools. This situation appears further highlighted in the subsequent sections.

#### **4.5.6 The combination of EYFS and Montessori principles in the nursery**

The unanimous confirmation by all the respondents pointed to the fact that both nurseries are not underpinned by Montessori principles alone as presented in 4.2.

It appears apparent that both nurseries are constrained to blend the EYFS and Montessori curriculum in order to be reckoned as meeting the regulatory requirement. This is clearly highlighted by the respondent who revealed that

“We are governed by Ofsted...if Ofsted came and did an inspection on us and we’re not following the EYFS, the nursery will be closed down regardless of being Montessori” ( *Teacher 1, nursery A*).

Further attestation to the fact that the nurseries’ operations are undergirded by a blend of EYFS and Montessori is seen in one stakeholder’s comment that “we combine the EYFS and Montessori principles to our curriculum. We use the **EYFS for our room layout** and integrate **Montessori** into this” (*nursery owner*).

In the same vein, the documents accessed from the nursery schools also corroborated the incorporation of EYFS and Montessori principles in both nurseries:

“The principles of our school are based on the philosophies of Dr Maria Montessori.... From September 2008, we will be observing, planning and evaluating your children’s achievement against the statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage...” (*School prospectus, nursery A*)

“From the use of the EYFS and Montessori principles we aim to develop your child to their true potential” (*school prospectus, nursery B*).

The above indicated policy statements appeared to have significant ramifications on the day to day nursery routines which now seem geared towards providing practical outworking of the EYFS focus as seen in **observation 12 8/3/2011** (nursery A) from 9 – 9.10am when a teacher got a girl and made her sit at a table to do sand paper letters with her. The teacher picked up a phonic sand paper letter, traced it with her fingers and said the name and sound it made. She then asked the child to do the same with all the different sand paper letters.

In consideration of this incident, the researcher noted in her journal entry that

I notice that the teacher working with the girl is noting down on a record sheet the different sand paper letters done by the child. I asked the teacher why she was recording the work done immediately. She explained that it is needed for preparing the work plan for the month of March and that she was working with the child to find out how much she knows the sand paper letters so that it will help to plan what activity the teachers will introduce her to next. The teacher further explained that **the work plan is followed and ticked off when the child has completed and mastered the activity. This is then put into the child's record of achievement for the purpose of documentation** (*Journal entry, 8/3/2011*).

This directress's explanation suggests that the outworking of the EYFS requirement necessitates thorough documentation. This tied in with one stakeholder's comment that "...the EYFS has, however, created much more paper work" (*Board member, Montessori Education UK Ltd*). Additionally, a document from one of the nursery schools also intimated its parents that "we have a new EYFS board where you can see **regular updates on how the children** are developing in accordance with **the EYFS framework**" (*2010 autumn/winter newsletter, nursery B*).

It appears that with the combination of EYFS and Montessori principles, certain other out workings of this tension were also evident in the prepared environment such as the **inclusion of non-Montessori materials and the lack of a daily 3 hour work cycle.**

#### **4.5.7 The inclusion of non-Montessori materials**

Some of the identified non Montessori materials were different types of toys as train sets, construction materials, puzzles, role play items, Lego and other building blocks. An insightful comment was made by a stakeholder that "it is difficult to provide **only** a Montessori learning environment as some areas are in conflict [with EYFS] e.g. role play" (*nursery owner*). This comment appears to suggest that the nurseries were aware of the difference between the two philosophies but had to embrace other features in order to fulfil its commitment to the EYFS requirement. Other informants also echoed this view point as they noted that:

“The children have jig – saws, we’ve got role play areas, so they have got dressing up clothes, the children also got building blocks, construction areas, trains sets...  
(*Teacher 2, nursery B*)

On a different note, another informant clarified that “There are things that we have made that you can’t buy but always with the Montessori ethos in mind (*Teacher 1, nursery A*). A key stakeholder equally affirmed the necessity of ensuring that the non-Montessori materials introduced into the nursery foster the Montessori ethos:

“**Other activities** can and should be provided but they should be prepared and underpinned by Dr Montessori’s philosophy....All activities must provide the child with purposeful work and not be there to keep the child quiet or busy” (*Board member, Montessori Education UK Ltd*).

Further to the inclusion of **non-Montessori materials** in the nursery settings, the board member Montessori Education UK Ltd was emphatic in her renunciation of the use of workbooks as she gave a clear “no” as answer. Interestingly, while the nursery schools did not have work books, it is important to underscore the fact that there was the use of exercise books in both nurseries. Accordingly, two respondents explained that “we have mark making books...we occasionally use colouring sheets...” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*) “They have their mark making books for their writing and language which we encourage them to take and mark make” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

Again, it was also evident that exercise books were in use in nursery A. For instance in **observation 28 9/3/2011** (nursery A) from 10.54am – 11am, a directress worked with two girls to do maths activities in their exercise books. She made circles in their books with a marker for them to count and circle the right answer. When one child was done, she told her to put her book in her drawer while she continued working with the other child. At the end of the activity, she told the girl to also keep her book in her drawer:

The researcher noted this incident and indicated in her journal entry that

I ask the teacher why the children are writing in exercise books and she explains that it is because they are older children (4.5 years) and it makes them feel grown



up and also because some parents like to see evidence of what the children are doing at the nursery. This appears to affect practice in this nursery because the parents' impression about what the children are doing in the nursery is obviously important (*Journal entry, 9/3/2011*).

The explanation given by the teacher seemed plausible and appropriate in this particular context. However, it does seem to bring to the fore the wider concern that such emphasis on written work may be shifting the focus to students performance rather than the quality of the learning experience as cited in **2.8.1**.

#### **4.5.8 Lack of a daily 3 hour work cycle**

The 3 hour work cycle as prescribed in Montessori education is a period of uninterrupted work for which children engage in tasks either individually or in small groups (Shilt, 2009; Wallace and Finn, 2005; Barnes and Snortum, 1973). One stake holder further explained that it is “3 hours where a child can be engaged in purposeful work – including choosing when to have a snack, when to go outside, when to sit and watch, when to garden or read a book. In other words they are not stopped because the school has a timetable” (*Board member Montessori Education UK Ltd*).

An analysis of the above description of the three hour work cycle reveals that children in the nursery need to have a learning environment where their creativity is encouraged by the flexibility of a school routine. The respondents revealed the lack of observance of the full three hour work cycle in their nursery “ it is something that we know and it's quite hard to do within a full day care nursery” (*Teacher 1, nursery B*) “ we don't specifically follow that because we are trying to work with the EYFS and the Montessori” (*Teacher 3, nursery B*)

“We do some work cycle. It's a work cycle in the morning and we try and do as much work cycle as we can in the afternoon” (*Teacher 2, nursery B*).

The foregone comments are seemed to validate the findings that there appeared to be a work cycle in the nursery setting although not to the full extent of 3 hours as noted by the researcher in her research diary during the observation exercise

There is no 3 hour work cycle in this nursery (B) as real work for the children starts at 9am and breaks off compulsorily after 1hr 30 minutes for tidying up/nappy time, which also takes another 30 minutes and then outside play for all from 11 – 11.30am (*Journal entry, 14/3/2011*).

It appeared from this finding that nursery B has a fixed school timetable which informs the operation of the nursery. Surprisingly, one respondent noted that there was the observance of the three hour work cycle in nursery A “we have a 3 hour work cycle from 8 – 11am...” (*Teacher 1, nursery A*). However, evidence from the observation exercise seemed to indicate that whilst there was a work cycle in this nursery, its implementation was not for 3 hours as noted by the researcher in her journal entry:

Teacher 1 had said in the interview that the three hour work cycle in this nursery starts at 8am – 11am and so I arrive at the nursery a few minutes past (8.15am) to ascertain if this is so and there are three children between 2.5 – 5 years in the nursery. Obviously, there is no work cycle actually going on from 8am – 11am because children are just beginning to trickle in and they are being settled...even at 8.35am, though there are 9 children in the nursery, directresses are not leading them to find work to do. What happens between 8.15am – 9am, is more a matter of settling children in by occupying them with story reading and giving them opportunity to have breakfast in the nursery (*Journal entry, 10/3/2011*).

In sum, given the context of both nurseries as full day nurseries, it seems plausible that children may have been afforded further opportunities to engage in work cycles in the afternoon period which was outside the time scope of this research.

#### **4.8.9 Lack of credentialed Montessori directresses in the nursery**

An accessed school document stated that:

“as an employer we seek to empower and assist our staff in achieving further qualifications as we require hard working and dedicated professionals who want to achieve their absolute best to enable them provide the best for your child” (*school prospectus, nursery A*).

In contrast to the above policy statement, it is interesting to note that there was only one certified Montessori teacher in nursery A with three other teachers on part time Montessori training and no certified teacher in nursery B as presented in 4.1. It would therefore appear that in order to give backing to the above policy statement, more encouragement needs to be given to teachers to pursue Montessori certification (see appendix 20 – staff qualifications). Whilst there is an obvious need for an increased number of qualified Montessori directresses in both nurseries, there is another important issue to point out. The present status of these nurseries reflects that although they appear to espouse Montessori principles, they are strongly driven by EYFS provision which may also have implications for staff training for the attainment of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) as well.

#### 4.5.10 Interim summary

It would appear that the learning environment in nursery A and B fell short of the Montessori philosophy in some respects as detailed in table 4.5.1 below. The table below is an assessment of each of the settings against a detailed checklist which encapsulates core components of the Montessori philosophy.

**Table 4.5 – the learning environment as prepared in the settings against the Montessori checklist on prepared environment**

	Nursery A	Nursery B
Qualified and credentialed Montessori teacher leading the classroom	**	*
Child sized furnishing in the nursery environment	**	**
mixed age grouping spanning a three year period	**	*
Flexible work period – usually a three hour uninterrupted period in the morning for children to engage with materials.	*	*
Full complement of Montessori learning materials	*	*
Freedom for children to move about, choose their learning material and work	*	*
Organisation of environment into different curriculum areas with cabinet unit of learning materials with the	*	*

core curriculum reflecting elements of true Montessori education		
Promotion of collaboration and cooperation among children	*	*
Learning program focused on the progress of the individual child in the different curriculum areas and his development because each child is seen as a unique individual.	*	*

**Moderately mentioned/observed (\*\*)**

**Somewhat mentioned/observed (\*)**

Accordingly, the evidence drawn from afore discussed sources revealed that the prepared environment in nursery A and B appeared **lacking in certain aspects** of the Montessori philosophy. This finding is significant because a key stakeholder explained that the preparation of a Montessori learning environment should be done “**carefully** as a servant prepares the home for his master” (*Board member, Montessori Education UK Ltd*). Contradictorily, it appeared that the application of care in the preparation of the learning environment in relation to the Montessori ethos in nursery A and B seemed to fall short in some aspects of its classroom set up.

The findings revealed that the mixed age grouping across a three year age span were not fully adhered to in nursery B and full complement of Montessori learning materials was lacking in both nurseries. The preparation of the learning environment was undergirded by a combination of Montessori and EYFS provision in both nurseries. There was also regulation of children’s work time and some observance of work cycle. Non Montessori practices such as role play construction areas, toys, puzzles and achievement board were incorporated into the learning environment. Use of exercise books for mark making and writing was employed in both nurseries There were also less child initiated activities with individual pace of learning down played while teacher led activities and group work were given prominence. Across both nurseries, only one qualified Montessori teacher was found leading the classrooms.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The teachers conceptualised best practice in Montessori education as being centred on the child. This was evident in both schools where the notion was repeatedly mentioned in interviews. However, their conceptualisation showed limited understanding based on the fact that all the directresses except one were uncertified in Montessori education and they also showed difficulty in articulating best practice because the EYFS provision was also incorporated into the nurseries' practice.
- How children learn in both nurseries was premised on a blend of Montessori principles and the EYFS provision as identified through the following main ways; teacher led/ child initiated activities, group and individual activities and the provision of independent access. There were strong similarities in the way children learn in both nurseries.
- The directress's role in the settings was chiefly enacted as fulfilling routine nursery duties without any streamlining to encapsulate Montessori directress role specifications. This applied equally in both schools with the exception of the certified directress who showed some understanding of a Montessori directress's role.
- The interaction between the teacher and children that occur in the settings were underpinned by both autonomy support and control and to some extent, respect for children.
- The preparation of the learning environment in both nurseries did not reflect Montessori philosophy in some aspects. This may be as a result of the challenge of combining the EYFS and Montessori principles as some areas were indicated as being in conflict to Montessori ethos like the greater focus on teacher led and group activities, inclusion of non-Montessori practices like role play, achievement board, toys, and construction area. Further to this, the mixed age grouping and open plan classroom was not adhered to in nursery B. Full range of Montessori materials were lacking, limited observance of work cycles and opportunities for individual pace of work and child initiated activities were not prioritised. Use of exercise books for mark making and writing was employed in both nursery schools.

The subsequent chapter will entail a further discussion of these findings in relation to the research questions and literature reviewed in order to situate this study in the continuum of reflective practice within the wider context of Montessori education.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research study explored Montessori education in two nursery schools in England. The findings are premised on data collected using unstructured observation, document interrogation semi structured interview with teachers, parents, a nursery owner and Montessori Education UK Ltd, board member. The research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the directress's notion of best practice in Montessori education?
2. How do children in this Montessori nursery learn?
3. What is the role of the directress (teacher) within the setting?
4. What is the nature of directress – child interactions that occur in the setting?
5. How prepared is the learning environment in relation to Montessori philosophy?

Accordingly, in this chapter, the findings on the above research questions as presented in the last chapter are herein discussed and relevant conclusions drawn. Furthermore, identified limitations of this study are highlighted. In the final section, key conclusions and recommendations are put forward.

### **5.1 CONCEPTUALISATION OF BEST PRACTICE**

The teachers' conceptualisation of best practice in Montessori Education revealed a limited depth of understanding when analysed against the Montessori checklist. Although as presented in 4.1.3, their individual answers in general terms pinpointed elements of the Montessori philosophy such as child based, independence, free access, freedom of choice, teaching responsibility and support for children's development, it seemed that the teachers appeared to find conceptualising best practice somewhat challenging. This scenario ties in with Whitescarver and Cossention's (2008) summation that conceptualising best practice in Montessori education will usually pose a challenge because of the multi –faceted opinion on the perception which favours traditional Montessori practice against the liberal and progressive stance which is pragmatic in its practice. Thus, it appeared that the teachers' difficulty in conceptualising best practice may fit into the bracket of the liberal and pragmatic mind set as seemingly dictated by certain contextual factors. These identified factors are:

### **5.1.1 Teachers Unqualified in Montessori education**

The fact that all the interviewed teachers from both nurseries except one were uncertified in Montessori education was revealing. Only the qualified teacher gave a conceptualisation of best practice that revealed some level of understanding of the Montessori philosophy of education. Unqualified teachers may not be able to convincingly articulate the underpinning ethos of Montessori education given their admission that they come from other professional early years backgrounds. Subsequently, they may not be able to adequately exemplify best practice as there appears to be a lack of in-depth understanding of this model of education. However, the finding as presented in **4.1.2** revealed the preparedness and effort of these teachers to achieve certified Montessori teacher status, through formal and informal avenues. Further to this, the teachers' commitment to professional development complements the stance of Nursery A, which underscored its support for staff attainment of appropriate professional qualification as indicated in **4.1.2**.

Additionally, the commitment to the attainment of appropriate qualification by the respondents in Nursery A and B strongly resonates with the EPPE study by Sylva et al (2003) that the availability of duly trained and qualified staff in a preschool setting is a key element which impacts on the quality of the setting as well as on children's performance. Equally highlighted by this study, is the need for staff to be knowledgeable in the requisite curriculum. From this observation, it may be summated that insufficient or lack of knowledge in a requisite curriculum area will translate to difficulty in conceptualising best practice in that curriculum area. This appeared to be the case with the respondents in this research. Nonetheless, it is revealing that the staff interviewed indicated their employment periods within these nurseries as being within the range of 6 months – 10 years (see appendix 20). Thus, while noting the teachers expressed commitment to professional enhancement, it may be possible to query their strong desire to achieve certified status, given the evidence of the number of years spent in the nurseries as teachers and the crucial premium placed on the preparation of a teacher in the Montessori method of education (Montessori 1965a; Standing 1957). Similarly, it is worth considering the availability of Montessori teacher training within the proximity of these nursery settings to encourage and facilitate accessibility to training centres. The importance of proximity and accessibility is vital because of the busy all year round operation of these nurseries.



### **5.1.2 The incorporation of the EYFS and Montessori principles**

The combination of Montessori principles with the EYFS in both nurseries appeared to play an important role in the teacher's conceptualisation of best practice because of the reality of operating daily under the demands of integrating Montessori principles into the EYFS framework with certain identified areas of conflict such as play, toys, role play, housekeeping, emphasis on combination of teacher led/child led activities and assessment/documentation (Murray, 2008; DFES, 2007). The challenge posed by this blending scenario appears to be consistent with Seldin's (2010) stance that Montessori nursery schools are showing evidence of variations in practice and fewer adherences to strict Montessori principles because of the pressure and influence of other external factors such as culture and technology and as presented in **4.1.2**, the EYFS.

