Supervision in the Early Years:

A case study of ten nurseries within the Private Sector

DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION

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Declaration of original authorship

Declaration:

I confirm that this is my own work, and the use of all materials from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

Supervision is a valued practice within many helping professions such as social work, nursing and counselling. The importance and benefits of supervision have been highlighted within literature. However, there is limited research within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector that examines supervision experiences, especially from the perspective of a Nursery Manager. Supervision is a relatively new practice to the sector and was made a statutory requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2012).

This thesis explores the supervision experiences of ten Nursery Managers that work within a large, private day-care organisation. A conceptual framework was applied to this research which consisted of three interrelated concepts. These were: (1) organisational culture, (2) professional identity, and (3) well-being.

The research was conducted from an interpretive paradigm. Nursery Managers who led Ofsted-rated 'outstanding' nurseries in the South of England were selected to participate in the research over a three-month period. This study used mixed methods as part of a case study approach. Mann and Warr's (2017) concept of a methodological toolbox influenced the choice of research methods, including metaphor cards, semi-structured interviews, and sand tray compositions. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phased approach to the thematic analysis was used as a framework to review the data.

Findings from this study revealed that all Nursery Managers delivered supervision, yet not all of them were recipients of supervision. There was inconsistency in approach, frequency in delivery and understanding of supervision across the group of ten Nursery Managers. Overall, Nursery Managers believed that supervision was important. However, the data suggests there is still work to do concerning supervision and professional identity. The study indicated that organisational culture is particularly important to the implementation of supervision. The study makes several recommendations, including addressing the absence of training and authentic engagement with key stakeholders to ensure involvement in shaping policies and procedures. Recommendations are also made concerning the Department for Education and Ofsted.

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Glossary of Terms

Attunement – is the sensitive interaction between child and adult. This involves being aware of a child's emotions, noticing subtle changes and responding accordingly.

Department of Education (DfE) – is the Government department responsible for children's services and education; this extends to early years, schools, further and higher education.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) – is a generic term that refers to the early years sector.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – the statutory framework that sets the standard for learning, development and care in England for children 0-5 years.

Early Year Professional Status (EYP) – a post-graduate qualification for experts who work with children 0-5 years of age.

Early Years Teacher Status (EYT) – is a post-graduate qualification for experts who teach children 0-5 years of age. An EYT must demonstrate professional competence against eight essential teacher standards.

Independent School Inspectorate (ISI) – an inspectorate that inspects independent schools on behalf of the Department of Education.

Loose Parts – are a range of resources, often natural in origin, that have no pre-set learning intention. Children can use them in various ways and are sometimes referred to as 'open ended' materials.

Key Person Approach – is applied within nurseries to promote secure attachments between children and ECEC professionals.

Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) - inspects nurseries, schools, colleges, childminders, children's homes, and independent settings.

Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) – is the term applied to describe the different funding streams of the early years sector.

Professional love - is a concept coined by Dr Jools Page to describe the feelings of love, intimacy, and care practitioners experience in their reciprocal relationships.

Serious Case Reviews (SCR) – is a process to review cases where a child has died, or abuse is suspected. It was established under the Children Act (2004).

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1.0 Introduction

1.0.1 Personal and professional heritage

I have worked within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector for over twenty-five years. I trained as a Nursery Nurse to work with babies, young children and their families. In these formative years, I had minimal interaction with other professionals or exposure to professional development, including the practice of supervision. However, in 1997, a notable political shift signalled a new era toward integrated practices, policies, and legislation. The Labour Government (1997-2010) placed early years at the heart of its manifesto and pledged significant investment to develop a graduate workforce. I benefitted from this pledge and studied for an undergraduate degree, a Masters degree and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). When choosing a Masters degree, I intentionally selected a programme that focused on integrated working and, as a result, studied at Pen Green's Research Base. Being immersed in the culture of Pen Green proved significant as I experienced transformational change whereby my thinking was stretched, practices challenged and respect for other disciplines nurtured.

Moreover, I was introduced to the theoretical concept of supervision, a new praxis yet to be implemented on a broad scale in the ECEC sector. Furthermore, I observed multi-disciplinary professionals working together to support children and their families. I admired the respect afforded to professional heritages, such as social work and supervision practice. These experiences contributed to and influenced a professional curiosity in supervision. My interest and awareness of supervision were heightened in 2011 due to the pending changes to the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Department for Education (DfE) (2012). At the time, I was employed as an Assistant Head at a large Children's Centre (CC). I had a dual role within the CC to provide individual and group supervision to a multi-disciplinary team. Supervision was met with a degree of suspicion, and while at least implemented, enthusiasm and commitment were scarce. Some staff were exasperated and felt that they were going through the motions of another tick-box exercise. There was a degree of mistrust and lack of clarity about what topics were deemed appropriate to discuss within the supervision meetings, such as personal and non-work-related issues.

Thereafter, my career trajectory changed, and I moved into Higher Education, where I taught work-based undergraduates. Often these cohorts consisted of experienced practitioners who studied and worked simultaneously. Each semester, I would deliver a lecture about supervision within the context of early years leadership. I would begin the session by asking the students to define supervision. Many confirmed they were not in receipt of supervision, whilst others admitted it was considered a tick-box exercise within the nursery and conducted infrequently. The professional debate highlighted that supervision lacked authenticity and purpose for some. The students also associated the term 'supervision' with caring for and supervising children's safety. While some students received supervision within a school environment, others who worked in nurseries were unfamiliar with supervision as it pertained to the EYFS (DfE, 2012).

My professional experience has influenced the topic of this thesis. I believe supervision is a critical practice relevant to the ECEC sector, just as it is to social work, nursing or counselling. Over the years, I have supported staff who have experienced both professional and emotional burnout. Research by academics such as Elfer (2012), Mathers *et al.,* (2014), Nutbrown (2012) and Tickell (2011) have raised awareness of the emotional impact associated with care and education. Hochschild (2012) has written about the impact of emotional labour and how this can lead to physical and emotional depletion when exerted throughout a day, week and month without any form of replenishment. Supervision should be a space where early years staff can positively address areas such as stress and burnout.

Nevertheless, concerning supervision, there is an absence of reference to practitioners' well-being within the EYFS (DfE, 2012, 2014, 2017). Elfer (2012) identified the importance of children's emotional well-being at nursery, supporting them to reach key milestones and promoting school readiness. However, the pivotal role of ECEC staff in nurturing children's learning and development is of equal importance. Whilst this is recognised to an extent within literature (Mathers *et al*., 2014; Nutbrown, 2012; Tickell, 2011), there is less emphasis placed on staff well-being within statutory documentation.

Furthermore, there was a significant void when searching for literature or training resources to support and inform supervision practice. The lack of research about supervision in the ECEC sector compared to other caring professions affirmed the importance of this research.

Supervision is a fundamental practice and essential for all staff who work with children and families. However, as described, prior experience suggests that some nursery staff may be uncertain about the purpose and function of supervision.

1.1 Research focus and context

The research aimed to explore Nursery Managers' (NMs') supervision experiences within the context of a large, private day-care provider. The purpose of the research was to ascertain how supervision was being implemented within ten nurseries in accordance with the statutory requirement, as outlined by the Department for Education (2017) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. As identified in the literature review (chapter 2), the key concepts, in addition to my professional knowledge and experience, have influenced the design of a conceptual framework and, subsequently, the research questions. The overarching research question was, 'what are NMs' experiences of supervision within the context of a large, private day-care provider?

The following questions were asked:

1. What is your experience of supervision?
2. How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?
3. How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?
4. How does supervision support well-being?

The research was conducted with ten NMs leading Ofsted 'outstanding' graded rated nurseries. The nurseries varied in size; the largest had 140 children on roll and over 35 staff members. In contrast, the smallest had sixty-four children on roll and eighteen employees. The Ofsted Early Years Inspection Handbook (2019) stipulates that a nursery can be graded 'outstanding' if the setting is 'performing exceptionally' and 'consistent and secure across the whole provision' (p.29). Furthermore, the handbook sets out how staff should directly influence children's well-being, learning, and development. Ofsted's focus on exceptional performance informed the rationale for selecting research participants leading outstanding nurseries. If the research had been conducted in nurseries rated 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' (Ofsted, 2019), supervision practices may have been weak; thus, it would have been challenging to learn what arrangements were in place.

1.1.2 Research impact

A professional curiosity drove this research as I was keen to understand current supervision practices at my place of work. I was also aware, through various informal conversations, of the disparity and confusion surrounding the practice of supervision. A further influence was the experience of working at a university and being made aware of the limited supervision work-based students received. I wanted to raise awareness of the importance of supervision, address its essential role within the organisation and implement positive change. Literature from other caring professions highlighted the benefits of supervision for staff working with children and their families (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011).

In parallel with the core research question, I sought to address the following two areas as an output of the research:

1. Raise awareness of the importance of supervision within the ECEC sector and add to the body of literature that is currently in short supply.
2. Use creative research methods that are playful and engaging.

1.1.3 The professionalisation of the early years workforce

The last twenty years have seen a proliferation of literature that explores professionalism within ECEC (Chalke, 2013; Dalli, 2008; Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Harwood *et al.,* 2013; Manning-Morton, 2006; McGillivray, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005, 2013; Osgood 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Simpson, 2010; Skattebol, Adamson and Woodrow, 2016; Taggart, 2011). The debate concerning professionalism has been influenced and shaped by policy, various government manifestos and legislative reforms. The discourse about professionalisation in England gained momentum as part of the New Labour government in 1997. These reforms signalled a new era for the ECEC sector, as extensive financial capital was pledged to develop the workforce (Faulkner and Coates, 2013). At the time, the Labour administration committed to raising quality through professionalisation (Horden, 2013). The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), established in 2005, had significant leverage in workforce reform and contributed to the agenda. Between 2006 and 2012, the workforce received unprecedented funding to mobilise and professionalise the early years sector. Higher qualifications were heralded as the nexus of professionalism. This was reflected by the

introduction of Early Years Professional Status (CWDC, 2007); thereafter changed to Early Years Teacher (DfE, 2013), such was the ambition to raise quality and standards within the sector (Nutbrown, 2012; Tickell, 2011). The significant shift in trajectory is critical to highlight, as it was instrumental in introducing supervision practice. Other professions such as counselling, social work and nursing are underpinned by professional standards, of which supervision is a core practice.

1.2 Drivers of policy relating to supervision

In recent years, academics, policymakers, and politicians have contributed to the debate about supervision and the early years workforce. Recommendations calling for supervision were made as a result of Serious Case Reviews (SCR) or Public Inquiries, whereby the absence of, or inadequate supervision, contributed to the tragic death of a child (Saltiel, 2017). Similarly, research examining child deaths in the United Kingdom (UK) cited inadequate or 'absent supervision as a factor when social workers become overwhelmed by complex, demanding cases that can impair judgment and critical thinking' (Brandon *et al.*, 2008; Reder *et al.*, 1993 cited in Saltiel, 2017, p.534).

The Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board (2010) published an Executive Summary into the failings of Nursery Z. The SCR sought to investigate the assertions of sexual abuse within the nursery. It was essential to ascertain how the perpetrator engaged in abusive sexual activity while working in a nursery. The critical report analysed both individual and organisational procedures to ascertain if the poor practice was systemic. Findings from the SCR illuminated a general lack of safeguarding knowledge; consequently, staff were uncertain of the procedure to report concerns, and the omission of a whistleblowing policy exacerbated this. Furthermore, the need for supervision was referenced throughout the Executive Summary, suggesting that, if present, it would have provided a safe environment for the disclosure and for staff to explore feelings, reflect on practice and challenge performance and inappropriate behaviour (in addition to training needs). The practice of supervision was identified as essential to the ECEC sector.

In June 2010, Professor Eileen Munro led an independent review of child protection in England. Fundamental to the review was the question: 'what helps professionals make the best judgements they can to protect a vulnerable child?' (p.6). The review focused on the social work profession as its primary concern and the importance of multi-agency working

and early intervention. A methodological systems approach was applied to ascertain how child protection practices had evolved. The research explored how supervision was implemented in an ordered, systematic approach or an ad-hoc manner.

There are notable similarities in social work practice to the ECEC workforce, and parallels can be drawn. Arguably, there is a similar, regulated compliance culture. There is a requirement for supervision; both are governed by principles that place the child at the centre, which is of paramount importance. Equally, both professions are responsible for supporting provision, such as early intervention. Supervision is referenced nineteen times in the Munro Review (2011), illustrating its critical function. In May 2011, The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report - A Child-centred System was published. An over-bureaucratic system and an overly compliant-based culture were identified as obstacles that restricted professional contact time with children and families.

Professional expertise, development, reflection, and challenge were highlighted as essential aspects required to realign and establish a child-centred system. Findings highlighted that supervision alone was insufficient; it needs to be embedded within a learning culture. Munro recognised the critical but often overlooked practice of reflection; she argued how technical and analytical skills are learnt and how experience is acquired over time. Supervision was seen to offer a place where staff could deconstruct their practice and learn from their experience. Munro highlighted the critical practice of reflection and line management. Specific emphasis was placed on the supervision meeting, whereby dominant managerial agenda items overshadowed meaningful dialogue about children and their families.

This focus on the managerial aspect of supervision is also referenced by Rose and Barnes (2008), who conducted a broader study into SCRs. Findings identified that SCR recommendations tended to focus on improving systems, processes and procedures, but less consideration was given to the development of management, training and supervision. To note is the emphasis placed on supervision, specifically preliminarily and post-graduate training. This research will explore people's experiences of supervision training within the ECEC sector, any training the NMs have engaged with, and if it was integrated within a formal qualification.

1.2.1 Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS)

Alongside the high-profile inquiries, the review of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) also raised the profile of supervision. In the summer of 2010, the Children's Minister, Sarah Teather, commissioned Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive of Action for Children, to lead an independent review of the EYFS. The following year, the report was published, highlighting the need for supervision due to its supportive function. Furthermore, she affirmed that supervision should provide a professional space whereby staff can discuss concerns about children's care, career opportunities, roles and responsibilities and how practitioners support and extend children's learning and development. Tickell cautioned against a formulaic approach to supervision. Instead, she advocated a model of supervision that encouraged reflective practice. The key recommendation about supervision is set out below:

> I recommend that the EYFS is clear what supervision means in practice, including some good practice examples and that settings should agree their own procedures for supervision. Childminders should also have access to the challenge and professional support that supervision can provide. I recommend that the Government should consider how peer networks, such as childminder networks and national organisations can provide this kind of support (p.47).

Whilst supervision is now a statutory requirement, the recommendation above was not fully implemented; for example, practice examples, peer networks or national organisations were omitted. This was a missed opportunity to introduce supervision as a critical practice with a clear mandate to support practitioner well-being. Furthermore, the EYFS was published without training examples. Instead, settings were left to implement supervision as they deemed appropriate. I argue this was an opportune moment to clarify the purpose, function and benefits of supervision. The areas identified by Tickell would have formed the basis of foundational supervision training. In 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced a revised version of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which was originally designed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) (2008). The revision integrated recommendations made following the Tickell Review (2011) of the EYFS (2008). Of significant importance was the inclusion of a statutory requirement to provide supervision for all staff who work with children and families.

All early years settings must follow and apply the statutory requirements, as they form part of the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS framework. Failure to comply can trigger an Ofsted visit or result in a series of actions.

The EYFS (DfE, 2017, p.21) states:

> 3.21. Providers **must** put appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision of staff who have contact with children and families. Effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children. Supervision should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement, which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues.
>
> 3.22. Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:
>
> - discuss any issues – particularly concerning children's development or well-being, including child protection concerns (added in 2017)
> - identify solutions to address issues as they arise
> - receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness

The use of language is explicit about supervision requirements; the word 'must' infers that providers are bound, obliged and compelled to implement, as instructed by the statutory framework. By contrast, the phrase 'appropriate arrangements' is ambiguous and open to interpretation. For some settings, this may be advantageous and foster creative solutions to the practical implementation of supervision. Conversely, the term may unintentionally confuse. Moreover, the statement asserts that 'effective supervision' provides ‘support, coaching and training…and promotes children's interests’. The omission of NM or practitioner guidance about a supervision framework and the differing roles of the supervisor or supervisee is significant. There is no directive concerning the expectations regarding training nor the frequency of supervision; this is interesting to note, as supervision does not have a professional heritage within the ECEC sector, so the absence of guidance is another missed opportunity.

The EYFS (DfE, 2017) outlines the positive benefits of supervision, stating that 'it should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement, which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues' (p.21). In the most recent version of the EYFS (DfE, 2017), further guidance was provided on what could be discussed in supervision 'including child protection concerns' (p.21). Finally, the EYFS states that supervision should provide the opportunity for 'coaching to improve their personal effectiveness' (p.21). Coaching is a skill that needs to be developed and may be limited to some NMs; however, an assumption has been made within the EYFS that all supervisors can coach others.

In addition, there is a complex discourse concerning the meaning of supervision, which may cause confusion. For example, supervision is referenced seven times in the EYFS and used interchangeably to describe different practices. There are four separate references whereby

the word supervision is used to infer supervision of practice or the supervision of children or staff. In addition, the word 'supervised' occurs three times, and the term 'unsupervised' is present four times. Clarity is required to promote a cohesive understanding of supervision across the sector. It seems that ambiguity concerning the semantics of supervision is not uncommon; indeed, Scaife (2001) observes that supervision can provoke an array of emotions in people and have multiple meanings. In the early years, the absence of supervision guidance is exacerbated by the shortage of literature available on the subject. By contrast, there is a wealth of literature in social work, nursing and counselling where supervision is more embedded. My research will contribute to ECEC sector-specific research.

1.2.2 The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting and regulating services that provide care, education and skills to children and young people. Ofsted inspects registered early years settings under the Children Act 2006, sections 49 and 50. Within the Ofsted Early Years inspection handbook (2019), grade descriptors are set to judge the overall effectiveness. As expected, there is a significant difference in grade descriptors dependent upon the category awarded, ranging from outstanding to inadequate. There has been a shift in language from 2015 to the most recently published handbook in 2019. To achieve an outstanding inspection grade by Ofsted (2015, p.41), the quality descriptor states that an inspector would need evidence that 'high-quality professional supervision is provided, based on consistent and sharply-focused evaluations of the impact of staff's practice.' By contrast, in 2019, the term 'supervision' has been omitted from the grade descriptor, and there is a greater emphasis on leaders to ensure the well-being of their staff is supported. However, the EYFS was not updated to reflect this amendment. While supervision has been removed from the outstanding grade descriptor, it is still a practice that is inspected, in line with the EYFS (2017). Inspectors will observe and collate evidence of ‘the effectiveness of staff supervision, performance management, training and continuing professional development and the impact on children’s learning and development’ (Ofsted, 2019, p.19). The shift in discourse concerning well-being and the management of work-related pressure is a new addition. This reflects a heightened awareness concerning well-being (Crown, 2015; Mainstone-Cotton, 2018; NHS, 2017; UNICEF, 2020). However, there is a subtle contradiction in the grade descriptor that focuses on the staff's well-being, yet the evidence gathered by an inspector is more child centric.

1.3 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of my professional heritage and explained the rationale for the research focus. Key policies and Government Reviews have been explored to contextualise how supervision became a new praxis within the ECEC sector. Furthermore, they illustrate that supervision is a complex discourse that includes child protection and compliance as critical factors. Moreover, it illuminates how the professional formation of supervision (and what it means to be a good supervisor) has been constructed in the ECEC sector. The following chapter will examine the literature concerning supervision in three caring professions, social work, nursing, and counselling. Different supervision frameworks will be explored, and recent early years research will inform the theoretical basis for this study.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

A decade ago, supervision was formally introduced to the ECEC sector as part of the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012). Literature highlights the many benefits of supervision (Collins-Camargo and Royse, 2010; Jones, 2006; Madeley, 2014; Soni, 2019). Supervision is recognised by Jones (2006) as 'supportive and educational' (p.150) and a process that reinforces quality assurance for professionals. Other academics such as Butterworth *et al*., (1999); Cutliffe and Epling (1997) claim that sustained supervision contributes to higher well-being, engagement, and staff morale, enhances support systems and promotes heightened self-awareness and reflection. Furthermore, research notes how supervision can aid confidence, enabling staff to be more solution and client-focused (Cutcliffe and McFeely, 2001; Dudley and Butterworth, 1994; Halberg and Norberg, 1993).

2.1.1 Research context

The context for this study is unique. Research about supervision has not been conducted in a large, private nursery chain. Therefore, this research will provide insight into the supervision practices of ten nurseries managed by the same provider. While there has been minimal research in England about supervision in the ECEC sector, there are some notable and important studies. Most recently, Soni (2019) conducted research with participants situated across different types of ECEC settings. Morris (2018) researched supervision with post-graduate students, and Madeley (2014) conducted her doctoral research within independent nursery settings. The ECEC sector is expansive and diverse. Therefore, it is essential to understand how supervision is conducted across the sector. This research will add to the emerging body of literature but with a specific focus on private provision.

2.1.2 Diversity of the ECEC sector

ECEC provision is diverse (Ofsted, 2015) and spans rural and urban communities. There are many different types of childcare providers. Private nurseries offer care and education from birth to five and are open 8 am - 6 pm (with many operating between 7 am – 7 pm). These may be stand-alone, privately-owned, or large organisations with over one hundred nurseries in their portfolio. Pre-school provision often referred to as a playgroup or a pack-away setting, is commonly hosted in community spaces, requiring daily set-up. Children Centres

(CC) were created to offer comprehensive, accessible services for children and their families within the local community (Bate and Foster, 2015). Many CC offer sessional care for parents or carers who attend educational courses. They may have full day-care provision onsite too. Maintained nursery schools also provide ECEC. They are funded by the Local Authority and operate similarly to schools. For instance, a headteacher will lead a maintained nursery school. When a child attends school, there is wrap-around care (before and after school) to support working parents and this provision is often situated on the school's grounds. Nursery education is also accessible via independent providers such as preparatory nursery schools; these settings are inspected by the Independent School Inspectorate (ISI) on behalf of the Department of Education (DfE), similar to Ofsted. Other provision includes care by a Registered Childminder or a private nanny. As the ECEC sector is varied in composition, supervision will be experienced, interpreted, and delivered differently. Nevertheless, as referenced in chapter one, supervision arrangements must be in place for all staff who work with children and families according to the EYFS (DfE, 2017) statutory requirements (nannies are exempt from this).

2.2 Research aims and focus

This research focuses on Nursery Managers (NMs) supervision experiences within a large, private day-care company. The research sought to ascertain how supervision was being implemented within ten nurseries in accordance with the statutory requirement, as outlined in the EYFS (DfE, 2017). The research was conducted in ten Ofsted (2019) ‘outstanding’ nurseries.

2.2.1 Overarching research question

What are NMs’ experiences of supervision within the context of a large, private day-care provider?

The following sub-questions:

1. What is your experience of supervision?
2. How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?
3. How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?
4. How does supervision support well-being?

2.2.2 Definition of supervision

The term ‘supervision’ is likely to be understood differently, depending upon context and occupation. For example, supervision in the retail sector would refer to the oversight of staff and stock. In construction, supervision would entail overseeing the site and building developments while ensuring the safety of all. It is difficult to define because supervision is applied differently in various occupations. For example, a standard dictionary definition differs from the therapeutic meaning of supervision. According to the Collins English Dictionary (2017), the word 'supervision' derives from Medieval Latin ‘*super’,* ‘over,’ and *videre*, ‘to see.’ The online Oxford Dictionary (2018) defines supervision as 'the action of supervising someone or something, such as ‘he was placed under the supervision of a probation officer' or 'she let them work without supervision'. Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary (2017) denotes supervision as the 'act of watching a person or activity and making certain that everything is done correctly and safely'. By contrast, Sturt and Wonnacott (2016) define supervision 'as a process by which one practitioner becomes accountable for the quality of another practitioner's work' (p.7). In all of the examples provided, supervision appears to include an element of management for, or over, others.

While there is no agreed theoretical definition of supervision, academics Beddoe and Davys (2010, p.21) state:

> Supervision is a forum for reflection and learning. It is, we believe, an interactive dialogue between at least two people, one of whom is a supervisor. This dialogue shapes a process of review, reflection, critique and replenishment for professional practitioners. Supervision is a professional activity in which practitioners are engaged throughout the duration of their careers regardless of experience or qualification.

The above quotation includes words such as reflection, critique, and learning. Beddoe and Davys (2010) refer to the practice of professional dialogue, suggesting that reciprocal debate and engagement are an element of supervision discussion. Supervision practice is referred to as a form of ‘replenishment’, which the Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines as ‘the act of filling something up again by replacing what has been used’. In a nursery environment, supervision can protect against emotional burnout if conducted regularly (John, 2012d). The role of human connection and reciprocal dialogue is critical to forming a healthy professional relationship, which is also necessary for supervision (Dalli and Cherrington, 2009; Taggart, 2011, 2014; Tronto, 1993).

2.2.3 Search strategy

Due to the dearth of literature relating to supervision within the domain of ECEC, it has been necessary to expand the scope of the review and draw on research conducted and contextualised by other helping professionals. Scaife (2001) identified these disciplines as 'counselling; psychotherapy; educational, clinical and health psychology; psychiatry; social work; nursing; art, speech and language and occupational therapies' (p.1). While there are many professions from which to draw, the parameters of the literature review will include social work, nursing and counselling.

The professions mentioned above were selected as caring for others is a common thread within nursing, social work, counselling, and early years. Comparisons have also been made by Taggart (2011), who compared the early years sector to nursing and social work when considering ECEC aspirations to be recognised as a 'caring profession' (p.85). Social workers, nurses, counsellors, and early years practitioners all engage in work underpinned by an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982). In addition to caring, engagement with supervision is seen as best practice for social workers, nurses, counsellors, and early years professionals.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

To ensure clarity, a conceptual framework has been applied to this thesis. A conceptual framework is a foundation that underpins the entire research process (Liehr and Smith, 1999). Informed by literature, the framework is a construct created by the researcher and identifies the key concepts to be explored. Organisational culture, professional identity and well-being are core concepts that have influenced the research. The key concepts identified throughout the literature review, coupled with my professional knowledge and experience, as set out in chapter one, have influenced the design of a conceptual framework and, subsequently, the central research questions.

This research is concerned with gaining an in-depth insight into the practices, perceptions and understanding of supervision within the ECEC sector.

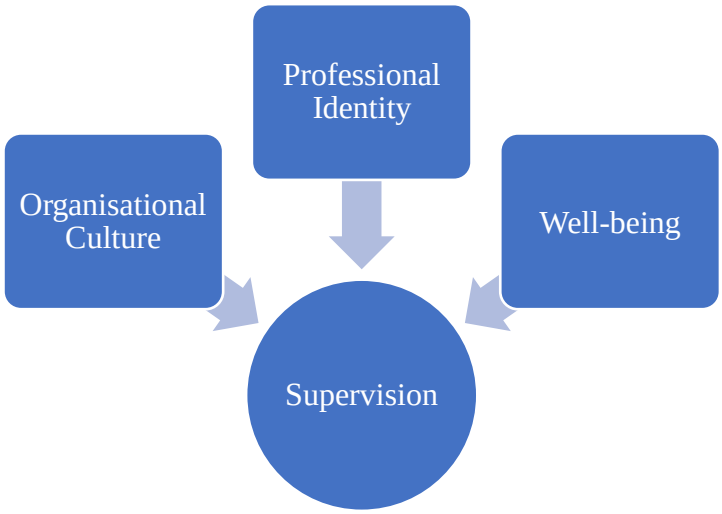


Figure 2. 1 A conceptual framework for exploring Nursery Managers' experiences of supervision.

The conceptual framework provides a structure through which to explore three interrelated concepts. Studying these interrelated concepts will support in gaining deeper insight into supervision practices within a large, private, corporate nursery group. It will also highlight any challenges that arise when implementing supervision, alongside effective practices and how these contribute towards well-being. Studying each concept within the framework will provide insight into the role of organisational culture in supporting supervision and the construction of professional identity. Thereafter, it will help identify how supervision supports well-being and how this can be further promoted. Each concept will be expanded upon within this chapter.

2.4 Organisational culture

Organisational culture is complex. Schein (2004) cautions against oversimplification and encourages it to be understood as a concept that helps understand the 'hidden and complex aspects of life in groups, organisations, and occupations' (p. 9). Oqvat *et al*., (2014) point out that the organisational culture of a workplace can powerfully influence how employees perceive themselves and their role within an organisational context. The latter point is important because how an NM perceives themselves and their role in delivering supervision may be influenced by how supportive the organisation promotes the practice. Schein (2010, p.1) refers to a conceptual map when discussing culture.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the categories of culture.

Culture	Category
Macro cultures	Nations, ethnic, religious groups, and occupations that exist globally
Organisational cultures	Private, public, non-profit, government organisations
Subcultures	Occupational groups within organisations
Micro cultures	Microsystems within or outside organisations

Table 2.1 Categories of Culture (Schein, 2010, p. 2)

A macro culture can refer to occupations that exist globally, such as teaching or working in the ECEC sector, either UK based or internationally. Macro-cocultures are large cultures that span beyond organisations. This demonstrates that the ECEC sector exists beyond and outside the organisation where the research was conducted. As referenced in chapter one, the research was conducted within a large, multi-site business with hundreds of nurseries within its portfolio. The organisational culture is influenced by the need to maintain and exceed profit year on year so that shareholders receive a return on their investment. To achieve this, there is a requirement to provide high-quality care and education to be a market leader within the sector.