Further to this, all the informants acknowledged the disparity between their expressed notion of best practice and what was actually the daily norm in the nursery classrooms and cited such issues as blending the EYFS and Montessori curriculum, lack of full complement and range of Montessori materials and shortage of qualified staff as some of the challenges hindering best practice in their respective nurseries. Additionally, it is noteworthy that whilst the prospectuses of both nursery schools portrayed a representation of best practice that aligned with the criteria set out by the Montessori Education UK Limited, the reality in both nursery schools corroborated the disparity in some aspects of the nurseries' practice as seen in a majority of the learning incidents presented in **4.2 – 4.5**. It may be concluded that these disparities raise questions on the benchmarks for the advertisement of these schools as Montessori education providers and thus in agreement with Manner (2007), I lament the common description of these schools as 'Montessori' without proper accreditation from governing bodies such as Montessori Education UK Limited which provide oversight functions to ensure standardization in practice and conformity to benchmarks for best practice. However, such disparity needs to be understood in the context in which both schools operate as the findings of this study seemed to suggest that whilst there may be disparities as presented in **4.1.3**, it appeared that these nurseries are constrained by the EYFS statutory provision to deliver an early years model which reflects the regulatory expectation of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). This is notwithstanding their advertised commitment of operating as Montessori nurseries. Given that this appears to be the case in both nurseries, it is apparent that several areas of the nursery practice will expose this reality and be subsequently

interpreted as not upholding best practice. Interestingly, the notion of these nurseries as a mixture of EYFS/Montessori does not appear to give sufficient validation to Montessori practice. It can rather be viewed as truncating certain Montessori core ethos like the overarching emphasis on auto education, the role of the teachers as a guide and facilitator, who work to ensure transference of activity to the child and the primary aim of the prepared environment being to make a child independent of the adult (Montessori 1965b; 1967; Standing 1957).

The above described scenario reflects the study by Daoust (2004) on Montessori preschool teachers in United States of America and their practice where four different sub groups of Montessori preschool teachers were identified. The traditional subgroup that adhered to Montessori practices adjudged as authentic, the contemporary subgroup that practiced elements of Montessori education adjudged as authentic but not to the extent of the traditional cluster and the blended and explorative subgroup that enacted elements of Montessori education in combination with other early years education models. This third subgroup of Montessori educators in USA who practiced the blended model by combining Montessori curriculum with other early years models appear to reflect the realistic practice of the Montessori educators in the two nursery schools involved in this study. Their expressed notion of best practice which embraced elements of the Montessori ethos differed significantly with their daily practice in the nursery, revealing a close resemblance to the practice of educators delivering a blended Montessori practice (Daoust 2004).

The foregone findings seem to suggest that one implication of conceptualising best practice in Montessori education when delivered in a blended context as identified in Nursery A and B is that it may not evidence all the distinctive components that mark out best practice in conventional Montessori practice (Dorer 2007; Schmidt & Schmidt 2009).

## **5.2 HOW DO CHILDREN IN THIS MONTESSORI NURSERY LEARN?**

The findings seem to strongly suggest that children's learning in both nurseries is underpinned by a combination of Montessori principles and the EYFS provision as presented in 4.2. The data provides evidence to the effect that children in both nurseries learn through teacher-led and child initiated activities, individual and group activities, one – to – one teacher presentations and through independent access. Further to this, more instances of teacher led activities was evidenced against those initiated by children while

there were more group activities than individual activities. The opportunities for working independently did not appear prioritised across both nurseries and the teacher presentations were chiefly employed to introduce the teacher led activities. Hence, as noted in both nursery schools, a significant number of incidents showed that children were not afforded opportunity and freedom of choice in the activities engaged in, neither were they allowed sufficient space and time to learn and develop as individual learners.

### **5.2.1 Learning through teacher led activities and child initiated activities.**

As presented in 4.2.1, the study revealed that teacher-led activity is pinpointed as the most prominent way that children in both nurseries learn. This finding brings to the fore the argument that teacher-initiated activities robs children of both opportunity and freedom of choice in learning (Daoust 2004; Douglas 2007). Further to this, other points of view recommend a need for both teacher-led and child initiated activities in preschool settings (Lillard 2005; Lindon in Featherstone & Featherstone 2008), but still prescribe that child initiated activities take precedence over teacher led activities. Conversely, the EYFS framework while also stipulating a mixture of teacher led and child initiated activities, takes a middle of the road position by leaving the decision of whether to employ more of teacher led activities against opportunities for child initiated activities to the teacher's prerogative (DFES 2012). One possible implication of leaving decision making with the teachers is that it may occasion a choice where teachers decide for more adult-led activities to ensure that planned learning targets for children are met to provide evidence and documentation of children's work because of statutory requirement (Montessori Society AMI UK n.d). This observation appears to be corroborated by the staff interviewed as well as the board member of Montessori Education UK Limited, who all acknowledged that there was an increased emphasis on paper work with regards to documentation of children's work and on planning to show evidence of integrating both EYFS and Montessori in order to meet government statutory guidelines for early years education providers in the United Kingdom. Accordingly, the data from this research revealed an overwhelming focus on children learning through teacher led activities. It is therefore plausible to suggest from the context of both nurseries that teachers appeared to exercise their prerogative by engaging children in pre planned learning activities. This position appears to contradict the Montessori ethos where the teacher is viewed primarily as a facilitator to assist the child make the most of his learning opportunities and not expected to dictate or impose any curriculum or agenda on the child as this may be seen as

obstructing the child's development and creating obstacles to his goal of self construction (Isaacs 2010; Montessori 1965b; Standing 1957). Thus, it may be argued that the notion of more teacher-led activities instead of facilitating children's development at any individual dual, may well serve to prepare children for mainstream education after the preschool stage.

Accordingly, great premium is placed on child initiated activities with caution for adult input (Montessori 1965b; Standing 1957; Tzuo 2007) because of the argument in Montessori education, that the sensitive periods experienced by a child should be relied upon to drive him to choose activities for which he is developmentally ready (Montessori 1967; Pickering 1992). Additionally, Bullock (1990) equally posited that child – initiated activities fostered in children a strong desire to explore, experiment and engage in meaningful interaction with others. Contrastingly, while a Vygotskian perspective would point to the need for adult scaffolding, Montessori argued that adult input may lead to a possible usurpation of a child's effort at personal growth and development and highlighted the necessity of the child's self-construction as a personal effort (Montessori 1965b).

### **5.2.2 Learning through group activities and individual activities**

It is important to note that learning through group activities was also identified as another principal way by which children in both nursery schools learn. Although staff interviewed explained that children learnt through individual activities as well as through group activities, the observation data as presented in 4.2.2 showed that more of the lessons were clearly undertaken as group activities and not as individual activities, especially in Nursery B. Significantly, learning majorly through group activities as observed in the two nursery schools involved in this research is in opposition to Montessori philosophy (Montessori 1964). This observation that learning through group activities does not align with Montessori philosophy is confirmed by Montessori's own specification that presentation of lessons should be delivered as an individual activity and marked by brevity (Lillard 2007; Montessori 1964). Further to this, the EYFS framework also underscored the need for individualised learning activities to be strongly sponsored in nurseries (DCSF 2008). Importantly, in spite of both the EYFS and Montessori emphasis on individualised activity, pragmatically speaking, it seemed unachievable in these nursery contexts. Thus, the involvement of children in these two nursery schools in whole group activities as against individual activities as espoused by Montessori appears to contradict the prescription of

how children should learn in a Montessori setting as noted in the unanimously expressed concern by Montessori educators in the Barber (2005) study about the difficulties experienced by children who having been used to individual presentations of lessons in Montessori classrooms, suddenly discover a new culture of whole group instruction and age dependent workload as they transfer to mainstream primary school. The parallel in this regard is that as an early year's approach, Montessori education is underpinned by individual interest exhibited by a child which subsequently provokes a learning response in the child as he freely chooses his own activities from what is available in the classroom (Tzuo 2007). Thus, group activities in a Montessori setting is to be viewed as an exception to the norm and not encouraged as it overrides the uniqueness of the child as an individual learner (Lillard 2007; Miezitis 1971, Montessori 1964).

### **5.2.3 Learning through the provision of independence**

It is important to note that learning through independent access in the nurseries was also not sufficiently afforded to children in comparison to other indicated ways that children learn. This may reflect one area of disparity in the practice of Montessori education in both nurseries because provision of independence is viewed as pivotal to how children learn as it is regarded as the underpinning catalyst for provoking and developing the spirit of exploration (Montessori 1965; Standing 1957). Hence, downplaying the need for independent access to materials may be indicative of a lack of proper understanding of the priority informing how children in a Montessori nursery should learn because as opined by Montessori (1965), curtailing children's independence results in a stifling of spontaneous activity.

Again, engagement in spontaneous activity is argued as leading to intrinsic motivation which is noted as the underpinning culture in Montessori classrooms (Rathunde 2003). This was however evidenced in very few instances across both nurseries as presented in **4.2.3** when children had opportunity to choose their activities and freedom to actively interact with learning materials. Data showed that in these instances, the children exhibited deep engrossment and concentration in that duration, often repeating the activities several times over until they appeared satisfied. The show of deep concentration and focus on tasks appeared to exemplify the Montessori notion of children experiencing Normalisation – a description of the process whereby children learn to focus and concentrate for a duration of time and at the end, derive satisfaction from the work they have done (Standing

1957; Zener 2006). The concept of Normalisation resonates with both the flow theory (Rathunde 2003) and the concept of Involvement (Laevers 1994). These theories are noted as having similar traits in children such as intense concentration, deep interest in chosen tasks, self – discipline, a lack of self consciousness, perseverance, fulfilment, etc (Laevers 1994; Rathunde 2003). Contrariwise, the trend in both nurseries appeared to provide limited opportunities for children to be involved in spontaneous activities and active interaction with the learning environment which would have possibly served to foster the aforementioned requisite conditions for Normalisation. It is relevant to emphasise that Normalisation is pinpointed as the single most important outcome of this model of education (Montessori 1967; Standing 1957). This identified situation may again be reflective of the consequences of over emphasis on teacher led activities which appears out of balance in both nurseries, even though prescribed by EYFS framework.

Furthermore, what was detailed in the school prospectus and newsletters (Nursery A), which are public documents and accessible to anyone seemed shy of what is the reality in the daily classroom situation in some respects as to how children learn. For example, opportunity for individual paced learning which will occasion self-correction as well as exploration and investigation did not appear to be given the correct emphasis in the classroom practice as evidenced from 4.2. Thus, while the prospectus included them as descriptions of how children learn in the nursery, it may be inferred that this inclusion served to paint a picture of the nursery as embracing and upholding the Montessori ethos in its entirety. Additionally, in Nursery B, the school prospectus provided a detailed description of how children learn which did not appear to be in consonance with the data in such specific areas as learning through discovery, individual pace of work and self-correction because these were not sufficiently prioritised as recommended in the Montessori philosophy (Montessori 1964, Standing 1957). Given this scenario, the gap between what is advertised, written and documented in the public domain as the principles of Montessori education which these nurseries extol may appear removed from its daily practice to some extent and thus reflect the conclusion that Montessori nurseries need to maintain truth in advertising (Blessington 2004; Caldwell 2010).

From the foregoing, the question does then arise as to whether, the nursery practice in both nursery schools is paying lip service to both the Montessori philosophy and the EFYS framework which are both underpinned by their identification of the uniqueness of the

individual child as being “a capable, competent and resilient learner” (DCSF 2008, p.8; Standing 1957). It does therefore appear by the identified ways noted above that children learn that there is a need to review the mode of instruction of children in these Montessori settings. This is with a view to ensure that proper emphasis is placed on giving children the opportunity and freedom to explore, discover and develop their own unique personality without stifling their creativity and independence because, as argued by Lindon (in Featherstone & Featherstone 2008), when children freely choose activities and resources whether within or outside the class environment by themselves and also select their own companions, then it can be concluded that such activities are child – initiated. This strongly contrasts with situations where activities available to children have overwhelming adult input as well as control without opportunity for children to assume ownership of such activities as observed in a substantial number of the incidents recorded in both nursery schools involved in this research.

### **5.3 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTRESS (TEACHER) IN THE SETTINGS?**

The summarised role of teachers in these Montessori nursery settings from the findings revealed that it was predicated on fulfilment of statutory nursery duties (lesson presentations, documentation of records, provision of care and support/assistance to children, observations, carrying out oversight functions, networking with stakeholders and preparing the environment). It is important to pinpoint that the principal role of teachers in the two nursery schools principally focused on lesson presentations and documentation of records. Although the issue of networking with other stakeholders and carrying out oversight functions was mentioned by some of the staff as part of their role, this was however not evidenced during the period of the research. Provision of support and assistance was also not sufficiently evidenced.

#### **5.3.1 Role Description – fulfilling routine nursery duties**

The teachers’ description of their role appeared to originate from their daily duties as enacted in the nurseries. This does however suggest that their understanding and enactment of their role as ‘Montessori teachers’ may not differ significantly from how a teacher’s role in any other early year’s model may be described and appeared in opposition to the Montessori ethos. The reason being that the teacher’s role in Montessori Education derives from being described as unobtrusive because of the recognition that the teacher works

subtly as the link between the child and the environment to ensure that the prerogative of learning remains that of the child and that he has ownership of his learning (Isaacs 2010; Montessori 1964; Standing 1957). One may thus query the description and branding of the teachers in these nurseries as ‘Montessori directresses’, given the considered delineation of their role and its alienation from the Montessori directress role expectation.

### **5.3.2 Lesson presentation and documentations of records**

The findings as presented in 4.3.2 indicated that the teachers appeared to describe their roles as teacher primarily in terms of lesson presentations. Although, this is a role description that resonates with Montessori philosophy, it is worth pointing out that the majority of lesson presentations appeared perfunctory without freedom or opportunity for children to input into these activities as teachers were often found to immediately fill in children’s records after lessons had been presented. This finding reveals a gap in practice because lesson presentations should also provide teachers with avenues to act as resource persons to fill in information gaps, and seize upon such opportunities to challenge and extend the children’s learning experience (Rambusch & Stoops 1992). The prescription for lesson presentations in Montessori education is that they should primarily be to the individual child and very occasionally to a small group of children and should be borne out of a child’s readiness, not to fit a pre planned agenda (Lillard 2007; Montessori 1964; Standing 1957). Thus, group lessons in Montessori education are not encouraged as they are in other early years approaches. For example, the Steiner approach views the teacher as a performer who leads children in group activities which involves both academic and artistic elements (Edwards 2002; Nicol 2007) and the finding that teachers in both nurseries mostly led children into group activities seemed to have some alignment with the role of teachers in the Steiner approach rather than the Montessori Method. Interestingly, the EYFS framework also appears to favour learning that is tailored to the individual child but stipulates that all learning and teaching should be premised on ongoing assessment that covers a wide range of contexts and requires all practitioners interacting with children in the nursery setting to give input into such assessments (DCSF 2008). We can thus conclude that this overarching recommendation may well account for the over emphasis on lesson presentations at individual and group levels in both nurseries as teachers appeared to use this means to ensure that their required input with regards to documentation is up to date on the children. This emphasis on giving lessons to ensure up to date documentation may be summated as being out of balance and could serve to misrepresent the goal of the



EYFS framework as teachers appear to focus on ensuring that the EYFS checklist is ticked off rather concentrating on the learning opportunities afforded children and the overall quality of the learning experiences (Damore 2004; Palaiologou 2010; Rathunde 2003).

### **5.3.3 Preparer of the environment**

The important role of the Montessori teacher as a preparer of an enabling environment to foster the child's development was not adequately highlighted in the data. The inability to specifically pinpoint the important role of being a custodian of the environment was not evident as the teachers cited other required roles such as networking with other stakeholders, carrying out oversight functions, provision of support/assistance to children, etc. However, these aforementioned role descriptions may not be deemed as priority in comparison to preparing the environment because as Lillard (1972) argued, the child's ability to maximise the opportunities in his environment is dependent on the teacher's guidance and careful preparation of the environment. Significantly, although the EYFS statutory framework also places premium on the preparation of the environment as a key to optimising the learning opportunities afforded children, there is however no clear delineation of the role of a teacher under the EYFS framework to include the preparation of the environment (DCSF 2008). Montessori however noted the foremost duty of the teacher as that of a custodian of the environment and this duty superseded all other duties that she may engage in because it had far reaching effect on everything else that happens in the setting (Rippa 1969). This is important as the Montessori teacher served as mediator between the child and the environment, linking him to challenging and stimulating activities which provoke a learning response in the child (Lillard 1972; Rambusch 1965). A teacher lacking clear understanding of this role would be equally oblivious of sensitive periods in the daily experience of the child and would therefore be unable to ensure that such developmentally crucial opportunities are seized upon and taken advantage of. In both nursery schools involved in this research, there appeared to be no significant reference to the role of the teacher in this regard.

### **5.3.4 Observation**

The role of the Montessori teacher as an observer was not given any significant mention by the respondents and neither did this fundamental role of a Montessori teacher appear evidenced across both nurseries. This is revealing given that a Montessori teacher's observation and understanding of the individual child's interests and developmental stage

form the premise for assessments and future planning with regard to the next level in the child's growth and total development in important areas such as concentration, intellect and social awareness as evidenced by Montessori's original practice (Lillard 2007; Montessori Education UK Ltd n.d; Montessori 1967). Similarly, the EYFS statutory framework equally noted that a crucial component for effective practice was observational assessment as it holds the key for planning the next learning steps for the teacher and works to ensure that the early year's provision delivered is developmentally appropriate and meets the learning aims for children in such settings (DCSF 2008). Whilst, the EYFS record keeping appears to serve as a form of observation, it is in sharp contrast with the Montessori form of observation which sheds light on the choices, interests and capabilities of children in the learning environment (Isaacs 2010). It is thus contradictory that although the EYFS and Montessori approach both espouse the benefits of observation, the enactment of this role was not evidenced in these nurseries.