Within the nursery organisation, there is a clear distinction between employees at the head office and staff working in nurseries; both have different functions yet co-exist within one business model. Schein (2010) refers to these different occupational groups as subcultures. Typically, the staff at the head office consist of subject specialists such as accountants, lawyers, and health and safety professionals, to name a few, and they work in small, defined teams. In comparison, the operational section of the business is split into geographical regions. Each region includes fifty nurseries and is managed by a Regional Director. Subcultures are likely to exist within each region. Overall, there is a notable difference between the professional heritages within the organisation, such as those working at the head office and the teams within the nurseries. As a result, this creates subcultures where people hold different beliefs and values concerning how things should be implemented.

Some practices exacerbate and highlight the different subcultures within the organisation. Predominately, the head office teams design systems, policies, and training and cascade these down to the nurseries. There is an apparent disconnect between this approach, the head office team design policies and systems that impact the practices of the nursery teams. However, NMs are not involved.

According to the EYFS (DfE, 2012), supervision is a statutory requirement for people who work with children and their families. Employees based at the head office are exempt from supervision. The nursery represents a microculture where supervision is applied to a select group of professionals. Supervision will be an unfamiliar practice for most employees based at the head office. Therefore, it is easy to see how microcultures co-exist within a larger organisational culture.

NMs' are important people within a nursery organisation, and the role comes with significant responsibility. There are also complex levels of hierarchy and systems within the microculture and subcultures. This research will seek to understand how supervision is enacted across the sample group of ten nurseries.

Organisational culture has been defined by Schein (2010) as:

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learns as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problem (p. 18).

Culture is a set of guiding principles, shared values, beliefs, and established methods for celebrating occasions. It is also a highly challenged and contested concept (Branson, 2007; Smollan and Sayers, 2009). Floyd and Fuller (2014) point out that 'cultures are socially constructed, shifting and experienced differently by diverse groups of people' (p.5). This may be the case with supervision across the various regions and subsequently within each nursery, as each setting is led by an NM whose experience will influence supervision practice. Martin (2002) states that culture is 'how things are done around here' (p. 3). However, this may be problematic if an NM is unaware of how supervision is meant to be conducted or if the expectations have not been clear.

Schein (2010) proposed that culture can be differentiated and understood by classifying the concept into three distinct levels visible to the individual: (1) artefacts, (2) espoused beliefs and values, and (3) basic underlying assumptions (see figure 2.3).

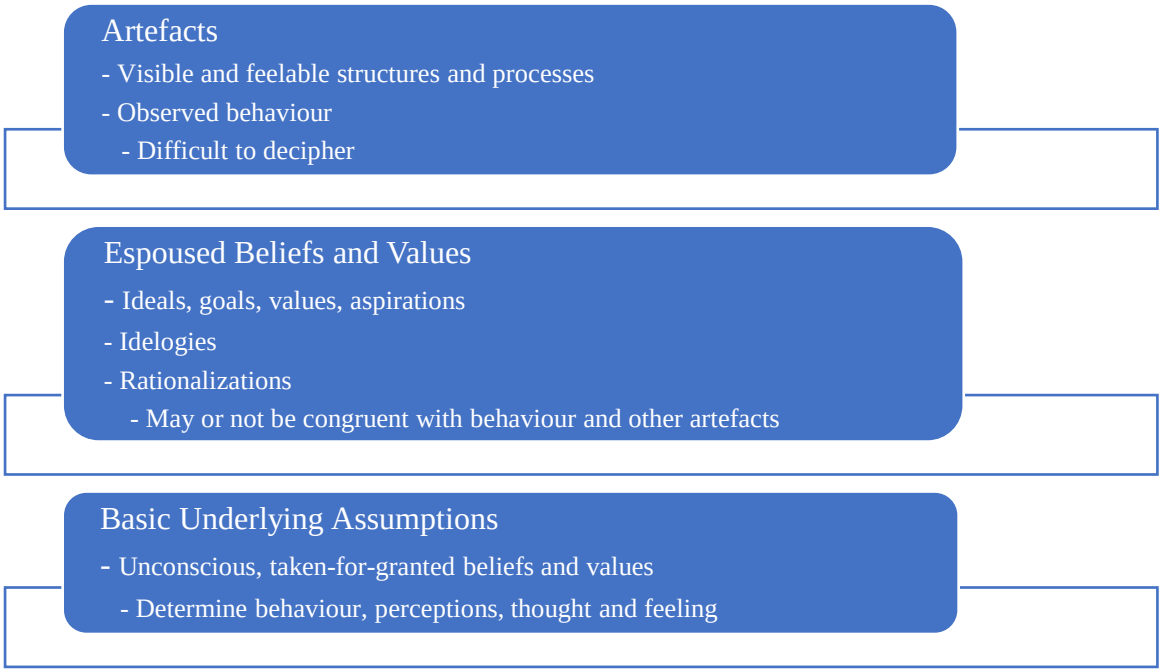


Figure 2. 2 Three levels of culture (Schein, 2010, p. 24)

Artefacts include the physical representation of an organisation, such as its branding, logo, published company values, organisational structures, routines and processes. A supervision policy and related paperwork would be considered an artefact in the nursery group where the research was conducted.

There is also a company charter, which lists cultural values, and is visible for all to see (e.g., a poster on display within the staff room). However, a poster listing the company values does not guarantee understanding or implementation. The final level of culture presented by Schein (2010) is referred to as basic underlying assumptions. This is where the key beliefs of a founder or leader become embedded as the core company values, and they remain in place, even when the leader departs from the organisation.

Research by Simpson (2010) identified how organisational culture could influence professional dispositions, with specific reference to emotional discourse and commonality of understanding. He refers to professionalism as ‘dispositions and orientations of professional groups and individual professionals to their status and work’ (p.6). This suggests that organisational culture can influence the professional identity of an NM and how they perceive themself. The organisational culture may also influence supervision and how it is delivered.

2.4.1 Organisational culture and supervision

The Munro Review of Child Protection: A child-centred system highlighted that organisational culture was a central tenet in the delivery of effective social work (Munro, 2011). The most significant barrier to the successful implementation of supervision has been identified as an unsupportive organisational culture (Heffron and Murch, 2010; Johns, 2003; Madeley, 2014). Indeed, the Wave Trust/DfE (2013) also recognised the interconnected role organisation culture has on the provision of supervision. It stated that an organisation must have an 'unambiguous commitment to a well-structured supervision system' (p.36) as an essential requirement for the delivery of effective supervision.

The Wave Trust/DfE (2013) recognised that supervision is fundamental to delivering positive outcomes for children. The organisation's culture can empower or act as a detractor to the quality of care and education provided within the nursery. Berlin *et al*., (2020) identified additional barriers to effective supervision. These included a lack of empathy by the supervisor for the supervisee and tension regarding a lack of preparation ahead of a supervision meeting. The literature (Berlin *et al.*, 2020; Johns, 2003) suggests that a collective and shared understanding of supervision is essential to ensure a sustained approach within an organisation such as a large nursery group. The culture within the organisation can influence how interactions between peers, children and parents are conducted (Deal, 1985).

2.4.2 A learning culture

Hargreaves (1994) notes that learning and development are critical to school improvement. In a similar vein, professional development is as equally important to quality improvement within the ECEC sector. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) state that 'supervision flourishes in a learning and development culture' (p.235). Studies within the field of education (Mok and Flynn, 1997) considered the relationship between people's behaviours, professional assumptions, and perceptions. This research will ascertain how supervision is supported through effective training as it is a clear indicator of sustainable practice.

Hawkins and Shohet (2012) note that supervision can take time to embed and requires a systemic approach to implement. Johns (2003) claimed that a cultural paradigm shift could take up to ten years to embed and requires full support and senior staff engagement. This is noteworthy, as it has been ten years since the supervision requirement was included within the EYFS (DfE, 2012). A learning culture where professional development is valued and deemed important must be modelled at all levels across the organisation. Therefore, this

research will seek to ascertain if the organisation supports the delivery of supervision and if, according to Johns (2003), the paradigm shift has transpired over ten years.

In addition, Jones (2006) identified a lack of time, training, and workload as possible causes of tension that can conflict with supervision practice. Supervision training may require work schedules to be adjusted to ensure attendance at meetings. Sufficient time is an essential factor in the delivery of supervision.

2.5 Well-being

The importance of practitioner well-being has become more prominent (Cumming, 2017; Faulkner *et al*., 2016; Jennings, Jeon and Roberts, 2020; Logan, Cumming, and Wong, 2020) note that it is an under-researched area that has not attracted significant interest until more recently. Jennings, Jeon, and Roberts (2020) attribute this to the COVID-19 pandemic. Susman-Stillman, Lim, Meuwissen and Watson (2020) report that nursery staff experienced difficulty maintaining a healthy balance between their well-being and workload. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of supporting early years practitioners' social and emotional well-being as this can impact the quality of provision provided to children and their families. Also, they noted how entrants into the ECEC sector are generally motivated by a deep desire to care for children yet find maintaining their sense of well-being a challenge. A lack of supervision and other professional support functions can contribute to high staff turnover, perpetuating low morale (Eaves Simpson, Robinson and Brown, 2018).

In preparation for the commencement of the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012), John (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d) from Pen Green Research Base published a four-part series in Nursery World. John (2012a) explained how supervision could support practitioners' well-being and stated how supervision acted as a container for staff, providing support and encouragement. ECEC staff may also do the same for the children and families. Moreover, Brandon *et al.*, (2008) note how supervision can be a tool that 'helps practitioners think, explain, and understand. It also enabled them to cope with the complex emotional demands of working with children and their families' (p.106). For example, in ECEC, supervision can support practitioners in managing the complex emotions associated with working with children and their families.

McMullen, McCormick and Lee (2018) defined well-being as a 'sense of feeling well physically and mentally' (p. 17). Furthermore, they identified nine elements of professional well-being which need to be present for an ECEC practitioner to be fulfilled and work at an optimal level. These include having a sense of comfort and security within oneself and the environment. It is from this sense of security that children and staff, together, can flourish. The security of a permanent employment contract, guaranteed hours, and a safe working environment for staff were also critical to well-being. In addition, connectedness, belonging and a strong sense of identity can contribute to feeling part of a community where staff are valued and respected as professionals. Finally, efficacy and agency were reported as crucial components of practitioner well-being. The former relates to the awareness of competence and capability, accountability, responsibility, and celebrating achievements. The latter is nurtured in a work environment that embraces democratic values, where each staff member can contribute and is empowered to be a confident decision-maker. Furthermore, they affirm that a prerequisite to secure and happy children are the health and well-being of ECEC staff. Supervision can contribute to the well-being of the staff team but also act as a safety net to identify when one of the nine elements is absent.

Logan, Cumming and Wong (2020) highlight the pressing societal need to ensure a sustainable and highly qualified workforce. Research findings by Sylva *et al.,* (2004) conclude there is a direct link between qualified staff, quality of provision and children's educational outcomes. Furthermore, Pascoe and Brennan (2017) identify how ECEC staff provide an essential service for parents to enable 'increased workforce participation' (p.75). While the former is essential to economic growth, it is critical to focus on the psychological well-being of ECEC staff, not because of their potential output but because they are people (Susman-Stillman *et al.,* 2020).

Berlin, Shdaimah, Goodman and Slopen (2020) found that supervisory behaviours such as 'giving advice, expressing care and concern' supported well-being (p.1081). Psychological safety was cited by Hall, Dollard and Coward (2010) as a critical factor in practitioner well-being. Psychological safety creates a culture whereby staff can voice their opinions without fear of humiliation or punishment if they make a mistake (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson and Lei, 2014). This is reflective of McMullen, McCormick and Lee (2018) findings. Recent research by LeNoble *et al.,* (2020) found that psychological safety is also a factor in stress

reduction. In addition, mutual trust, respect, and inclusive leadership improved a sense of psychological safety.

When considering a suitable supervision framework for the ECEC sector, psychological safety is an element that needs to be considered. Similarly, John (2012d) found that staff experience psychological safety when engaged in a collaborative learning activity, such as group or paired supervision, which aided their understanding of the supervision process.

Practitioner well-being is complex and can be influenced by relationships with parents, colleagues and children (Elfer, 2012; McMullen, McCormick and Lee, 2018). The link between effective supervision and well-being will be explored with NMs and discussed in chapter 3. McMullen, McCormick and Lee (2018) argue that practitioner and child well-being are interconnected. Thus, if nursery staff experience stress, this could directly impact the quality of care provided within the setting. Similarly, Jacobson (2008) recognised that emotional history, including childhood trauma, can influence behaviour as an adult. Therefore, self-awareness is essential when working with children, as it is the nursery practitioner who creates a positive learning environment. Furthermore, Jacobson (2008) identified how the environment must be an 'emotional safe haven for *everyone*' (p.22). The literature indicates that supervision can support nursery teams in managing stress and act as a vehicle for promoting practitioner and child well-being.

2.5.1 Stress and burnout

Recent research by the Social Mobility Commission (2020) identified stress and burnout as contributing factors that cause people to leave the ECEC sector. Commentators Allen and Kelly (2015) also note that people in the ECEC sector experience low well-being and low self-esteem due to working conditions (McDonald, Thorpe, and Irvine, 2018). Sometimes, staff experience secondary trauma (Osofsky, 2009) due to working in an emotionally challenging environment. In addition, Faulkner *et al.,* (2016) found that work-related stressors and demands of parents led to nursery staff suffering from exhaustion.

Within nursing, Nantsupawat *et al*., (2016) and Stockwell (2015) also found that stress and burnout negatively impacted nurses' ability to care for others. Research indicates that high-quality supervision can prevent or reduce employee burnout and secondary trauma, limiting staff turnover rates (Brittain and Conrad, 2006; Collins, Camargo and Royse, 2010; Landsman, 2007). Furthermore, MacLaren *et al.,* (2016) found that supervision enabled

nurses to manage complex emotions. Also, when the exploration of emotions was allowed within supervision, it decreased stress levels within the workplace. This presents a strong case for organisations to support and promote supervision practices.

2.5.2 Emotional labour

The definition of supervision by Beddoe and Davys (2010) also referenced the importance of supervisory relationships. The emotional labour associated with building and maintaining relationships has been explored by Tronto (1993), who identified care as a collective activity encompassing the care of self, others, and the environment, all of which 'interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web' (p.103). The idea of being connected via relationships echoes the work of Goldstein (1998), who references the centrality of relationships. Dalli and Cherrington (2009) also referred to the interconnected nature of care, recognising the centrality of relational work. The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is critical. Relationships are interwoven within the foundations of the ECEC sector and feature as one of the four overarching principles of the EYFS (2017) 'positive relationships' (p. 6). There is recognition that children develop and grow with the support of others. This principle can also be applied to ECEC professionals and the supportive function of supervision.

Hochschild's (1983) influential work and the conceptualisation of emotional labour are often applied as a theoretical framework to discuss work carried out within a nursery. The notion of 'emotional labour' was first conceived when Hochschild observed the practices of flight attendants. It has been defined as the 'management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value' (p.7). When applied to the context of ECEC, the role of a flight attendant would be substituted for that of an early years practitioner. Academics such as Elfer (2012), Osgood (2005) and Taggart (2011) have all contributed to this discourse. Research conducted with teachers by Hargreaves (2008) demonstrated how educational professionals derive satisfaction from undertaking emotional labour. Similarly, ECEC staff engage in emotional labour and experience stress and emotional burnout.

2.5.3 Attachment

According to Bowlby (1988), the principles of attachment remain relevant from childhood to adulthood. Interactions within the formative years, the availability and responses provided by the adult to the child, can shape the construct of security. In addition, experiencing meaningful interactions can support well-being and enhance curiosity, openness and problem solving (Mikulincer and Florian, 2001). In contrast, insecurity can lead to the avoidance of relationships. Research conducted by Collins and Feeney (2000) found that a person's sense of security affects their ability to self-regulate and, as a result, may influence their ability to support and care for others.

Bowlby (1969) reasoned that distress, and a lack of reciprocal care could deplete the ability to care for others as energy is focused on meeting internal needs. Nevertheless, if a secure base is established and restored, it can establish positive relationships and comfort others (Bowlby, 1969). Within the context of ECEC, Taggart (2014) highlights the interplay between securely attached children and adults and their ability to demonstrate compassionate care towards others. The relationship between attachment and supervision is, therefore, important.

More recently, Elfer (2012) has written about the importance of attachment-based practice within the ECEC sector. Notably, the key person approach is a fundamental aspect of the EYFS (DfE, 2017). The inclusion of the key person approach demonstrates the centrality of attachment between the practitioner and the child. The focus of attachment theory within this research is concerned with the supervisory relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. The subject of attachment can be emotive and cause people to reflect on their formative and current relationships. Explicit questions were not asked about attachment; however, the research methods allowed the participant to explore their supervision experiences. For example, the metaphorical card activity and engagement with the sand tray allowed the participants to discuss the environment, the dynamics of the supervisory relationship and the impact of supervision on their well-being.

In addition to the work that attempts to define and prescribe policy for the specific caring professions, a body of literature exists to identify generic models or shared aspects of good practice. Significant to this literature review is Winnicott (1960) and Bowlby's (1988) work. Both theorists have influenced the field of early childhood and counselling (Issroff, 2005). Winnicott (1960) and Bowlby's (1988) work, while different, is underpinned by a commitment to advancing early care by recognising the significant role of a stable physical and emotional environment.

While there are various supervision models for the helping professions, it is necessary to recognise the difference and the subtle nuances within each framework as they have been designed to meet the needs of the various professional groups (Hawkins, 2011). Supervision models used within the ECEC sector have been adopted from other professional heritages such as social work. It seems strange that a model has not been designed for the ECEC sector, as it is a statutory requirement.

Winnicott (2002) believed that children have an 'inherited tendency toward development' (p.179). In addition, he recognised the importance of a healthy, physical, and emotional environment. As such, he noted that children are hard-wired to flourish with the support of a nurturing caregiver. His observations illuminated the importance of the reciprocal, interconnected relationship of the mother and child, specifically, how the good enough mother demonstrated her ability to nurture, tend to, and respond to the child's exact needs and mirror his or her actions. Winnicott (1958) referred to this as 'Primary Maternal Preoccupation' (p.302), where the mother is attuned and fully regulated to her child's needs. He noted that this type of interaction could be intense and demanding. He recognised that effective support was necessary to sustain the caregiver. At the time of his writing, Winnicott (1958) commented that it was the role of a husband and father to provide a safe harbour, a place of safety, rest, and replenishment. Winnicott used the analogy of a 'holding environment' (p.29) to denote a significant other's role when caring for the carer. In order to meet the child's physical and emotional needs, the mother or primary caregiver requires a 'holding environment' to draw strength and courage. It is interesting to note that Winnicott (1960) considered the holding environment as 'a form of loving' (p.592). In the context of an early childhood practitioner, the holding environment should offer a supportive environment.

Hawkins and Shohet (2012) compared the idea of the holding environment to a 'nursing triad' whereby the child can experience a sense of security, even if the midst of their upset. This sense of security is linked to the caregiver and the level of support they receive. A nursing triad in the ECEC sector would include the supervisor, supervisee, and the client (this could be a child within the nursery, their family, or team members). Hawkins and Shohet (2012) refer to the good enough mother metaphor when discussing the supervisor and supervisee's different roles. They propose that a 'good enough' supervisor can provide a holding environment for a helping professional, such as a social worker or counsellor, even with significant challenges. They propose that the supervisory relationship provides the 'holding environment' (p. 4).

The influential work of Bowlby's (1988) examines the relationship between a child and their caregiver. The construct of identity and early attachment is a fundamental aspect of Bowlby's work. Positive interaction forms the foundation of healthy relationships. The quality of the interaction between child and carer shapes and influences the child. For example, if a child cries and their caregiver responds in a nurturing manner, they will learn to expect comfort. This repeated pattern of behaviour reinforces to the child the permanency of the caregiver. Bowlby argues that negative or positive attachments can impact a child's lifespan.

It would be remiss not to discuss Bion (1962) and his concept of 'containment' as it is an important concept in attachment. In supervision, the supervisor would act as a container for the supervisee, enabling them to share difficult experiences and express emotions. The supervisor can contain the emotion of the supervisee, thus providing safety and boundaries. Bion (1962) proposed that young children project their fears and unregulated emotions upon their mother; the mother holds, assimilates, and acts as a container. Over time, the child or supervisee can self-regulate as they have experienced empathetic containment. Supervision without containment may lead to a lack of openness or depth of professional discourse. The supervisee may lack a sense of security and not feel able to talk freely. The environment in which supervision is conducted is important. Heffron and Murch (2010) state that it should be 'marked by safety, containment and mutual respect' (p.5). Heffron and Murch (2010) note that the provision of a safe environment is part of the supervisor's role in caring for the supervisee.

Much has been written about the emotional well-being of children (Bradshaw, 2016; Estola, Farquhar and Puroila, 2014; Robson, Brogaard-Clausen and Hargreaves, 2017; Rose, Gilbert, and Richards, 2015). More recently, Elfer's (2012) research has highlighted the complex tension concerning the interconnected relationship between children's emotional experiences at nursery, attachment-based practice, critical professional reflection, and the emotional well-being of carers. The significant role of positive attachments in human relationships was noted by Elfer (2008) as critical to both adults and children.

A key element of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) was influenced by Elfer's (2008) research concerning the quality of attachments between the child and the carer. The key person approach operates whereby each child is allocated a key person to care for them. The premise of the approach is to promote caring relationships with the child, carer, and family. There is significant research to support the fundamental role of positive attachment; this is evidenced and interwoven throughout the curriculum (DfES, 2002, 2007; DfE, 2012, 2017) and within literature (Belsky, Burchinal, McCartney, Vandell, Clarke-Stewart and Owen, 2007; Page and Elfer, 2013).

An interesting finding from Elfer's (2008; p.131) research explored a juxtaposed frame of reference to attachment, whereby nursery staff 'contain' their emotion rather than 'evoke' purposeful relationships. This is where staff actively avoided meaningful connections with children. The intent may be self-preservation against the loss of a child leaving or moving nursery rooms or could stem from fear of developing a connection with a child that the parent may resent. Supervision can provide space to address complex emotions associated with working with children. Without such a forum, Elfer (2008) concludes that areas of practice such as attachment and forming relationships with children and parents become a suppressed area of professional discourse. Furthermore, a practitioner suppressing their emotions could directly impact the quality of care and education provided to the children.

2.5.4 Secure base

When examining Bowlby's theory of attachment, it is evident there are similarities to Winnicott, such as the central role of the environment in children's development (Bowlby, 1969). Similar to Winnicott's notion of the 'holding environment' is Bowlby's (1988) concept of the 'secure base' (p.12).

> A secure base from which a child or adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened. In essence, this role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary (Bowlby, 1988, p.12).

Comparisons can be made between Winnicott's 'holding environment' and a secure base that Bowlby (1979) describes. The secure base of supervision enables the supervisee to develop, learn, test boundaries, experience success and failure with the knowledge that they can return to the place of safety. Pivotal to a secure base is the shared relationship between mother/child or supervisor/supervisee, which requires investment and nurturing, 'disruption, and the renewal of affectional bonds' (p. 69). Bowlby advocated the virtues of disruption within a relationship; in supervision, this could extend to being challenged through coaching conversations, critical reflection, and others' perspectives.

Research by Feeney (1999) highlights the necessity of having a secure base within relationships, as it appears to be an influencing factor in caregiving behaviours and key to regulating emotions within interpersonal relationships. Evidence suggests that positive attachments and having a sense of security aid the ability to care for others (Collins and Feeney, 2000; Kunce and Shaver, 1994) which is pertinent to all caring professions.

A key element of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) is to provide a 'secure foundation' (p.5) for children within their early years. One of the overarching principles of the framework is to support the development of learning via the development of 'positive relationships' (p.6). The act of caring is a core function of the ECEC profession. Alongside caring for children, staff are expected to foster professional relationships with parents, colleagues, and external experts.

2.6 Professional Identity

Individual identity is a complex construct of self that can change over time. Hall (1990) states that identity is 'never complete and always in process' (p.222). Identity can be shaped through various experiences, relationships, and political and social beliefs. Furthermore, the identity construct extends across many aspects of life, such as national identity, gender identity, social identity, and class identity.

A comprehensive literature review conducted by Brock (2012) explored the work of (Friedson, 1994; Goodson and Hargreaves, 2003; Hoyle and John, 1995; Sachs, 2003; Sims, Fine and Gabriel, 1993). The review identified the multifaceted and complex nature of professionalism (McGillivary, 2008). It highlighted seven professionalism concepts, including professional and expert knowledge, education, and training at graduate level or

above, including the commitment to continual professional development. Acquisition of specialist skills and the ability to manage complex tasks was also a hallmark of professionalism, as was the ability to operate autonomously. Professional values, ethics, and strong morals, such as a commitment to integrity and confidentiality, were considered important.

Supervision is a familiar practice in social work, nursing and counselling. It forms a salient element in 'developing and sustaining professionals' identities' (Saltiel, 2017, p.532). The introduction of supervision by the DfE (2012) signals a trajectory like that of other caring professions (Soni, 2013). Supervision is widely practiced in social work, nursing, and counselling, yet it is a relatively new concept within the early years. Indeed, Soni (2019), the leading voice on supervision within the field of ECEC, has identified it as an unfamiliar practice within the early years sector and highlighted the challenges of embedding supervision due to it being a borrowed and adopted praxis.

The professionalisation of the ECEC sector in England has focused on a graduate workforce and robust development. In addition, supervision became a mandatory professional practice for the ECEC sector in England (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011; Tickell, 2011). The implementation and delivery of supervision reinforces a shift in professional discourse. Floyd and Morrison (2014) note how 'professional practice continues to be re-configured' (p.43). This is evident in the role of the NM, as the expectation of the role has extended to include the delivery of supervision. Floyd and Morrison (2014) note that professional identities are often 'deeply held personal values developed through prior socialisation experiences' (p. 46). The interview will explore NMs' views on supervision and if they deem it an important practice that aligns with their professional values. Prior supervision experience will likely differ depending on their professional heritage and perspective.

2.6.1 Professionalism and care

The influential work of Gilligan (1982) has informed the professional discourse concerning the nature of care, including the gendered disparity between men and women. The latter references societal differences or norms for men and women. For example, empathy and compassion are more traditional in women's constructs of care. The ethics of care can be applied to the ECEC sector, as historically, care has been perceived as women's work (Cameron and Moss, 2020; Taggart, 2011, 2016). Much has been written about the absence of men within the ECEC sector (Bonetti, 2019; Warin, 2019; Wright and Brownhill, 2018).

To date, the ECEC workforce remains a female-dominated sector despite numerous national campaigns to attract men into the profession. Warin, Wilkinson, and Greaves (2021) recently reported that only 4.4% of the workforce are men. As a result, they caution that early years care and education are in danger of remaining a sector known to be ‘women’s work’ (p.882).

Research conducted by Bonetti (2019) identified a slight increase in the percentage of men working in the sector. Findings reveal that the proportion of men working in qualified roles, such as nursery nurses and assistants, is 1.8 percent. In contrast, 26.7 percent of teaching staff are male (Bonetti, 2019). The significant increase suggests that male staff prefer teaching children over five years. While the subject of male practitioners in the ECEC sector is important, it is not the focus of this research. There is, however, a stark contrast between the diversity of male and female representation in the ECEC workforce.

Research conducted by Hargreaves and Hopper (2006) into the perceived professional status of early years, primary and secondary teachers found that early years teachers experience significant challenges regarding how they are perceived compared to primary and secondary teachers. Early years teachers were seen in a caring capacity, which affected their sense of occupational status. A complex discourse exists concerning the ethics of care and professionalism within the ECEC sector. Taggart (2011, 2014) has argued that the notion of care has been misrepresented and deprecated due to the entrenched societal belief that women are better caregivers. Since the 1990s, as outlined in chapter one, there has been a concerted effort to professionalise the sector. Ambitions to be an all-graduate workforce coupled with significant funding from the government enabled a traditional Nursery Nurse to upskill to be an Early Years Professional or, more recently, an Early Years Teacher; the former represents an affinity towards care while the latter is a notable shift towards education.

Supervision is a professional practice and is considered an act of caring for the other. While a shift in discourse is needed concerning care being seen as a woman’s work, caring for others must not be omitted. Supervision within the ECEC sector has the potential to demonstrate ‘unconditional positive regard’ (Johnson, 2010, p.5) towards each other. Noddings (1984) states, ‘caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's’ (p.24). This concept can also be applied to the practice of supervision. For example, the supervisor may consider an event from the supervisee’s perspective or frame of reference. When the supervisor listens and does not force their opinions onto the supervisee but is curious and seeks to understand, this demonstrates an act of care and empathy.

2.6.2 Professional Standards and Councils

Social Work England (2020) is the specialist regulator for social workers. It is also the organisation where people register once they have completed their social work qualifications. It is a requirement that all social workers must be registered with Social Work England if they want to work and be known as a social worker. Social Work England (2020) set out the professional standards that social workers must adhere to once registered. It explicitly references the importance of supervision and the role of both reflection and feedback in improving performance.