Furthermore, as presented in **4.3.1**, the job descriptions noted in the internal school documents from both nursery schools did not give any specific mention of the role of the teacher to encapsulate a Montessori focus although there was a delineation of the role of the teacher to align with the Montessori philosophy in Nursery A school prospectus which is a public document. This disparity appears indicting because the job description, as the main document which gives an insight into the role of the teacher in the setting appears to read rather like a check list to be adhered to in order to function in the capacity of a teacher. There appeared to be little attempt in the job description to align the role of the teacher in this setting to the prescribed role contained in the Montessori framework. Importantly, the finding that there was no job description in Nursery B database begs the question of how a teacher in this nursery is to be guided in the discharge of her duties because the situation leaves room for possible ambiguity with regard to the role and responsibilities of a teacher especially with the integration of the EYFS and Montessori approach underpinning the early years delivery in the setting. This seeming administrative gap calls to mind the EYFS statutory requirement that obligates early years providers to ensure its employees are acquainted with their roles and responsibilities in the setting (DCSF 2008).

### **5.3.5 Further reflection on the teacher's role as an observer**

Observation of children in the Montessori nursery setting is viewed as the cornerstone upon which the Montessori philosophy is established (Isaacs 2010; Lawrence 1998; Montessori, 1964). Aptly therefore, Kohn (in Doran 2002) posited that the most credible evidence of the success of teachers can only be derived from observation of the behaviour of children. It is thus a matter of significance that observation was not mentioned amongst the staff interviewed except by the only trained Montessori teacher as a role expected of Montessori teachers. This is indicative perhaps of the gap between theory and practice which possibly may be a result of having uncertified staff as teachers in a Montessori setting who may not fully grasp the philosophy underpinning Montessori early years provision. It is therefore suggestive that observation as a key tool would be fully maximised and utilised if teachers involved in delivering an early years provision are duly trained and professionally qualified to understand the critical role of a teacher as an observer. The importance of thorough training was emphasised by Montessori as an important prerequisite preparation for a teacher in any Montessori settings (Lillard 2007; Montessori 1964; Standing 1957) and coincides with the EPPE finding (Sylva et al. 2003). Given the findings relating to this research question, the need for thorough delineation of the role of a teacher in both nursery settings appears imperative. It appears necessary to highlight that these role delineation should reflect both the EYFS position and the Montessori approach in order to ensure that the teachers are well informed on the role expectation across both provisions such that the enactment of their role as teachers will give evidence of reflective practice.

### **5.4 WHAT IS THE NATURE OF DIRECTRESS – CHILD INTERACTIONS?**

The findings revealed that the interactions between the directresses (teacher) and the children were underpinned to some extent with respect and autonomy support. However, autonomy control was also strongly evidenced.

#### **5.4.1 Respect for children and their work**

As presented in 4.4.1, the finding revealed that the unanimous view among the respondents that respect underpinned teachers' interactions with the children did not always appear as the reality in practice as evidenced in the settings. Recurrently, some teachers displayed disrespect for children by interrupting children who were working, talking loudly to other staff over the heads of children at work and on a few occasions, there was harsh treatment

of children and unnecessarily use of harsh words. These actions exhibited by the teachers seemed to run counter to Montessori ethos and appear to further expose the absence of proper training in Montessori principles which advocates the inner training and preparation of a Montessori directress (teacher) as priority in order to deal with issues of personal traits/ flaws like pride, anger which may become obstacles in the path of a child's development and make a teacher unable to serve the interest of the child (Montessori 1964; 1967; Standing 1957). She further argued that the interests of the child are best served when the teacher has a humble and patient disposition (Montessori 1950). This was not evidenced in some incidents observed at both nurseries. Similarly, Rambusch (1965) emphasised that since children would approach the use of learning materials differently with varying levels of interests, the teacher in a Montessori nursery needed to employ a patient, observant and respectful stance without becoming judgemental. Montessori (1967) opined that a teacher's misguided intervention or disruption of a child at work is certain to lead to creation of obstacles on the child's path to development and advised that a child at work ought not be disturbed by others, surmising that it was the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that all possible external or internal distractions are removed for a child at work. It therefore is a source of concern when a teacher appears to become the main obstacle to a child at work as presented in the findings from the two nursery schools involved in this research. Similarly, Normalization which epitomises the child who has reached the peak of concentration and is enraptured in his work is according to Montessori, the single most important achievement of the Montessori Method of education (Montessori 1967). It is therefore significant to observe that children identified as engrossed at work in Nursery school B for instance were not protected and encouraged but rather interrupted by the teacher herself and made to put away such work even though it was evident that the children in these instances were still desirous of working on their chosen activity and in one such case, the apparently upset child refused to follow the teacher's instruction to join the rest of the children for a compulsory timetabled circle time, opting rather to hide away at the corner of the classroom. Such reaction to the teacher as exhibited by this child can be viewed as a reaction to the interruption of her work and the creation of an obstacle to her learning. Hence to avoid this scenario, Montessori (1967) stipulated that teachers should work to ensure that children are occupied with challenging activities that engage their mind and body without interferences or disruptions.

#### **5.4.2 Autonomy support in directress – child interaction; reflections**

Montessori education as reflecting the ideals of the child centred approach (Tzuo 2007) advocates that children are afforded maximum opportunity in a carefully prepared environment to personally choose their own activities with the understanding that such freely chosen activities should occasion exploration and experimentation. Thus, the teacher acts in a supportive capacity as guide to ensure that the prepared environment effectively responds to developmental needs and interests of the children and ultimately results in self education because of their direct interaction with the learning materials (Bullock 1990; Isaacs 2010). Further to this, the consequent interaction recommended between the teacher (directress) and children should be viewed as active only in relation to proper preparation of the environment and ensuring children's accessibility to learning materials in the classrooms but passive in relation to conventional teaching of children (Isaacs 2010; Standing 1957). Corroboratively as presented in 4.4.2, the board member of Montessori Education UK Ltd reiterated the need for passivity on the part of the teacher in terms of conventional teaching in order for the child to assume ownership of his chosen activity and extend his learning through personal interaction, exploration and discovery of such materials. These views are suggestive that interactions between the teacher and children should reveal a situation whereby teachers actively work to give autonomy to children to pursue their desired learning activities (Lillard 2007). While the explanations from the respondents revealed that their interactions with children on some occasions were such that children were given opportunity to choose their activities and subsequently supported to go forward to extend their learning through direct interaction with learning materials, the findings revealed that in several more instances it was the teachers who made decisions on the activities children were involved in and for how long. This scenario within the contexts observed appears to strongly reflect the argument that autonomy control in interactions between adult – children was predicated on the erroneous idea that children are handicapped and in a misplaced bid to assist them, there is disregard for what children may view as interesting and needful (Formankova 2007). Thus, the learning environment in both nursery schools revealed that interactions between the teacher and the children demonstrated high teacher control without corresponding high children's freedom (Tzuo 2007). Additionally, the interaction occurring between teacher and children as observed in both nursery schools appeared at variance with Daoust (2004) who opined that the interaction between teacher and children should depict both autonomy support and respect for the child's work of auto education. Interestingly, Tzuo (2007) advocated a balance in

the nature of the interaction between the teacher and children whereby high teacher control will meet with high freedom of children to create an optimal learning environment where learning opportunities are maximised. This recommendation by Tzuo appears to rather align with the view that better outcomes in classroom settings are achieved when children possess a sense of control (Lillard 2007). Similarly, the EPPE project report also argued that interactions between teachers and children that was premised on 'sustained shared thinking' was likely to produce better results in nursery settings (Sylva et al. 2003).

Significantly, autonomy which is usually predicated on freedom of choice is of utmost importance in Montessori education as Koh & Frick (2010) concluded in their study that intrinsic motivation in children depends on autonomy support. In line with this observation by Koh & Frick, it is important to note that the undermining children's autonomy appeared very evident in the nursery schools involved in this research as there was mostly controlled based interactions between the teacher and children without the opportunity for either the procedural autonomy which is the children's ownership of the form of their work or cognitive autonomy which implies ownership of learning (Koh & Frick 2010).

Furthermore, Rambusch & Stoop (1992) in highlighting pointers which mark out authentic Montessori practice, stipulated that one of the characteristics of a Montessori learning activity is that there is intrinsic motivation. Since the Montessori Method of education thrives on intrinsic motivation as an important hall mark of children (Montessori 1967), it is noteworthy that the prevalent interaction between teachers and children in Nursery A and B appeared essentially predicated on autonomy control. These were enacted through teacher directed learning/activities which is in direct opposition to the ideals of a child centred approach and therefore may not engender intrinsic motivation in the children (Tzuo 2007). This finding appears aberrative because Koh & Frick (2010) concludes that Montessori Method of Education has as its emphasis the ability of children to gain mastery of the learning environment and subsequently attain self education because of the provision of autonomy by teachers in the setting.

In summary therefore, the findings from this research question revealed that the issue of giving autonomy to the child received more mention by all parties and may mirror the expectation that stakeholders desire to see exhibited in the daily practice of these Montessori nurseries. Aptly, this expectation is not misplaced as the tenets of the Montessori philosophy thrive on ensuring that a child's development is facilitated through

the provision of autonomy in the learning environment to allow the child reach his full potential (Lillard 2007; Standing 1957). However, a possible challenge to the achievement of this expectation is the EYFS recommendation that autonomy control be enforced by way of increased teacher led activities in classroom setting as children get older (DFE 2012). This recommendation is diametrically opposed to Montessori philosophy which aims to give endorsement to a child's autonomy in the learning environment (Isaacs 2010; Lillard 2007; Montessori 1965b; Standing 1957). One recommendation in attempting to resolve this seeming conflict is that the teacher in the setting needs to understand that she remains well positioned to exercise sensitive judgment on what would be appropriate to aid the individual child's development against an overarching stipulation because as cautioned by Lillard (2007, p.270) "adult sensitivity to when a greater or lesser degree of scaffolding is needed is very important. All children benefit from some level of demandingness and control, but as children become more competent, adults' continued directiveness becomes negative."

## **5.5 HOW PREPARED IS THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN RELATION TO MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY?**

### **5.5.1 The EYFS, Montessori ethos and the learning environment**

It appears from the finding that combining the EYFS and Montessori curriculum seemed to pose a challenge in the preparation of the learning environment in the nurseries to match up to the Montessori checklists due to certain conflicting areas/practices. This suggests the likelihood of a learning environment that gives evidence of an integration of EYFS and Montessori principles as acknowledged by a stakeholder in **4.5.1** and discussed below.

### **5.5.2 Classroom set up**

One prominent area that was clearly incompatible with the Montessori ethos especially in Nursery B was the classroom set up. Whilst, Nursery A was characterised as having open plan classroom, mixed age grouping and child sized furnishing, it however appeared cramped and constrained by space limitation like Nursery B as presented in **4.5.1 and 4.5.2**. Conversely, Nursery B had a classroom layout that was not only demarcated but further compounded by the separation of children into age streams. This is a fundamental flaw in the preparation of this nursery because the prescription for a Montessori classroom environment is that it is always marked out by being open planned, free flowing with a three year mixed aged grouping with child sized furnishing. This is because the Montessori

classroom is viewed as a place for the child to construct his own world through his experiences in the environment, working with multi aged peers who extend his learning opportunities through imitation and the development of community life (Barnes & Snortum 1973; Lillard 2007; Montessori 1950; Mieztis 1971, Standing 1957). In opposition to the Montessori approach, the EYFS framework generally recommends that the learning environment be carefully prepared in such a way that it provides for the maximisation of children's learning opportunities without any specific stipulation on a fixed three age grouping, classroom layout or type of furnishing (DCSF 2008). It is thus possible to speculate that this may be a factor in downplaying strict conformity to the Montessori ethos in Nursery B with regard to the classroom set up. This line of thought appears supported by the nursery owner's acknowledgement in 4.5.6 that the EYFS is used for its classroom layout with Montessori integrated into it.

### **5.5.3 Limited range of Montessori materials and inclusion of non Montessori materials**

The findings in this research revealed that both nurseries did not possess a full range of Montessori materials with Nursery B, particularly having a significantly limited range as presented in 4.5.2. This finding contrasts with the ethos of this educational model because Montessori learning materials are noted as the result of earlier pedagogical experiment with children and have been reported as designed to need specific developmental needs at different stages of childhood within the Montessori preschool classroom with the learning (didactic) materials being inherently self correcting (Montessori 1964; Standing 1957). Thus, they are regarded as highly necessary for achieving a well prepared learning environment in Montessori education (Isaacs 2010). Whilst the respondents as presented in 4.5.2 had acknowledged the limitation of certain parts of the Montessori curriculum in the nursery setting and the need for renewal, the findings however seemed to further reveal that the focus of Nursery B in its acquisition of new nursery furniture and toys appeared more geared towards the EYFS emphasis than Montessori education, given the purchase of toys, construction sets, role play materials, which are not recommended in Montessori philosophy (Murray 2008).

Further to this, findings from both nurseries also revealed the inclusion of other non Montessori learning materials in the learning environment such as Lego, building blocks, puzzles, achievement board, various toys and other teacher made materials/activities, all of



which tied in with the list of modified materials as detailed by Lillard (2008). The inclusion of these different materials appeared to exemplify the observation that the evolution in Montessori education has given rise to modifications in practice whereby teachers were taking on the prerogative of adding new materials/activities to the classroom which are different from the traditional ideas (Lillard 2008). Additionally, other view-points cautioned against the treatment of the traditional Montessori didactic materials as sacred but opined that modifications and introduction of other innovations be based on classroom observation and children's developmental needs because this was the premise upon which the Montessori Method was developed (Hunt in Montessori 1964). In alignment with this caution, the respondents in this research noted that some of the above included materials are not in consonance with Montessori ethos. This acknowledgement appears to resonate with the argument that several of the non-Montessori materials serve to obscure the uniqueness of a Montessori classroom different since all the above mentioned materials are commonalities in other preschool settings (Lillard 2008).

#### **5.5.4 Certified Montessori teachers**

The lack of Montessori trained teachers who are knowledgeable about the Montessori philosophy is another deficit in the preparation of both nurseries as presented in **4.8.9**. As also cited in **5.1**, across both nurseries there was only one Montessori trained staff and this may well have impact on the delivery of Montessori provision in both nurseries as equally noted in the EPPE project report which brought to the fore, the need for credentialed staff in any preschool setting to ensure delivery of quality early years' provision (Sylva et al. 2003). The EPPE report thus underscores the necessity of requisite training for staff in the curriculum offered by any early years settings. While this has strong implication for teacher training in the Montessori nursery schools in this study, it appears to have a far wider implication vis –a – vis the EYFS framework and the need for teachers involved in the implementation of the EYFS in preschool settings to attain the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). This recommendation appears to take into account the fact that the findings from both nurseries also revealed that there was no teacher certified in early years professional status in both nurseries. This may not only check lapses in the delivery of the EYFS but may ensure that practitioners are confident in both the interpretation of the framework and its implementation in other early years contexts such as the Montessori education.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the notion of a Montessori trained directresses in these nursery settings is not prioritised and does not also appear very compatible with the EYFS provision because one core ethos of the Montessori method of education is the qualified directress. Where this is lacking as in these settings, it does cause a query in the validity of practice.

#### **5.5.5 Three hour work cycle**

The three work cycle in Montessori nurseries gives children uninterrupted work time to focus on their activities and grow in concentration which is viewed as a significant state in the learning experiences of young children (Montessori 1950; Shilt 2009). Interestingly, the EYFS framework requires the practitioner to take cognisance of the fact that children differ in ability to concentrate while still advocating for sustained period of active learning without prescribing specific work periods (DSCF 2008). The findings in the nurseries revealed that whilst both nurseries engaged in some period of work cycle, it was however not to the extent of the three hour cycle and also appeared not to follow the EYFS recommendation which seemed predicated on children working at individual learning paces. The scenario as revealed by the findings in both nurseries was that children were involved mostly in group activity or one – on –one lesson presentations within a form of nursery timetable structure. Thus, the operation in these nurseries which did not appear to make sufficient allowance for flexible work periods where children will have freedom to move around and choose their activities with opportunity to concentrate for sustained periods of time seemed to contradict the underpinning of child – centred activities (Lindon in Featherstone & Featherstone 2008). In sum, the nurseries did not adhere to a 3 hour work cycle neither were the children allowed flexibility of time in the nursery to meaningfully engage with activities that would derive from being intrinsically motivated and hence, develop the ability to concentrate.

#### **5.5.6 Greater focus on teacher led activities**

The findings as presented in 4.5.4 showed that there was over emphasis on activities initiated by teachers but the recommendation in Montessori education is that less priority be given to teaching because its ethos is in favour of child – initiated activity which fosters auto-education (Gueterbock 2012; Montessori 1964).

## **5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The inherent limitation of this research as a case study precludes its findings from being representative of other Montessori settings (Cohen et al. 2000). However, it may possibly offer some insight on Montessori practice in integrated contexts and provide a starting point for more Montessori nursery based studies which presently appear almost non-existent. Further to this, the research has touched on the EYFS provision, which has raised some challenges at conceptual level rather than being a school issue and it is highly probable that there is a fundamental challenge with coping with this governmental statute across similar nursery settings because it touches on certain conceptual issues on the Montessori ethos. Again, the original design to make this research a multicase study fell through as the researcher was hard pressed to find schools willing to participate in a study that would focus on their practice. The availability of two willing schools eventually determined the scope of the study. Additionally, the inability to obtain interviews from two teachers from Nursery A, in spite of several promises from the school head did not allow for the balance of three teachers per school as originally planned. This was augmented by the inclusion of other stakeholders such as the nursery owner; three other parents and a Montessori UK Ltd board member.