Within nursing, supervision is a central tenet of the preliminarily and post-registration process. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the professional regulator for nursing and midwifery in the United Kingdom. While it is evident that nursing and midwifery are different disciplines, each with their professional heritage, they collectively identify with one regulatory administration, which stipulates a common approach to supervision. The core purpose of the NMC is to regulate high standards of practice; similar to Social Work England (2020), it also maintains the register for nurses and midwives in the UK. To practice in either discipline, registration with the Council is a prerequisite for adherence to the professional code. The NMC (2018) considers the code a 'reinforcing professionalism' (p.5) and states that it promotes professional trust and currency within the caring sector.

There are similarities between NMC (2018) code and the EYFS (DfE, 2017) as they reference supervision practice. However, the NMC code provides guidance and sets clear expectations concerning supervision practice. Whereas the EYFS (DfE, 2017) provides minimal advice and guidance about supervision, neither does it stipulate its delivery frequency. There is also a lack of information or criteria concerning the experience or qualifications required to deliver supervision. This ambiguity is surprising given that the requirement to provide supervision falls within the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and is given legal status under section 39(1)(b) of the Childcare Act (2006).

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (2018) is a professional organisation that counsellors can register with, although it is voluntary. Anyone can practice as a counsellor. Membership with a professional body is self-elective. Once a counsellor gains membership with the BACP via registration, specific requirements need to be met.

Registration with the BACP provides professional kudos, and counsellors' names are added to a certified register. The BACP stipulates that a qualified counsellor must receive monthly supervision (at least 1.5 hours). For counsellors in training, the expectation is the same. Also, there is a clear expectation that counsellors adhere to professional standards (BACP, 2020). There is a requirement to commit to maintaining sector currency, working collaboratively to strengthen the profession, and maintaining accurate record-keeping and continual professional development. It is a requirement that counsellors invest and attend to their ‘physical and psychological health' to support the client to the best of their ability.

2.6.3 Preparation for practice

A review of BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree programmes was conducted via university search pages, and it revealed an absence of reference to supervision in module summaries. Six universities were reviewed based on internet search engine results (derby.ac.uk; londonmet.ac.uk; northampton.ac.uk; plymouth.ac.uk; port.ac.uk; uel.ac.uk). Each module and course description were reviewed, and no reference was made to supervision. It has been ten years since supervision was made a statutory requirement, yet it does not feature as a standard topic within the syllabus. The omission of supervision within undergraduate and Level 3 Early Years Educator course content, suggests a lack of awareness and understanding for it be included in the syllabus.

As referenced in chapter one, the Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC, 2007) published guidance to support effective supervision within the care sector. This was influenced by the belief that 'high quality' supervision is critical in 'ensuring positive outcomes for people who use social care and children's services' (SkillsforCare, 2007, p.2). While this is useful to an established profession such as social work, it highlights the absence of a specific supervision and training framework for the ECEC sector.

Historically, the journey to becoming a supervisor within the counselling profession was associated with someone highly experienced in the field. To qualify for such a role, consideration was given to the tenure of the counsellor. Carroll (1996) refers to this as an 'inherited role', which occurs as part of a counsellor's life course. However, Creaner (2014) notes that counselling and supervision require different skills. Counsellors who aspire to deliver supervision must train for such a role in current practice. The BACP (2018) recognises that the delivery of supervision ‘requires additional skills and knowledge’ (p.22).

Henderson, Holloway and Millar (2014) suggest that many people working in the helping profession develop supervision via an apprenticeship-type model. Learning occurs through observation to ensure consistency of understanding. The very essence of an apprenticeship model is built on inexperienced apprentices learning from skilled experts. This model proves problematic within the ECEC sector as supervision practice is relatively new, so finding experts may prove difficult.

Creaner (2014) asserts that effective supervision requires commitment. Furthermore, she states that 'preparation, reflection, negotiation and active participation' (p.xi) are central tenets of the process. Moreover, Bailey (2009) notes that supervision is now regarded as a discipline, so supervisors must undertake appropriate training. It is a process practiced ‘from a sound base of theoretical, psychological and ethical understanding’ (Henderson, Holloway and Millar, 2014, p.11). Hawkins and Shohet (2012) recognise that supervision can seem an overwhelming task without suitable training or support. They champion the role of supervision as it 'provides an opportunity to increase one's capacity and skills in helping others to learn and develop within their work’ (p.50). Other professions recognise the necessity of preparation, training and opportunities to practice supervision.

Frameworks or codes of practice set expectations for supervision. There is a lack of supervision training for the staff or a set of supervision standards pertinent to the ECEC sector. Moreover, neither does the sector have to attain or demonstrate any competency in supervision to deliver it to others. John (2019) asserts that experiential training, preferably with the entire staff team, is essential to aid understanding and more in-depth training for supervisors. However, she acknowledges the concerns and tensions related to supervision, such as limited resources, lack of supervision experience and time.

Individual and group supervision facilitation is complex and requires planning, a practice framework, awareness of group dynamics, advanced facilitation skills, and experience (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012: Proctor and Inskipp, 2001). Like individual supervision, training, knowledge, and preparation are essential to effective supervision. Without the latter, supervision lacks any structure or framework. Academics such as Heffron and Murch (2010); Corey, Robert, Moulton and Muratonri (2021) stress the importance of preparation and training for supervision. Indeed, Tsui (1997) reported how training was the crux of the successful implementation of supervision within social work.

2.6.4 Purpose and function of supervision

Academics, such as Carroll (1996) and Scaife (2001, p.2), acknowledge the differences between the purpose and function of supervision. There is a lack of consensus concerning the key functions of supervision. It seems that the model or framework applied by the supervisor directly influences the functions explored in supervision. The most traditional functions of supervision include management, development, support, mediation, and reflective learning. These functions were applied to (Morrison's, 2008) 4x4x4 supervision model that draws on Kolb's (1984) adult learning theory.

The management function ensures professional standards are being adhered to; within the ECEC sector, this would apply to Ofsted, health and safety, child protection and the implementation of the EYFS (DfE, 2017). The supervisor and supervisee can then evaluate practice against sector standards through professional dialogue. The management function involves the supervisor overseeing the supervisee to ensure clarity of their roles and responsibilities and overall performance and undertake annual appraisals. Commentary by O'Donoghue, (2015) notes that an over-reliance on the management function of supervision can stifle and disempower the supervisee. This is because the management function of supervision can be misused to reinforce accountability.

The development function aims to assess and support the supervisee with potential theoretical and practice needs. It also promotes reflective practice and feedback to aid professional growth. Furthermore, the development function encourages self-assessment of a supervisee's ability to be resilient when faced with challenging situations such as a child protection case.

The support function aims to create a safe space to recognise the supervisee as a professional and an individual. It is also an opportunity to set and revisit boundaries between what constitutes counselling and supervision. The supportive function also addresses areas of well-being and stress and provides opportunities for the supervisee to discuss their feelings.

Finally, the mediation function aims to clarify the supervisee's remit and, thereafter, the wider team. It also facilitates greater awareness of the supervisee and their connection to the broader organisation. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for the supervisee to escalate any concerns they may want to represent with the wider management of the organisation.

Alternatively, Adamson (2012) highlights different supervision functions as a ‘swingometer’ (p. 197), whereby the functions compete against each other and create tensions in the supervisory relationship. These include risk management and accountability; efficiency, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness; occupational health; sustainability; quality, consumer rights and best practice; professional development and competence. Adamson (2012) suggests these tensions are influenced by organisational culture and subtle political nuances that drive decision making across the business or service.

While there are many different perspectives, research acknowledges that a key aspect of supervision is to support clients' well-being in tandem with the continual professional development of the supervisee (Beddoe and Davys, 2016; Holloway, 1992; Watkins and Scaturo, 2013). The purpose and functions of supervision can be applied to all helping professions (Scaife, 2001).

2.6.5 Supervision models for caring professionals

There are numerous supervision models available. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) developed a ‘seven-eyed’ supervision model for use across the caring professions. The model's name reflects the various perspectives required when conducting supervision and promotes ‘super-VISION’ (Pooley, 1966, p.551). It is a complex theoretical framework that has been developed over several years and is still evolving. First, attention is placed on the client and the concerns they may present, followed by exploring the supervisee's 'strategies and interventions' (p.91). The purpose of this is to ascertain what has already been implemented. The supervisor will then examine the type of relationship the supervisee has with the client to determine any tensions, barriers or concerns that need to be addressed. This is followed by focused time on the supervisee to explore their response to the client and any associated thoughts or emotions. The model's penultimate stage involves the supervisor reflecting on their own experiences, bias, emotions and responses to the client and the supervisee. Finally, the supervisor shifts the focus to the client's broader context, the community in which they live and the impact of external factors such as the political and economic climate. In addition, professional boundaries, standards and codes of ethics must be adhered to. This model may support experienced professionals who have been trained to deliver supervision. However, the model is complex and requires previous supervision experience. There are numerous stages throughout the model that could lead to confusion. A framework for the ECEC sector must be clear, and child focused. While this model may be appropriate within social work,

the various stages may be inappropriate for the ECEC sector due to supervision being a new practice.

Before the publication of the EYFS (2012), research by Elfer (2012) raised awareness of a model referred to as 'Work Discussion' (WD) to support critical, authentic professional reflection (p.129). This builds upon previous work (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007) that explored WD as an opportunity to consider professional practice. Elfer draws on the work of Rustin (2008) to define WD within a group context as an activity that requires:

> …understanding of what is going on, and the emotions and anxieties that are in play in a situation, but also of actively trying to help a participant observer to cope better with a situation and, through this, to enable practice to become more thoughtful (p.269).

The WD framework is essential but not exclusively a forum where practitioners can reflect upon and discuss the emotional demands of working with children and their families. Elfer states that professional reflection has dual functionality, firstly, to be 'heuristic in relation to relationship theory and practice in the nursery' and secondly, to be 'emotionally containing of stress and anxiety arising from emotionally close and serial engagements with young children' (p.132). Furthermore, he advocates that having a space to deconstruct and contribute to nursery policy development proved empowering. Findings from the research indicated that the experience was positive and facilitated discussion of sensitive topics. While it is not referred to as supervision, the WD framework offers a model which enables staff to discuss issues and receive support.

As discussed, supervision models have been adapted from other caring professionals. One such model has been used within social work and modified by Sturt and Wonnacott (2016) for use in the ECEC sector. The model was designed using Gibbs (1998) Reflective Cycle. Strut and Wonnacott (2016) have assumed a level of knowledge not included within the syllabus for either Level 2 or 3 Early Years qualifications. This is an important point as reflective theories and models are introduced at Level 4, whereas the minimum level of qualification required to be an NM is Level 3. While many NMs hold a higher-level qualification, it could be a stumbling block for some. This reaffirms the need for a sector-specific supervision framework, as outlined in chapter one, which will be a recommendation of this research. It is interesting to note that, at present, the ECEC sector has not developed a specific model for early years. This could be due to a lack of understanding, focus or interest concerning supervision. It also suggests that supervision is not high on the educational

agenda. However, well-being is an area of focus, and if links can be made between the impact of supervision on practitioner well-being, its influence will be more significant.

Doctoral research conducted by Madeley (2014) found that the ECEC sector lacked a specific framework or theoretical supervision model. She applied the four overarching principles of the EYFS to create a supervision framework. However, while familiar language was used within the model, there is no evidence to suggest this has been implemented across the sector.

2.6.6 Supervision and Reflective Practice

For many, reflective practice is not a new concept (Brock, 2014; Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011), and as previously referenced, it is a core component of Elfer's (2012) WD framework. Recent research comments on the positive link between reflection and well-being (Susman-Stillman *et al.*, 2020). As discussed, it is a concept introduced at Level 4 and above in English, Early Years qualifications.

Reflection is a core principle of educational theory and practice (Manen, 1991; Schon, 1983). Hyun and Marshall (1996, p.23) describe three types of reflection: various pedagogical practice stages. The first is technical, reflected in the 'application of skills and knowledge' (p.23); this can be demonstrated through general classroom administration. The second is practical. The teacher begins to explore and ask a question about pedagogy, although she remains task-focused and is aware of the disparity between 'espoused theory and philosophy' (p.23). Critical reflection represents maturation where 'process and outcome' are considered in addition to 'moral and ethical issues of social compassion and justice.' Hyun and Marshall (1996) advocate that clinical supervision is essential for early years teachers. They state that 'critical reflection in, on, and *for* action helps ensure that teachers consider multiple and diversified viewpoints and the long-term social and moral consequences of their decisions (p.135). This depth of reflection is explored through supervision as part of teacher training and is subsequently built upon throughout a teacher's career.

Henderson, Holloway and Millar (2014, p.11) comment that a supervisor should provide a 'safely constructed place' where supervisees can explore and discuss their concerns and debate possible solutions. They assert that reflection is a critical element of supervision, and to omit it, both supervisors and supervisees are at risk of burnout. This is supported by (Elfer,

2012; Elfer and Dearnley, 2007), who note that the absence of opportunity to reflect and explore complex emotions can avoid challenging practice areas. With this in mind, reflective practice needs to be covered within all levels of early years qualifications.

Academic commentary highlights the complex nature of supervision (Creaner, 2014; Hawkins and Shohet, 2012). An element of this complexity is the practice of reflection, which is considered a fundamental aspect of supervision but is notable often due to its absence (Saltiel, 2017). There are numerous models of reflective practice. However, Gibbs (1998) Reflective Cycle, Kolb's (1984) Experimental Learning Cycle, and Schon's (1991) approach differentiate between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. A practical supervision model that encourages reflection-in-action and on-action could help early years practitioners deconstruct their work with children and families. It would be of considerable value. Reflective practice needs to be demystified and normalised within supervision to make it accessible for the ECEC profession.

Reflective supervision is closely linked to clinical supervision and is commonly used in the American early childhood sector (Heffron and Murch, 2010; Scott Heller and Gilkerson, 2009). The reflective learning model operates from the premise that supervisees learn from their experiences. Davys (2001) posits that supervision is a continual process of learning and discovery. Reflective supervision can provide a lens through which to examine unconscious behaviours and patterns of thinking consciously. Fook and Gardner (2007) discuss how it can provide a forum to challenge unknown assumptions. There may be times when working with a family or supporting a child may trigger childhood memories or unresolved issues. Eaves Simpson *et al*., (2018) suggest that reflective supervision provides space to examine their feelings and, by doing so, supports well-being.

Similarly, Shahmoon-Shanok (2009, p.8) asserts that supervision can allow staff 'to step back from their interpersonal work and think alongside a more experienced partner'. In addition, Beddoe and Davys (2010, p.88) state that when supervision is regarded as a reflective learning process, a shift occurs, moving the supervisor from 'expert' to a 'facilitator' in the supervision forum'. This echoes the work of John (2012), who writes about the importance of collaboration. Reflection adds a further dimension to supervision that provides perspective and depth. Paige-Smith and Craft (2011) state that reflective practice is a 'vital aspect of working with young children' (p.1). However, reflection is not referenced within the EYFS

(DfE, 2017) statement about supervision, which is another missed opportunity to embed professional practices.

In America, the organisation Zero to Three offers a rich and deeply embedded perspective on reflective supervision. This is interwoven in their mission statement and driven by the desire to support adults who work with babies and young children. Heffron and Murch (2010) write about reflective supervision from this unique position. Reflective supervision is defined as a 'relationship-based supervisory' (p.5). They emphasise the frequency of meetings, a collaborative, relational approach and reflection as essential elements. Commitment to regular, scheduled meetings is a central tenet of the model. They describe how a supervisor provides:

> Space for reflection and introspection, nurturing staff members' well-being, helping staff members understand the mission and values of the team and the organization, staff training, quality assurance, serving as an intermediary between direct service staff members and upper management, promoting change and innovation, and initiating community collaborations (Heffron and Murch, 2010, p.2).

Reflective supervision is a fundamental practice 'necessary for quality services and sustaining staff's well-being' (p.3). This contrasts with the definition provided in the EYFS (DfE, 2017), where mention of practitioner well-being is absent. On the contrary, a characteristic of Zero to Three is their commitment to building and strengthening connections through relational attachments, developing a sense of belonging, psychological safety, being cared for and being known. They recognise and build on the work of Bowlby (1988) and advocate that supervision provides a secure base from which to be curious, explore complex issues, manage ambiguity, acknowledge and learn from the past, regulate emotions, be open to new ways of thinking through a process of co-construction. They use a metaphor to capture the complexity of supervision, stating that a supervisor needs 'at least two interchangeable lenses' (p.73), one to provide a broad angle of what is happening within the community, setting, family and children, the latter to afford minutia detail, which can be the 'nexus for change' (Heffron and Murch, p.73). In addition, Boris and Grabert (2009) note the importance of listening within supervision; while it may seem obvious, it can be challenging to implement. Through attunement (Shohet and Shohet, 2020), the supervisee can filter thoughts and connect with others, such as their supervisor.

Reflective supervision provides the opportunity to connect and communicate with another human being, where the supervisee can feel understood, appreciated, and supported. If the supervisor is fully present, she can demonstrate empathy to the supervisee. Doing this will assist the development of empathy beyond supervision to the children and families that the supervisee supports. The supervision forum provides a safe space where sociocultural issues can be raised in tandem with self-awareness. The supervisee can examine prejudice and unconscious bias. As discussed throughout this chapter, reflection is a core practice and must be considered part of an ECEC supervision model.

2.6.7 Supervision for supervisors

Hawkins and Shohet (2012) resurrect an age-old question posed by Juvenal 'Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?' This translates from Latin to English as 'who will care for the carers?' While ancient in origin, the centrality of the question is pertinent for contemporary supervision practices. Heffron and Murch (2010) discuss the critical role of supervision for supervisors and suggest that for them to be effective and skilled in their role, it is essential that they, too, are recipients of supervision. Scott Heller and Gilkerson (2009) note that a supervisory relationship reflects the parallel process (Searles, 1955). Therefore, a supervisor should be offered the same supportive space they provide their supervisee. This will then provide a space whereby they can explore their feelings through honest self-reflection. The benefits of supervision for the supervisor are outlined by Carroll (2014), Creane (2014), John (2012a), Hawkins and Shohet (2012), Shohet and Shohet (2020).

Hawkins and Shohet state that a good supervisor values and prioritises regular supervision. However, supervision for supervisors raises a broader organisational issue (John, 2012) and requires a systematic approach. In the instance where the manager could also be the owner of the setting, they may struggle to fund supervision due to the financial implications of sourcing external supervision. Conversely, there may be a lack of trained supervisors in a single site nursery or a large company with multiple sites. Also, there may not be an expectation or realisation that supervisors must receive supervision. However, it is apparent within the EYFS (DfE, 2017) statutory document that *all* staff working with children and families must receive supervision, extending to the nursery manager. As manager and supervisor, they may be dealing with a problematic safeguarding concern within the nursery or managing multiple complex issues while maintaining the role of containing others through supervision.

2.6.8 Group supervision

Group supervision is a forum that can offer a 'rich tapestry for learning and development with a range of possible formats and leadership roles' Scaife (2001, p.4). Likewise, Proctor and Inskipp (2001) affirm that group supervision can offer the supervisor and supervisee restorative opportunities. However, it does place demands on the supervisor and requires them to negotiate success and failure within a group context. Here, the notion of 'good enough' supervision is imperative, as supervisors will need to manage their own and others' expectations. Literature highlights the many benefits of group supervision (Corey *et al.*, 2021; Hawkins and Shohet, 2012), particularly in times of economic restraint. It can promote a collective use of time, money and expertise. Within a group context, over-dependence on a single supervisor can be reduced due to the omission of the one-to-one supervisor/supervisee relationship.

Conversely, it could foster a greater sense of group or team cohesion (Corey *et al.*, 2021; Morrison, 2008) as they learn to share and trust each other. The supportive environment can provide a space where staff can discuss difficulties and receive input, feedback, and reflect (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Morrison, 2008), fostering greater transparency. Through authentic discussion, prejudice can be identified, and opportunities can be created to re-address any bias. The group can hold each other accountable for change management by allowing the supervisee to rehearse their responses to potential sensitive scenarios and gain insights into other working practices (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Morrison, 2008). In addition, group supervision can provide unique opportunities to explore the 'complex dimensions' of practice' (Beddoe and Davys, 2010, p.234).

Group supervision may be more suitable for field-based Regional Directors who have the flexibility to meet together; however, this would be difficult for NMs' to implement. Research conducted by Soni (2013) suggests that group supervision led to 'positive team dynamics and management support' (p.158) which participants reported being an essential success factor to supervision. This is also mirrored in Madeley's (2014) research. She identified that group supervision, undertaken alongside individual supervision, would benefit staff working in the caring professions. Group supervision is not referenced within the EYFS (2017) and is unlikely to be implemented unless there is an awareness of the practice or format. While group supervision offers many positive opportunities, it is important to acknowledge that there would be less time for individuals in this model. Furthermore, a

power imbalance could exist within the group, leading to an individual's silence, or some in the group may become disinterested and unwilling to engage. Conversely, a dominant person may take over the group, resulting in others not feeling comfortable or willing to contribute. An agreed way of working is important when conducting group supervision. There are several approaches. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) advocate the methodological approach of 'contracting' (p.179), similar to the process undertaken within individual supervision.

As identified in her research, Soni (2013) noted the many different positive outcomes of group supervision. These findings mirrored other work (Madeley, 2014), which found that staff could learn from each other via supervision when the environment was considered safe. ECEC staff listened to other perspectives while sharing their positive and negative experiences. Furthermore, Soni identified several positive outcomes from ECEC staff engaging with supervision, such as a 'reduction in feelings of isolation, raised confidence and reassurance that others face similar problems and issues' (p.158). This is an important finding, as highlighted in this chapter; well-being is an area of concern and, therefore, essential to address. Soni (2013) identified how group supervision aided a collective sense of identity, team dynamics and fostered a greater sense of care. The findings illustrate the supportive nature of supervision. In addition, group supervision nurtured empathetic team relations that increased a sense of togetherness and collective identity. While my research is not focused on group supervision, I will explore the relationship between supervision and well-being. Other benefits include discussing problems and practicing care, thereby reducing professional isolation, emotional fatigue, and stress. A more abstract benefit of supervision is developing new practices and theoretical models (Porter, 1997; Rafferty and Coleman, 2001).

2.7 Summary

This chapter has explored literature about supervision. Due to the lack of research about supervision in the ECEC sector, it was necessary to review and widen the scope to other occupations. As a result, social work, nursing, and counselling supervision practices were explored to determine how it was administered, accessed and valued.

The literature review was instrumental to the design of the conceptual framework. The concepts of organisational culture, professional identity and well-being were explored. These have influenced the overarching research focus to explore NMs' supervision experiences

within a large, private day-care company. These themes directly influenced the sub-questions:

1. What is your experience of supervision?
2. How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?
3. How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?
4. How does supervision support well-being?

Initially, the subject of attachment was a key concept within the research. However, it became clear that well-being and attachment were interconnected. Positive attachment influences a person's well-being. Similarly, learning and development had been identified as core concepts, and through the literature review, it became evident that the company's organisational culture influenced the provision of training. As a result, learning was included in sub-question number two.

The literature review identified some similarities concerning supervision between professions. There is clear guidance and supervision expectations for those who register with professional bodies. There are expectations about the frequency of the meetings and ongoing continual professional development. The practice of supervision appears to reinforce professional identity. The literature also highlighted a lack of a supervision model or framework for the ECEC sector.

Furthermore, there is a broad range of academic interest and professional discourse about supervision, enabling progressive practice in other caring professions. Parallels can be drawn between the professions and the emotional labour required to care for others. However, there are considerable differences in the preparation and training provided to social workers, nurses and counsellors to become supervisors. This extends to ongoing continual professional development, guidance about the frequency of supervision and resource to explain the purpose and functions of supervision.

The next chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the methodological approach applied to this study, including a clear rationale for the chosen research methods. A discussion of my ontological and epistemological position, ethical considerations and thematic analysis will be explored.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore NMs' supervision experiences within the context of a large, private day-care provider. The research aimed to ascertain how supervision was implemented within private early years' settings per (DfE, 2017) statutory requirement, as outlined in the EYFS.

In this chapter, I will set out the methodological approach adopted for this study. A 'road map' will signpost the reader through the various stages of the data collection process, including a discussion of my ontological and epistemological beliefs. An overview of case study research will also be discussed. Metaphorical thinking was central to the methodological design and influenced my decision to use creative research methods, as discussed in this chapter.

In addition, contextual information about the nursery settings and research participants will be provided. I will also discuss how I navigated ethical considerations when conducting workplace research. The power dynamics of researching within the workplace are also referred to as insider research by Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010). To make sense of the data collected, thematic analysis was used and will be discussed later in the chapter.

3.2 Research paradigm

Punch (2009) defines a research paradigm as a 'set of assumptions about the social world' (p.358). Kuhn (1962) defines it as a 'world view' and a way of 'looking at or researching phenomena' (p.23). It is an abstract concept that Hughes (2010) compares to a picture frame. For example, if the picture remains the same but the frame changes, the picture, whilst unchanged, will be altered, and the way it is presented to the beholder will be different. Academics, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) denote a research paradigm as a 'loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts and propositions that orient thinking and research' (p.22). Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a 'worldview that defines, for its holder, the 'nature of the world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts' (p.108).

3.2.1 Traditional paradigms

Within research, positivism and interpretivism are dominant research paradigms (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Kumar, 2014; Newby, 2010). According to Bassey (1999) the methodological approach of a positivist researcher is primarily 'quantitative' due to how data is collected and measured. Johnson and Christensen (2012) note that characteristics of quantitative research include explaining and predicting data or patterns. Objectivity is obtained due to the predictability of behaviours studied in controlled environments, enabling bias to be isolated. Quantitative research is driven by the need to understand, confirm and generalise theories applied to the masses. The analysis of data within quantitative research is primarily concerned with the statistical relationships that can be applied to a large population. The nature of this approach is not suitable for my research.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) highlight limitations concerning a positivist paradigm, principally, the absolute requirement for objectivity, which does not represent or value individuals' uniqueness or stories. My research is concerned with the experiences of supervision. I set out to gain an in-depth understanding of NMs' perspective of supervision. A pure, positivist approach would be unsuitable for this research.

Conversely, Bassey (1999) affirms that an interpretive researcher believes in multiple versions of reality whereby 'people perceive and so construe the world in ways which are often *similar* but not necessarily the *same'* (p.43). Moreover, qualitative research is concerned with understanding the individual instead of the masses. This research focused on a small sample group of ten NMs', and the research approach intended to gain an in-depth insight into their supervision experiences.

Waring (2012) illustrates the extremes of realism and constructivism by placing them at opposite ends of a continuum. The equivalent positions to realism and constructivism would be positivism and interpretivism. He states that a researcher must consider their ontological position, defined by Strega (2005) as 'a theory about what the world is like – what the world consists of and why' (p.201). Thereafter, thought must be given to the epistemological stance of studying knowledge. As such, interpretivism values the multi-lens perspective, the 'accounts and observations of the world' and seeks to understand, appreciate, and develop knowledge through a 'process of interpretation' (Waring, 2012, p.16).

Schwandt (2003) recognises that knowledge formation is often constructed through shared experiences, dialogue, and trying to make sense of a situation, concept or practice. The theory of social constructivism has influenced my epistemological position.

3.2.2 Mixed methods

In recent years, mixed method research has increased in popularity within the field of education, health, psychology, and sociology (Biesta, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Denscombe, 2008). It combines purposeful data collection by drawing on both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The mixed methods approach has been described by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as the third methodological movement alongside the more conventional research paradigms. Patton (1990) coined the phrase 'paradigm of choices' (p.39), which refers to a different way of viewing the tradition of qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Instead, the 'paradigm of choices' seeks to provide the researcher with options that suit 'methodological appropriateness' (p.39) as a central tenet. The mixed methods paradigm provides the scope to select methods that complement the research questions. As Patton (1990) described, methodological appropriateness allows the researcher to implement innovative methods. Strict adherence to one paradigm would limit methodological inventiveness, as described by Mann and Warr (2017) and the choice of methods used within the case study. A pragmatic approach has been applied to this research as opposed to a principled approach described by Biesta (2012).

There are different classifications and perspectives of how mixed methods can be implemented (Biesta, 2012; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989, p.259) proposed five key purposes of mixed methods research, which include the 'triangulation' of data from the use of different methods, maximising the strengths of the two different approaches. The second is 'complementarity'; its purpose is to gain greater clarification and depth of the result. The third uses the results from one method to develop or inform the other. 'Initiation' is the fourth purpose of mixed methods research which searches for the 'discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives of frameworks.' Finally, the fifth is 'Expansion', which seeks to extend the range of the research by using a range of methods.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) have identified six possible advantages to a mixed methods approach. These include maximising the strengths of different methods to counterbalance other methods' weaknesses. Mixed methods can answer a particular research question and provide more comprehensive results than a single method approach. Although not relevant to this study, using mixed methods can encourage interdisciplinary working across departments due to applying multiple worldviews. Finally, mixed methods research is ‘practical’ (p.12) as it encourages using different techniques and approaches.