## **5.8 KEY CONCLUSIONS**

- The realistic conceptualisation of best practice in a blended context as operated in both nurseries may not provide evidence of all the bench marks in Montessori education.
- The children's learning which was surmised as predicated on the EYFS and Montessori principles did not appear to sufficiently prioritise individualised learning occasioned by greater balance of child – initiated activities as recommended in Montessori philosophy. The conclusion thus reached is that prioritising child-led learning is not possible within the context of EYFS, although the EYFS appears supportive of child-led learning.
- The importance of professional training in the EYFS framework and Montessori education for staff in both nurseries cannot be overemphasised. For instance, although the teachers pinpointed the EYFS as impacting how children learn, it is noteworthy that whilst there are certain points of conflict between the EYFS and Montessori, there are also several more aspects where both coincide and undergoing training to attain Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and

Montessori certification would have provided a thorough understanding of how to ensure that the blend of EYFS and Montessori works to the advantage of children in the settings. For instance, the EYFS prescribed individualised pace of learning, albeit without corresponding low priority on teachers – initiated activity which appears to negate the former. This ambiguity shows the need for staff training which will result in proper understanding and interpretation to effectively implement the blended curriculum.

- The role of teachers did not align with the Montessori teacher role description given the fact that the role of observation, preparation of the environment and linkage of children with the environment which serves as significant role expectations for a Montessori teacher did not appear evidenced. This may again be a reflection of their lack of understanding of their role expectations because of the fact that internal documents such as the job descriptions did not appear to clearly delineate a teacher’s role in the setting to encapsulate the Montessori ethos and more significantly, as seen in Nursery B, the lack of a job description document in the entire nursery database serves to reinforce this point.
- The nature of interaction between the teacher and children in the settings appeared to evidence more autonomy control which seemed to align with the nurseries’ overwhelming focus on teacher – led activities and reflected the teacher’s prerogative of deciding what children learn, how they learn and for how long. It appeared that both nurseries needed to provide more autonomy support for children and their work against autonomy control.
- The prepared environment in Nursery A and B may not be said to fully reflect the Montessori philosophy nursery because operationally the nursery settings can not be said to be underpinned by Montessori principles alone. In line with this, the nurseries evidenced space constraints, shortfall in Montessori learning materials and insufficient provision of independence and freedom for children. All of which resonate with the Montessori ethos. Thus, while Nursery B appeared to clearly reflect a considerable integration of EYFS with Montessori principles, Nursery A showed more alignment to the Montessori ethos but with some EYFS integration.

## **Summary conclusion**

The Montessori practice in Nursery A and B appears fundamentally compromised by the EYFS provision and therefore these nurseries are not able to function realistically as Montessori underpinned in the prevalent context.

## **5.9 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.9.1 Further research**

From the foregone discussions, one area for future research may include:

- The attainment of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) by Montessori trained staff and its potential effect on integrating EYFS and Montessori in nursery settings.
- Montessori practitioners' perception of the role of a directress and the relevance of Montessori certification for directresses.
- Montessori Education in UK nurseries: A longitudinal study.

### **5.9.2 Stakeholders policy level (Montessori Education (UK) Ltd /Montessori Schools Association)**

It is noteworthy that the EYFS has been pinpointed in several aspects as impinging upon the complete adherence to the Montessori philosophy in both nurseries. It may thus be that since the EYFS has become a statutory requirement for all preschools providers in England, the Montessori governing organisations in the UK may need to identify and reconcile the areas of seeming mismatch within the EYFS/ Montessori approach. This may involve some modifications in practice in order to align with the EYFS framework and would necessitate the dissemination of these modifications on a national level to Montessori establishments to ensure their reflection in the daily practice in individual nurseries and thereby raise awareness in the teachers attempt to implement Montessori principles within learning environments where integration of the statutory framework has now been made mandatory.

Further to this, where modifications in practice may undermine the integrity of the Montessori ethos, it may be necessary at the national level for Montessori governing bodies to consider the pursuance of the provision for exemption in areas of incompatibility as prescribed in the EYFS document:

“existing provisions for exemptions have been carried forward and re –enacted in section 46 of the Childcare Act 2006 which enables the secretary of state to confer exemptions from the learning and development requirement in certain prescribed circumstances” (DCSF 2008,P.41).

Importantly for this research, there appears to be some incompatibility with the Montessori philosophy in the delivery of the EYFS in these Montessori nursery contexts in such aspects as the prioritisation of child-initiated learning, the role of the directress and the preparation of the learning environments. The above suggested recommendations may ensure the continued validation of Montessori philosophy as the underpinning ethos in the practice of Montessori Education for these nurseries contexts.

### **5.9.3 Department for Education (DFE) – EYP training requirement**

The findings from this research reveal a gap in staff professional training across both nurseries in Montessori Education and as Early Years Professionals (EYP). As a statutory requirement in England, it may better serve the aim of the framework for OFSTED to encourage training for the attainment of EYP status for practitioners involved in delivering the framework across all early years providers. Additionally, a vigorous encouragement of training would serve as an important and continued follow up to the UK Government’s declared support for a professionalised early years sector through its commitment to practitioners attaining the EYPS (DfE 2012). In line with this, one key benefit of EYP training is highlighted in the report on a review of the Graduate Leader Fund. The report revealed that there was overall improvement in settings where there has been the attainment of a graduate leader with the EYPS as against settings that did not have this placement (Marthers, Ranns, Arjette, Moody, Sylva, Graham & Siraj-Blatchford 2011). Thus, it can be concluded that the attainment of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) by practitioners may ensure correct understanding and implementation of the EYFS statutory framework in the different early years nurseries such as these Montessori settings because as stated by a EYP training provider:

“EYPS is the key to raising the quality of provision in early years settings. Those with EYPS will lead practice across the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and become role models for other practitioners in safeguarding and supporting children’s learning and development (Edge Hill University 2012).

## **5.10 SUMMARY**

Since 2008, the EYFS has been made a statutory guideline to ensure standardization across all early years providers in the provision of high quality nursery experience for children from birth to 5 years (DCSF 2008). Thus, this mandate changed the educational landscape in England with all early years settings working to conform to the framework and the attendant challenge of integrating the statute into preschool settings as in the Montessori nurseries in this study. Whilst it can not be concluded that the EYFS framework is entirely responsible for some inconsistencies in the Montessori education practiced in Nursery A and B, it appears that the EYFS has encroached on distinct Montessori principles as both nurseries sought to out work the blending of Montessori principles and EYFS. Beyond this, it is possible to conclude that both nurseries appeared to have evidenced some measure of practice that reflected the Montessori philosophy, though not to a level that appeared to evidence all the Montessori benchmarks. Conclusively therefore, the overall nursery practice in Nursery A appeared to exhibit more level of conformity to the Montessori philosophy than Nursery B. Such specific areas in Nursery A as the prepared environment and conceptualisation of best practice seemed to match up with the Montessori checklist in several regards. However, both nurseries appeared to evidence some level of disparity with the Montessori checklist in the aspects of how children learn, the nature of interaction between teacher and children in the settings as well as the role of teachers. The challenge of delivering a Montessori approach that completely aligns with the Montessori checklist in the changing face of government policies, culture and technology continues to necessitate crucial debate and further research (Seldin, 2010).

## EPILOGUE

The three year period of conducting and completing the research project reported in this thesis can be summarised as a journey on which I learnt through experiences on several different levels which may not be possible to capture in this brief epilogue. While this period was ultimately transforming, it however proved challenging in several respects. This was particularly so at the data collection and data analysis stages because the nature and focus of the research as documented in this thesis required that I operate within the role of a researcher with the challenge of having previously been trained as a Montessori practitioner. This apparently caused some tensions and conflicts which I was aware of, but had to work through especially with regard to the interpretation of my data. In retrospect, it is worth highlighting below a few key moments of the journey of my working through the tensions or conflict occasioned by my role as a researcher of Montessori Education and my knowledge as a trained Montessori practitioner.

The starting point for obtaining access had to do with looking up nursery schools in the Montessori web listing and subsequently making telephone calls to explain the research project and ask for participation. The final outcome was the acceptance of two nurseries to participate in the project. The actual process of obtaining access to the nurseries was not easy because it was time consuming (entailing visits to both sites over a period of time) and also financially demanding for a research student. The visits to the nurseries were for familiarisation with the setting, the staff and children. Consequent upon these visits, formal written letters of consent were obtained from the nurseries with the nurseries specifically indicating that they would be responsible for informing the parents and children about my time in the nursery. This was a huge relief for me as it meant that I would have little or no explanations to give to the parents about my presence in the nurseries, which might have been difficult. Additionally, because I had made preliminary visits during which I was shown around the nurseries and introduced, I was not totally strange to the staff and children. The nurseries' generous cooperation made my access to the research subjects easier.

It is important to state that my training as a Montessori teacher possibly helped the acceptance that I received at the nurseries as the staff appeared pleased with the knowledge that I was a 'Montessorian' and thus an 'insider'. Thus, my relationships with the staff in the settings were very cordial with one staff seeking to know my opinion on a particular Montessori subject and asking for help with an essay on her part time Montessori course.



However, in hindsight, I believe that the fact that I had training in Montessori may possibly have increased their expectations and in turn caused probable changes in their ways of behaving in both settings and as one staff member quipped “you can probably show us how to do things better”. This, I guess, was the beginning of working on my identity as a researcher and seeking to maintain a detached role as an observer.

In seeking to achieve to be objective in my role, I had to reflect on how my background may affect the project. This meant that even though there was a Montessori framework /checklist as generated from my literature review which framed the research, I had to engage in “self – critical sympathetic introspection and the self – conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher” (England 1994,p.82). The implication of this action of seeking to realistically confront the issue of bias/tensions to ensure that every effort is brought to bear in making this research project as value free as may be possible entailed that certain steps such as the following need to be taken:

- Entering the settings in a state of reflexivity based on “self – questioning and self – understanding ...an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it” (Patton 2002 p.64).
- Giving attention to the usage of rich description to capture the reality of the contextual factors/issues that underpin the daily practice in both nurseries.
- Interpreting the data with the understanding of these identified contextual issues.
- Editing my research journal entries at a later stage to remove such narrations that evidence strong emotive language which appears judgemental, too critical or unfair. Allowing such use of emotive language may reinforce the suggestion of bias and tensions that may be perceived as clouding the interpretation of data.
- Re –applying Montessori framework/checklist as a final step in the data analysis to remain more objective. Further to this, I also modified or even deleted those interpretations made in ‘haste’ on the settings as shown in some entries of my personal journal.

Clearly, the level of maturity attained during the research process of data collection and analysis had to do with my supervisors ’continued advice that social research should be looked at through the realistic lens. It is important to reiterate that the entire process of undergoing this doctorate programme was truly a time of growth for me intellectually and

psychologically because as a result of this journey, I can surmise that the saying “man know thyself” became the reality of my transformation in this period.

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**APPENDICES  
APPENDIX 1**

TORKA ABU  
19 CER Y MYNYDD  
BANGOR  
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77002601

A copy of this Disclosure has been sent to:  
DAVID SULLIVAN  
LECTURER IN EDUCATION  
BANGOR UNIVERSITY  
BANGOR UNIVERSITY  
DEAN STREET  
BANGOR  
GWYNEDD  
LL57 1UT

**Applicant copy**

**Enhanced Disclosure**  
Page 1 of 2

**disclosure**

**Disclosure Number** 001271788431  
**Date of Issue:** 08 MARCH 2010

**Applicant Personal Details**

Surname: ABU  
Forename(s): TORKA JOYCE  
Other Names: NNIKINA, TORKA JOYCE  
Date of Birth: 12 APRIL 1968  
Place of Birth: KONO NIGERIA  
Gender: FEMALE

**Employment Details**

Position applied for:  
EDUCATION RESEARCHER  
Name of Employer:  
UNIVERSITY OF WALES BANGOR

**Countersignatory Details**

Registered Person/Body:  
BANGOR UNIVERSITY  
Countersignatory:  
DAVID SULLIVAN

**Police Records of Convictions, Cautions, Reprimands and Warnings**  
NONE RECORDED


**Information from the list held under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002**  
NONE RECORDED

**ISA Children's Barred List information**  
NONE RECORDED

**ISA Vulnerable Adults' Barred List information**  
NOT REQUESTED

## APPENDIX 2

**Coleg Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes**  
Prifysgol Bangor  
Stryd y Deon  
Bangor  
Gwynedd LL57 1UT  
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10 Feb. 11

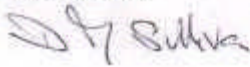
Torka Abu  
19 Ger y Mynydd  
Bangor  
Gwynedd  
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Dear Torka,

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE.

Thank you for submitting additional amendments material to support your application on '*An Examination of Montessori Education, A Case study of two Montessori Nursery in UK*' to the Ethics Task Group.

I am pleased to inform you that your application now has ethical approval and you may continue with your studies.

Yours Sincerely,  


Dr. David Sullivan  
Chair of the Ethics Committee.

## APPENDIX 3

COLEG ADDYSG A DYSGU GYDOL OES  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING



Your ref:  
Our ref: SPO/postgrad/Abu.TJ.11-09

18/11/2009

To whom it may concern

I confirm that **Torka Joyce Abu** is a student on the Education Doctorate Programme in the College of Education and Lifelong Learning at Bangor University. As a student on this programme, Ms Abu will require access to relevant research information from your organisation. Please could you give all necessary assistance to Ms Abu to enable her to carry out the research work required.

For your information, the Director of the Course is Dr Anwei Feng who can be contacted by e-mail ([anwei.feng@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:anwei.feng@bangor.ac.uk)) or by telephone +44 (0) 1248 382941.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information about the course or the University. I can be contacted by e-mail ([s.p.owen@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:s.p.owen@bangor.ac.uk)) or by telephone +44 (0) 1248 383013.

Yours faithfully,

**SIAN PERIS OWEN**  
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## APPENDIX 4

### March 2011

#### Big Room News

This month is going to be a busy and exciting month for the children and their Mummy's! We will be preparing for the very special Mothers Day Tea Parties, to make sure you all have the perfect party! We are sure you will enjoy your special day, full of fabulous surprises from your children.

We are also going to start "the people who help us project", we will be talking a lot about all the things that Mummy's do to help us. To give the children a sense of understanding about their community we will be learning about the people who help us in our environment, from the emergency services to the milkman.

We will learn new songs, do art and craft activities, and hopefully have some visitors to the nursery telling us all about their important and interesting jobs.

With love Charlotte, Tasha, Sam, Victoria, Emma S, Sally and Angela xx

#### Little Room News

We will also be getting ready for Mothers Day tea party and making and preparing all of the surprises for all of our Mummy's. We will also be starting out Spring topic as the seasons change and hopefully the weather warms up a bit! We will be making tulip pictures, and celebrating St Patricks day by making clover leaves and decorating them. We might see if we can find any 4 leaf clovers in the garden and field. We will continue with our Grace and Courtesies and welcoming new friends.

With Love Emma H and Lindsey xx

#### Students



We have a student coming into nursery for the week commencing 7<sup>th</sup> March. She will be observing the children and the Montessori environment and seeing the principles put into practice. Her name is Toka Joyce Abu and she will be with us for 1 week.

#### Important Dates for this term

- Parents Evenings week commencing 7<sup>th</sup> March
- Mothers Day Tea Party – afternoons of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April
- Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> April term ends, nursery closed on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup>, Monday 25<sup>th</sup> and Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April for bank holidays.

## APPENDIX 5

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Montessori Education has received world wide acclaim as an educational approach that prepares children for life and has been successful with children of all backgrounds. However the purpose of this study is to explore the Montessori Method of education using a case study of two Montessori nursery schools in United Kingdom.
- My name is Torka Joyce Abu, an Ed.D student at Bangor University, Wales.  
Email address; [edpb76@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:edpb76@bangor.ac.uk)  
Phone numbers; 07741580564, 01492 338349
- Participants in this study are the staff and children who attend the morning sessions in Montessori Nursery A and B, approximately 60 in number as well as 4 staff members. Also included in the study are 3 parents, a Montessori nursery owner and 1 board member Montessori Education UK Ltd.
- Confidentially and anonymity of information and details of all participants would be guaranteed in this study.
- The duration of this investigation is two weeks (Monday- Friday; 9am- 12noon) at Montessori Nursery A and B.
- Children would be observed daily in their normal classroom setting and adult staff members would be interviewed.
- All questions and further information on this research study should be directed to Mr John Humphreys and the secretary of the Ethics committee.
- Please be assured that all data would be stored securely and used only for the purpose of this dissertation.
- Participants may withdraw from this research at any time without fear of any bias in the treatment.
- Welfare of all participants would be monitored by the researcher.
- Information about results of investigation would be available to all participants on request.
- Ethical approval has been sought for this study.

Torka Joyce Abu

**APPENDIX 6**

**CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF PROJECT: MONTESSORI EDUCATION IN NURSERIES IN ENGLAND: TWO CASE STUDIES**

Please cross out as necessary

Have you had opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES/NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? YES/NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES/NO

Have you read the participant Information sheet? YES/NO

Who have you spoken to? Dr/Mr/Mrs/Prof.....

Do you understand that the data obtained from this study will be published in the researcher's thesis? YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

- At anytime and
- Without having to give a reason for withdrawing and
- Without affecting your position in the university?

YES/NO

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/NO

**Signed**..... **Date**.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS).....

**Signature of witness**..... **Date**.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)



## APPENDIX 7

11<sup>th</sup> August 2010

Dear Parents,

My name is Torka Joyce Abu, a Doctorate student at Bangor University, Wales. I am doing a research study on Montessori Education. I kindly wish to seek your assent as parents/ caregivers as I would be doing classroom observations of the children in the nursery as part of my research.