For this research, a mixed methods lens has been applied to this study. The research aimed to gain insight into NMs’ experiences of supervision. Furthermore, using mixed method research provides a greater depth of rigour and different opportunities to ask relevant research questions. Within the case study, a range of methods was applied. There were three distinct stages within the semi-structured interview. Metaphor cards were used at the beginning, as they allowed the NM and interviewee to settle into the interview and explore supervision in a relaxed way. Thereafter, the NM was asked a series of semi-structured questions. Finally, the NMs created a sand tray composition that reflected a positive supervision experience. In this way the purpose, using Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) classifications, were ‘complementarity’, that is gaining greater insight and depth of result and ‘expansion’, that is seeking to extend the range of the research, thereby gaining overall a more comprehensive result.

Figure 3.1 illustrates my ontological, epistemological beliefs and values (axiology). An additional box has been added to reflect my choice of data analysis.

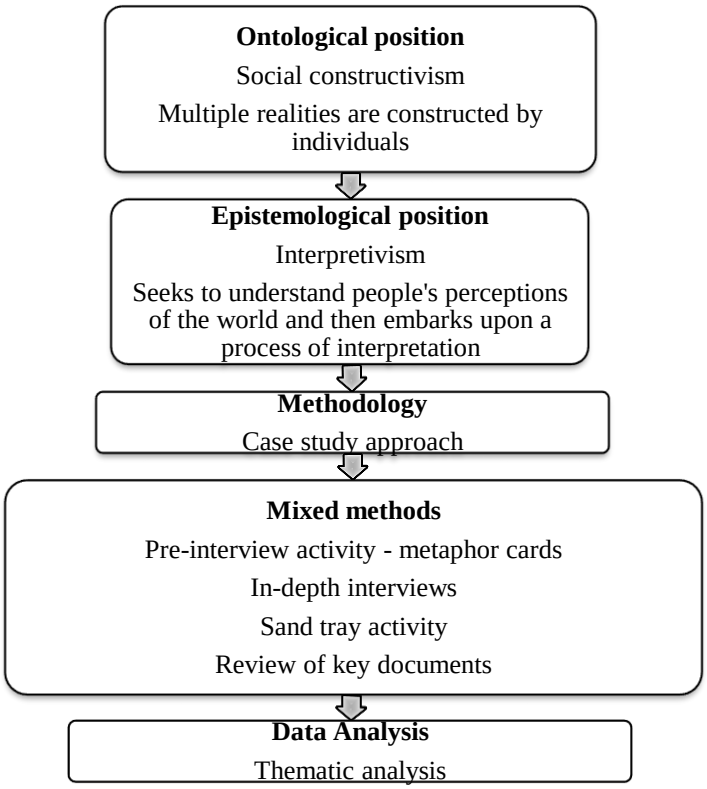


Figure 3.1 Research approach (adapted from Waring, 2012, p.16).

3.3 Research design and case study approach

A case study approach was used for this research. In the absence of a universal definition for case study research Kumar (2014) poses that a case 'could be an individual, a group, a community, an instance, an episode, a subgroup or a population, a town or a city' (p.155). On the other hand, Stake (1995) defines a case study as 'a bounded system, emphasising the unity and wholeness of that system, but confining the attention to those relevant to the research problem at the time' (p.258). Further commentary by Yin (1984) refers to case study research as an empirical inquiry that examines a 'contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (p.23).

My research explored the perceptions and experiences of NMs who deliver and receive supervision. A case study approach provided a framework to gain insight into the social workings of supervision. Case study research can provide a unique insight into real situations and record detail and meaning in ways quantitative data does not (Cohen, *et al*., 2011;

Robson, 2002). Case study research offers scope to record depth, context and emotion by design. It allows for 'thick description', which Denzin (1989) notes is more than a transactional interaction; instead, it captures the 'webs of social relationships that join persons to one another' (p.83). Central to my research is the supervisory relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. Case study research was selected as it recognised the interconnectedness of relationships. Literature illuminates the many positive aspects of a case study approach (Gilbert, 2008). However, a frequent critique is the inability to forge generalisations concerning research findings due to the extensive data and the singular nature of a case.

An instrumental case study is applied when insight is sought on a specific subject or when the research objective tests a theory. According to Mukherji and Albon (2015), an instrumental case study is the 'instrument or tool used to help the researcher understand more about a general phenomenon' (p.105). However, multiple cases will be studied if the research seeks to investigate the wider population. Multiple cases have some limitations, such as the absence of depth per case. Johnson and Christensen (2012) refer to this as the 'depth versus breadth trade-off' (p. 398). It can also be challenging to achieve a consistent approach when collecting in-depth data across numerous cases (Mishler, 1979). The implementation of collective case studies allows the researcher to make generalisations about their findings. While a multiple case study approach might have been an obvious choice for this research due to the involvement of ten NMs' located across the South of England, it was not a suitable approach. While the NMs' are located at different geographical sites, they are a part of one large nursery chain with the same overarching core principles and values. They are governed by the same organisational policies and procedures to which they must adhere.

The lens applied to this case study was informed by Kumar's (2014) stance that a case study must consider the 'total study population as one entity' (p.155). All ten nurseries form one entity. The research was carried out with NMs', as they are the key stakeholders who receive and deliver supervision in line with the EYFS (DfE, 2017). In comparison, support staff at the Head Office do not work in nurseries or have direct contact with children.

The bounded 'case' is the organisation where the research was conducted. The supervision policy is an abstract expression of the institutional values of the organisation. Considering this, an intrinsic case study defined by Stake (1995) was the best fit for my research. The

shortage informed the rationale of literature about supervision in the ECEC. The case in question is so significant that it qualified to be studied in-depth.

Table 3.1 provides further clarification on the use of an intrinsic case study.

Element	Description
The case	The private nursery chain is the case to be studied. The supervision policy, albeit abstract, represented the company values. The primary research interest was the implementation of supervision across a sample group of ten outstanding nurseries.
A bounded system	Supervision is the activity that was studied within the bounded system. The boundary of the case is the organisation. The commonality within the bounded system was that all participants led outstanding nurseries. All NMs' were sent identical sets of metaphor cards and given the same equipment when completing the sand tray compositions.
Studied in context	Insider research was conducted (Fleming, 2018; Floyd and Arthur, 2012; Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). The research context was significant as limited studies have been conducted in the ECEC and none in a large, private, day-care organisation.
In-depth study	An intrinsic case study was adopted to facilitate the collation of in-depth information. Fieldwork is a critical aspect of case study research. Interviews were conducted face to face with all participants.
Selecting the case	Participants were NMs who led outstanding nurseries within the south of England. The location was selected for accessibility.
Research participants	Ten NMs took part in the research. The context for the research was the statutory requirement set out in the EYFS (DfE, 2017) that states: 'Providers **must** put appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision of staff who have contact with children and families' (p.21).
Multiple sources of evidence	Mixed methods: Metaphor cards, semi-structured interviews, sand tray activity and documentary analysis. Each method was selected to aid greater depth, allow for multiple perspectives, and support triangulation. Method of analysis: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model.
Case study design	Intrinsic case study as defined by Stake (1995, 2006).

Table 3.1 Adapted from Harrison, Birks, Franklin and Mills (2017)

In summary, case study research was a suitable methodology as it enabled me to understand how supervision was conducted. It provided a framework and a bounded system in which to explore NMs' experiences of supervision. The data collection methods provided multiple opportunities to understand how supervision was implemented within the nursery.

3.3.1 Context of the case study

The research was conducted in a large, private childcare company in England. When the research was conducted, I was a senior leader within the organisation and had worked there for six years. The company (which will not be named to maintain anonymity) had grown exponentially via acquisition and new openings.

The research was conducted with ten NMs'. At the time of the research, they all led Ofsted (2019), rated 'outstanding' nurseries based in the South of England. The largest nursery involved in the research had 140 children on roll and employed over 55 people. In contrast, the smallest nursery out of the ten could accommodate up to 64 children and had a staff team of 18 employees. The most recent Ofsted inspection report was published in 2019, with the oldest conducted in 2013. Therefore, all inspections were carried out post the inclusion of supervision in the EYFS as a statutory requirement (DfE, 2012) and six inspections after 2017, when the additional safeguarding element was incorporated. Six of the ten outstanding inspection reports made specific references to supervision practices.

3.3.2 Sampling and Participants

Random sampling was inappropriate for this case study, as I had a set of criteria that needed to be met. Instead, I applied purposive sampling (Kumar, 2014), an 'information-oriented' method (p.155). The nurseries' location and proximity to major roads or accessibility via public transport were critical factors in their selection. All ten settings were located in the South of England. I was keen to explore supervision in outstanding nurseries instead of inadequate settings. It was necessary to access settings where supervision was delivered in some format. Random sampling would have been an unsuitable sampling method for case study research.

Information about the research was sent to over forty NMs via email. As stated, an outstanding Ofsted inspection grade and the location were perquisites concerning involvement in the research. In the first instance, the response was slower than expected, and several NMs opted not to participate due to their workload. However, the ten NMs that agreed to be involved were all committed to the research and were keen to reinforce their support. The research took place over twelve weeks due to the time-consuming nature of the interviews.

I visited eight of the ten nurseries to conduct the research. When visiting, I knew I was entering the NMs' environment, office and space, staff room and domain. I was respectful of their authority and leadership. All NMs spoke confidently about their settings, and, on most visits, the NM also took me on a tour of the nursery and garden. Due to time constraints, NMs (6 and 9) could not conduct a nursery tour following the interviews. Finally, NMs (2 and 5) opted to be interviewed at the Head Office, away from the nursery environment, due to

a lack of suitable office space. They both stated that interruptions would have been inevitable if the research had been conducted at the nursery.

The table below provides a contextual overview of who participated in the research, their tenure within the organisation and their qualifications.

Participant	Training/background and qualifications	Number of years NM has worked in the early years sector	Number of years worked as an NM at the time of research
Nursery Manager (1)	A-levels BA Hons in Early Childhood Studies	10 years	3 years 3 months
Nursery Manager (2)	Level 3 in children and young people's workforce	7 years	2 years
Nursery Manager (3)	CACHE Level 3 in Extending Childminding Practices BA Hons in Early Years Care and Education	20 years	4 years
Nursery Manager (4)	Diploma in Childcare and Education Level 3 BA Hons Early Childhood Studies Post Graduate Certificate in Early Years practice with EYPS	13 years	2 years
Nursery Manager (5)	BA Hons in Early Childhood Studies	14 years	3 years
Nursery Manager (6)	Cache Level 3 Certificate Montessori Diploma Level 4	23 years	3 years
Nursery Manager (7)	CACHE Diploma in Childcare and Education Level 3	13 years	12 months currently acting manager
Nursery Manager (8)	Early Years Childcare and Education Level 3	19 years	8 years
Nursery Manager (9)	CACHE Level 3Early Years Childcare and Education BA (Hons) degree in Early Years Education with Early Years Teacher Status	10 years	1 year
Nursery Manager (10)	Level 3 in Childcare Level 3 in Forest School	14 years	Manager for 2 years, 10 months

Table 3.2 Overview of participants' experience and qualifications.

Nine women and one man took part in the research. The research participants had significant experience working in the ECEC sector, with NM (2) having the shortest tenure of 7 years and NM (6) having the longest of 23 years. This contrasts with the reasonably brief incumbency of all NMs' (apart from NM 8, who had been a manager for eight years) who had been in the post between 1-4 years. Furthermore, five out of ten participants held sector-related undergraduate degrees and NM (4 and 9) held a Post Graduate Certificate in Early Years practice with Early Years Professional Status. The remaining five participants held level 3 childcare qualifications. Overall, the NMs' had significant experience within the sector.

3.3.3 Documentary methods

Documentary methods were used to review important documents for this research. According to Bailey (1994) documentary research method involves reading, analysing, and reviewing critical documents about the subject area being studied. McCulloch (2012) defines a document as a 'record of an event or process' as source materials (p.210). Many documents can be used within documentary research, such as personal documents and autobiographies, diaries and letters. Due to the nature of personal documents, it would be naive not to expect bias and commentary. As such, the information presented within personal documentation is subject to exaggeration by the author and may lack rigour due to a delay in the recall of information. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge potential bias when reviewing personal documents.

While most information is now accessible to the general public via the internet, some documents are required to be accessed differently due to the way they are stored. Archival documents could refer to information that is stored via the National Archives, such as records, census publications or government documents. Historical manuscripts are important and may require special handling due to age, although not relevant to this research. Another area of documentary methods is video, film, paintings and photographs. While other information, such as company policies and processes, may only be accessible for internal use within a company and not to an external audience.

Stewart (1984) notes that documentary methods differ from primary research data and are recorded as secondary data sources as they contain material 'not specifically gathered for the research question at hand' (p.11). At the same time, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) recognise the importance of documentary methods and state that they can provide a 'rich vein' (p.173) of information for analysis.

According to Scott (1990), a framework is helpful when engaging with documentary methods; this includes authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Establishing a document's 'authenticity and credibility' is essential (p.6). For example, when accessing an Ofsted report, it is best to do so via the official Ofsted website. When reading an article, such as a journal, flyer, newspaper or book, it is essential to ascertain the credibility and representativeness of documents. For example, it is crucial to ascertain if the document is reliable or if the author may be writing from a specific political point of view. As a result, the

content is likely to represent and promote political policy or beliefs. Finally, meaning refers to the clarity and accessibility of the content. The overall purpose of examining documents is to understand the meaning and significance of what the document contains. Lee (2021) takes this one step further and adds that the 'objective in looking at documents is to examine how they influence behaviour' (p. 44). The latter point is pertinent to the supervision policy and how the document informed supervision practice.

Selection of documents

McCulloch (2012) notes that combining a range of documents is preferable when conducting documentary research as it provides a 'fuller and more comprehensive account of specific themes' (p.214). Several documents were used, including Ofsted reports, the organisation's mission statement, supervision policy and corresponding paperwork.

Ofsted reports

In the first instance, Ofsted grades were used to identify potential research participants. As identified in Table 3.1. An essential criterion of a research participant was that they led an outstanding nursery. The Ofsted grade is listed in the inspection report. While Ofsted reports are in the public domain, it is impossible to reference the documents within the research as they need to be anonymised so as not to reveal the identity of the organisation where the research was conducted. When reviewing the Ofsted reports, the key intention was to ascertain whether supervision practice was explicitly mentioned.

Supervision Policy and paperwork

The supervision policy was an essential document to review. It was a surprisingly brief document, given its importance. The overall format included the original quotation about supervision from the EYFS (DfE, 2012) and a succinct statement about the purpose of supervision.

The company's supervision paperwork was reviewed in parallel with the supervision policy. The rationale for reviewing the supervision paperwork was based on the statement made below about supervision record sheets, which were referenced in the supervision policy. The policy states:

> A written record of each supervision meeting must be kept and signed off using the staff supervision record sheets. The top copy is to be kept in the staff member's office file and the bottom copy is for the staff member to keep.

On review, it became apparent that the supervision paperwork was basic in design and contained minimal information. The format took the design of a pad that included carbon paper so that both parties could have a copy of the notes.

Mission Statement

The final document that reviewed was the company's mission statement. This document is a one-page flyer that is displayed in every nursery. The mission statement sets out the values and behaviours that are expected to be adhered to by all employees. For example, these included being respectful and honest in all interactions. It was important to review this to ascertain if the listed values were included or referenced within the interviews or when the NMs described their experiences of supervision.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical practices were considered and adhered to throughout the research process, following the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2018) and University of Reading guidelines. Furthermore, a comprehensive ethics proposal was submitted to the University's Ethics Committee, where it was scrutinised, and approval was gained (see appendix 8.0). In addition, permission was sought from a legal representative and a senior director of the organisation where the research was conducted (see appendix 8.2). This was necessary, as they acted as the gatekeeper for the organisation, and approval meant I could proceed with the research. The research was not sponsored or funded, nor was it an area of interest for the organisation.

3.4.1 Informed consent

A fundamental consideration that had to be addressed before the research commenced was to gain informed consent from the NMs'. Newby (2010) explains that informed consent includes the participant being fully aware of the purpose of the research and, more explicitly, what they had agreed to participate in. An openness as to why participants were selected to take part in the research was also essential. At the outset, it was made clear that NMs had been invited to be involved in the research as they led Ofsted, outstanding nurseries.

Informed consent was sought and obtained from the NMs'. It was reiterated throughout the research process that they could withdraw their consent at any point and without any repercussions, penalties, or impact on their role within the organisation (Costley *et al*., 2010). This informed the inclusion of multiple checkpoints throughout the research process. Transparency about how the data was to be used and that it would be published in a doctoral thesis was discussed with each participant. In addition, anonymity would be adhered to throughout and after the research process; NMs were referred to numerically within the thesis to maintain confidentiality.

As the researcher, I was fully aware that informed consent extended beyond the formalities of the traditional research letter (see appendix 8.2) and that it is a process that must be revisited at each stage of the research.

3.5 Quality Considerations

Literature (Cohen, Manon and Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Newby, 2010; Patton, 1990; Punch, 2009) highlights the potential challenges of achieving rigour and credibility when conducting qualitative research. Arguably, qualitative research by design can be complex and nuanced in contrast to quantitative research, which is often more structured (Cohen, Manon and Morrison, 2011). The researcher's subjectivity can also obscure the interpretation of data, which in turn, may compromise the validity of the results.

Nevertheless (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Morse, 2015; Noble and Smith, 2015) all recognise the importance of rigour and advocate that steps are taken to ensure rigour throughout the research process. Cypress (2017) advises that rigour needs to be built into all research activities and processes, similar to the checkpoints concerning informed consent. With this in mind, informed consent was sought and gained before conducting the research. Specifically, consent was gained to take photographs of the sand tray compositions as documentary evidence and to be included within the final published thesis. In addition, consent was given to record all interviews using a Dictaphone. Thereafter, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and on completion, all scripts were shared with the NMs. They were asked to review their scripts and provide feedback on the content and accuracy of the data. If necessary, changes were made to the scripts due to the NMs' feedback and then reshared for their endorsement. As part of my commitment to developing trusting and respectful relationships with the NMs', I did not take notes throughout the interview process as the

NMs' responses were recorded as mentioned. Instead, I made every effort to be present by making eye contact and displaying positive and encouraging body language.

I sought to be a respectful, approachable and transparent researcher at all times. Newby (2010) asserts the centrality of ethics within research and advocates a holistic approach, whereby ethics are embedded throughout all aspects of the study. As mentioned, all interview transcripts and photographs (sand tray compositions) were shared with the NMs to endorse the accuracy and provide permission for the content to be used. Moreover, interview scripts and photographs were stored electronically on a password-protected computer, and the files were encrypted for additional security.

Additional time was built into the interview schedule, specifically, the sand tray exercise due to its relationship with therapeutic play, as described (see appendix 8.1). NMs were offered the opportunity to ask any further questions following the interview, and my contact details were provided should they want to speak at a later stage. I was keen to establish an environment whereby NMs' felt comfortable contacting me at any point. Indeed, NMs did email me on several occasions, and these interactions were to confirm the content of the transcripts or to request an amendment.

3.5.1 Trustworthiness

Schmidt and Brown (2015) refer to trustworthiness as a concept defined by the quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of qualitative data. Moreover, trustworthiness is concerned with the level of credence associated with the research findings, as identified by Cypress (2017), such as the level of trust in the ECEC sector concerning my supervision research. It is essential that qualitative research is conducted with rigour; a part of this is about recognising the potential bias and subjectivity of the researcher.

Literature (Arthur *et al*., 2012; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Punch,2009) encourages qualitative researchers to be transparent about the actions taken to assure trustworthiness. Creswell and Miller (2000) write about adopting a systematic method to organise and analyse the research data. For my research, Homeyer and Sweeney's (2011) six-phased approach was applied to demonstrate consistency and reliability within the coding process.

Furthermore, to reduce potential bias and demonstrate my commitment to producing credible research findings, all NMs involved in the study were unknown to me. I did not possess prior knowledge of them as individuals, nor had I visited their nurseries. The only information in my possession was their Ofsted report. In addition, the NMs were unaware of the other participants involved in the research.

3.5.2 Conducting research within the organisation

The research for this study was conducted within an educational organisation. Punch (2009) has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of conducting research within an educational setting. The benefits include convenient access to participants who work within the local area. In addition, gaining access to a setting, such as a nursery, is more straightforward when conducting research within the organisation. There is often a willingness to support colleagues with research; therefore, gaining consent is easier. Finding a relevant topic to study when conducting research within an organisation can be motivated by an interest or a problem that needs to be solved. Therefore, linking 'professional relevance' (p.44) and research is advantageous. Punch (2009) also expands upon the disadvantages of conducting research, including bias, subjectivity, having a vested interest in the results, making generalisations and the ethical implications of being a researcher and an employee.

Insider research refers to studies conducted within the researcher's place of employment, community or institution where they have a membership. Smyth and Holian (2008) note that a characteristic of those who conduct insider research are 'immersed, embedded and strongly connected with both the setting and those being 'researched' in a shared setting where they operate together' (p.34) and would be considered an insider as opposed to an outsider (Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). As a researcher, being connected to the place of work may be considered a benefit and could offer exclusive accessibility that was not available to outside researchers (Floyd and Arthur, 2012).

Literature highlights the strengths and weaknesses of researching as an 'insider' (Fleming, 2018; Floyd and Arthur; 2012; Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). Awareness of external and internal ethical engagement is essential when conducting insider research (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). The former refers to the traditional perspective of gaining ethical permission, going through the motions, at times, 'superficial' (p.171), expectations of addressing ethical considerations within the research. Whereby the latter, having an awareness of internal

ethical engagement attests to the tension and complexity of insider research and the 'ethical and moral dilemmas' (p.171) that the researcher experiences. Indeed, Mercer (2007) and Thomson and Gunter (2011) identified that the researcher maintains multiple identities, may experience discomfort and negotiate possible relational conflicts of working with colleagues.

A series of measures were implemented to mitigate paying lip service to ethical considerations after reflecting on the literature (Fleming, 2018; Floyd and Arthur; 2012; Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). I was fully committed to maintaining the anonymity (Cohen *et al*., 2011) of all participants involved with the research and acting honestly. To address this, I made every effort to build respectful relationships with all involved in the research. As referenced, ongoing consent was sought at various stages of the research (Clandinnin and Connelly, 2000). I considered my dual roles as a researcher and senior leader within the organisation. I reflected on the possible power dynamics that could unfold, including my influence to coerce people to participate and researcher bias. I was aware of my position in the organisation and my role as an insider conducting research. Costley *et al*., (2010) point out that an 'insider researcher' position is unique, enabling accessibility that may not have been granted otherwise. My position with the organisation provided access to NMs and insight into supervision practice.

3.5.3 Positionality

The positionality of the researcher must also be considered. Day (2012) recognises that a researcher needs to have heightened awareness and understanding of their position, which will promote a better understanding of the power dynamics of research participants. This is echoed by Peshkin (1998), who argued that 'subjectivity is inevitable' (p.17). Therefore, it is crucial to recognise any bias, often linked with a chosen topic area, in my case, supervision. Similar to Alder (2004), I also considered my subjective positionality. I define myself as White British, a lifelong learner, head of a department, working-class, forty-something, wife and mother. I am also a first-generation graduate and a committed early years advocate who has worked in the childcare sector for over 25 years. Exploring my positionality highlighted a bias towards training and learning as well as a fundamental belief in the role of supervision. I was mindful of my bias towards training, learning and supervision when asking questions during the interview. A heightened awareness of my bias influenced my decision making. For example, participants for the study were selected by a Senior Operations Manager and not myself. I had no prior involvement in the nursery, and the NMs were unknown to me. I was

careful not to ask leading questions about training, learning or supervision. Mixed methods were used to avoid bias and provide the NMs with multiple opportunities to explore their supervision experiences.

3.6 The use of metaphors within research

Metaphors have been used throughout literature, in religious parables, fairy tales and Greek mythology to communicate the process of transformation, growth and change (Campbell, 1988). The online Oxford Living Dictionary (2019) defines a metaphor as 'a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable' or 'a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else'. Metaphors are deeply embedded within everyday language (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) thoughts and human experiences. Using metaphors within language can promote personal experience (Fox, 1989). When exploring the NMs' supervision experiences, metaphor cards were used as a prerequisite before the interview. The use of a metaphoric research method within this study was influenced by the notion that metaphorical thinking facilitates new ideas, growth and development (Langer, 1948). I wanted to provide a tool that supported NMs' thinking about supervision.

For many years, metaphors have been applied to the helping professions (Barker, 1985; Barnat, 1977; Gordon, 1978; Martin, Cummings and Hallberg, 1992). Indeed, Lydon, Clay and Sparks (2001) considered the impact of metaphoric language, narrative and storytelling in counselling. They proposed that the use of metaphors and 'metaphorical knowing' had the potential to assist in 'developmental change processes' (p.269) within the context of counselling. These included developing a safe and secure relationship; the exploration of emotion through symbolisation and metaphoric language; the identification and challenge of tacit assumptions; supporting with resistance, and finally but not exclusively, a reframing of perspective through the introduction of new frames of reference. While I did not conduct research within a counselling context, drawing upon disciplines whereby the use of metaphor had already been applied was helpful. Indeed, it is important to note that significant figures in counselling, such as Freud (1965) and Rogers (1951), championed using metaphors to promote awareness, development and growth.

Bernard and Goodyear (1998) observed the potentiality of metaphor activities within supervision. More recently, Guiffrida, Jordan, Saiz and Barnes (2007) provided a helpful commentary on the implementation of metaphor and the cogency of metaphoric activities in

clinical supervision. Valadez and Garcia (1998) provided examples of metaphoric activities that included the use of environmental metaphors. This method was used to assist in the conceptualisation of past evaluative experiences. Additionally, the use of metaphoric stories in supervision has been noted by Young and Borders (1999) to help elicit themes for supervision sessions and create a 'shared language for the supervisee's experience' (p.147). In addition, Amundson (1988); Fall and Sutton (2004) identified tools such as metaphoric drawing activities that can aid the transference of complex emotion, experience, thoughts and representation of visual images. These drawings are often completed before a supervision session and then used as a provocation and focus of discussion.

Mills *et al.*, (2017) have recently employed the use of metaphor as a methodological tool within a secondary school context when researching the social justice dispositions of teachers. Mills *et al*., (2017) applied a Bourdieusian sociological approach as a framework to explore metaphors of social justice through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Bourdieu, 1990). They argued that adopting a sociological view of metaphors can enrich and amplify the 'cognitive understanding by highlighting how metaphors serve as a discursive manifest of internalized social structures' (p.856). Similarities can be drawn with Hughes' (2010) metaphor of a paradigm to a picture frame. A metaphor represents a window or a mirror in which to reflect on thought and action.

Furthermore, Bloom (1997) employed a narrative approach to elicit the reflections of experienced nursery directors' careers within an early year's context. In-depth data emerged via semi-structured interviews. This was enhanced by asking the participants to describe their career journey using metaphorical language. The metaphorical characterisations of their career pathways were articulated as going on a journey, having their horizons expanded, experiences of feeling like they were being stretched and aware of personal growth, challenge and development, for example, 'navigating the rapids - the white water is exhilarating but sometimes terrifying' (p.34).

As discussed, the effectiveness of case study research enables the collection of comprehensive, rich, descriptive, and complex data. There is a methodological synergy between a case study approach and creative research methods, such as metaphor cards and the sand tray. Indeed, Bassey (1999), Crowe *et al.,* (2011) and Day Ashley (2012) affirmed that selecting a case study approach as part of the research design can offer a diversified approach to data gathering.

Mann and Warr (2017) point out that social research has primarily relied on 'numbers and words to depict social life' (p.547). Instead, they promote alternative approaches to social research and a multi-dimensional, creative strategy for data collection. They advocated for expanding a 'methodological toolbox' such as 'visual, mobile, sensory and observational methods' to explore and represent layers of knowledge and experiences in fluid and unimpeded modes. Furthermore, Law (2004) discussed the merits of additional methodological tools that promote new frames of reference, such as the use of metaphor and visual representation. Mann and Warr's (2017) metaphor of a 'methodological toolbox' was a reference point for my research design. Metaphor cards were an essential tool; this is explained below.

3.7 The interview

3.7.1 Interview schedule

An interview schedule was designed as part of my commitment to trustworthiness and consistency of approach. The interview schedule design was influenced by the work of Jacob and Furgerson (2012). The benefits of having a written interview protocol and clear guidelines have been helpfully set out by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). They highlight how the use of a script helps guide the beginning and end of an interview. The script is a checkpoint for all the essential information that needs to be shared with the NMs. Such as the purpose of the research and why it is important. Before the interview, it is another opportunity to revisit how confidentiality will be maintained, where and how the research will be used, informed consent, and the option to withdraw from the research at any point, should they wish to do so. Included in the script is a reminder to introduce myself and build rapport with the NM. At the end of the interview, it was also helpful to check that the NM had the necessary contact details so they could make contact and check their transcript. Please see appendix 8.3, the interview schedule.

3.7.2 Metaphor cards – stage one of the interview

The use of metaphor cards stemmed from an activity that I experienced at an Educational Doctoral teaching session. We were asked to select a postcard with an image that resonated in some way to describe professionalism. On reflection, it was a powerful and straightforward way to encourage a group of people to discuss what professionalism meant to them.