Please, be assured that confidentiality, anonymity and integrity would be maintained with regard to all children involved in this exercise and they are at liberty to withdraw at any time. Please, kindly signify your assent by signing below.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Torka Joyce Abu (Mrs)

## APPENDIX 8

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- 1 Are you a trained Montessori teacher?
- 2 Where did you train and what qualifications do you have?
- 3 When were you employed as a staff in this nursery?
- 4 Describe your role as a teacher in this nursery?
- 5 Describe how children learn in this nursery?
- 6 Do you have a situation where the children choose their own activity or it's the teachers that choose their activities for them?
- 7 Would you say the children's learning is initiated by the children or by the teacher?
- 8 How would you describe the teacher – child interaction in this nursery?
- 9 What is your notion of best practice in Montessori Method of education?
- 10 How would you describe the practice in this nursery vis – a – vis Montessori's notion of best practice?
- 11 Describe how a Montessori nursery environment should be prepared according to Montessori Method of education?
- 12 Do you think the prepared environment in this nursery is set up in line with the Montessori ethos on prepared environment?

If yes, explain how.

If no, explain why not.

- 13 Do you use workbooks in this nursery/
- 14 Apart from the Montessori materials, do you have other non-Montessori materials on the shelf?
- 15 If yes, what are these additional materials?
- 16 Do you aim to get more trained Montessori teachers in this nursery?
- 17 Can I ask about the 3 hour work cycle in this nursery?
- 18 To what extent has your practice been influenced by the EYFS?
- 19 Does EYFS make you more record conscious than you ordinarily would have been as a Montessori nursery?

## APPENDIX 9

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. How many children do you have in ~~Stopping Stone Montessori~~ Nursery?
2. Any specific reasons for enrolling your child/ward in this nursery?
3. How did you come about an awareness of Montessori education?
4. What is your opinion of best practice in Montessori education?
5. What is your understanding of how children learn in this Montessori nursery?
6. Describe the role of a teacher in this nursery as you understand it.
7. Describe the interaction between children and teachers in this nursery?
8. Describe how the learning/prepared environment in a Montessori nursery should be set up from your own understanding.
9. Do you think the learning/prepared environment in this nursery is set up in line with the Montessori philosophy? Yes / No
10. Please expansiate further on your given answer to question 9.

## APPENDIX 10

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BOARD MEMBER

- 1 Are you a trained Montessori teacher?
- 2 Where did you train and what qualifications do you have?
- 3 How long have you been a member of the Montessori Education UK council member?
- 4 What is the role of Montessori Education UK Ltd?
- 5 Describe how children learn in Montessori Method of education?
- 6 Who initiates children's learning in Montessori Method of education?
- 7 How would you describe the teacher –child interaction in Montessori Method of education?
- 8 Describe the role of a Montessori teacher in the prepared environment?
- 9 What is your notion of best practice in Montessori Method of education?
- 10 How would you describe the practice in Montessori nurseries in UK vis –a – vis Montessori's notion of best practice?
- 11 Describe how a Montessori nursery environment should be prepared according to Montessori Method of education?
- 12 Do you think the prepared environment in Montessori nurseries in UK is set up in line with Montessori's ethos on prepared environment?  
If yes, explain how  
If no, explain why not
- 13 Do you recommend the use of workbooks in the Montessori Method of education?
- 14 Apart from the Montessori materials, do you recommend other non-Montessori materials on the shelf?
- 15 If yes, what are these additional materials?
- 16 What is the 3 hour work cycle in Montessori Method of education?
- 17 To what extent has Montessori Method of education been influenced by the EYFS?
- 18 Do you think EYFS makes Montessori nursery schools more record conscious than they would ordinarily have been?

## APPENDIX 11

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NURSERY OWNER

- 1 How long have you owned this nursery?
- 2 Are you a certified Montessori practitioner?
- 3 How did you come about your awareness of Montessori education?
- 4 Is the Montessori Method of education the underpinning early years' approach used in your nursery? YES/NO
- 5 Please kindly expatiate on your given answer to question 4?
- 6 What is your notion of best practice in Montessori education?
- 7 How do children learn in this nursery?
- 8 Describe the role of a teacher in this nursery?
- 9 Describe the interaction between teachers and children in the nursery.
- 10 How should the learning/prepared environment in a Montessori nursery be set up in line with Montessori philosophy?
- 11 Do you think this nursery is set up in line with the Montessori ethos? YES/NO
- 12 Please kindly expatiate further on your given answer to question 11.
- 13 Does the EYFS provision impact on the Montessori Method of education delivered in this nursery? YES/NO
- 14 Please kindly expatiate on your given answer to question 13.

## APPENDIX 12

### List of Themes/codes

	Research questions	Central theme	Codes
1	What is the teacher's notion of best practice?	It's all about the child	Independence – (INDP) Free choice – (F/C) Free access – (F/A) Observation – (OBS) Mixed age group – (MAG) Teaching - (TCHNG) Provision of support/care - (PSC)
2	How do children learn in the nursery?	It's premised on a blend of EYFS and Montessori principles	Teacher initiated/led – (T/LD) Child initiated/led – (CHD/LD) Individual activity – (INDV-ACT) Group activity – (GRP-ACT) Independent access – (INDP-ACC) Teacher presentation – (TR-PRSNT) Hands on – (HNDS -ON)
3	What is the role of the teacher in the setting?	Fulfilling routine nursery duties	Lesson presentation – (LSSN-.PRSNT) Provision of support – (PSC) Documentation of record – (DOR) Carrying out oversight function – (O-SIGHT /FUNCT)
4	What is the nature of directress – child interaction that occurs in the setting?	Underpinned by respect and autonomy support to some extent	Autonomy control – (AC) Autonomy support – (AS) Respect – (RESPT) Lack of respect – (L/RESPT)
5	How prepared is the learning environment in relation to Montessori philosophy?	It's lacking in certain aspects	Lack of credentialed teachers – (L/C/TRS) Lack of full range of materials – (L/F/MATLS) Mixed age group – (MAG) Open plan classroom – (OPC) Demarcated classroom – (DMC) Lack of 3 hour work cycle – (L/3/WCYCLE) Greater focus on teacher led activity – (GF-T/LD) Combination of Montessori and EYFS - (MNT+EYFS) Inclusion of Non Montessori materials – (N/MONT.MATLS)

## APPENDIX 13

### EXAMPLE OF CODED INTERVIEW

#### INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER 1

- 1 Interviewer: Are you a trained Montessori teacher?
- 2 Teacher 1: yes, yah.
- 3 Interviewer: May I please ask where did you train?
- 4 Teacher 1: at the AMI in London
- 5 Interviewer: and what qualifications do you have?
- 6 Teacher 1: emmm...Montessori diploma and the post graduate diploma.
- 7 Interviewer: Montessori diploma?
- 8 Teacher 1: and the post graduate diploma.
- 9 Teacher 1: I've got a B.A, and I've got a degree in education but that's not Montessori related.
- 10 Interviewer: ok, so you have a B.A but that's not in Montessori
- 11 Teacher 1: that's in education, not in Montessori.
- 12 Interviewer: ok
- 13 Interviewer: and May I ask when you were employed as a staff in this nursery?
- 14 Teacher 1: emmm...3... December, 2007
- 15 Interviewer: so that looks like you've been here for 4 yrs?
- 16 Teacher 1: well, 3 and a bit.
- 17 Interviewer: ok
- 18 Interviewer: would you say you are a teacher in this nursery?
- 19 Teacher 1: emmm, yah, Montessori teacher, yah.
- 20 Interviewer: can you please describe your role as a teacher in this nursery?
- 21 Teacher 1 : emmm, I teach 2 days a week, emmm, so I guess its...am the only qualified Montessori teacher in the nursery, so I help all the other members of staff because they are training to be Montessori teachers, emmm...with the teaching and the planning and observation, for the children in the classroom. (LESSN- PRSNT) (O-SIGHT/FUNCT)
- 22 Interviewer: can you expand further, emm...what the role... what you do as a teacher. This is a nursery, you are a teacher here, if I came in here and I wanted to see you as a Montessori teacher, what will I see you doing as a teacher here?
- 23 Teacher 1: emmm...observations, emmm...showing children... u know doing presentations one to one and group presentations with the children, emmm... teaching the grace and courtesies, emmm...introducing them to the environment, teaching them how we are in the classroom, emmm...guiding them, you know, teaching them things that they need to know, helping them with their self care, toilet training, toileting, health and hygiene, emmm...that's it really. (LESSN- PRSNT) (PSC)
- 24 Interviewer: right, so that is what you would say is your role as a teacher here?
- 25 Teacher: yah.
- 26 Interviewer: I have here; observe, introduce the children to group lessons, one on one, introduce them to the environment, teach them how we are in the classroom, guide them, teach them what they need to know.

APPENDIX 13b

- 27 Teacher 1: Yah
- 28 Interviewer: so that's your idea of a teacher in the nursery here?
- 29 Teacher 1: Yah, I think so, yah.
- 30 Interviewer: could you please describe for me how children in this nursery? If I came here in the morning and I want to see how the children learn typically every day, could you describe how the children in this nursery learn? What should I expect? How do they achieve their learning?
- 31 Teacher 1: emmm... I guess they work one to one and in groups with adults, emmm...they learn from the older children, the older ones teach the younger children how to do their specific activities but also how to be in the classroom, emmm...all the work is very hands-on, there is hardly any like...it's all very sensorial based, there isn't any kind of emmm... Obviously when they do their letters and their numbers they're learning that but there isn't much..., there are no work books, they are not sat at desks, there is a lot of floor work on maths and things, emmm.... with specific pieces of equipment. Emmm.... That's it. (INDU-ACT) (GRP-ACT) (HANDS-ON)
- 32 Interviewer: thank you. Do you have situations where the children choose their own learning or the teacher chooses their learning for them?
- 33 Teacher 1: it's a mixture, yah.
- 34 Interviewer: Could you explain that for me?
- 35 Teacher 1: the children... they learn...they can learn and choose what they want to do based on what they've been shown by the teacher, emmm.... But they can come in each day and don't have to work with the teacher at all that day, they can choose what they want to do, they follow their own emmm....desire about what they want to do that day. Emmm...so they can emmm...so they work with an adult and on their own and they...yah.
- 36 Interviewer: so, you're saying...because I asked "would you say the children's learning is initiated by the children?"
- 37 Teacher 1: yah
- 38 Interviewer: or would you say it's initiated by the adults?
- 39 Teacher 1: mainly child - Initiated, the majority of their work will be child initiated but there would be adult led activity as well, yah (CHILD/AD) (T/AD)
- 40 Interviewer: ok, thank you. How would you describe the teacher- child interactions in the nursery?
- 41 Teacher 1: in what way?
- 42 Interviewer: How do the teachers interact with the children? What's the type of interactions who should see or sees in this nursery? In terms of working with children? In terms of relating with the children? What kind of interactions, you know, what's the nature of the interactions?
- 43 Teacher 1: emm... they've all good really good relationships. The adults would plan what they're going to do with the children, emmm....but yes, very mutual respect for each other, emmm...they've got good open nice relationship. The adults respect the children and their needs and what they want they want to do and the children respect the adults, you know, in a formal way of respect, emmm...yes, the adults respect what the children (RESPT)



## APPENDIX 13c

want to do, their likes and dislikes, it's not all about what we think they should be doing. It's all about what they want to do and how we help them achieve that. (AS)

44 Interviewer: Could I just ask, what is your notion, what's your idea of best practice in Montessori education? In the Montessori Method of education, what is your notion of best practice?

45 Teacher 1: emmm... We try to get the children to work as independently as they can really. Emmm... The adults to be a good observer in the classroom, emmm... to have the mixed age groups, strong sense of community. Emmm... the Montessori ...the term "Montessori teacher" isn't really accurate. It's more Montessori directress because the adults are helping the children to be in their environment. It's not our environment that they're coming into but theirs and we've come into it. We're helping them, you know, to learn what they need to learn from that environment. Emmm... yah, having mixed age groups. (INDP) (OBS) (MAG)

46 Interviewer: Can I ask also, having said that, how would you describe the practice in this nursery vis – a – vis Montessori's notion of best practice that you have just shared with me? How is the practice here measure up to that? How would you describe your practice?

47 Teacher 1: Yah, emmm... we aim for that on a daily basis but it's difficult to achieve it, emmm... because we have all the things like we've got younger children here than we would normally have in a school because we are more a nursery rather than a Montessori school, so emmm..., yah; I think we try and achieve all that. We aim to achieve best practice but it is difficult when we've got staff who are not Montessori qualified or experienced because they don't necessarily..., you know, until they've worked here for longer or been on some training, they might not know it but with the people we've got who're ...we're always striving to achieve,... to be the best nursery, to be the best Montessori nursery but there's lots of challenges. Best practice is a like a textbook but you know life gets in the way sometimes of that, you know, there are staff shortages and people are off sick, emm...things that you plan for may not always have the desired outcome, so ....

48 Interviewer: could you please describe for me how a Montessori nursery environment should be prepared according to Montessori Method of education? How should the Montessori nursery environment be prepared?

49 Teacher 1: It should all be child sized with all the different areas of learning, so the practical life, sensorial, maths, language, cultural, emmm...it should be...emmm..., every thing on the shelf should go from simple to complex , from left to right, emmm... the children should always be building on prior knowledge and achievements, emmm...it should be, you know, methodical and organised, emmm... the Montessori directress and the staff in the environment obviously, are there to care for the environment, so replacing things that get broken, making sure the equipment are in tact and complete, anything that isn't complete is removed from the environment, emmm... any thing that is broken, encourage the children to help fix it, emmm... I think that

Untrained staff is limiting to best practice

## APPENDIX 13d

probably sums it up. Have a rich and varied environment for children, change the resources to make it interesting and exciting for the children.

- 50 Interviewer: So can I just ask then, do you think the prepared environment in this nursery is set up with the Montessori ethos on prepared environment, just as you have described?
- 51 Teacher 1: Yah.
- 52 Interviewer: Can you explain how you think it is set up in line with what you've just explained?
- 53 Teacher 1: Because we've got all areas of learning that I described, because we've got... everything is child sized, emmm... we keep on top of the resources, the shelves are tended to at the end of the morning, at the end of the afternoon, at the end of the day, in the morning like for example, the water pouring, the practical life there are refilled. The dry pouring are restocked and as much as life doesn't, you know ...like at the moment we are short of two staff off sick, you know, it's difficult sometimes to keep up with that but you know, the majority of the time, the different areas of learning as always, sometimes, at the end of the day to get it done, things that are done in the morning or through out the day instead.
54. Interviewer: is there any thing you would like to ask?
55. Teacher 1: no, nothing.
56. Interviewer: so you don't use work books? Apart from the Montessori materials, do you have other things on the shelf?
57. Teacher 1: emmm...not really. I mean we have some things we've made that you can't buy but always with the Montessori ethos in mind, yah
58. Interviewer: emmm...do you also think that you should be aiming to get more trained Montessori teachers?
59. Teacher 1: emmm...yah, it's me training and there's charlotte and Natasha and Sam. They're all sick but they're trained Montessori teachers, there're only two teachers that isn't training.
60. Interviewer: but right now, among the six that are here, it's just you.
61. Teacher 1: it's five of us but two are sick.
- 62 Interviewers: five...
63. Teacher 1: they are training right now.
64. Interviewer; but how many are trained as at this week that am here?
- 65 Teacher 1: qualified? Ok it's just me.
66. Interviewer: Am asking about this nursery having qualified Montessori teachers because that's the point from which am coming. I am supposing that am talking to some one like you who's trained, properly qualified, so can answer my questions. From what you're saying, you do have staff who are in training
67. Teacher 1: yah
- 68 Interviewer: but in terms of those who are fully trained it's just you that is fully trained.
- 69 Teacher 1: yah

only one certified teacher in setting \*

(N/MONT.)  
MATERIALS

## APPENDIX 13e

70 Interviewer: as of today. Now, it's clearer to me. Some people are in training but you are the one trained Montessori teacher as of today in this nursery.

71. Teacher 1: yah

72. Interviewer: so I would hold you accountable for the good and bad things I do see.

73. Interviewer: Can I just ask about the three hour work cycle? I have been here two days and I am wondering at the structure of the nursery that you have, is it a flexible structure?

74. Teacher 1: we have a work cycle from 8am – 11am because we open at 8

75. Interviewer; you open at 8?

76. Teacher 1: we start at 8 until 11.30. Sorry, 11 o'clock they go outside and if they don't want to go outside they stay inside and it can go on till 11.30

77. Interviewer: so are you saying if I came here by 8am

78. Teacher 1: yah

79. Interviewer: how many children would be in this nursery at 8am?

80. Teacher 1: depends each day. I don't know, emmm...sometimes it's fifteen, sometimes it's five. It depends...

81. Interviewer: so your nursery starts from 8 and so your work circle starts from 8?

82. Teacher 1: yah,

83. Interviewer: and closes up at 11? I see thanks

84. Teacher 1: some children don't get here till quarter to 9. We open at 8, our work circle starts then. It's difficult cause we're not ...when I worked in London in a Montessori school, our work circle was from 9.15 to 12.15am and every child got there at 9.15....but we're a nursery, you can't do that. By law you can't make the parents bring their children here at 8 o'clock. And we can't because we're a nursery not a school, we can't not open until 9 and we can't start our work circle at 9 o'clock because we know it will finish at 12, then it would be too late to have lunch because of day just goes on so we have to do what we can, which is start at eight and have the work cycle till 11 and we would get our three hours in.

85. Interviewer: effectively, you're saying your practice is being influenced and compromised.

86. Teacher 1: definitely, it has to be because we're nursery not a Montessori school.

87. Interviewer: Can you tell me what the difference is?

88. Teacher 1: a school is for children who are school aged whereas a nursery is preschool.

89. Interviewer: but you have children here who are from 2.5 – 5.

90. Teacher 1: we're still a nursery though. A school is open from 9 o'clock till 3 o'clock, term time only. We're open from 8 till 6 o'clock all year round every day. So, we're a nursery that uses the Montessori philosophy. Every thing about Montessori to make us a Montessori

\* Not a 3 hour work cycle

C4/3/W

## APPENDIX 13f

nursery but it's difficult, primarily we're a nursery but we're also Montessori, so that's the difference. We're a nursery not a school.

91. Interviewer: To what extent has your practice been influenced by the Early Years Foundation Stage?

92. Teacher 1: emmm... as much as it has to be because obviously Ofsted... because we're governed by Ofsted, emmm...if they came and did an inspection on us and we're not following the EYFS, the nursery will be closed down regardless of being Montessori... and then we won't... the thing is that Montessori does follow the EYFS quite well... they marry up very well, so it's not going to be that bad in terms of having to follow the EYFS, but if Ofsted who are the EYFS governors came and saw us and thought we weren't following the EYFS, you know, they can close us down.

93. Interviewer: But definitely, it makes you more record conscious than you ordinarily would have been?

94. Teacher 1: emmm...not really. Emmm...I don't know I've worked in other Montessori schools and never worked in a Montessori nursery before. This is the only Montessori nursery I've worked in so I'm kind of going on what the nursery does really. Emmm..., I've challenged the practice but in terms of Montessori, I listen to the Early years professionals that come to see us, so...

95. Interviewer: alright, that would do me for now, thank you.

\*  
EYFS  
influence

## APPENDIX 14

### EXAMPLE OF CODED OBSERVATION SHEET

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2011

#### JOURNAL ENTRY

Time: 8.55am

*The children are settling into the nursery for the day. A group of 4 children are having their breakfast at a table with a teacher seated beside them. There is another table with two children doing individual art activities. Four teachers are in the class. Two of whom are in conversation with each other and the other two are busy with children having breakfast. No teacher is actually standing back to observe the happenings in the classroom and see what the other children are really doing. Observing the children will help to extend their learning. However, one draw back in this nursery is the extent of personal conversations carried out among the teachers instead of actually paying attention to the children.*

#### OBSERVATION 42

Activity name: paper cutting

Subject: practical life

Time: 9am – 9.07am

A teacher is seated at a table with three children. Two of them have taken out some materials to work with. They are quietly cutting strips of paper with scissors. One of the boys is handling the scissors dangerously. However, the teacher who sat with the children is filling in her record for a child's folder and has left the table. There are other teachers in the classroom but they are all engaged either in doing chores, conversations or documentation. (DOR)

#### JOURNAL ENTRY

*There is a lot to be said for the issue of observation of children with the teachers in the nursery and the respect they show for the children's work and the environment.*

#### OBSERVATION 43

Activity: circle time

Time: 9.10am – 9.30am

The circle time started with the teacher greeting the children and a child is called to do the hand shakes. As soon as he starts, a teacher who is the child's key worker goes to get a camera to capture the action of the boy shaking hands with a teacher. The boy is encouraged to smile. Another teacher unwittingly says to the teacher shaking hands with the boy "make it look natural" because she was (GRP- ACT)

*Observation  
lacking \**

## APPENDIX 14b

looking stiff. Counting of the children in the nursery is done by another child and then the teacher leading talks about the day's date and all the children sing a song about days of the week. A child is asked to put up the name of today on the weather board. Teachers and children all repeat what the day/date and month is. They also sing a song about the weather and have some more discussions on it. The teacher goes on to ask the children what they would like to do today. She tells the children they will be paired up to work and they should show each other what to do. She also tells some of the children specific activities to do. Circle time ended at 9.28am.

### OBSERVATION 44

Activity: Colours

Subject: practical life

Time: 9.30 – 9.45am

A teacher chooses an activity about colours for a child and brings four pencils with yellow, red, blue and orange colours and some sheets of paper. The teacher lifts up a pencil and says the colour of each pencil one after the other and tells the boy to say the colours after her. They both go through the colours of the four pencils. Then the teacher asks him "where is the yellow one?" The child responds by picking up a pencil to show her. When he gets the colour right, she traces his palm on a sheet of paper and tells him to colour his palm. When he doesn't get it right, she says no and repeats the question until the boy gets it. Then she goes on to the next colour. The teacher however interrupts the lesson to answer the nursery door twice. Another teacher passing by stops at the table while the teacher is asking the boy about the orange coloured pencil and says to him "your tiger is orange." Both the teacher and the boy are obviously surprised by her interruption. She remains at the table for some time and takes over the lesson from the teacher but leaves abruptly the table. The teacher and boy continue the activity, asking a colleague to get the camera and take a picture of the boy drawing his palm.

(T/LD)

(L/RESPT)

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*During the exercise with the coloured pencils, the teacher interrupts the lesson twice by standing up to answer the nursery door. Another teacher also interrupts the lesson by interjecting with comments and taking over the lesson from the teacher working with the boy. This is a pattern with several of the teachers in this nursery – interrupting a lesson by either talking to a teacher working with a child or leaving their lesson with a child to run errands. The habit of immediately photographing children's activities as soon as they are done is suggestive of the pressure to show evidence of children's work.*

(L/RESPT)

(DOR)

## APPENDIX 14c

### OBSERVATION 45

Activity: bolt and chain

Subject: practical life

Time: 9.50am – 9.56am

A child goes to the shelf and chooses a material – bolt and chain to work with. She sits alone and does this activity by herself. She is engrossed in the material and works with it for a few minutes before returning it to the shelf and gets another material and quietly works with. After a few minutes, she returns it to the shelf.

(CHD/LD)

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*Although this child has freely chosen two materials to work with by herself and has been engrossed in the activities, she however spent a very brief time with each material before returning them to the shelf. Why is her concentration so only for a short time? Could it be she is used to the materials and doesn't find it challenging any more? Perhaps she needed to be led by a teacher to work with a more challenging material. A teacher observing her would have noticed these two instances and possibly redirected her to a different activity.*

\*Observation  
lacking

### OBSERVATION 46

Activity name: Mystery bag

Subject: sensorial

Time: 9.58am – 10.12am

A teacher chooses a gift wrapped box containing a mystery bag. Another teacher joins her at the table with two children. Three other children join them at the table to watch but the teacher is working with only two of the children. One boy is given the mystery bag to choose something from it without looking – he brings out a car and the teacher asks him to name the object. When he does, they clap and say “good boy.” The second boy is also given the mystery bag and he chooses an aeroplane. He is helped to name it as an aeroplane. All the identified objects are dropped in the gift wrapped box. The nursery door bell rings and although there are five teachers in the classroom, none go to answer the bell except the teacher doing the mystery box. She goes to answer the bell and one of the boys becomes agitated at her departure. He is calmed by the second teacher at the table who reassures him that she will soon be back and attempts to continue the lesson. The other three children are quietly watching but they are told by the teacher who has now returned to go and get their own work while she continues the mystery bag with the two boys.

(T/LD)

## APPENDIX 14d

### JOURNAL ENTRY

Teachers ought to realise that it is not good practice to abandon a child they are working with to run errands in the nursery. It is both a disruption to the flow of the lesson and does not show respect for the work that the child is doing.

(L/RESPT)

### JOURNAL ENTRY

Today there are fewer children in the nursery and they are mostly working on their own in group activities such as play dough and crafts. The children working with play dough are on a table by themselves and are having animated conversations.

(CHD/LD)

(GRP-ACT)

### OBSERVATION 47

Activity: number rods

Subject: Maths

Time: 10.15am – 10.20am

A teacher gets the number rods to work with a boy. She brings out five number rods and number cards. She points at a rod and the boy counts the red and blue markings on the rod, says the number of the rod before matching the number card to it. The teacher and boy continue this activity. When the child does not get it right, the teacher tells him to count the rods again. When he gets it, the teacher continues with a new number. Two children have come to join this activity and distract the child. The teacher tells the children to give the boy space to do his work. When he has completed the activity, she gets a camera and takes a picture of the work done and tells the boy to pack up the material and then leaves to fill in the boy's daily record sheet.

(LESSN-  
PRNT)

(T/LD)

### JOURNAL ENTRY

Why doesn't the teacher ask the boy if he still wants to continue the activity and then watch him or lead him to choose another activity he may be interested in? The teacher's concern is to record that this particular activity has been done by the boy with photographic evidence to back it up.

(DOR)



## APPENDIX 14e

### OBSERVATION 48

Activity: animal/colour sorting

Subject: Cultural

Time: 10.23am – 10.27am

A child goes to the shelf and gets a basket containing different plastic animals. She goes through them one after the other, placing them on the table until she tires of activity and returns it to the shelf. She collects a new material and is working quietly doing the colour sorting activity. Another child joins her at the table and she is also working quietly doing the colour sorting activity. She goes through the material placing them individually into the allotted spaces using the colours as a guide. When she has put in all the colours, she returns the material to the shelf and gets a tree puzzle which she dismantles and begins to work with. She finds the puzzle challenging but perseveres until she is able to fit in all the puzzles in their right place. She returns the work to the shelf and walks away.

(CHD/LD)

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*Children in the nursery do need the input of a teacher to link them to the environment. The two girls finished their chosen activities very quickly and were idly walking around the nursery, looking like they didn't know what else to do. An observant teacher would notice that they still want to work but need to be guided to choose a material more challenging to engage them.*

\* Tr. rob.  
\* Observative  
looking

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*The children need more encouragement from the teachers to learn to tidy up and return a material to the shelf when they are through. The teacher could also use the opportunity that the nursery environment provides to ask a child to use the dust pan to clean the floor or wipe the table. This will provide real practical life activities using natural opportunities which should be maximised.*

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*It is 10.40 am, the time when children go out for play. There is a lull in the nursery as the children mill around. A group of four children are seated at the snack table while three other children are at another table doing different activities. All three teachers in the classroom are busy filling in their records. No attention is being paid to the children.*

(DOR)

## APPENDIX 14f

### OBSERVATION 49

Activity: lunch time

Time 11.40am – 12am

The children are in from play time. Three children are called to help lay the table and three others are also chosen to serve lunch, supervised by a teacher. The children sit down for a brief circle time and are called one after the other to be served lunch. It is lovely to see the sense of responsibility built into the children through lunch time routine. The children are allowed to come back and serve themselves more food if they so desire. Several children return for second helpings. This is an opportunity for all children to be involved in real life situations.

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*Three children are seated at the lunch table with a teacher assigned to their table. The children, all boys, soon get into a tussle with spoons. The teacher seated at their table is writing up her records and doesn't immediately respond to this incident but is intent upon her documentation. She later attends to the children but still retains her record book in front of her at the table. The teacher at the next table with another group of children who are eating is also busy writing up her record and the children are left unattended.*

(DOR)

### JOURNAL ENTRY

*The importance of observing children and remaining sensitive to their needs is clearly lacking with the teachers in the nursery, the focus is more on recoding, documentation and doing chores/ running errands.*

fulfilling routine duties

## APPENDIX 15

### JOB DESCRIPTION – NURSERY A

#### JOB DESCRIPTION – Nursery Nurse/Montessori Teacher

It is Montessori Nursery Ltd policy to ensure that all staff are given a job description which while not exhaustive or exclusive clearly outlines the roles and duties expected for the position by the Company.

#### 1.0 Purpose of Post

- 1.1 To provide a high standard of care and education for children placed at
- 1.2 To follow the Montessori philosophy.
- 1.3 To assist and support the team within
- 1.4 To implement the daily classroom routine.

#### 2.0 Key Areas

- 2.1 Working with the children within the Montessori curriculum.
- 2.2 Working as a team.
- 2.3 Liaising with parents.
- 2.4 To maintain and continuously up date your individual skills inline with current nursery and Montessori practise.

#### 3.0 Responsible To:

The Nursery Manager and Person In Charge.

#### 4.0 Duties and Responsibilities

##### Specific to Child Care:

- 4.1 Adhere to all nursery Polices & Procedures.
- 4.2 Liaise with and support parents and carers.
- 4.3 Plan and implement a program of activities, using Birth to Three Matters/ Foundation Stage & Montessori curriculum.
- 4.4 The preparation and completion of activities to suit the children's stage of development.
- 4.5 Ensure that records of your key children's achievements are kept up to date.

## APPENDIX 15b

### JOB DESCRIPTION – Nursery Nurse/Montessori Teacher



- 4.6 Complete accident, incident and medical records as required.
- 4.7 Ensure that mealtimes are a time of pleasant social sharing.
- 4.8 You are required to carry out washing and changing of children as required.
- 4.9 Provide comfort, care and warmth to a child who is unwell.

#### General Duties:

- 4.10 You are required to assist in ensuring that the nursery provides a high quality and caring environment for all children.
- 4.11 Work with the SENCO and parents/carers of children with additional needs to ensure their full integration into the nursery environment.
- 4.12 Work closely with all staff in a professional and team like manner.
- 4.13 You are required to be involved in out of work hour's activities, e.g. training, staff meetings (approximately every three weeks), summer fete, report writing, parent's evenings, Father's nights and other special events organised from time to time by the nursery.
- 4.14 You are required to be flexible within the working practices of the nursery and be prepared to help when needed, including but not limited to, preparation of snacks, cleaning of nursery equipment, assisting with the cleaning of the nursery (in the event the cleaner is absent), food preparation (in the event the cook is absent).
- 4.15 Work alongside the Nursery Manager, Person In Charge and the staff team to ensure that the philosophy and ethos of the nursery is upheld.
- 4.16 Look upon the nursery as a 'whole' and where you can be of most help or best utilised. Be constantly aware of the needs of the children in the nursery.
- 4.17 You are required to develop your role within the team of staff and as a key worker.
- 4.18 You are required to respect the confidentiality of all information received, verbal or written and adhere strictly to the nursery's Confidentiality Policy.
- 4.19 You should always be aware of the high profile and reputation of the nursery.

## APPENDIX 16 JOB DESCRIPTION (NURSERY B)

Job title: Teacher EYFS Co-ordinator

Location: ~~Cambridge~~

Reports to: ~~Managing Director~~

Title: Managing Director & Company Secretary

Level/Grade:

Type of position:

Hours 43 /week

Full-time  Part-time

### General Description:

#### 1. Manage the day to day routine and staff in 3-4 Years (Pre School)

- Develop weekly plans etc for the room (with support from staff)
- Develop relationships with parents ensuring they see this as a pre-school setting which is preparing their children for school
- Review observation records for the room ensuring they are of a high standard and identify areas to improve
- Motivate & manage staff in the room
- Review policies and procedures with staff. Identify any knowledge gaps and make recommendations
- Ensure all Pre-school children's records are up to date including personal and learning journey's
- Identify resource requirements through 'Moving On' document and take action with support from manager
- Use Montessori and EYFS principles to deliver excellent learning opportunities for the children. Develop children's understanding of phonics, reading and writing ensuring we are stretching the children to their full potential. Introduce voluntary home work to help the children's learning and engagement with the parents.
- Ensure room is striving for excellence
- Support Manager and Deputy in addressing any areas in the room

#### 2. Acting 3<sup>rd</sup> in Charge

- Ensure staff ratios are maintained to appropriate levels and staff are allowed time for planning, learning journey's and training etc
- Ensure we have appropriately qualified staff on the premises at all times
- Ensures all records for the site are completed i.e. Accident forms and appropriate action is taken by all members of staff.
- Invoicing/Banking and dealing with customer queries in relation to their bills and ensure payment is made
- Provide support to manager when staff are absent

#### 3. EYFS Co-ordinator

- Review standards of planning, observation processes and recording to ensure they are to a high standard across the nursery. Support the development of all learning journey's in the Nursery and make recommendations for improvements
- Work with other settings (Pre-school, other nursery's) to ensure child's development is clearly understood
- Develop links with schools to understand requirements for children and help develop processes for preparing them for the change.
- Work with parents to help them understand the changes their child will go through when moving to school
- Responsible for all communications from the nursery (to include: newsletters, events, plays & shows)
- Plan parents evenings ensuring all learning journey's and written reports are up to a high standard for each child in the setting

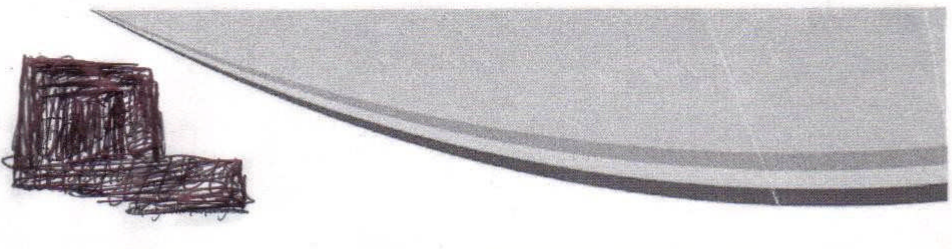
#### 4. Ofsted/Council









- Work with manager and EYFS consultant to improve the setting making recommendations and implement actions
- Support manager in completing Self evaluation Form

#### 5. Viewings

- Manage Complaints using standard processes

SCHOOL PROSPECTUS EXTRACT (NURSERY B)



-  HOME
-  Our Vision & Philosophy
-  Premises
-  Rooms
-  Meal & Snacks
-  Newsletter
-  Contact us
-  OFSTED


### Our Vision and Philosophy

*Helping little people grow.....* (MNT + EYFS)

Through the use of the EYFS and Montessori principles we aim to develop your child to their true potential. We believe this their first step on the journey of life and we want them to be prepared for that journey.