I adopted a similar approach to the research conducted by Sutton (2011). Her exploratory research focused on women's embodied experiences. As part of the research design, Sutton recognised that a creative approach was necessary to elicit 'bodily narratives', and she chose to use 'concept cards' (p.182). She designed the cards using keywords, and participants were asked to select those significant to their situation. I followed a similar approach whereby NMs were asked to choose cards resembling their supervision experience or cards significant to them. This method provided an opportunity for an open and descriptive response. Sutton (2011) commented that the concept cards added a 'playful' (p.183) dimension to an emotive subject that otherwise may have triggered painful memories.

In other studies, Roininen *et al.,* (2006) presented cards with keywords to encourage word association concerning food choices. Moreover, Thompson *et al.,* (2008) used photographs as a visual provocation at the beginning of an interview, similar to my research. More recently, Han and Oliffe (2015) engaged in photovoice research. This is slightly different and uses photographs to elicit participant experiences (Harper, 2002). Other examples include research by Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) and Karnieli-Miller, Nissim and Goldberg (2017), who used illustrated metaphorical cards as a research method. They were used to enrich the interview process and gather additional data. In my research, metaphor cards were used as a pre-task, similar to Barton (2015), Guentte and Marshall (2009) and Thompson *et al.,* (2008).

Sutton (2011) highlighted that concept cards were used in qualitative and quantitative research. A range of techniques can be applied, such as sorting, classification and ranking. For this research, NMs' were sent a selection of cards that contained an image and a metaphor linked to supervision. They were asked to reflect on the statements and select the cards that resonated with them. The pack of cards included twenty-four metaphoric statements about supervision. My research did not seek to replicate any therapy or counselling situation. The pre-task allowed the research participants to familiarise themselves with the cards before the interview.

Figure 3.2 An example of four different metaphor cards

Various sources influenced the images and statements used for the metaphor cards. Keywords such as ‘support’, ‘effective’, ‘confidential discussion’, ‘teamwork’, ‘improvement’, ‘solutions’, ‘personal effectiveness’ and ‘coaching’ are all present in the paragraph about supervision within the EYFS (DfE, 2017, p.21). Other sources included my experience of being a supervisor and a supervisee, in addition to anecdotal information shared with me by colleagues in the ECEC sector.

Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) also used metaphor cards within their semi-structured interviews to explore concepts such as professional identity with teachers. Examples of metaphors were provided in addition to inviting teachers to construct their own metaphors. The cards allowed an element of playfulness similar to Sutton (2011). Play is a fundamental principle in the early years. Through play, children can explore experiences and take calculated risks (Moyles, 2010). I wanted to include the element of playfulness as a design feature. This decision was purposeful. I was keen for NMs to feel relaxed and confidently share their supervision experiences. Like Sutton, the inclusion of playful methods enabled participants to connect with the materials and expand upon their supervision experiences. The cards also helped to make abstract concepts more concrete.

3.7.3 Semi-structured interview

A characteristic of case study research is that data collection is often sought via various methods and is often interviews and observations (Creswell, 2007; Punch, 2009). Interviews are an established research method and fundamental to case study research, according to Yin (1984). Interviews can be classified concerning their degree of flexibility, specifically around question and answer (Kumar, 2014). Structured interviews can be associated with a positivist

research paradigm and, by design, are characterised by a series of closed questions, limiting detail and depth of response (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). These are often conducted with an interview script and pre-defined questions to ensure consistency.

Conversely, unstructured interviews are primarily fluid, open, flexible and unplanned by design (Kumar, 2014). This non-standardised approach, as discussed by Fielding and Thomas (2008), allows the interview to take twists and turns, which is known to generate in-depth data. While this approach may be suitable for life history or biographical research, some level of structure was required, so it was rejected. In addition, I deemed this approach unsuitable as it appeared to contradict the requirements of a bounded case due to the open and unstructured nature of the interview style. By contrast, semi-structured interviews offered flexibility and fluidity of expression. For my research, I used semi-structured interviews.

Kvale (2006) provides a critique of the potential power dynamics of conducting an interview. This includes 'one-way dialogue', which is controlled by the interviewer, misconstrued interpretation of comments, and 'manipulative dialogue' (p.485). Furthermore, other power dynamics could include having a hidden agenda or making final edits for their benefit.

A growing body of research (Fontana and Prokos, 2007; Schwandt, 1997) recognises the active role of both the interviewer and interviewee, which was considered too. The former is not absent from the situation 'rather they are part of the interaction they seek to study, and they influence that interaction' (Fontana and Prokos, 2007, p.83). Instead, this negotiated text or perspective has been described as a form of discourse constructed by both involved (Schwandt, 1997). When I carried out my research, I was acutely aware of power dynamics and respectfully conducted the interviews.

The interviews lasted between 35-60 minutes and were recorded using a Dictaphone and then fully transcribed, similar to Jenks (2011) (see appendix 8.0). I applied thematic analysis to aid the interpretation of the data (Robson, 2011), which was a labour-intensive process. However, it enabled me to immerse myself in the data and reflect upon the information in detail. I read the transcripts several times and began initial coding (see appendix 8.0). I returned to the interviews numerous times before the initial codes were arranged into themes (see appendix 8.0). The process of thematic analysis is highly subjective and open to interpretation. Robson's (2011) sage advice of not attaining perfection when identifying research themes was helpful. It was an 'iterative process' (p.483) that involved reflecting on

the data and then moving back and forth between interviews. I found this process stressful but using a framework supported and structured my thinking. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.7.4 Theoretical foundations of sand tray use in research

The final tool in my 'methodological toolbox' was the sand tray. Lowenfeld (1890-1973) pioneered using the sand tray as a therapeutic play technique. When Lowenfeld introduced the tray and sand, she encouraged children to create what they thought, such as worlds or scenes. Hutton (2004) points out that Lowenfeld's beliefs on play distinguished her from peers such as Klien (Mitchell and Friedman, 1994). She was convinced that children were conscious of their thoughts and emotions but lacked the maturation or language development to express them fully. The World Technique was designed from the premise that children express emotion, thought and intention through their bodies. The apparatus enabled children to express their inner worlds using the equipment provided. Lowenfeld's work was critical to her firm belief that play should be self-regulated and spontaneous (1979). As supervision is a new praxis in the ECEC sector, I wanted to provide an outlet for NMs to express their thoughts via a creative outlet.

Research conducted by Stark, Frels and Garza (2011) posit that the 'modality' of the sand 'allows supervisees to freely express and explore personal and professional growth' (p.277). Moreover, they suggest that using a sand tray with trainee supervisees can facilitate self-reflection. At the same time, they maintain that metaphor can create 'therapeutic distance' (p.280), subsequently bringing depth to the sand tray activity. Stark, Frels and Garza highlight that introducing the sand tray in the first instance may raise anxiety due to the unknown nature of the activity. They emphasise the supervisor's role, or in my case, the researcher's, to 'set the tone of curiosity, respect and excitement' (p.280). As such, I explained that it was an opportunity to play. When children engage in open-ended play, no fixed or desirable outcome is required, and the same idea was applied to the research participants.

The sand tray has been used within clinical supervision to develop trainee supervisees. The practical elements of the activity reflect the process as described above. Fall and Sutton (2004) used the sand tray to reduce anxiety in a supervision session. Also, they claimed that it could cultivate creativity, similar to Lowenfeld (1979). Through engagement with the sand

tray, supervisees could make links via their play and connect with their work context. Swank and Jahn (2018) used a sand tray to support university students' career

decision-making. Career counsellors provided students with a sand tray and miniatures, such as people, animals, natural objects and vehicles. Homeyer and Sweeney (2011) discussed that students were given prompts. These focused on different areas, for example, 'create your career world' in the sand, 'create a world of things you like to do' and 'create a world of things that are important to you' (p.271). Once the student has completed the scene, the counsellor then discusses the use of the equipment and their respective meanings. This approach is similar to how I managed the sand tray activity.

3.7.5 Loose Parts Theory (LPT)

Nicholson (1972) is best known for his work concerning physical environments such as buildings or recreational spaces. He highlighted how static, one-dimensional spaces could impact the creativity and fluidity of children's play. He recognised how children enjoyed playing with loose parts or open-ended objects. As such, Nicholson has influenced playscape designers such as Ward (2018) and early years professionals such as Daly and Beloglovsky (2014; 2016; 2018); Olsen and Smith (2017) to consider how the environment supports open-ended learning experiences.

In recent years, Daly and Beloglovsky built upon the work of Nicholson (1971) and applied the concept of LP to the early years sector. As well as offering open-ended learning opportunities to children, it can promote the exploration of thought (Dillion, 2018). When used within the context of small-world play, LP can provide children with the opportunity to 'claim a safe arena' (p.162) and enable them to test boundaries whilst maintaining control. Similarly, Gibson, Cornell and Gill (2017) comment that 'unstructured play allows children space to choose and create their playful activities, to navigate their social worlds' (p.296). As such, the LP approach is used within the nursery chain. LPT acted as a theoretical scaffold for the sand tray activity from this premise. Homeyer and Sweeney's (2011) six-step process was applied to this research. Loose Parts play is an approach implemented in many nurseries across the organisation. As such, the equipment used with the sand tray was familiar to all NMs'.

3.7.6 Practical use of a sand tray in research

Homeyer and Sweeney (2011) designed a six-step process when presenting a sand tray to a client. They stressed the importance of room preparation, such as ensuring the resource was carefully arranged and accessible. A prompt is provided, either direct or indirect. This process was applied to my research. Guidance such as ‘show me what a positive supervision session would look like’ was provided to NMs’. When this proved too abstract, as in the case with NM (8), the participant was asked to ‘select three objects to represent supervision’. This was followed by a request to build upon the narrative. Participants were invited to create a scene in the sand tray and asked to indicate when they had finished. The post-creation stage allowed the NM to reflect on the scene and then discuss the items' significance. Homeyer and Sweeney (2011) note that during the discussion, the composition of the tray may change as the items are added or removed by the participant. There are differing views on the penultimate stage, referred to as the ‘sand tray clean-up’ (p.34) and who should be involved in returning the objects to the respective baskets. However, as this was not a therapy session, but a method used as a creative, methodological approach, I offered both options to the NM. The final step was to document the session. Photographs were taken of the completed scene.

3.7.7 Presentation of the sand tray and loose parts

The research participants were provided with a plastic tray that contained sand and a selection of LP materials, such as wooden cotton reels, coconut husks, sticks, a wooden farm set, a collection of wooden people, various sizes of smooth pebbles, smooth, glass stones of various colours, wicker spheres and segments of wood.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the six-phase model, initially used by Homeyer and Sweeney (2011), was applied as a framework to the sand tray activity, see figure 3.3. Using a six-phase presentation model provided structure to a relatively fluid process.

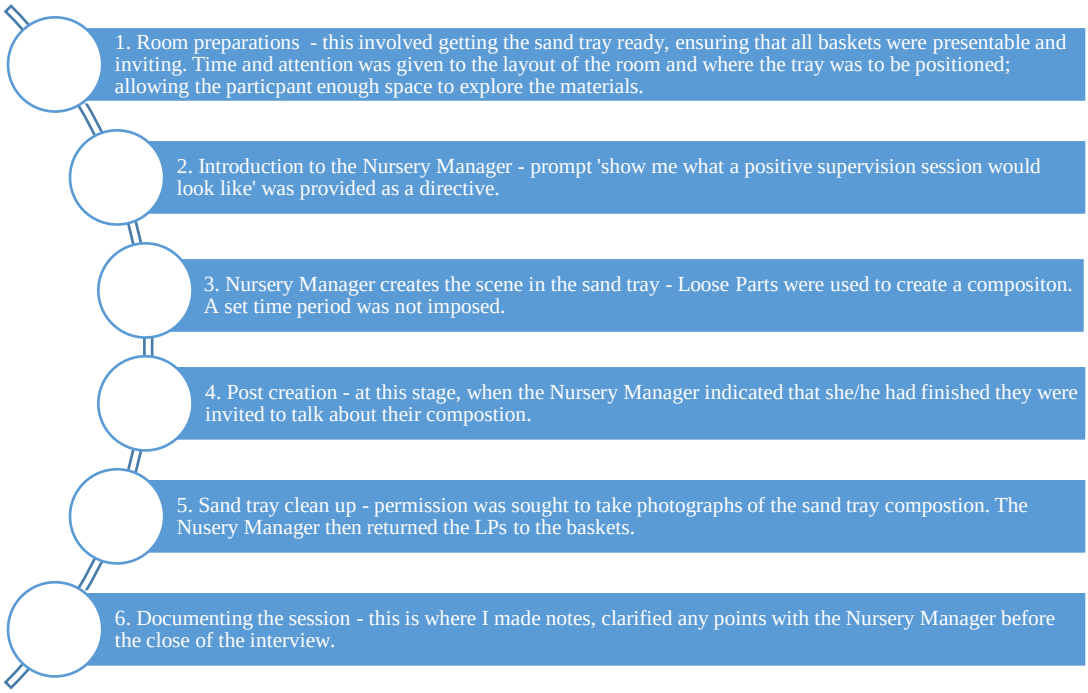
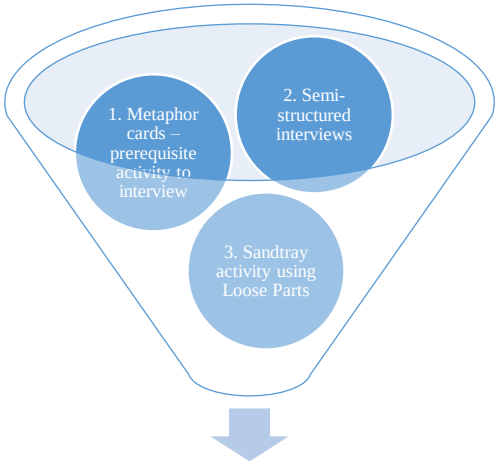


Figure 3.3 – Homeyer and Sweeney's (p.34) six-phase sand tray presentation model

In summary, three key components formed the methodological toolbox used in this research, as identified in figure 3.3. I was keen to use various creative research methods, both playful and allowing for creativity and autonomy of thought.



Creative methodological toolbox

Figure 3.4 Methodological approach

3.7.8 Data Collection

The data was collected over twelve weeks. Participants were sent introductory information via the postal service and by email. At least two weeks before the interview, each NM was sent a set of metaphor cards, which I designed, and instructions on carrying out the activity (see appendix 8.4). They were asked to select the cards that resonated with them and their experiences of supervision. All NMs completed the activity and brought the cards to their interview. The set included twenty-three pictorial cards, except one with statements about supervision. The final card allowed the participants to add their comments, should they not identify with a pre-statement card.

Each interview began with a reflection on the pre-activity. All ten participants had sorted through the cards and selected those pertinent to their supervision experience. This provided an opportunity for the participants to explain the rationale for their selection. Some NMs (5, 6, 8, 10) referred to the thought-provoking nature of the activity and reported how they would like to use it as part of staff training sessions.

A significant amount of data was generated from the metaphor card activity, semi-structured interviews and the sand tray compositions. Like Mann and Warr's (2017) research, the results of the sand tray compositions were photographed as part of the six-phased model. These photographs were used, along with the accompanying narrative, to analyse the significance of sand tray composition.

3.8 Data Analysis of interviews

Thematic analysis was applied to the transcripts generated from the semi-structured interviews. Academic commentary by Braun and Clarke (2006) reports that thematic analysis is a 'poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method' (p.77). Furthermore, Sandelowski and Leeman (2012) noted that a lack of clarity has contributed to the ambiguity of definition and thematic analysis within qualitative research. Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) explained the key features that differentiate content and thematic analysis. The former systematically examines the content, which involves the coding and categorising of data to 'determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships and the structures and discourses of communication'

(p.400). The latter is often portrayed as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun and Clarke, p.79). Primarily, the thematic analysis approach examines data for patterns within the data.

Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell *et al.,* (2017) agree that thematic analysis is a research method in and of itself. They caution that thematic analysis can be disorganised without clear guidelines and sometimes lack rigour. As a result, Braun and Clarke developed a six-phased approach to thematic analysis. A central tenet of thematic analysis is its pliability and unconstrained theoretical attachment to a particular framework. This provides a flexible model and one that can be used with different theoretical frameworks.

Just as clarity concerning the research process and practice is vital, it is also essential to distinguish and clarify whether an inductive or deductive thematic analysis is used to inform how the themes are theorised (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this research, I adopted an inductive approach to the analysis; the themes were generated from raw data. As a result, I had the freedom to divert from the original research questions if necessary. I tried to be open rather than manipulate the data to fit a pre-existing set of assumptions or theoretical framework, as Nowell *et al*., (2017) identified. There are similarities to Grounded Theory, whereby the codes are generated and led by the data, as discussed by Charmaz (2003).

Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as something that represents important information about the data ‘the research question and represents some level of *patterned* responses or meaning within the data set’ (p.82). Furthermore, DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) recognised that a theme is ‘an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestation’. They continue by expanding and discussing how the theme unites the various experiences into a ‘meaningful whole’ (p.36). This is reflected in the work of Aronson (1994), who illustrates how a theme represents and unites various ideas, beliefs and experiences, whereas, in isolation, they lack context and meaning.

In addition, (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ely *et al.*, 1997 and Taylor and Ussher, 2001) caution against the notion that themes emerge or are discovered through the process of analysis, stating that this suggests a passive stance and omits the role of the researcher. Indeed, Taylor and Ussher (2001) affirm the researcher's active role in recognising and selecting appropriate themes and patterns. While it is important to consider the process of coding data, including the size of the theme, frequency of occurrence and how to denote between a pattern or theme, the literature suggests (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ely, *et al*., 1997; Taylor and Ussher, 2001)

that there is a degree of flexibility around the prevalence or frequency applied to the coding with thematic analysis. However, consistency of approach is necessary. This research required the same method to be applied to all interview transcripts, and of utmost importance was whether the theme encapsulated the key areas connected to the overall research question.

I have applied the six-phased approach to thematic analysis, as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following section will describe the process I followed when analysing the semi-structured interviews.

3.8.1 Phase 1. Familiarising yourself with the data

All interviews were transcribed in full from recordings on a Dictaphone. There is no prescribed method or system of transcription with thematic analysis. I opted to transcribe each interview verbatim. At this point, I was unclear about what was relevant and essential. However, I decided not to record non-verbal cues, such as laughter or pauses. This process was time-consuming, with some transcripts being more than 9,000 words in length. In addition, I also listened to the voice recordings on more than one occasion to aid my understanding and verify details. At the time, this process felt intense and all-consuming. However, Riessman (1993) recognised the importance of immersion in the data, while laborious, as a critical analysis element.

In the first instance, I read and reread all ten transcripts. I made notes in the column using the review mark-up tool in Microsoft Word. This enabled me to track my initial thoughts and responses to the content. This led me to re-read all ten interviews once again, reflecting upon the comments that I had made.

3.8.2 Phase 2. Generating initial codes

Before coding, I revisited my initial list of ideas and commented on the transcripts. Coding was methodically applied to the interview data set. This was carried out using manual coding as opposed to a software programme. I applied codes to keywords or phrases linked to the research question and, subsequently, the interview questions. When tagging keywords or phrases, I used various colours to identify different areas of interest. Braun and Clarke recommend coding as many potential themes as time permits, and then in the later phase, if not relevant, they can be disregarded.

3.8.3 Phase 3. Searching for themes

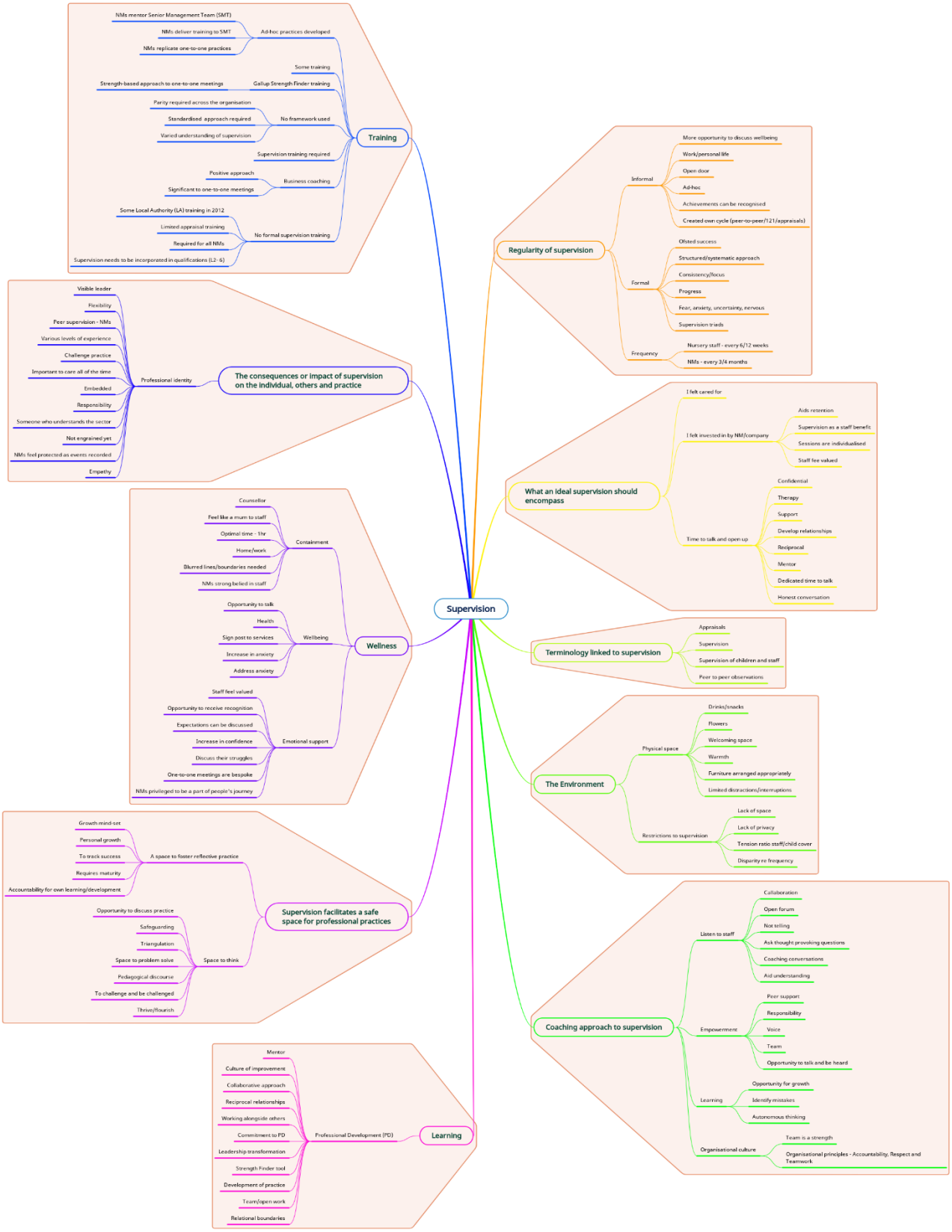
Drawing on the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006), a long list of codes was generated. This enabled me to visualise the scope of codes that had been identified. Thereafter, I used a table format to record the various codes that had been identified. An additional column was added to include potential themes. I applied colour coding to the themes, primarily as a key, to distinguish one from another. I worked with the data at this stage to create sub-themes and key themes (see appendix 8.6). This level of analysis aided a greater degree of clarity.

3.8.4 Phase 4. Reviewing themes

Having reflected on feedback from a tutorial with my supervisor, I recognised the need for further refinement. I revisited the initial codes and re-read all the interview transcripts, which led to further modifications. Later in the process, headings were amended to ‘major theme’ and ‘minor theme’.

Braun and Clarke emphasised the importance of cross-referencing to check and verify the themes identified in phase 3 to ensure they correspond to the coded extracts in phase 1 and the data set in phase 2. Furthermore, they advised that any outlier data be coded at this point in the analysis process. I used the mind map technique to create a ‘thematic map’ to represent the analysis for greater clarity. It was apparent that I had several similar themes, so I decided to absorb and combine them.

Figure 3.5 Thematic map



3.8.5 Phase 5. Defining and naming themes

Further analysis and refinement identified clear themes, with some overlap in certain areas. For example, *Learning* was a prominent theme, yet links connected two other themes: *Training* and *A Coaching Approach to Supervision*.

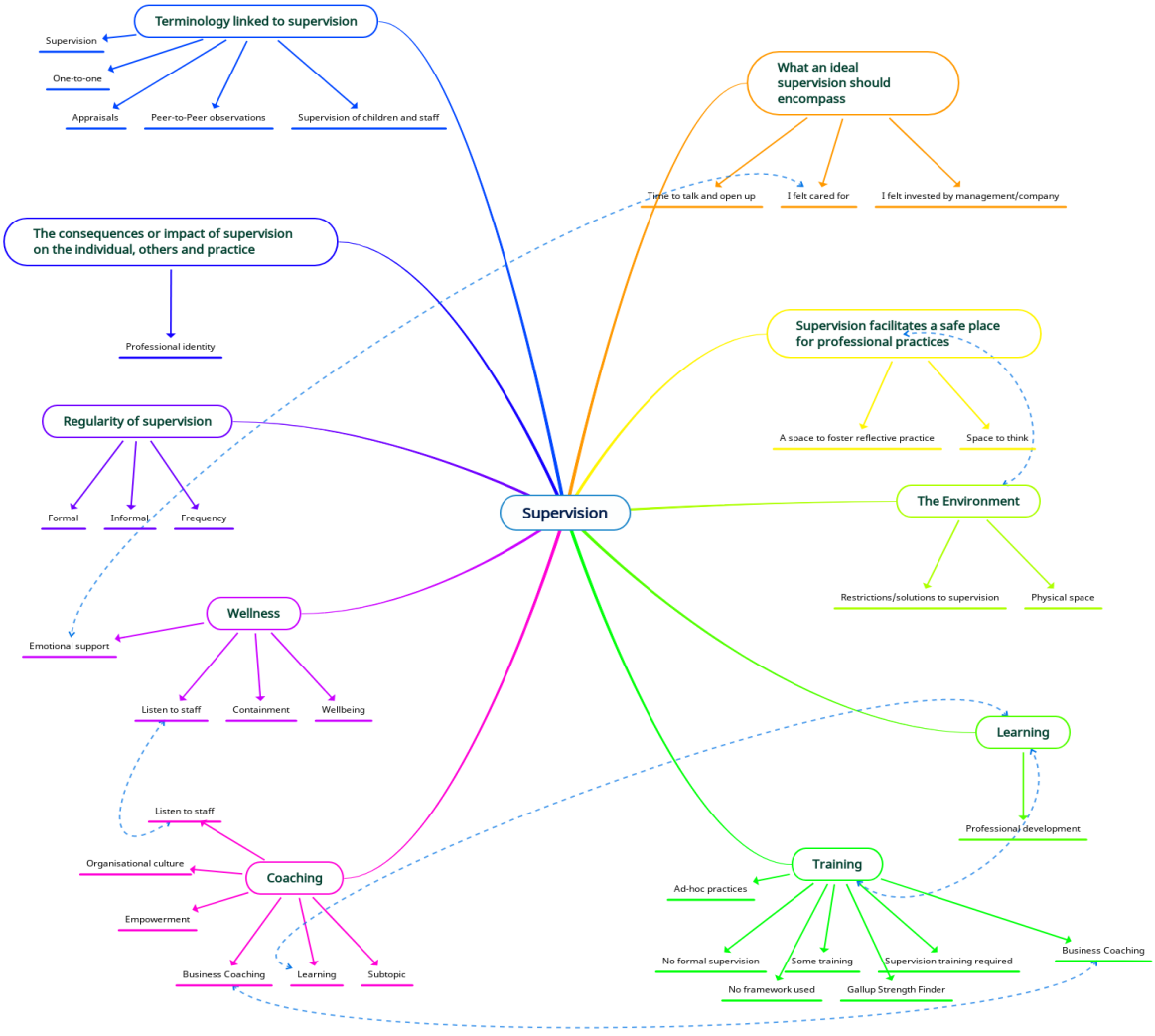


Figure 3.6 Refined themes

The above diagram (Fig 3.6) clearly illustrates the similarities between learning and training. Therefore, I decided to represent both elements in a theme, *The impact of wider learning on supervision and the need for training.* On further analysis, *the consequences or impact on supervision* was also linked to training; therefore, this was absorbed into a former

theme to avoid repetition. In readiness for phase 6, an order was applied to the themes. These are reflected in the diagram (Fig. 3.7) and will influence how the next chapter will report the thematic analysis results.