*'The development of the child during the first three years after birth is unequalled in intensity and importance by any period that proceeds or follows in the whole life of the child'*

MARIA MONTESSORI 1870-1952



**The Montessori Philosophy – What does it mean?**

The Montessori approach facilitates learning by discovery rather than instruction. With instruction, a child must react by listening to something that is spoken or by reading something that is written by someone other than himself. The result of instruction is information - the facts of what is being taught. Discovery promotes a deeper level of learning from the very beginning of the process.

**Discovery is the process of learning something without being taught.**

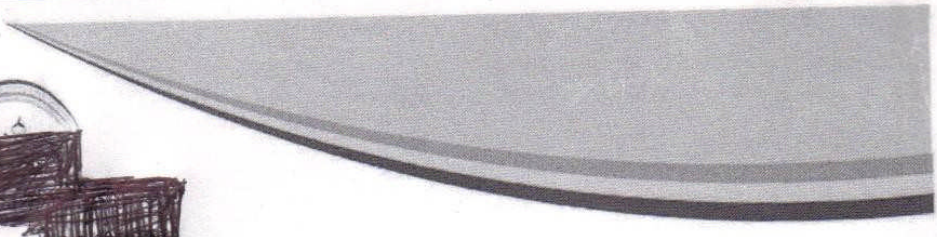
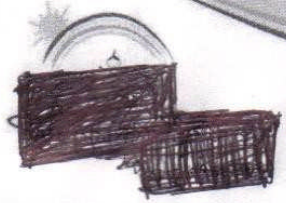
The Montessori approach recognises the different learning styles and allows each individual to learn at their own pace of learning. Children are encouraged to learn through making their own decisions and therefore are not afraid of making mistakes. There is a culture of self correction which means that children persevere until they have achieved the desired outcome. (INDV-ACT)









Children are encouraged to work at self chosen tasks as well as working together on larger activities. To promote positive team work children are encouraged to continually strive to reach their full potential for the good of all instead of competing with each other. (GRP-ACT)

In the Montessori environment the material are designed to be self-correcting, while motivation is not for external reward but for internal fulfilment. (CDD/LD)

*'The Secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds maybe sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination'*

MARIA MONTESSORI 1870-1952



-  HOME
-  Our Vision & Philosophy
-  Premises
-  Rooms
-  Meal & Snacks
-  Newsletter
-  Contact us
-  OFSTED

We have bright and airy rooms for all of our children



OUR ROOMS

(DMC)



A purpose built building especially designed for children from the age of 0-2



For children aged 2 and up to pre-school

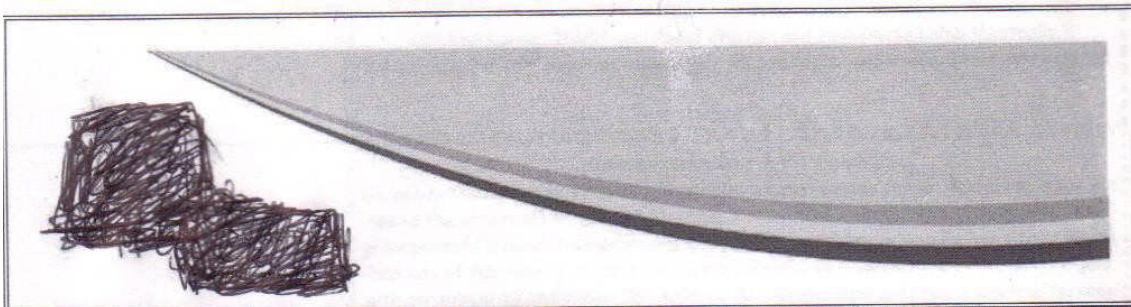










For Pre-school children who are getting prepared for big school

Each room has:

- + A key worker for every child to track progress and development and ensure their needs are being met
- + A development record of your child called their "learning Journey" which we are happy to share with parents on request
- + Commitment to produce 6 monthly reports supported by a parents evening to discuss the development of each child





-  HOME
  -  Our Vision & Philosophy
  -  Premises
  -  Rooms
  -  Meal & Snacks
  -  Newsletter
  -  Contact us
  -  OFSTED
- (MNT+EYFS)

## Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2010

~~Welcome to our newsletter~~

You may have noticed lots of change since the last newsletter? Firstly we have renamed all of our rooms: ~~the baby room~~ (0-2's), ~~the toddler room~~ (2-3's) and the Pre School room is now ~~the play room~~. Thank you to Julie (our cook) for coming up with the naming suggestions!

We have invested in new furniture and toys and in accordance with EYFS principles/Montessori have designated learning zones (reading corner, construction, practical life, role play etc). We are now focussing on the outdoor space including fitting a soft play surface and again creating learning zones for the children. All of these changes are to support the growth and development of each child. The staff have been working incredibly hard and remained committed and focussed throughout this period.

Additionally, we have a new EYFS board where you can see regular updates on how the children are developing in accordance with the EYFS framework. We also have a parents' notice board and will be shortly having a post box for you to provide feedback or suggestions for improvement at any time.

I have promoted ~~the baby room~~ to head of the baby room to provide leadership and direction. Natalie will continue to be supported by ~~the baby room~~.

Welcome to ~~Maria~~ (EYFS Teacher/Co-ordinator) and ~~Sarah~~ (Deputy Manager) who have both settled into the nursery really well and hopefully you have all had a chance to meet?

We are having a parents evening on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> November where you can talk to your child's key worker and I will also be available on the evening to discuss any questions or queries. You will receive a progress report for your child before this date and after this appointments can be made for the evening. Refreshments will be provided and we look forward to discussing your child's achievements and next steps.

Finally, in light of all the recent changes please let us have your feedback or suggestions or if you want to have a chat please feel free to talk to me at any time.

Thanks ~~the baby room~~

### Website

Our website is now up and running. We will be continually developing the website and will be using this as a platform for communication going forward. Take a peek and tell all your friends about how much your children love being at ~~the baby room~~.

Visit us at...

~~www.babysroom.co.uk~~

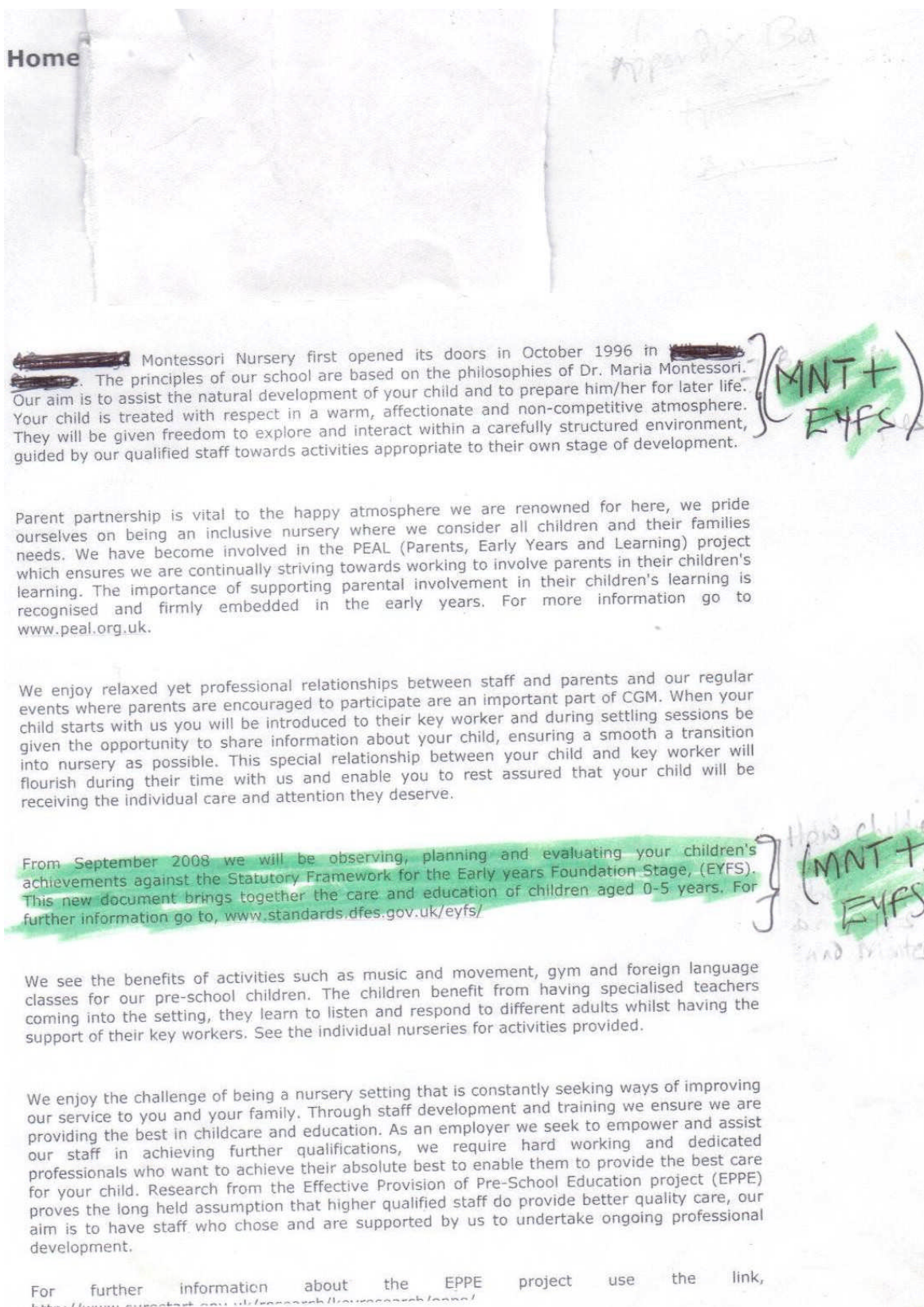
### New Menu!

Our winter menus are now being displayed on our parent notice board for your perusal. We have a hearty variety this season that includes many of the children's favourites.



## APPENDIX 18

### SCHOOL PROSPECTUS EXTRACT (NURSERY A)



Home

Appendix 18a

Montessori Nursery first opened its doors in October 1996 in [redacted]. The principles of our school are based on the philosophies of Dr. Maria Montessori. Our aim is to assist the natural development of your child and to prepare him/her for later life. Your child is treated with respect in a warm, affectionate and non-competitive atmosphere. They will be given freedom to explore and interact within a carefully structured environment, guided by our qualified staff towards activities appropriate to their own stage of development.

(MNT + EYFS)

Parent partnership is vital to the happy atmosphere we are renowned for here, we pride ourselves on being an inclusive nursery where we consider all children and their families needs. We have become involved in the PEAL (Parents, Early Years and Learning) project which ensures we are continually striving towards working to involve parents in their children's learning. The importance of supporting parental involvement in their children's learning is recognised and firmly embedded in the early years. For more information go to [www.peal.org.uk](http://www.peal.org.uk).

We enjoy relaxed yet professional relationships between staff and parents and our regular events where parents are encouraged to participate are an important part of CGM. When your child starts with us you will be introduced to their key worker and during settling sessions be given the opportunity to share information about your child, ensuring a smooth a transition into nursery as possible. This special relationship between your child and key worker will flourish during their time with us and enable you to rest assured that your child will be receiving the individual care and attention they deserve.

From September 2008 we will be observing, planning and evaluating your children's achievements against the Statutory Framework for the Early years Foundation Stage, (EYFS). This new document brings together the care and education of children aged 0-5 years. For further information go to, [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/)

(MNT + EYFS)

We see the benefits of activities such as music and movement, gym and foreign language classes for our pre-school children. The children benefit from having specialised teachers coming into the setting, they learn to listen and respond to different adults whilst having the support of their key workers. See the individual nurseries for activities provided.

We enjoy the challenge of being a nursery setting that is constantly seeking ways of improving our service to you and your family. Through staff development and training we ensure we are providing the best in childcare and education. As an employer we seek to empower and assist our staff in achieving further qualifications, we require hard working and dedicated professionals who want to achieve their absolute best to enable them to provide the best care for your child. Research from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project (EPPE) proves the long held assumption that higher qualified staff do provide better quality care, our aim is to have staff who chose and are supported by us to undertake ongoing professional development.

For further information about the EPPE project use the link, <http://www.evidencebasedchildcare.gov.uk/research/ourresearch/eppe/>

## APPENDIX 18b

### What makes us special

At [redacted] we offer your child a Montessori education and below are reasons why Montessori education is special:-

\* Montessori schools begin with a deep respect for the children as unique individuals, recognising their emotional and social development to be an essential part of their education.

\* Emphasis is not what is to be learnt but on how. The child selects what to learn, and is helped to find the most effective way of learning. The focus is on developing and understanding, not on mere memorisation or mechanical imitation.

(INDP)

\* The Montessori approach recognises and addresses different learning styles, and follows each individual's pace of learning.

\* Children learn through hands on experience, investigation and questioning, they are encouraged to be actively involved in their learning not to be passively fed information. The teacher aims to facilitate a child's independent discovery, rather than giving instruction.

(HANDS-ON)

\* Children in Montessori schools are not afraid of making mistakes. They are encouraged to see them as natural steps in the learning process. The culture of self-correction leads to a healthy enjoyment of challenges and sense of perseverance.

(Self-correction)

\* The focus is on enjoyment in learning, and on satisfaction through personal endeavour. Rewards become obsolete when the satisfaction of the task itself is so high. Punishments become unnecessary since the quickest and the best way to restore good behaviour is through satisfying activity. Bad behaviour is always stopped, but the focus then shifts to positive opportunities.

\* Children work at self-chosen tasks as well as collaborating on major projects. The emphasis is on striving for one's personal best, or for the good of all, rather than on competing against each other.

(CHD/LD)

\* The curriculum is carefully structured and integrated to demonstrate the connections between different subjects areas. Learning in one area thus always has relevance to others areas.

(GRP-ACT)

\* The value of learning is in its application. When children recognise the usefulness of what they learn, they come to enjoy learning.

## APPENDIX 18c

# Why Montessori?

### The Importance of the Early Years

Dr. Montessori, one of the most important educators of our time, emphasized the need for early education. She wrote,

"The most important period of life is **not** the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to age six. For that is the time when man's intelligence itself, his greatest implement, is being formed. But not only his intelligence; the full totality of his psychic powers...at no other age has the child greater need of an intelligent help, and any obstacle that impedes his creative work will lessen the chance he has of achieving perfection".

### The Real Needs of the Child

Montessori attitudes and philosophy are most consistent with the needs of a child in the process of developing and learning. Montessori's educational theories are based on the way a child develops naturally and are then correlated for use as an educational system consistent with these laws.

### Child Centred

Dr. Montessori believed that no human being is educated by another person. People teach themselves. A truly educated individual continues learning long after the hours and years spent in a classroom because he or she is motivated from within by a natural curiosity and love for knowledge. She felt, therefore, that the goal of early education should not be to fill children with facts from a pre-selected course of studies, but rather to cultivate their own natural desire to learn. Her experiments made the child the centre of education; her program is adapted to the interests and needs of children. As a result, children concentrate with enthusiasm and achieve a real and profound understanding of their work. This intellectual progress is accompanied by emotional growth. The children become harmonious in movement, independent in work and honest and helpful with one another.

### Phases of Growth

Dr. Montessori discovered, and recent educational research has verified successive phases of growth in children each with characteristic sensitivities which guide physical and mental development. These phases of growth, she called "sensitive periods". They are outwardly recognisable by an intense interest which the child shows for certain sensorial and abstract experiences. Dr. Montessori discovered that the guiding sensitivities constitute needs in the child which demand fulfilment and are universal to all children. Thus, the validity of Dr. Montessori's observations have remained constant since she began her task of the discovery of the child.

### The Role of the Teacher

The function of the teacher in a Montessori classroom differs considerably from that of the traditional teacher; hence, Dr. Montessori used the term "**Directress**". The directress brings children into contact with the world in which they live and the tools by which they learn to cope with the world. She is, first of all, a very keen observer of the individual interests and needs of each child; her daily plan proceeds from her observations rather than from a prepared curriculum. She demonstrates the correct use of materials as they are individually chosen by the children, carefully watches the progress and keeps a record of their work. Individual children's total development as well as their progress toward self-discipline is carefully guided by the directress, who prepares the environment, directs the activities, and offers each child enticement and stimulation. The mutual respect of the student and the teacher-guide is the most important factor in this process.

(OBS)  
(CDOR)

## APPENDIX 19

### STAFF QUALIFICATION LIST – NURSERY B

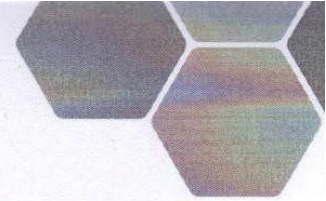
Teacher 1	CACHE Diploma Level 3 and working towards Montessori diploma
Teacher 2	Degree in Early Years
Teacher 3	Qualified teacher
Teacher 4	NVQ Level 3
Teacher 5	NVQ Level 3
Teacher 6	NVQ Level 3 and working towards Montessori Diploma
Teacher 7	NVQ Level 2 working towards NVQ Level 3
Teacher 8	NVQ Level 3

- It was not possible to access the staff qualification list from Nurserv A

## APPENDIX 20

### BACKGROUND QUALIFICATION OF PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Teacher 1	Bachelor of Arts (B.A), Montessori Diploma, Post graduate diploma
Teacher 2	CACHE Diploma Level 3 and working towards Montessori diploma
Teacher 3	NVQ Level 3 and working towards Montessori Diploma
Teacher 4	Degree in Early Years



# Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage

May 2008

Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for children from birth to five



Every Child Matters  
Change For Children



department for  
children, schools and families

## Section 1 – Introduction

### Purpose and aims of the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 1.1 Every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right, and it provides the foundation for children to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up. When parents choose to use early years services they want to know that provision will keep their children safe and help them to thrive. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the framework that provides that assurance.
- 1.2 The overarching aim of the EYFS is to help young children achieve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being by:
- **setting the standards** for the learning, development and care young children should experience when they are attending a setting outside their family home, ensuring that every child makes progress and that no child gets left behind;
  - **providing for equality of opportunity** and anti-discriminatory practice and ensuring that every child is included and not disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability;
  - **creating the framework for partnership working** between parents and professionals, and between all the settings that the child attends;
  - **improving quality and consistency** in the early years sector through a universal set of standards which apply to all settings, ending the distinction between care and learning in the existing frameworks, and providing the basis for the inspection and regulation regime;
  - **laying a secure foundation for future learning** through learning and development that is planned around the individual needs and interests of the child, and informed by the use of ongoing observational assessment.