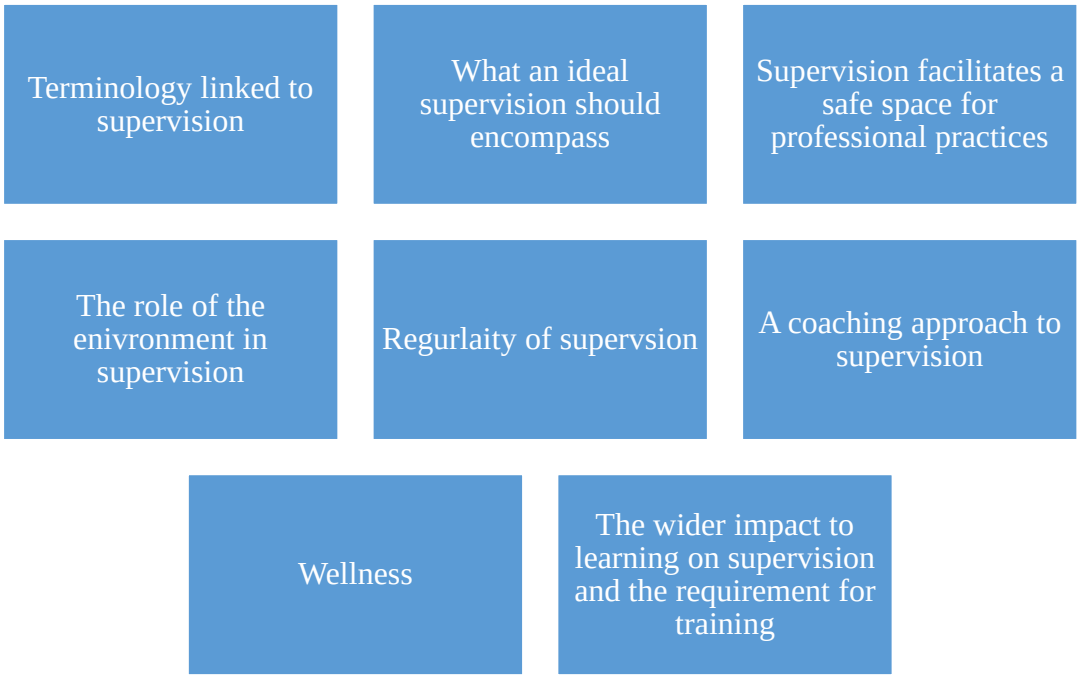


Figure 3.7 Thematic topics identified from semi-structured interviews

3.8.6 Phase 6. Producing the report

The final stage in Braun and Clarke's six-phased approach to thematic analysis is the presentation of key extracts from the interview transcripts and the holistic narrative woven throughout the data. This will follow in the next chapter.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have set out the methodological approach applied to this study. I have explained the rationale for using an intrinsic case study and set out the research parameters. Figure (3.1) illustrates my choice of paradigm, ontological and epistemological beliefs, the methodological approach, the use of methods and the form of data analysis. I discussed research ethics, the challenges and nuances of insider research, drawing on research by Floyd and Arthur (2012), Fleming (2018), Mercer (2007) and Trowler (2011). In addition, I took the time to locate myself and reflect upon my positionality (Alder, 2004).

Furthermore, Mann and Warr's (2017) metaphor of a 'methodological toolbox' was discussed as I expanded upon the research methods used within this study. The meaning and use of metaphor cards and semi-structured interviews were considered, in addition to the theoretical underpinning of the sand tray and LPT. Thereafter, I presented Braun and Clarke, (2006) six-phased approach to thematic analysis.

In the next chapter, I will present the research findings of the NMs' experiences of supervision and how it was being implemented within private, early years settings in accordance with the statutory requirement, as outlined in the EYFS (DfE, 2017).

4.0 Results

4.1 Introduction

Vignettes will be used to illustrate the NMs' experiences of supervision. Within research, vignettes have multiple meanings and can be used to present findings (Erickson, 2012). For this research, vignettes will provide contextual information about the nursery, NM and supervision experiences. Thereafter, the discussion of findings will be presented thematically.

4.2 NM (1) Vignette

The nursery is in an affluent area and operates from a large, converted house. The nursery was owned by private investors and was acquired in 2018. The staff team experienced significant leadership changes. When NM (1) joined the setting, she inherited the Ofsted quality judgement of 'Good'. An organisational target was to strengthen the team's capabilities and develop partnerships with the parents. The most recent Ofsted inspection highlighted the 'highly effective supervision' provided. The inspection report emphasised the rigorous processes to support staff's health, safety and well-being within the nursery. Reference was also made to supervision and how it supported staff capability.

NM (1) has ten years of ECEC experience, three of which have been as a nursery manager. Entrance to the profession was as a graduate, following A-levels and a degree in Early Childhood Studies. She has ambitious plans for the nursery and is keen to progress her career within the business.

NM (1) selected several cards; some themes were also illustrated within the sand tray composition. Significant emphasis was placed on clear and attainable objectives, whereby the supervisee had meaningful goals and efficiently worked towards them. Also, due to the frequent scheduling of supervision meetings, clear expectations were set concerning the achievement of all targets. A systematic approach was applied to the planning of supervision across the nursery by the NM. The approach taken by NM (1) was similar to NM (10), who had a formal and outcome-focused approach to supervision. For example, all NMs selected the card 'supervision provides space to think', but NM (1) was the only NM who applied this to her role as a supervisor. There were further similarities with NM (10), who compared the practice of supervision to oxygen, whereby she would not do her job successfully without it.

Supervision afforded protection, explicitly concerning issues relating to safeguarding. Record keeping and documentation were raised as essential processes by NM (1 and 10).

4.3 NM (2) Vignette

The nursery is situated within a borough of London. The staff team are highly qualified, with a significant number of people holding post-graduate teaching qualifications. It is a small setting, which has made notable progress concerning the quality of provision. The penultimate inspection found the nursery to be satisfactory (3) under the old inspection criteria of Ofsted (2015); more recently, it was deemed to be an outstanding setting. Within the report, it was noted that staff were supported via comprehensive supervision, which had a positive impact on their well-being. The report stated, 'the NM supports staff through supervision and appraisals, by supporting training needs.' NM (2) joined shortly after the inspection and has led the nursery since, building on the established culture of support and supervision.

Before joining the ECEC sector, NM (2) worked in a support role within Children's Services for many years. She has seven years of nursery experience, two as a nursery manager. She gained her Level 3 qualification in Children and Young People's Workforce whilst working in a nursery. Due to her previous experience, NM (2) was familiar with the concept of supervision.

There was a complex narrative to support her card selection and the sand tray composition. This centred on her belief concerning the purpose of supervision and that the focus should be on the supervisee. Supervision, therefore, acted as a spotlight to illuminate areas of development. Similarly, she stressed that the supervisee should have the opportunity to discuss areas of concern and be listened to. This theme was reflected within the sand tray composition. She created a scene that positioned the supervisee on a pedestal, thereby illustrating that the session was for them and that the work they engaged with needed to be 'honoured'. She recognised the toil and labour of working within a nursery and the subsequent impact from an emotional well-being perspective. She strongly advocated that supervision should be 'their time' to receive encouragement and support.

4.4 NM (3) Vignette

The nursery is a large, purpose-built building that is situated in a busy commuter town. Demand for places is high, and as such, there is a long waiting list. The recent Ofsted inspection confirmed that provision was outstanding in all areas, which builds on the previous 'Good' outcome. There was no reference to support or supervision within the report. Instead, there was a strong focus on how skilled the nursery team are in providing a stimulating learning environment.

NM (3) has worked at the nursery for many years and has a strong sense of loyalty to the community, children, staff and parents. She has worked in the ECEC sector for over twenty years and has held the role of nursery manager for four years. She holds a Level 3 in Extended Childminding Practices and more recently completed a degree in Early Years. NM (3) selected cards where the metaphor was linked to support. Her choices reflected NM's (6). Similar to NMs (6 and 8), there was a preference for informal supervision rather than structured meetings that were prescriptive and planned. Instead, the NM spent time observing staff, providing feedback on their practice and modelling pedagogical excellence; this was identified as necessary to positive supervision by NMs (7 and 8).

The narrative associated with the sand tray composition was powerful so far as NM (3) described her vulnerability while waiting for supervision (see figure 4.8). She described how her anxiety increased the longer she was kept waiting. Thereafter, she experienced a time of reorientation, where she needed to settle and reconnect with her supervisor. She likened supervision to therapy, which significantly shifted her previous feelings of anxiety. NM (6) also made comparisons to the healing and therapeutic benefits of supervision.

4.5 NM (4) Vignette

The purpose-built nursery is oversubscribed and has a waiting list. It predominantly serves parents who work within a close radius of the nursery. It has recently been graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted. The manager leads a highly qualified and experienced team. Unfortunately, there was no reference made to supervision within the report.

The NM has an Early Years degree, Early Years Professional Status (EYTS), and a Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education. She has worked in the sector for thirteen years and has been an NM for two years.

NM (4) selected several cards that focused on aspects that supervision should encompass, such as support, a safe space for professional dialogue, identifying problems and solutions and providing a challenge. These themes were also evident in the sand tray composition, whereby she constructed a layered approach to solving problems. This was illustrated through layered pebbles (figure 4.9), representing teamwork, resilience, boundaries and a safe place. Interestingly, the sand tray composition was very similar to NM (10) in design. In particular, there was a focus on collaborative working, problem solving and the strength of a team. Moreover, NM (4 and 10) both expanded upon the importance of receiving supervision as NMs. Indeed, they both selected the card 'supervision is like oxygen to the body – without it, I couldn't do my job.' This is reflective of NM (3 and 6), who described supervision as therapy and healing.

NM (5) Vignette

The nursery is purpose-built and oversubscribed. It is set within the grounds of a primary school, and while not connected, a collaborative partnership has been nurtured. The community nursery is located within an affluent area and serves working parents that commute to London. Since its last inspection, the nursery has made significant progress. The most recent inspection graded the nursery as 'outstanding'. The Ofsted report noted that 'staff and management receive high-quality supervision'.

The manager has a degree in Early Childhood Studies and A-Levels. Prior to working within a nursery, she spent time in a school. She has worked in the sector for fourteen years, three of which have been as a manager.

The sand tray composition created by NM (6) was the most visibly striking out of the ten. The image of six boxes (figure 4.10) reflected her chosen metaphor card, 'supervision is like a jigsaw'. The image created within the sand tray captured a compartmentalised approach to supervision. To maintain focus in supervision, she schedules additional meetings to discuss individual well-being to not detract from objectives, results and impact. This practice is similar to that of NM (10), who also holds additional well-being meetings; however, the significant difference between the two is that NM (10) does this to provide an additional layer of support. Again, this highlights the nuances in the delivery of supervision.

Moreover, the idea of an optimal time was discussed throughout the interview and was also illustrated within the sand tray composition. Specifically, that one hour allows the supervisee to settle into the supervision and connect with the supervisor before moving forward. Less time would not allow for the supervisee to relax and discuss areas of importance. This was similar to NMs (1 and 4), who identified that optimal time and frequency were essential to implement and adhere to. Interestingly, the NMs who planned supervision in a more formulaic fashion have all worked in schools, where learning and activities are scheduled. In addition, the former are graduates; both NMs (1 and 5) completed A-Levels which are linear by design. This method of learning could have influenced the organisation of supervision. This contrasts NMs (7 and 8), who favoured a more flexible approach to supervision.

NM (6) Vignette

The nursery is situated within a large, converted house located in a more rural setting than the other nurseries involved in this research. The nursery is oversubscribed due to its Montessori approach that is sought after within the locality. The nursery is a recent addition to the organisation's portfolio. The Ofsted inspection report cites the effective practices of supervision at the nursery, 'the NM monitors staff performance through regular supervision sessions.' In addition, the report recognised the collaborative work of the nursery manager. The 'outstanding' grade was the first inspection result for the nursery.

NM (6) has worked in the sector and the nursery for twenty-three years. For the majority of her tenure, she has worked as a practitioner with children. For the last three years, she has held the role of NM. She has a Level 3 sector qualification and a Level 4 Montessori Diploma. Before her time in early years, she had a successful career in investment banking.

NM (6) has developed relationships with her team that have moved beyond a superficial level. She cares for them. She knows their families, has supported them through various circumstances and is friends with many of them. Unsurprisingly, providing support was a key theme throughout the interview. She selected the card 'supervision is like having a cup of tea with a friend', in addition to 'supervision is an opportunity to talk and to be listened to', supervision is like a good pair of tights…they provide support' and 'supervision is like therapy'. While there is an element of planning, albeit minimum, value is placed on informal and unplanned conversations, similar to NM (8). There is a recognition that circumstances

within a person's private life will impact their professional conduct. A holistic perspective to professional development was encapsulated in her approach to getting to know the person, supporting them, empathising and addressing performance issues if necessary but from a position of improvement. This was also reflected in the sand tray composition, where she described the importance of creating a comfortable, unhurried environment and confidential space. Similar to NM (8), the provision of refreshments and the environment were key elements to successful supervision. Attending to their basic needs (Maslow, 1943) provided a basis for reciprocal dialogue and a safe environment to discuss areas of strength and weakness, similar to NMs (8 and 10).

4.8 NM (7) Vignette

The nursery serves professional parents who work in the City of London. It is a purpose-built nursery that is oversubscribed and has a waiting list. On their first inspection, the nursery was graded 'outstanding'. The report emphasised the exceptional support and supervision provided by the management team, which Ofsted recognised as contributing to the high-quality provision. The Ofsted report noted that 'leaders conduct comprehensive supervision meetings.'

NM (7) is currently in the role of an acting manager while the business recruits an experienced leader. NM (7) has been in the sector for thirteen years and has been in her current role for 12 months. She has a Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education.

NM (7)'s choice of cards reflected her need for support, mainly due to the temporary nature of her role. A number of her responses were provided from a practitioner's perspective and not a manager's, indicating that supervision should provide an opportunity for nursery staff to talk and be supported. NM (7) explained that she had not received supervision since being in the new role. There are similarities to NM (9) who is also in her first year of nursery management; both have identified a need for support; one receives it from their supervisor, the other, NM (7), does not. However, both have led an Ofsted inspection and achieved outstanding, and both deliver supervision to their staff teams. While it is a statutory requirement to provide supervision, it is evident that the absence of it, in NM (7)'s case, has not altered her commitment to providing it to others nor diluted its importance. NM (7) recognises the importance of supervision and while training has been absent, she is still

committed to professional practice. Again, this suggests a tacit knowledge and insight concerning the professional development and support of staff.

Similar to NMs (2 and 8), consideration was given to the positionality of the furniture and the distance between the supervisor and supervisee. In addition, attempts were made within the sand tray composition to create a sense of containment; to reduce interruptions, thereby providing an environment whereby professional dialogue could occur.

4.9 NM (8) Vignette

The nursery is set in a large, converted house in an area of affluence. The quality of provision has moved from 'good' to 'outstanding' in the recent Ofsted inspection. The practice of supervision was highlighted as an area of strength. The nursery joined the business via acquisition less than two years ago; since then, the team has seen notable changes. NM (8) is currently looking after the nursery to support the transition due to his long tenure in the organisation and management experience.

NM (8) has worked in the early years sector for over nineteen years, eight of those years as a nursery manager. He holds a Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education; this was gained via an apprenticeship. He has experience in the different roles within the nursery; as such, the scope of his role is to support other managers and nurseries in the organisation.

There was a particular focus on the environment throughout the interview; this was also illustrated in the sand tray composition. Attending to the supervisee's basic needs (Maslow, 1943) was important within supervision. The aesthetics of the room were significant, as was the positionality of the furniture, temperature and ambience. The manager spoke of having flowers in the room to make it feel welcoming and the importance of offering refreshments. In the composition, he created his ideal environment for supervision. This perspective differed from his experience, which was more peer focused and ad-hoc. So, while the planning and delivery of supervision were unstructured, the sand tray composition suggests he needed a more structured model that facilitated creativity. He enjoyed the metaphor and sand tray exercise; it appealed to his more unconventional ways of working, and he could see how it would be a valuable tool within supervision.

Both NMs (6 and 8) deemed it essential to create a relaxed environment, believing that the informality would encourage conversation. In contrast to NMs (1 and10), where formality, structure and planning were vital elements of supervision, the opposite was apparent in this case. The former both recorded important elements of the informal supervision conversations in note format. Again, this approach is inconsistent with the supervision models explored within the literature review. Prescribed documentation was avoided and cited in conjunction with the metaphor card 'supervision is like a checklist', implying that supervision paperwork was an additional burden.

NM (8) was the only manager to discuss supervision in the context of children. He selected the card 'supervision is like being in a boxing ring'. He compared this to the safer deployment of staff, whereby they were positioned at each corner of the ring to supervise the safety of the children. He also selected the card which referred to supervision as a jigsaw; again, he related this to the children and staff. This provided a different perspective and demonstrated how the word supervision has dual meaning, depending upon the context. While he recognised the importance of meeting with staff, this was not scheduled, unlike NMs (1 and 10). Instead, he addressed situations with staff when they arose and spoke of how he supervised staff more holistically, such as walking around the nursery and observing practice. His approach was more informal, but this did not detract from the standards he expected from the team. It appears that his supervision style has replicated his experience of supervision. He did not receive formal supervision and did not apply a systematic approach. The varied approaches to supervision within this sample group of ten NMs, suggests that supervision practices could differ across the organisation.

4.10 NM (9) Vignette

The nursery is set in a large, converted house and provides early years education to the local community. A recent Ofsted inspection graded 'outstanding', reports that 'the nursery manager uses effective supervision systems to monitor and support staff.' This denotes an improvement since the last Ofsted inspection, where the nursery was awarded a 'good'. The quality of training and supervision support were identified as areas of exemplary practice in the inspection report. The nursery joined the business through acquisition less than two years ago; the staff team have remained consistent throughout this transition.

NM (9) is a qualified Level 3 early years practitioner, graduate and Early Years Teacher. She has worked at the nursery for ten years and has been in her current role for one year. The nursery team consists of thirty people, of whom the management team shares the responsibility for supervision.

NM (9) was decisive about the cards she selected. As a new manager, she spoke about the importance of supervision. The idea of a safe space is illustrated by creating a square boundary using sticks in the sand. It was a strong image, as was the narrative centred on being safe enough to voice opinions and receive feedback. Within the boundary of supervision, NM (9) was able to discuss any concerns about the nursery. Furthermore, the boundary and all that it represented supported well-being. Supervision provided a safe space to learn and, as a result, aided the transition of roles. Because of this, she wanted to replicate the model with her staff team. This was significant due to her recent promotion and length of service at the nursery, as she now manages staff who were once her peers.

For NM (9), supervision provided a space for dialogue, specifically about the leadership of the nursery and staff team. As a supervisor, the focus with the supervisee was on addressing problems, finding solutions, making progress and impact. There are similarities with NM (1), who also emphasised goals, attainment and impact. Both nurseries and managers joined the organisation via the same acquisition.

4.11 NM (10) Vignette

NM (10) leads a purpose-built nursery that serves a diverse community. It is significantly oversubscribed and has a waiting list. The nursery also offers Forest School. The quality of care and education has improved since the previous inspection. The nursery has progressed from a ‘good’ to a recent ‘outstanding’ Ofsted grade. The NM is proud of her highly qualified and long-serving team of fifty-five staff. In the interview, she commented that the nursery was like a ‘second family’ to her. She referred to the importance of belonging, similar to NM (6). Furthermore, NM (10) stated that she was ‘dedicated’ to her team. She believed that if the family culture were not tangible, it would negatively impact the quality of care and education.

NM (10) is a passionate and committed leader. She has worked at the nursery for eight years. She explained how the previous nursery manager invested time in her development and led by example. It was clear from visiting the nursery and throughout the interview that early years is a vocation for NM (10). She has worked in the sector for over ten years, three of which have been as a manager. She holds a Level 3 qualification in Childcare and is also a Forest School Leader.

A number of the supervision metaphors selected by NM (10) were mirrored in the final composition of the sand tray activity. In particular, the manager recognised that both personal and professional circumstances could impact people in different ways. She talked about how supervision can be compared to a rollercoaster; the high points are the significant achievements and the low points, issues, or difficulties discussed. The sand tray arrangement illustrated support, which was not exclusive to supervision. Throughout the interview and sand tray activity, there was a strong representation via figurines supporting each other, either by having coffee together, socialising outside of work or by being present in the moment (Bowlby, 1988), via active listening. NM (10) recognised the contributions of the whole staff team and their perspectives concerning being active problem solvers.

NM (10) has worked hard to establish a safe working environment within the nursery. She welcomes professional debate and focuses on pedagogical leadership. Supervision is planned for with precision and is delivered every six weeks by the management team. This mirrored the practice of NM (1), whereby supervision was embedded within daily practices. In both examples, setting achievable goals, monitoring progress, celebrating success and seeing impact were standard agenda items. Again, both NMs (10 and 1) track supervision to ensure all partake of the professional practice. This is very different to NM (8), who does not plan for supervision but instead addresses issues on an 'ad-hoc' basis. It appears he has a different perspective on the purpose of supervision, as discussed within the corresponding vignette.

While every manager selected the card 'supervision is an opportunity to talk and be listened to', NM (10) was the only participant to articulate the reciprocal nature of support that she draws from her staff team. She also received supervision from her line manager on a frequent and planned basis, which the NM described as her 'safe space' and place of trust. It may be that this experience has enabled her to offer a secure base to the people whom she supervises. In the case of NM (10), the absence of training has not hindered the delivery of supervision.

It appears there is a degree of tacit knowledge of Winnicottian principles (1960) like the ‘holding environment’ and knowledge of Bowlbian (1988) attachment theory and how this can be applied to supervision. While the correct theoretical terminology may be missing, her strong sense of care has found a way to nurture others.

4.12 Metaphor cards

Appendix 8.5 illustrates the selection of cards that were chosen by NMs. The quantity of data generated by the activity was extensive. Several cards that the NMs’ did not favour were ‘Supervision is like…being in a boxing match’ selected only by (NM 8) and ‘Supervision is like…a mirror’ chosen by (NMs 5 and 10). See appendix 8.5 to see which cards were not selected. The word count for this thesis does not extend to the presentation and discussion of all cards. Therefore, cards will be presented that are the most relevant.

4.12.1 Supervision is an opportunity to talk and be listened to

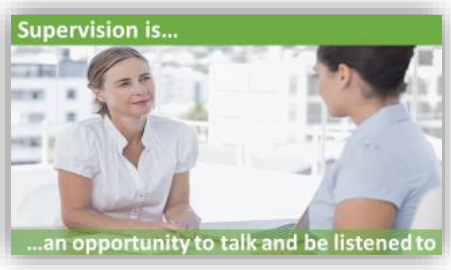


Figure 4.1 - All ten (100%) participants selected the above card.

There was agreement amongst all NMs’ that supervision should provide an opportunity for listening and discussion. NM (3) described how supervision provides 'a good opportunity to have an open conversation and for people to be honest'. She explained how the supervisory relationship enabled staff to address any concerns. This was echoed by NM (5), who identified that listening and being listened to was a central facet of supervision and NM (7) highlighted how supervision should provide an opportunity for staff to share their thoughts and concerns. NM (6) expanded upon this by stating, ‘it's an open forum, it is a safe place, and you know that it can be confidential'. The idea of supervision being a safe place was also referenced by NM (10). Whereas NM (8) described how supervision is an 'opportunity to sit down and have a chat and just look at areas where things are strong and celebrate success [of the supervisee]'. He discussed his relaxed approach to supervision and how he preferred a more informal environment. Conversely, for NM (9) as a new manager, supervision is

essential as it provides an 'opportunity to discuss with my line manager just things that are going on in the nursery, any challenges that I have with my staff team or the nursery in general'. She explained how supervision had supported her ‘mental well-being' and how she valued the opportunity to speak with someone external to the nursery. She expanded upon this and explained that due to her tenure at the nursery and the various roles she had held, it was problematic to discuss professional concerns with the nursery team. Having a supervisor and partaking in supervision has enabled her to transition into management and navigate several complex nursery relationships.

4.12.2 Supervision is like a good pair of tights; it provides support

Figure 4.2 - This card was selected by seven (70%) out of the ten NMs’.

NM (1) offered a dual perspective of the supervision roles when explaining the rationale of her card selection. As a supervisee, she saw supervision as an opportunity to discuss her aspirations with her supervisor. She spoke of her motivation to develop and progress within the company. Likewise, assuming the supervisor's role, she explained that a critical element of supervision was to 'support and develop’ her staff team. NM (5) also referenced the supportive function of supervision, discussing how supervision should aim to 'develop individuals and support them in finding paths forwards'.

NM (6) spoke of the importance of knowing her staff team and felt that staff members knew that she supported them by having an open-door policy. Similar to NM (6), an 'open door' policy was adopted within the nursery by NM (10). Conversely, NM (7) described how supervision within her nursery is often triggered because a staff member requires support or has concerns about their professional practice. She explained how support was provided in an action plan. Also, she described how she would offer support to the supervisee by observing them within the nursery room and then providing feedback.

NM (10) described how supervision is an extension of her job and how she has found that providing support to others is often a reciprocal experience. She described the nursery as a 'second family' due to immediate family living out of the area. NM (10) talked about the responsibility that she felt towards her team and discussed the sense of 'guilt' she would feel if she did not provide support or 'wasn't devoting my time to those staff'.

4. 12.3 Supervision is problem-solving

Figure 4.3 - This card was selected by five (50%) of the ten NMs'.

NM (4) felt that supervision should provide an opportunity to coach and support. It was seen as a forum to develop others, encourage solution-focused thinking and promote the accountability of ideas. NM (9) shared how supervision provided a forum for 'talking through conversations and ideas, how you can make improvements or changes to what you're doing.' This was echoed by NM (10), who explained how supervision enabled staff to find solutions. This extended beyond the nursery, too, for example, the staff were keen to pioneer a multi-generational project, whereby children and the elderly from a local care home could build relationships. Supervision was used as a forum in which to reflect on the benefits of such a partnership.

4.12.4 Supervision is being challenged

Figure 4.4 – This card was selected by five (50%) of the ten NMs'.

This card generated discussion about how staff should be autonomous in their thinking and how supervision should offer stretch and challenge. Moreover, NMs (4, 8, 9 and 10) discussed the role of coaching in supervision to challenge the supervisee's thinking positively. While NM (5) outlined how supervision should be 'supportive, safe and challenge the team'. This was also echoed by NM (8), who described how he would use supervision to address practice, ask questions and challenge negative behaviour if necessary. He, too, discussed the benefits of the coaching staff to aid their thinking and practice.

NM (9) selected the card as she felt it reflected her experience of being a supervisee rather than a supervisor. She described how her supervisor coaches her and how this helps to improve her thinking. As a result, this approach to supervision was then replicated by NM (9). She explained how she asked her staff to rationalise the learning environment and provision available to the children and the various learning opportunities. The purpose of this was to ascertain if the nursery team had areas of development that required support.

4.12.5 Supervision is like therapy

Figure 4.5 – This card was selected by five (50%) of the ten NMs'.

NM (1) chose the card ‘supervision is like therapy' from the premise that she had observed an increase in conversations about well-being. She stated that 'I feel like I'm a bit of a counsellor.' Conversely, NM (3) spoke from a supervisee's perspective and described how supervision was like therapy, 'not so much for the staff, but me.' She explained that supervision provided an opportunity to remember and reflect on the challenges of nursery work. In turn, this enabled her to empathise with her team and appreciate the challenges they faced.

In contrast, NM (4) described how supervision could feel like therapy, not for her but for the supervisee. She stated:

> I feel like I'm a mum to thirty women in my nursery because they come to you with a small problem, and they want to talk things through; they want to have a moan. And afterwards, they feel so much better from off-loading and having somebody to bounce back ideas off them.

A similar perspective was shared by NM (5), which also reflected the comments of NM (1). She, too, had noticed an increase in staff wanting to discuss issues concerning their well-being. As a result, she implemented separate well-being meetings, in addition to supervision, to avoid either meeting 'becoming too much like therapy.' NM (6) offered a different perspective and described how supervision provided a space for open dialogue. She states:

> I think that it is a lot about sharing your problems, and by sharing your problems, hopefully, your problems are a little lighter. I think feelings should be shared, and it is a place that problems can be discussed, and solutions can be sought. I think that it is healing; it helps promote self-esteem.

She explained that supervision should be a place where staff are listened to, 'an open place where you can say anything.' She described how she has always operated an 'open door' policy, whereby staff can speak to her at any point.

A final question was posed to all NMs following the metaphor card activity: ‘What does supervision mean to you?' Table 4.1 illustrates the responses that have been collated.

Nursery Manager (NM)	**Definition of Supervision**
NM 1	Supervision provides an opportunity for progression and making sure that they feel valued, and it gives them the opportunity to feel like they've achieved.
NM 2	I always tell the staff that at that time [supervision] it is all about them, where they want to go, what they want to achieve, and how I can help them get them there.
NM 3	It [supervision] can be so many things, or it can be nothing. Sometimes I come out of a one-to-one [supervision] and think, okay, so that has ticked a box. It shouldn't be about sitting down with staff and writing things down. I think it is more about working with staff and being in the room and sharing ideas.
NM 4	It is about being supported, being encouraged. Having an open forum where you can talk about difficulties or things that you are happy with. It is about being challenged and coached to the best that you can be in that job role.
NM 5	A chance to have an open dialogue to raise concerns, to raise challenges, to speak both positively but also to speak about areas of development. But also, to teach and to learn. So, to me, a review is a conversation.
NM 6	It is mentoring, coaching, helping others that are falling behind, working together for a common goal, encouragement, helping staff, problem-solving and find solutions, we share a sense of community, we count on each other, teamwork, we both encourage, and we enforce information and accomplish a goal, negotiating, listening and clarify. We are dependent on each other, share leadership. Give direction, take direction from one another. Reflect and stand by one another.
NM 7	Supervision is all about sort of guiding and teaching, but it is also about picking up on people's strengths as well.
NM 8	For me and my role, it is about supervising my staff.
NM 9	Allowing you to think through what you have been doing, what you can do to improve, almost like a reflection, setting targets, short term.
NM 10	My team sharing some of the stuff with me, and actually, that is the whole relationship, and it just builds upon it. Supervision is about time and trust.

Table 4.1 – NMs’ definition of supervision

This case study has identified that ten NMs, within the same organisation all have a different understanding of supervision, as illustrated in table 4.1. However, whilst there are multiple definitions of supervision, there was a strong preference towards Kadushin’s (1976) supportive supervision function. For example, supervision was seen as a forum to talk through personal and professional concerns. It was also seen as a place to seek support, and in some instances, it provided therapeutic comfort. The latter all represent elements of the supportive function. Thereafter, the professional discourse was concerned with the challenge of practice and problem-solving, which is reflective of the educational function. While the managerial element did not feature as a strong theme, it was evident throughout the interviews.

The NMs' commented that the card activity provided an opportunity for them to prepare and think about supervision. Some NMs discussed the activity with their senior teams too. They reported how it enabled them to enter the 'zone' and to focus on the topic.

4.13 Results of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Nursery Managers (NMs'), all of whom lead Ofsted outstanding nurseries, as discussed in chapter 3. When planning the interview, I envisaged that the questions would act as the structure to present the results, but this was not the case. As identified and discussed in chapter 3, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework informed the generation of interview themes. Therefore, it will be the themes rather than the interview questions that will act as the framework for presenting the results. There are eight key themes presented in this chapter.

4.13.1 Theme 1 - Terminology linked to supervision

From the outset, it was evident that there was some confusion concerning the definition of supervision. Distinctions were made between the terminology of annual appraisal, one-to-one meetings, peer-to-peer observations and supervision. Staff appeared confident in their understanding of appraisals, stating it was about 'yearly goals' (NM 2), 'celebrating achievements' (NM 4), 'more formal' (NM 6), 'all the good stuff' (NM 8) 'looking back on the whole year and then setting targets for the year' (NM 9). Comments were also made about the mandatory nature of an appraisal (NM 3). There was less clarity about the terminology linked to supervision and its various functions. Indeed, when asked about the difference between appraisal and supervision, there was some ambiguity with the latter term. For example, (NM 8) referred to supervision in the context of staff supervising children, which is not incorrect but not appropriate to the context of the question. However, (NMs 1, 5 and 9) made a distinction between short-term targets set in supervision and long-term targets agreed at the annual appraisal. In comparison, (NMs 4 and 5) saw supervision as a conduit for learning and development.

Furthermore, terminology such as supervision and one-to-one meetings were referenced interchangeably. Supervision was seen as an opportunity to offer support and coaching (NM 4) and as a method to address unwanted practices. There were some negative connotations associated with the term supervision; it was considered a different type of conversation and

required formal documentation. A ‘one-to-one’ was viewed as an informal catch-up. In addition, several participants referred to the 'supervision pad' (specific paperwork used during supervision) (NMs 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10) as ‘a telling off pad’ (NM 3); further inquiry revealed a notable dislike of this practice. Indeed, the thread of negativity was expanded upon by (NM 4) who stated, 'it can be confusing…it [supervision] often occurs when 'an error is made, or something has gone wrong…we have supervision pads’. She explained that a 'mini-investigation would take place in receipt of a parental complaint’, and the supervision would 'definitely need to be documented'. Thereafter, a review would take place to ensure the practice had improved. Using the supervision pad was also referenced by NM 8, who explained that 'the one-to-one would be more of a catch-up…and a supervision would be used if I saw poor practice'. It is clear why supervision in this context is perceived as a formalised meeting to address practice. The statement below illustrates the dichotomy of supervision and one-to-one meetings:

> I prefer the term one-to-one to supervision meeting; it sounds a lot sterner; it sounds a bit like somebody is in trouble. And it sounds like you've identified something that you want to address. Whereas I think if it is a one-to-one meeting, it sounds a lot friendlier (NM 3).

Following a recent Ofsted inspection, NM (5) introduced the term 'supervision' to reflect the statutory framework's language to ensure clarity of meaning before using the term ‘one-to-one’. NMs (2 and 6) both use the phrase, supervision as commonplace. The former attributes this to her previous employment in the Social Services, where she received formal supervision and the latter to align with the language used in the EYFS (DfE, 2017). To conclude, results from the interviews indicate some confusion about terminology linked to supervision. While all NMs are a part of the same organisation, there are differing perspectives and understanding about supervision.

4.13.2 Theme 2 - What an ideal supervision should encompass

When analysing the interview transcripts, it became apparent there were some key factors that NMs thought needed to be present in supervision. Participants referenced the centrality of having 'open, honest and confidential' conversations (NMs 1, 4, 6). Some NMs felt supervision should provide an opportunity to be heard and where 'feelings could be shared…problems discussed, and solutions can be sought' (NM 6). A non-judgemental approach was also highlighted (NMs 3, 6 and 9) as an essential factor.

Dedicated and uninterrupted time were both deemed essential elements of supervision. Trust was also cited as vitally important; NM (10) stressed that 'time and trust are two big words' and fundamental to developing professional relationships. She explained how she signals to her staff ‘you have my time’ when conducting supervision. Some NMs (1, 2, 3, 6, 9 and 10) referenced the importance of taking a holistic approach to supervision; this was reflected in an openness to talk about work and personal situations. Furthermore, NMs (5, 6, 9, and10) discussed how supervision should make people feel valued. Indeed, the practice of supervision was seen to support staff through difficulties, be a relaxed and inclusive practice, available to anyone who requests it (NM 3). NM (2) spoke about the impact of not receiving supervision and how she left a small, independent nursery due to its absence. Similarly, NM (4) explained that a lack of supervision led to her feeling unsupported, resulting in her resignation.

NMs (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) valued the practice of peer-to-peer observation as it strengthened the supervision process and reinforced a culture of improvement. They identified how peer-to-peer observation triangulated with supervision, pedagogy and practice. The opportunity for ‘stretch and challenge’ (NMs 1 and 10), in addition to the setting of short-term targets, distinguished supervision from a one-to-one meeting. Progression and moving forward were also cited as elements of ideal supervision. In addition to stretch and challenge, space to reflect was cited (NMs 1, 2, 5 and 9, 10).

4.13.3 Theme 3 - Supervision facilitates a safe space for professional practice

Some NMs (2, 3, 4, 9 and 10) identified that supervision should provide a safe space to discuss professional practices. Within this safe space, NMs highlighted how they conduct discussions about the supervisees’ pedagogical practices. Several NMs (4, 5, 9 and 10) referenced how they had requested their supervisees to bring children's learning journeys to the supervision meeting; they encourage reflection and discussion. The extension of children's learning and planning was also discussed. Pedagogical leadership was highlighted as a critical topic to discuss by NM (10) and central to the quality of care and education. NMs (4 and 9) explained how they had implemented a process whereby they triangulate evidence from practitioner observations, children's learning journeys and supervision. NM (4) stated 'it is important to challenge people’s thinking in supervision' probing them on what 'they could do better'. In comparison, NM (9) described how she would focus on the quality

of the nursery, individual key children and their next steps of learning. This was echoed by NM (1), who commented that rigorous stretch and challenge, with support, 'creates that culture of wanting to improve...it helps significantly'; this is something that she said takes place within supervision.

Reflective practice was referenced by NMs (4, 5, 8, 9 and 10) as a method to think and prepare for a supervision session. NM (5) observed that where staff were engaged in some formal learning, their reflective practice was more evident; this was demonstrated through curiosity, questioning, willingness to share ideas coupled with a level of immediacy. Similarly, NM (9) explained how she reflects on past supervision sessions (as a supervisee), both positive and negative elements.

NM (8) referred to a daily practice which he considered informal, group supervision. He holds morning meetings with room leaders, where they reflect and share practice. They discuss who will be observed to identify 'weak spots' or the 'stronger' staff members.
In summary, some NMs use supervision to facilitate pedagogical discourse, whereas others do not. Moreover, in most cases, the focus is on the supervisee as opposed to the child. It also seems to be a space where reflective practice is fostered for both the supervisor and supervisee. It appears that there is a tenuous link between the engagement of reflective practice and enhanced pedagogical output.

4.13.4 Theme 4 - The role of the environment in supervision

NMs' (2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10) referenced the role of the environment, specifically about how it can be a help or a hindrance to supervision. Space, location, comfort, aesthetics, privacy minus interruptions were deemed essential considerations. In addition, NMs' (6, 7, 8 and 10) talked about the importance of refreshments and how they contribute to a relaxed atmosphere. A lack of physical office space was a source of frustration for NM (2) due to the open-plan office situated within the nursery foyer. When conducting supervision, she described how she had to contend with staff 'coming through to get phones, go on lunch, the door is still going, the phone is still ringing, so it feels that they don't get 100% of me'. The location of the office was also raised as a concern by NM (3), whose office is situated at the building entrance, albeit it is a separate space. She stated that conducting supervision was like being in a 'goldfish bowl'; this was reiterated by NM (5), who commented that 'the office isn't

practical…because of the possible interruptions that can occur.' She explained how she had resorted to taking staff offsite for a coffee and how this presented a set of new challenges, such as maintaining the appropriate staff-to-child ratio, safeguarding and health and safety requirements. NM (10) referenced how she had conducted supervision in the staff room and the cot room as an alternative to the nursery office due to numerous interruptions.

4.13.5 Theme 5 - Regularity of supervision

There was a considerable disparity in the frequency of supervision. Table 4.2 illustrates the regularity of supervision delivered by NMs' and the regularity in which they received supervision from their respective line manager.

Nursery Manager (NM)	Regularity of supervision delivered by NM	Formal	Informal	Regularity of supervision received by NM via line manager	Formal	Informal
NM 1	Every 6 weeks	✓		Every 12 to 16 weeks	✓	
NM 2	Every 6-8 weeks	✓		Every 8 weeks	✓	
NM 3	When required		✓	Every 8 to 12 weeks	✓	
NM 4	Every 8-12 weeks	✓		Every 8 to 12 weeks	✓	
NM 5	Every 12 weeks	✓		Every 12 weeks	✓	
NM 6	Every 8 weeks		✓	Every 6 months	✓	
NM 7	Every 12 weeks	✓		N/A	N/A	N/A
NM 8	Ad-hoc		✓	N/A	N/A	N/A
NM 9	Every 6-8 weeks	✓		Every 12 weeks	✓	
NM10	Every 3-6 weeks	✓		Every 16 weeks	✓	

Table 4.2 Table to show regularity of supervision

Four NMs' (1, 2, 9 and 10) formally deliver supervision every 6-8 weeks. Staff are made aware in advance of their supervision to prepare, and the meeting notes are recorded. NM (1) described how she conducts supervision every six weeks; these are recorded and tracked using a self-designed matrix. Similarly, NMs' (1, 4 and 10) also plan supervision via self-designed spreadsheets and matrix grids. This systematic approach contrasts with NMs (6 and 8), who do not plan and have adopted an ad-hoc approach to supervision.

Thereafter, the frequency of supervision extends to 8-12 weeks. NM (4) plans for supervision, whereas NM (6) favours an informal approach that extends to ‘catch-up’ conversations. NM (5) and NM (7) conducted supervision every 12 weeks. In contrast, NM (3) and NM (8) do not plan for their supervision meetings; they also do not record the meeting in a structured way. Both identified their preference for ad-hoc discussions with their staff teams rather than formal supervision meetings. Instead, they spent time in the nursery rooms to observe practice and provide feedback. NM (8) admitted the following:

> To be honest, I haven't done any planned ones [supervision]. They've been kind of if situations have arisen. I've been like, right, let's have a chat about that. Just use some one-to-one documents; it can be written down, so we've got a copy of it.

Furthermore, he explained that in the case of a new member of staff, who may require more support than others, they have 'catch-ups...rather than having one-to-one chats. But if there is anything I feel that we need to document and then revisit later, then I would put it down on a one-to-one form.' A similar practice was described by NM (6), who explained that she has a folder that contains 'lots of scraps of paper’ where she makes notes of the informal conversations. She referenced a preference for informal meetings, particularly with long-serving staff.

NM (5) reported that she conducted supervision every three months. Furthermore, she commented, 'I don't like to tell them [supervisees’] until the day so that they aren't working themselves up for it if that is the case which I have found.' This practice is contrary to NMs (1, 2, 9 and 10), who encourage staff to plan and prepare for their supervision meetings. When discussing the frequency of NM supervision, it was apparent that NMs’ provided supervision more frequently than they received it. When asked how often supervision took place, NM (1) replied, 'not half as frequently as I do them…' she explained that she receives supervision four times a year. Pending her nursery inspection, the focus was on the attainment of an outstanding grade. She commented:

> I would probably like more to- almost to check-in, to make sure that those things that we have set as targets, not so much that I'm achieving them, but having that support to get to that. I think because everyone has so much to think about, that kind of maybe gets lost sometimes.

NM (2) described supervision as 'personal, and it's just some time for you both'. She explained that her most recent supervision consisted of a triad; this included her line manager and a support member of staff. She described how she had a good relationship with both; however, there was a lack of choice regarding supervision format. This was reflective of NM (3). At the same time, she recognised the benefit of the triad. When reflecting on her

supervision, NM 3 described how she would 'come out of one-to-one meetings, and I think okay, so that has ticked that box'.

4.13.6 Theme 6 - A coaching approach to supervision

Central to this theme was the importance of listening to others and how supervision facilitated a space for the supervisee to think, problem-solve, challenge assumptions and learn. At the beginning of the meeting, (NMs 1, 2, 9 and 10) reinforce how supervision is for the supervisee's benefit. Indeed, the concept of coaching was referenced by numerous NMs (4, 5, 9 and 10). Some had attended a two-day, accredited coaching course and said how it had influenced their supervision practices.

Moreover, NM (5) described the impact of a coaching approach, which has heightened engagement in teaching and learning elements, dissemination of practice, curiosity and developing a sense of excitement about pedagogy. Similarly, NM (1) noted how coaching enabled supervisees to take ownership of their work. Indeed, NM (4) implied that supervision had aided retention and was considered a benefit. As such, if supervision was not delivered, this could lead to seeking alternative employment elsewhere. Moreover, enabling people to take accountability for their actions, learning and behaviours appeared ideal for NM (4). There was an expectation that staff should take ownership; NM (8) commented, ‘they have a responsibility as well…it is not all me …it is a team effort.’ Similarly, working together as a team was referred to in various contexts, such as NM (6) attributing their recent Ofsted Outstanding grade to the team. ‘I didn’t get the outstanding on my own. It was largely down to my team’.

NM (4) stated that supervision is about ‘asking the right questions for them [the supervisee] to come to the conclusions.’ While an incremental approach was applied by NM (10), she states:

> So, coaching and mentoring are obviously different ends of the scale, but I think there is some mentoring at first…then coaching, and you can just work up the ladder towards coaching.

The theme of support is woven through various responses. NM (7) described how supervision was about ‘guiding and teaching’ and focusing on their ‘strengths’ too. NM (5) echoed this, who spoke about caring for her team, ‘helping them grow and develop’ through supervision

conversations. This was also highlighted by NM (3), who expressed frustration in the traditional idea of supervision; she states:

> It shouldn't be about sitting down with staff and writing things down. I think it is more about working with staff and being in the room with the staff and sharing ideas.

The above statement references a mentoring dynamic, one that is active and collaborative. NM (1) spoke about the impact of disseminated practice within the nursery and described how staff responded to supervision:

> They're now delegating or following up, empowering them and their teams to think about what should be happening next rather than giving them the answer.

NM (9) described how she had received coaching within her supervision and that 'talking it through…makes you come up with your own solution'. In addition, NM (6) recounted that 'supervision reinforced the fact that I was doing the right thing [in the nursery].' She continues, 'supervision has given me that knowledge and support' as a new manager.

4.13.7 Theme 7 - Wellness

It was evident that NMs manage a varied degree of complex emotions, depression and mental health concerns in supervision. NMs (2, 3, 4, 6, 9 and 10) reported an increase in conversations that centred on mental health, particularly related to anxiety. Comments such as 'I feel like I am a counsellor' NM (1) and 'quite often I feel like I'm a mum to thirty women in my nursery…they need to offload' NM (6), this illustrates how supervision, in some instances is used to support well-being. Indeed, participants' (2, 3, 4, 6, 7) consensus was that supervision should support the well-being of the supervisee; however, it was essential to 'tread carefully' NM (7), due to their lack of training about mental health. Such is the commitment and concern of some NMs (4, 5 and 10) about well-being, they now offer additional meetings to support their staff. They explain:

> Well-being does not just impact the person, it affects the children and the rest of the team, and it can bring the morale of the team down, and that is not an outstanding setting (NM 4).
> We have well-being meetings as well as supervisions, reviews, appraisals etc. So, we can avoid it becoming too much like therapy. You need to do your job, but yes, of course, I will support you to do it. If you can't do your job because of it, then we need to reassess. So, I think that is where the line needed defining (NM 5).
> I've really focused on mental health and well-being. (NM 10).

There is an awareness that work, and home are intrinsically linked, and one impacts upon the other. The following quotes illustrate this point:

> I find they automatically lead on to things that you're not aware of, or home life and how it's impacting upon them here, even though they try and separate the two (NM 1).

> It gives somebody the opportunity to talk when maybe they would have said nothing. So, you have some people who might have an issue; it could be personal, it could just be home life, depression, anxiety (NM 2).
> I think as a manager and supporting my team, it is down to me to help them offload and to help find out what the issue is and see if I can support in any way; if they have problems in their home life, it will impact on their work-life (NM 4).
> What is going on in their life and actually how are they feeling… affect massively at work. I think that's why supervision is so important because it is about them as a whole person, not just their work-life (NM 10).

While staff care for children, the supervisor maintains a dual role of caring for both the staff and children. NM (10) described the complexity of this relationship and references feelings of guilt:

> A lot of my staff describe this nursery as a second family, so I think for me, if I didn't do it [provide support], I would feel guilty that actually, I wasn't devoting my time to those staff NM (10).

In a similar vein, the notion of 'availability' and being present was discussed:

> So, you've got to be available. If you're going to ask that question [how are you?], you've got to be able to have that conversation when anybody wants it NM (3).

The responsibility of being available to staff could become burdensome. It may cause stress and anxiety for the NM. Indeed NM (10) described feelings of guilt if she was not in a position to offer support. Several NMs (9) identified how the supervisory relationship supported well-being. Similarly, NMs (1, 2 and 10) recognised the importance of staff happiness, particularly regarding their time at the nursery. NMs (2, 3) noted an increase in staff raising concerns about their well-being. Furthermore, she explained that she did not feel comfortable recording the sensitive and personal issues on the supervision paperwork and therefore supported but not formally. Instead, she researched the area in question and tried to support it.

4.13.8 Theme 8 - The impact of wider learning on supervision and the need for training

There was a sense of agreement that supervision or one-to-one meetings could support positive, professional practice. When conducted appropriately, it can have a significant impact on the nursery. Indeed, some NMs (2, 3 and 5) believed supervision should form an element of basic NM training and comparisons were made to the nursing profession, where supervision training is a mandatory element of pre-requisite and post-registration. Also, NM (3) stated that supervision should be included in early years' qualifications to understand the professional practice.

Some NMs presented differing views on supervision, although they recognised its importance of it for various reasons:

> I think it [supervision] is vitally important… it should be a part of the identity [early years professional], but I think there are still things that get in the way of…the quality of it. It still appears to be a tick list job where it shouldn't be (NM 5).
> I think it's [supervision] impacted favourably in as much I think you get to learn about your staff better. It does help, and it probably is a good thing that supervision has come in because it does help people to learn, and it does help people learn from their mistakes (NM 6).
> Beforehand [pre-2012 when it became a statutory requirement to deliver supervision], we were very vulnerable. Now I feel very secure if Ofsted or any external or internal auditors [visited the nursery]. I probably wouldn't do my job now without supervision. I would probably stick to a deputy role, so I don't take that full responsibility as a nursery manager (NM 10).

All NMs' referred to the absence of supervision training; only two NMs (5 and 10) had received some form of training at a previous place of employment. Those with supervision training in 2012 attributed it to the Local Authority, which was minimal. NMs (1, 4 and 7) stated how they learnt to deliver supervision from 'watching other people'. The lack of training may have contributed to the disparity in supervision practices; this will be discussed in the next chapter. Some NMs use supervision or one-to-one paperwork as a framework for meetings NMs (1, 6, 7 and 9). At the same time, it appears other NMs apply a variety of approaches, such as 'watching other people' (NM 7), 'personal preference's (NM 8) and 'own experience of one-to-ones and supervisions' (NM 9).

When asked if there was any theoretical framework used to inform their supervision practices, there was an unequivocal response:

> There isn't a particular framework that we use; it's more kind of like target driven, I would say. I wouldn't know what the expectation of supervision is (NM 1).
> I don't know if there is a model; I just ask questions (NM 2).

Furthermore, where supervision training had been absent, some NMs substituted this with their ideas and training. NM (1) described how she leads training frequently for her senior team. She states:

> We did a senior meeting based around supervision and what they deemed to be included within that and how they would then deliver that to their teams.

There was an irrefutable consensus (100%) that supervision training was required for NMs'. When interviewed, participants recognised the need for a consistent approach to supervision; this is illustrated by NM (5), who states, 'every manager I have spoken to does it differently'. Recommendations were made about a tiered approach to training based upon roles and responsibilities. In the first instance, NMs (8 and 9) discussed a need for essential training for new and current NMs'. Furthermore, there was an acknowledgement that current supervision practice is too general:

> There is so much room for it to be done differently, maybe key things that should be included in supervision and other things that may be adapted as you need to be helpful (NM, 9).

While supervision training has been absent, recent professional development, such as the accredited Business Coaching course, has benefited how some NMs (4, 5 and 10) approach supervision.

4.14 Results from the sand tray activity

This section will focus on the sand tray compositions. The results will be presented using images and text boxes, reflecting the format used by Mann and Warr (2017). It offers a snapshot of each sand tray composition and key narrative. All NMs took part in the sand tray activity and were provided with the same brief – to create a scene that reflected ideal supervision. A range of LP materials was available to the NMs to create sand tray arrangements. In addition, all NMs agreed that their final compositions could be photographed for this study. Similar to Mann and Warr's research, I felt it was essential to include photographs of the compositions within the central thesis. All engaged in creating their composition and freely shared their stories; each composition is unique and reflects the experiences of the NM. The inclusion of the next section is a way in which to honour their narratives about supervision.

4.14.1 Nursery Manager (1)

The NM expressed how excited she was to engage in the sand tray activity. She explored the LPs materials by holding them, positioning them in the sand and returning them to the basket to exchange for alternative materials. She took her time to create the scene, placing the objects, experimenting and repositioning the items. The diagram below illustrates the NM's sand tray composition.

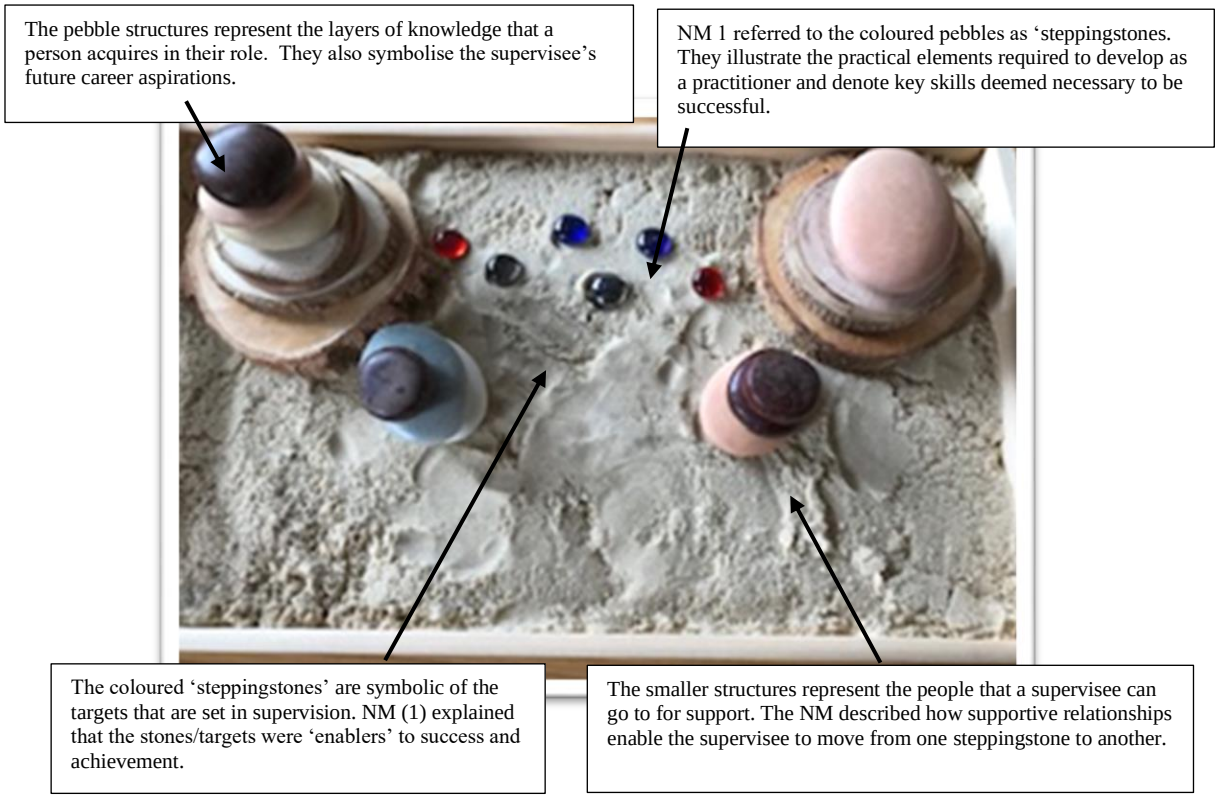


Figure 14.1 NM (1) representation of an ideal supervision session.

As Homeyer and Sweeney (2011) identified, the post creation stage of sand tray practice is to invite the participant to talk about their composition. NM discussed the necessity for targets within supervision, the importance of progression, achievement, and outcomes. The composition depicts knowledge and success as an upward construction, illustrated by the tower of pebbles. NM (1) indicated that a supportive, supervisory relationship was necessary and clear, measurable goals, illustrated by the coloured glass 'steppingstones', are an essential output of supervision.

4.14.2 Nursery Manager (2)

The sand tray composition reflected a recent event within the nursery. The narrative centred on a supervisee who felt demotivated and has considered leaving the nursery. The NM explained how supervision provided a forum in which to reflect and offer support. The NM described how supervision was the conduit for improved supervisee performance.

There were different elements to the sand tray composition. Key components included a herd of animals representing the busyness of nursey life, a coconut husk was described as a 'safe place' for supervision. Achievement and progression were linked to the happiness of staff and children. Significant emphasis was placed upon the supervisee and how supervision was 'their time' and space.

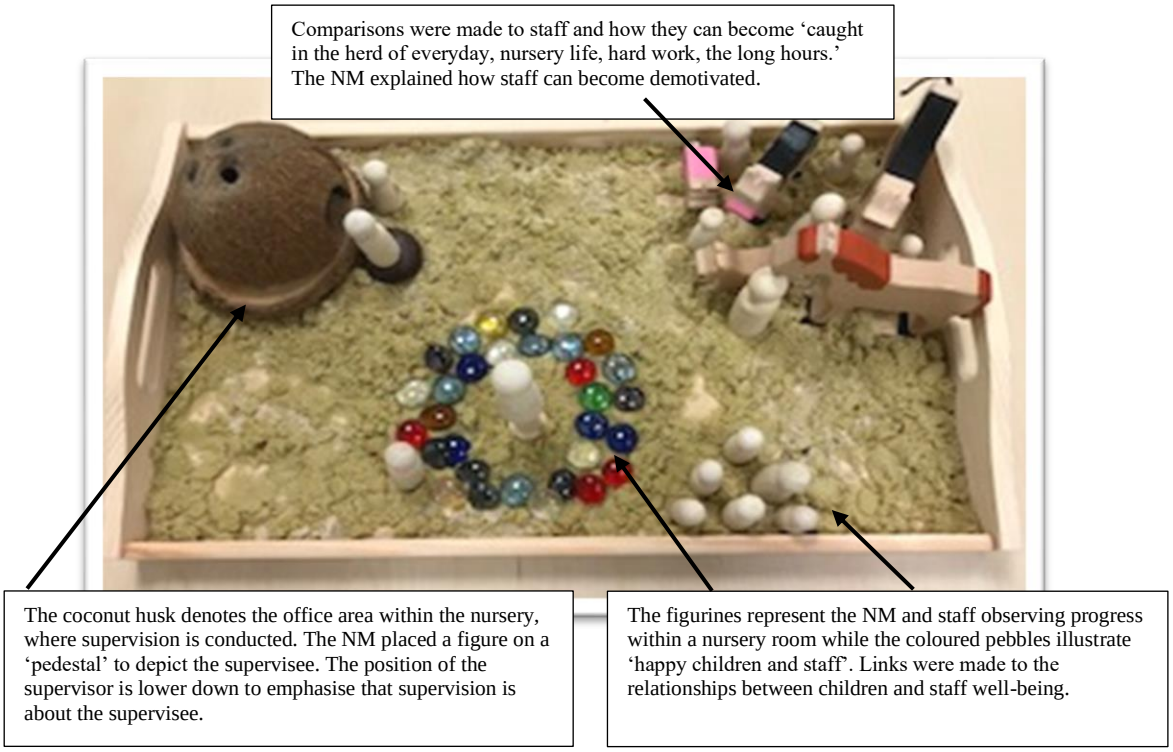


Figure 14.2 - NM (2) representation of ideal supervision session.