### Context and legal responsibilities

- 1.3 The EYFS is a central part of the ten year childcare strategy *Choice for parents, the best start for children* and the landmark Childcare Act 2006. The Act provides the context for the delivery of the EYFS and taken together with the other elements of the strategy, the EYFS will be central to the delivery of the new duties on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities.
- 1.4 Recent years have seen significant developments in early years practice and standards. The EYFS builds on these and practitioners will recognise continuity with the principles, pedagogy and approach of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, the *Birth to Three Matters* framework, and the *National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding*. These three frameworks are replaced by the EYFS and will be repealed.
- 1.5 The EYFS is given legal force through an Order and Regulations made under the Act. From September 2008 it will be mandatory for all schools and early years providers in Ofsted registered settings attended by young children – that is children from birth to the end of the academic year in which a child has their fifth birthday.

- 1.6 The term 'early years provider' includes: maintained schools; non-maintained schools; independent schools; and childcare registered by Ofsted on the Early Years Register (to be introduced in September 2008), all of which are required to meet the EYFS requirements. From September 2008 it is the legal responsibility of these providers to ensure that their provision meets the learning and development requirements, and complies with the welfare regulations, as required by Section 40 of the Act.

### About this document

- 1.7 This document contains the statutory framework for the EYFS. It sets out the legal requirements relating to learning and development (the early learning goals; the educational programmes; and the assessment arrangements) in Section 2 and the legal requirements relating to welfare (safeguarding and promoting children's welfare; suitable people; suitable premises, environment and equipment; organisation; and documentation) in Section 3. The learning and development requirements are given legal force by the Early Years Foundation Stage (Learning and Development Requirements) Order 2007 made under Section 39 (1) (a) of the Childcare Act 2006. The welfare requirements are given legal force by Regulations made under Section 39 (b) of the Childcare Act 2006. Together, the Order, the Regulations and the Statutory Framework document make up the legal basis of the EYFS. The requirements in this document have statutory force by virtue of Section 44 (1) of the Childcare Act 2006.
- 1.8 Providers have a duty to ensure that their early years provision complies with the learning and development requirements, and the welfare requirements. In addition, this document contains statutory guidance. All providers must have regard to this guidance, which means they must take it into account and, if they decide to depart from it, they must have clear reasons for doing so and be able to demonstrate that their alternative approach achieves the ends described in this guidance. Ofsted will take account of any failure to have regard to this guidance when exercising its functions, including any proceedings which are brought under the Act.
- 1.9 This document is referred to as the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* and is part of a package of materials which comprise:
- this document – legal requirements relating to learning and development (including assessment and the welfare requirements and statutory guidance;
  - *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet – the areas of Learning and Development, non-statutory guidance, additional advice and information;
  - EYFS resources for providers and practitioners – CD-ROM, poster and Principles into Practice cards.

### A principled approach

- 1.10 The EYFS principles which guide the work of all practitioners are grouped into four distinct but complementary themes:
- A Unique Child
  - Positive Relationships
  - Enabling Environments
  - Learning and Development



1.11 Effective practice in the EYFS is built on these four guiding themes. They provide a context for the requirements and describe how practitioners should support the development, learning and care of young children. The themes are each broken down into four commitments describing how the principles can be put into practice. The EYFS *Principles into Practice* cards explain how practitioners can use these in their day-to-day work.

- **A Unique Child** recognises that every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. The commitments are focused around development; inclusion; safety; and health and well-being.
- **Positive Relationships** describes how children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person. The commitments are focused around respect; partnership with parents; supporting learning; and the role of the key person.
- **Enabling Environments** explains that the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning. The commitments are focused around observation, assessment and planning; support for every child; the learning environment; and the wider context – transitions, continuity, and multi-agency working.
- **Learning and Development** recognises that children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates, and that all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.

1.12 This approach ensures that the EYFS meets the overarching aim of improving outcomes and reflects that it is every child's right to grow up safe; healthy; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and with economic well-being.

#### Setting the standards

1.13 The EYFS sets standards to enable early years providers to reflect the rich and personalised experience that many parents give their children at home. Like parents, providers should deliver individualised learning, development and care that enhances the development of the children in their care and gives those children the best possible start in life. Every child should be supported individually to make progress at their own pace and children who need extra support to fulfil their potential should receive special consideration. All providers have an equally important role to play in children's early years experiences – for example, a childminder who sees a child for two hours a day should consider what a child's individual needs are at that time of day, and ensure that the provision they deliver is both appropriate to those needs and complementary to the education and care provided in the child's other setting(s). All types of providers have the potential to deliver the EYFS to an excellent standard.

#### Providing for equality of opportunity

1.14 Providers have a responsibility to ensure positive attitudes to diversity and difference – not only so that every child is included and not disadvantaged, but also so that they learn from the earliest age to value diversity in others and grow up making a positive contribution to society. Practitioners should focus on each child's individual learning, development and care needs by:

- removing or helping to overcome barriers for children where these already exist;
- being alert to the early signs of needs that could lead to later difficulties and responding quickly and appropriately, involving other agencies as necessary;
- stretching and challenging all children.

## Early learning goals

2.18 By the end of the EYFS, children should:

- Respond in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel.
- Express and communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings by using a widening range of materials, suitable tools, imaginative and role-play, movement, designing and making, and a variety of songs and musical instruments.
- Explore colour, texture, shape, form and space in two or three dimensions.
- Recognise and explore how sounds can be changed, sing simple songs from memory, recognise repeated sounds and sound patterns and match movements to music.
- Use their imagination in art and design, music, dance, imaginative and role-play and stories.

## The assessment arrangements

### *Assessment during the EYFS*

2.19 Ongoing assessment is an integral part of the learning and development process. Providers must ensure that practitioners are observing children and responding appropriately to help them make progress from birth towards the early learning goals. Where practitioners require additional training in order to assess capably and objectively, it is the responsibility of the provider to ensure practitioners receive the support that they need. Assessments should be based on practitioners' observation of what children are doing in their day-to-day activities. As judgements are based on observational evidence gathered from a wide range of learning and teaching contexts, it is expected that all adults who interact with the child should contribute to the process, and that account will be taken of information provided by parents. An essential feature of parental involvement is an ongoing dialogue, building on the partnership begun by any previous practitioner(s). Settings should report progress and achievements to parents throughout the EYFS.

2.20 The *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* sets out detailed formative assessment suggestions in the 'Look, listen and note' sections of the areas of Learning and Development. Practitioners should:

- make systematic observations and assessments of each child's achievements, interests and learning styles;
- use these observations and assessments to identify learning priorities and plan relevant and motivating learning experiences for each child;
- match their observations to the expectations of the early learning goals.

### *Assessment at the end of the EYFS – the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile*

2.21 The EYFS Profile is a way of summing up each child's development and learning achievements at the end of the EYFS. It is based on practitioners' ongoing observation and assessments in all six areas of Learning and Development. Each child's level of development must be recorded against the 13 assessment scales derived from the early learning goals. Judgements against these scales, which are set out in Appendix 1, should be made from observation of consistent and independent behaviour, predominantly children's self-initiated activities.

- 2.22 Some children will have experienced a range of settings during the final year of the EYFS and may have a number of carers. In these cases the EYFS Profile must be completed by the provider where the child spends the majority of time between 8 am and 6 pm. Providers should take account of all available records and of any formal or informal discussions with the parents and with those involved with children in the previous year.
- 2.23 Children with special educational needs may be working below the level of the scales and require an alternative approach to assessment. In these cases providers may use the assessment systems of their local authority or other systems according to the needs of the children.
- 2.24 At the end of the EYFS providers must ensure that children are assessed against the 13 scales in the EYFS Profile. Providers may use the e-Profile (available from local authorities) or their own record keeping systems. Regulations made under Section 99 of the Childcare Act 2006 require early years providers to provide information about the assessments they carry out to local authorities. Local authorities are under a duty to return this data to the DCSF.
- 2.25 Local authorities have a duty to monitor and moderate the EYFS Profile judgements to ensure that providers are making assessments that are consistent across settings. Providers must take part in these arrangements.

*Assessment arrangements – the requirements*

2.26 The assessment requirements are that:

- All providers must make arrangements for each child within the final year of the EYFS to be assessed throughout the year by a practitioner. Practitioners must use the 13 scales and have regard to the scale points as set out in Appendix 1 to complete the EYFS Profile as a record of achievement.
- This must be completed in the final term of the year in which the child reaches the age of five and no later than 30 June in that term.
- Providers must permit the relevant local authority to enter the premises at all reasonable times in order to observe the implementation of the arrangements for the completion of the EYFS Profile.
- Providers must permit the relevant local authority to examine and take copies of documents and other articles relating to the EYFS Profile and assessments.
- Providers must take part in all reasonable moderation activities specified by their local authority.
- Providers must provide the relevant local authority with such information relating to the EYFS Profile and assessment as they may reasonably request.
- Within the final term of the EYFS providers must provide the parent of a child in relation to whom the EYFS Profile has been completed with:
  - a written summary reporting the child’s progress against the early learning goals and the assessment scales;
  - where the parent requests it, a copy of the EYFS Profile;
  - details of the arrangements under which the EYFS Profile and its results may be discussed between a practitioner and the parent, giving a reasonable opportunity for the parent to discuss the EYFS Profile and its results with that practitioner.

## Section 4 – Other information

### Other legal duties

4.1 The EYFS requirements sit alongside other legal obligations and do not supersede or replace any other legislation which providers must still meet. For example, where provision is taking place in maintained schools there is a range of education legislation in place with which headteachers, teachers and other practitioners must comply. Providers should ensure that they are aware of the requirements of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (which creates offences) and any guidance issued under this Act which lays the foundation for the introduction of a new vetting and barring scheme from autumn 2008. Other duties on providers include:

- employment laws;
- anti-discriminatory legislation;
- health and safety legislation;
- data collection regulations;
- duty of care.

### Competency in English

4.2 Parents may choose to have their children educated primarily in their home language and choose a provider specifically for this reason. Linguistic diversity should be valued and we do not want to take away from parents the choice of using a provider who can meet the EYFS requirements through languages other than English. However, it will be necessary for providers to demonstrate to Ofsted that their employees have a sufficient grasp of English to ensure the well-being of children in their care. For example, it must be clear to Ofsted that providers would be able to summon emergency help where necessary, keep certain records and share these with Ofsted, and read and understand instructions such as safety instructions, information on administering medication or on food allergies. As part of the learning and development requirements, providers should also be able to support children to develop their Communication, Language and Literacy skills in English. Further information and advice on this issue is set out in the *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*.

### Exemptions

4.3 The EYFS framework is designed to be fully inclusive of all children's needs, recognising the need to respond to differences of ethnicity, culture, religion or belief, home language, family background, SEN, disability, gender or ability. There is significant flexibility to provide the six areas of Learning and Development in a way that reflects the needs and circumstances of each child. In the majority of cases, therefore, it will be possible to deliver the EYFS in a way that is compatible with providers' and parents' philosophies and beliefs. However, existing provisions for exemptions have been carried forward and re-enacted in Section 46 of the Childcare Act 2006 which enables the Secretary of State to confer exemptions from the learning and development requirements in certain prescribed circumstances. Such exemptions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and where the provider can demonstrate that every effort has been made to comply with the requirements.

# Section 1: Implementing the EYFS

## Introduction

- 1.1 This booklet provides guidance for practitioners on meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. It aims to provide useful advice and detailed information on supporting children's learning and development and welfare.
- 1.2 The guidance looks in more detail at how to implement the learning and development requirements and the welfare requirements in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* document. There is also guidance on children's development, what to look out for, effective practice and useful hints on planning and resourcing. The sections in 'Development matters' and 'Look, listen and note' also support the continuous assessment that practitioners must undertake. Of course, these sections are not intended to be exhaustive – different children will do different things at different times – and they should not be used as checklists.
- 1.3 The *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet is part of the EYFS package of materials and should be used alongside the:
- *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet (the legal requirements and statutory guidance);
  - EYFS resources for providers and practitioners (CD-ROM, poster and Principles into Practice cards).
  - The Principles into Practice cards provide easy-to-use information about effective practice across the themes of the EYFS. They are arranged into the four guiding themes which put the requirements into context, and describe how practitioners should support the development, learning and care of young children. The cards include lots of information, hints and further questions to prompt reflection and provide useful pointers for practitioners in their day-to-day work with children.
  - The EYFS poster shows you at a glance how the EYFS Principles support effective practice in the EYFS.
  - The EYFS CD-ROM contains all of the written documents in the pack plus in-depth information on the EYFS, including video material, examples of effective practice and information about supporting every child's development. It also has lots of references and website links to further information and reading to support your work. The CD-ROM will help you to use the EYFS effectively and provides opportunities for ongoing self-training and development. Additionally, the CD-ROM information will be available on the Teachernet website [www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk), where you can also access the most up-to-date links and information on the EYFS.

## Putting the Principles into practice

- 1.4 The principles which guide the work of all early years practitioners are grouped into four themes:

**A Unique Child – every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.**

**Positive Relationships – children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.**

**Enabling Environments – the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.**

**Learning and Development – children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected.**

- 1.5 These four guiding themes work together to underpin effective practice in the delivery of the EYFS. They put the legal requirements into context, and describe how practitioners should support the development, learning and care of young children. The Principles into Practice cards will also support practitioners to plan appropriate activities based on the needs and interests of individual children. There are lots of suggestions for activities that work, with issues raised about challenges and dilemmas practitioners may face in their work.

### General points on provision of the EYFS

- 1.6 The rest of this section breaks down the key issues which are paramount to successful delivery of the EYFS and meeting children's needs. There are strong links to the cards, and practitioners should think about how the information on the cards can influence their day-to-day work with children.

### Meeting the diverse needs of children (Principles into Practice cards 1.2 2.1)



- 1.7 Meeting the individual needs of all children lies at the heart of the EYFS. Practitioners should deliver personalised learning, development and care to help children to get the best possible start in life. The EYFS CD-ROM provides some examples of ways in which you can achieve this.
- 1.8 You must promote positive attitudes to diversity and difference within all children. In doing this you will help them to learn to value different aspects of their own and other people's lives. This includes making sure that all children and families feel included, safe and valued; that all children and adults are treated as individuals and are not discriminated against; and that all children are listened to and respected.
- 1.9 Practitioners must plan for the needs of children from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds, including those learning English as an additional language, and for the needs of any children with learning difficulties or disabilities. Providers must actively avoid gender stereotyping and must challenge any expression of prejudice or discrimination, by children or adults.
- 1.10 You must plan for each child's individual care and learning requirements. The focus should be on removing or helping to counter underachievement and overcoming barriers for children where these already exist. You should also identify and respond early to needs which could lead to the development of learning difficulties. There must be appropriate challenges for gifted and talented children.

### Partnership working (Principles into Practice card 2.2)

- 1.11 Early years practitioners have a key role to play in working with parents to support their young children. This should include identifying learning needs and responding quickly to any difficulties. Wherever appropriate, practitioners should work together with professionals from other agencies, such as local and community health and social services, to identify needs and provide the best learning opportunities for children. Partnership working may be required in particular for a child with disabilities or a child who is looked after in care.
- 1.12 Regular information should be provided for parents about activities undertaken by the children; for example, through wall displays, photographs and examples of children's work.

### Flexible provision (Principles into Practice cards 1.1 3.4)

- 1.13 Many children will receive education and care under the EYFS framework in more than one setting. Some may attend part-time, while others may attend full-time and also use extended services, such as breakfast or after-school clubs. These patterns of attendance will be a key factor in planning. For children who attend more than one setting, practitioners must ensure effective continuity and progression by sharing relevant information with each other and parents.

1.7 Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development. Practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to focus strongly on the three prime areas, which are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas. The three prime areas reflect the key skills and capacities all children need to develop and learn effectively, and become ready for school. It is expected that the balance will shift towards a more equal focus on all areas of learning as children grow in confidence and ability within the three prime areas. But throughout the early years, if a child's progress in any prime area gives cause for concern, practitioners must discuss this with the child's parents and/or carers and agree how to support the child. Practitioners must consider whether a child may have a special educational need or disability which requires specialist support. They should link with, and help families to access, relevant services from other agencies as appropriate.

1.8 For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. Providers must also ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during the EYFS, ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1. When assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English. If a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child's skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay.

1.9 Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity. Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults. There is an ongoing judgement to be made by practitioners about the balance between activities led by children, and activities led or guided by adults. Practitioners must respond to each child's emerging needs and interests, guiding their development through warm, positive interaction. As children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1.

1.10 In planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