Similar to NM (1), a key focus of supervision was the achievement and progression of staff. She discussed the time and space provided by the supervisor for the supervisee, whereby encouragement was provided, which was a significant factor in a successful promotion. The NM captured the theoretical concept of emotional labour Hochschild (1983) in the herd of animals and how the impact of nursery life and long working hours can lead to demotivated staff; this will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.14.3 Nursery Manager (3)

The NM expressed a level of anxiety about the sand tray activity, as she was unsure what to expect. The sand tray composition was reflective of the NM's experience of supervision. She described supervision and the anticipation of the meeting and how it can 'feel like a chore', particularly when her line manager was delayed due to poor timekeeping. This led to the NM reflecting on the supervision experience of her staff team, and she was keen for them not to experience similar feelings to herself. The diagram below illustrates NM's sand tray composition.

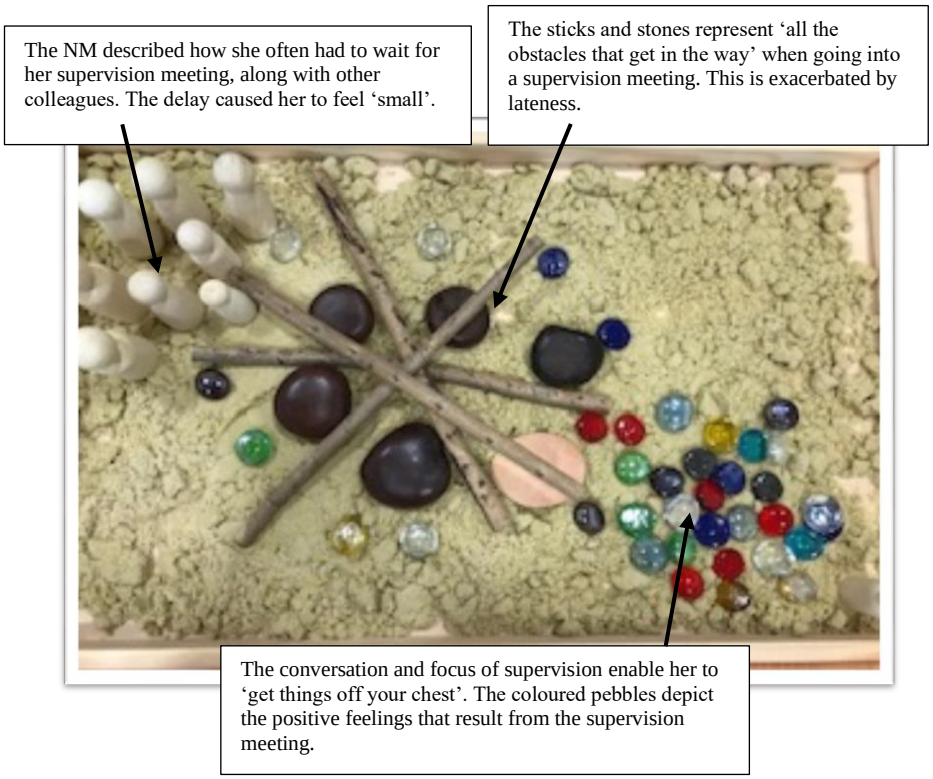


Figure 14.3 NM (3) representation of an ideal supervision session.

The NM described how having to wait for supervision due to her supervisor's lateness caused her to feel anxious and 'small' and she referred to these feelings as 'obstacles'. However, once she had moved past the initial barriers illustrated by the sticks and stones, she did engage and benefited from supervision.

4.14.4 NM (4)

The NM was curious about the LP materials. She took time to explore the different resources before placing the sand tray items, similar to NM (1). The composition was completed from the perspective of a supervisor conducting supervision.

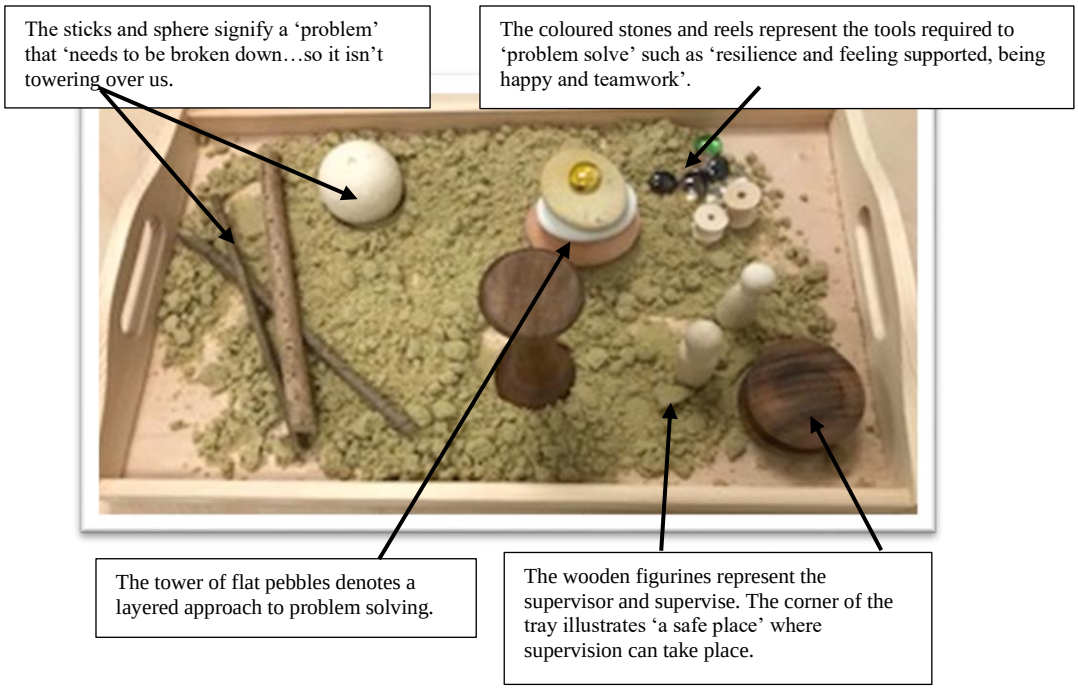


Figure 14.4 NM (4) representation of an ideal supervision session.

In addition, similar to the composition created by NM (2), a corner space was created within the tray to illustrate where supervision would take place. In this instance, NM (4) explained that the large wooden reel embodied a 'safe space' for early years practitioners. Both NMs (1 and 4) used layered, flat pebbles to denote the facilitative role of supervision in problem-solving via a multi-tiered approach. They were used to represent what NM (1) referred to as 'stepping-stones' and NM (4) referenced as 'tools'; this included resilience, teamwork and support. The coloured stones also symbolised a state of 'achievement', 'happiness' or 'positive feelings' for NMs (1, 2, 3 and 4), which were achieved either during the supervision session or after that.

4.14.5 NM (5)

The NM was familiar with the LP approach and had recently attended training about the subject area. The idea of an 'optimal time' for supervision was explored in relation to 'quality time'. She states, 'as the time goes, people tend to relax into it [supervision], and then some of the more honest conversations tend to happen in the last half an hour'. Furthermore, the NM spoke about supervision between two people. Although she referenced the value of group supervision too, 'you can have moments when you are working with a larger group…it can be supervision still, but the more beneficial way is that one-on-one learning from each other. It should be natural'. Emphasis was placed on the role of personal development and learning within supervision.

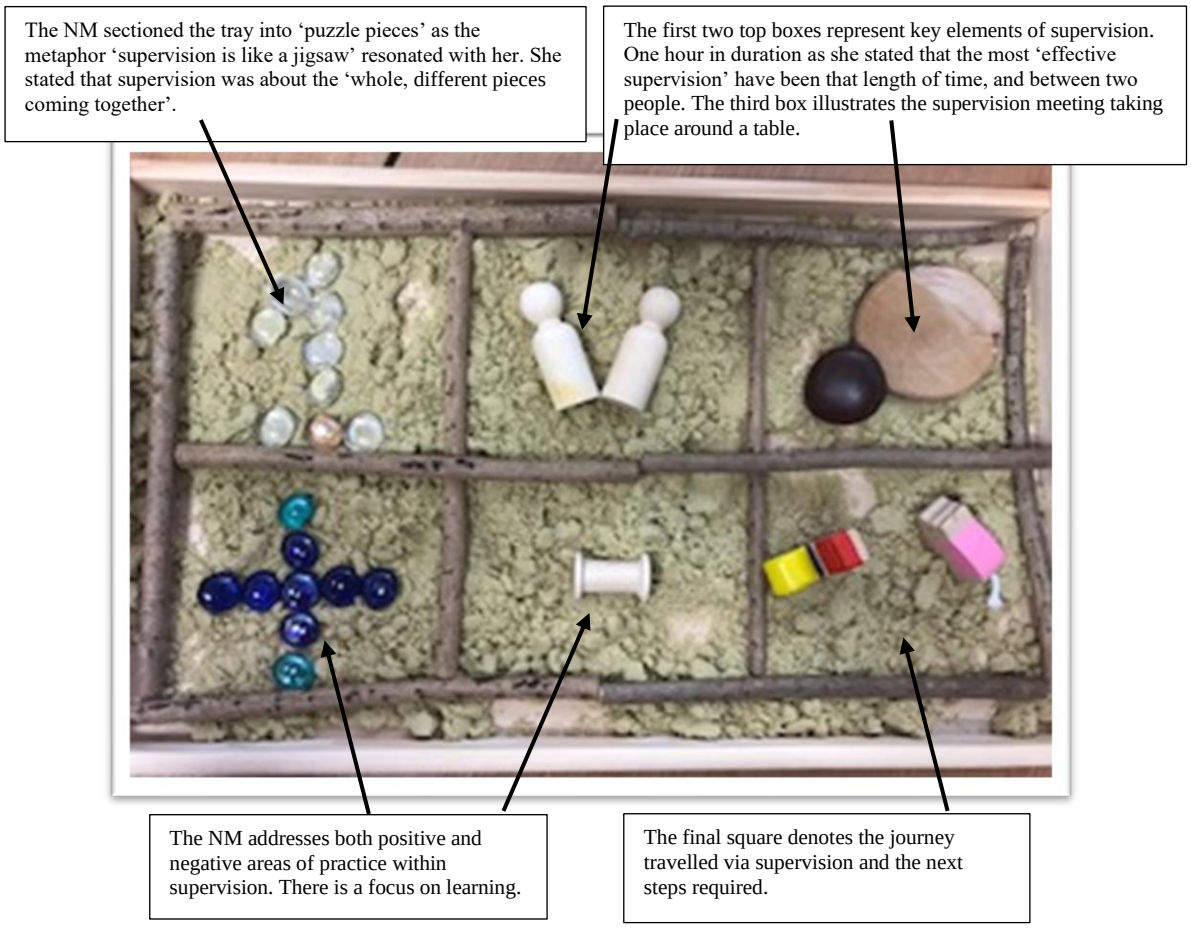


Figure 14.5 NM (5) representation of an ideal supervision session.

4.14.6 NM (6)

The NM appeared relaxed and engaged with the sand tray activity. Similar to NM (1), she took her time to investigate and explore the objects. She described the importance of a comfortable environment to conduct supervision; this was illustrated through her choice of LPs. The coconut husks represented ‘chairs’, and the sphere symbolised the ‘sharing of information’ and that conversation with supervision must be a ‘two-way dialogue’.

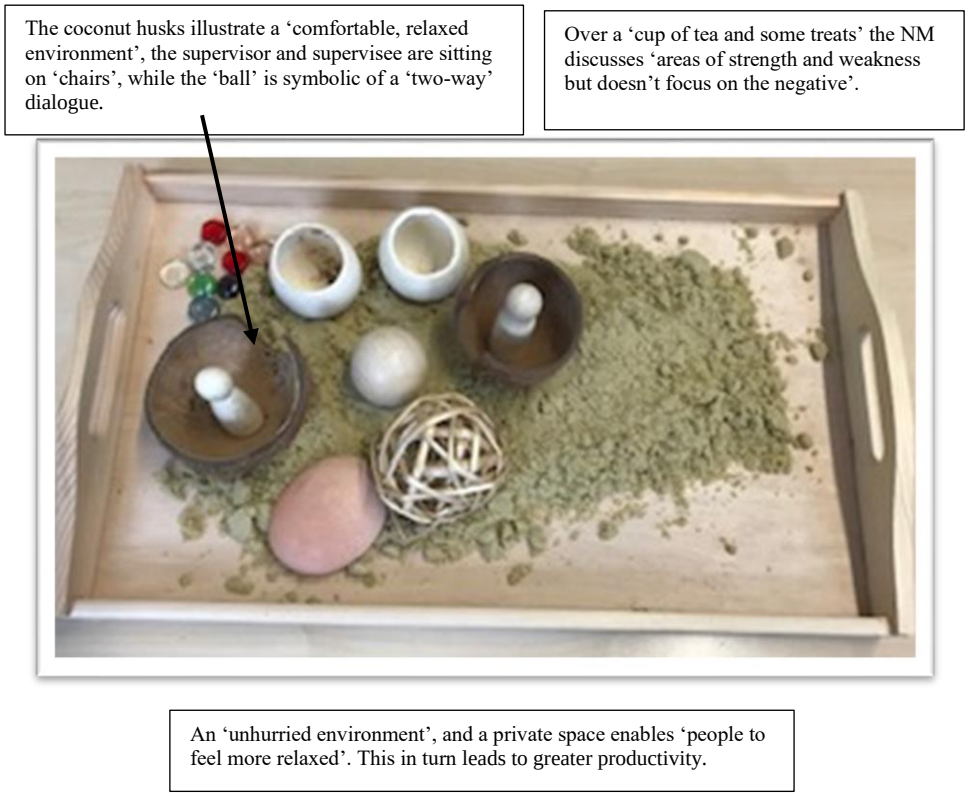


Figure 14.6 NM (6) representation of an ideal supervision session.

During the debrief, NM (6) emphasised the importance of safety, comfort and nourishment as supporting supervision characteristics. She stated that supervision should be ‘open ended’ and unhurried’. An individual approach to supervision was adopted, and time is allocated accordingly.

4.14.6 NM (7)

It is evident from the photograph that few objects were used, compared to NM (5) however, there was a straightforward narrative that explained the composition. The placement of the LPs emphasised spatial awareness, body language and power dynamics. NM (7) reflected on the positionality of furniture and the supervisor's role in creating an equitable environment.

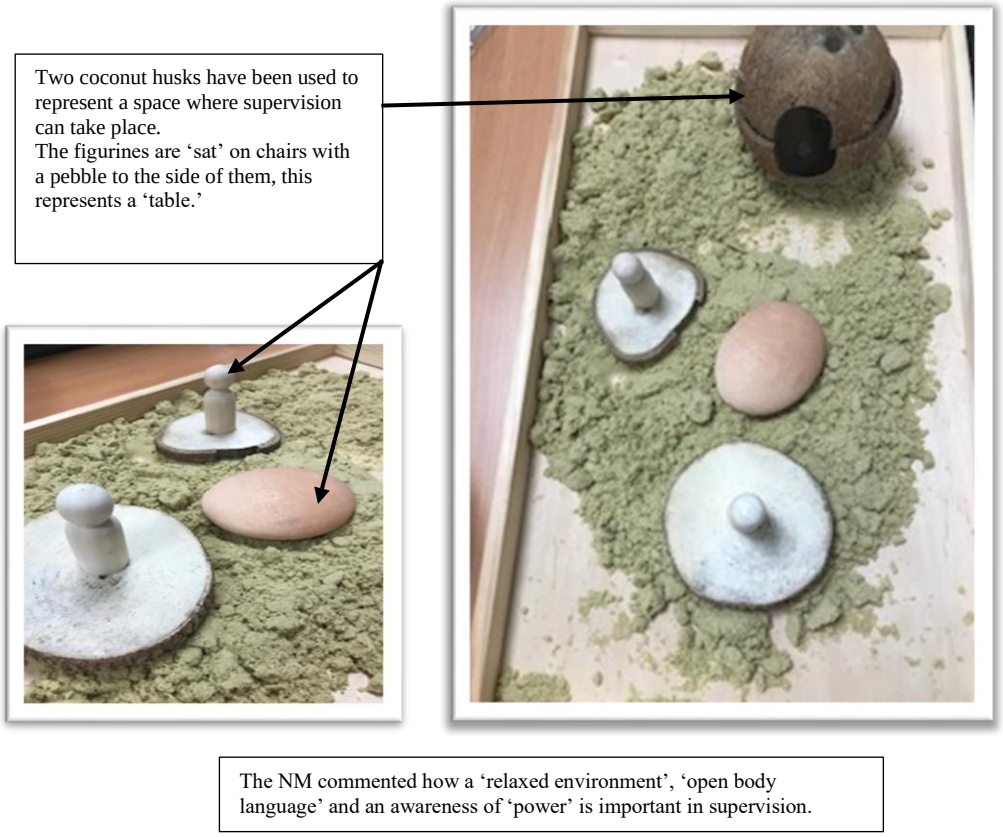


Figure 14.7 NM (7) representation of an ideal supervision session.

Privacy, no interruptions and a relaxed environment were all elements discussed by NM (7), as was refreshments for the supervisee. This was similar to NM (6) and NM (8), who favoured a less formal approach to supervision and referenced the environment's aesthetic. The husk represents a small, comfortable and contained space in which supervision takes place. Out of all ten compositions, NM (7) was the only person to use two husks to create a cocoon-like enclosure, signifying a place of containment. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.14.8 NM (8)

At the start of the sand tray activity, the NM stated that his composition would be ‘basic’. I encouraged him to explore and view it as an opportunity to play with new resources. Throughout, he spoke about creating a welcoming, physical environment and discussed spatial awareness, such as where the seats and table were placed, similar to NM (7). Upon completing the task, he stated how much he ‘enjoyed’ the research’s exploratory element.

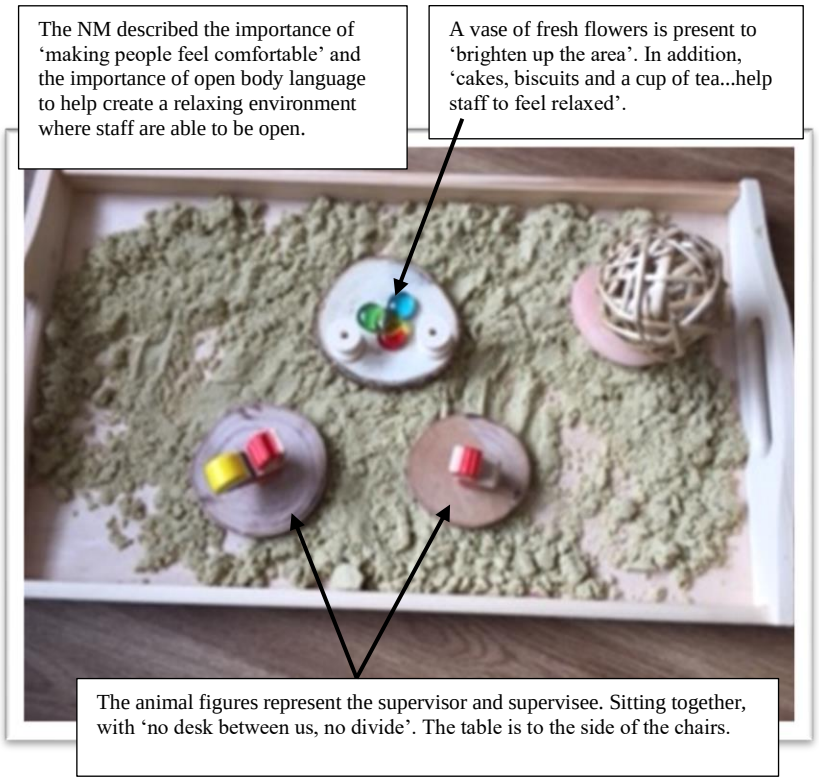


Figure 14.8 NM (8) representation of an ideal supervision session.

The physical environment and attending to others’ needs, featured within this composition, similar to NM (6)’s. However, he was the only NM to include flowers as part of the composition. Both NM (7) and NM (8) demonstrated an awareness of power dynamics and positionality by placing the table to the side within the composition.

4.14.9 NM (9)

The NM was familiar with the concepts of sand play and LPs. She engaged quickly and explored the materials, comparing them to a course she had attended on play therapy. The composition was created from the perspective of a supervisee. A triad supervisory relationship is illustrated in the sand tray; it is the only scene whereby more than two figurines were present. Throughout, the NM referenced the idea of a ‘safe space’. She used sticks to create a physical boundary and placed the figurines within the defined perimeter.

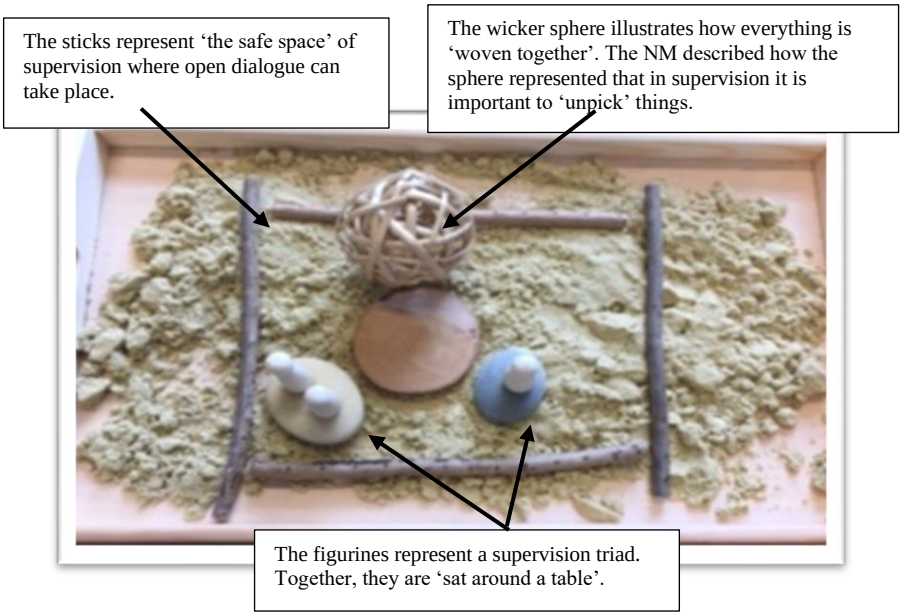


Figure 14.9 NM (9) representation of an ideal supervision session.

There was a strong focus on supervision being a safe and contained space, represented both in the composition by the boundary created through the placement of sticks and in the debrief description. NM (9) described how the ‘safe space’ fostered a level of openness that allowed ‘opinions’ to be shared.

4.14.10 NM 10

The NM presented a completed sand tray composition on arrival at the nursery, as illustrated below (figure 4.15). She wanted to explore what made a successful supervision experience with her staff team. Together, they identified the key elements. Central to the composition are support and collaboration. The NM referenced the importance of listening within supervision and 'being there for each other'. She explained how she differentiated her style of supervision dependent upon the supervisee.

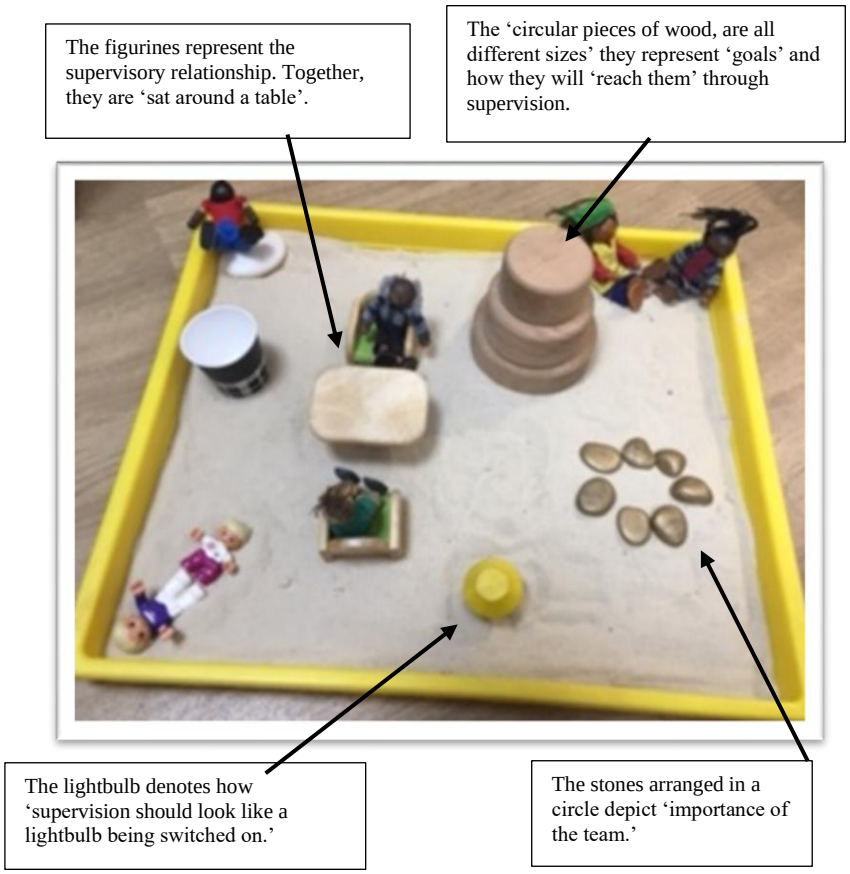


Figure 14.10 NM (10) representation of an ideal supervision session (part 1).

There are many elements within this composition. NM (10) was the only participant to discuss how she adapted her supervision approach to meet the supervisee's needs. She described how some staff valued an 'informal' approach while others expected a formal meeting, whereas NM (6) referenced how she would modify the time allocated for supervision dependent upon the supervisee. Like NM (1), the composition included a layered, tower-like construction that represented goals that needed to be achieved by the supervisee. This was replicated in the second composition (Figure 4.16) with more structures.

Following the interview, NM (10) chose to explore the materials provided (even though the option to opt-out was offered due to completing the sand tray above). NM (10) was keen to engage with the materials and create an additional sand tray composition. The loose parts approach is embedded within her nursery and is used with all age groups. As such, the NM immediately began to create her scene and confidently explained the objects' significance. She was keen to summarise her beliefs about supervision.

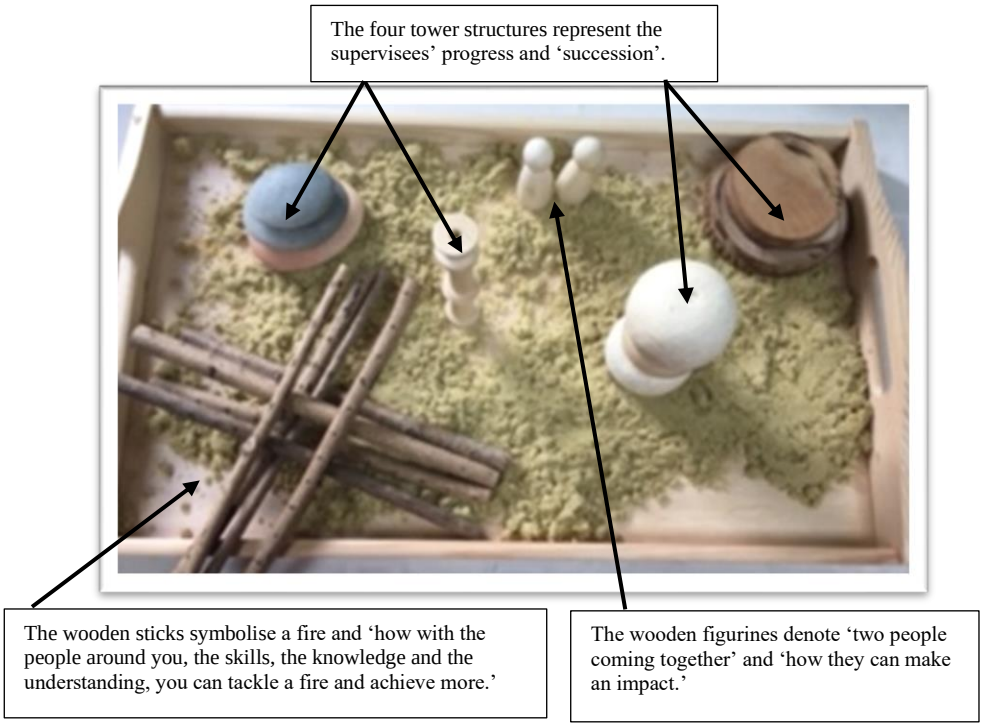


Figure 14.11 NM (10) representation of an ideal supervision session (part 2).

In this composition, the construction of sticks represented 'fire', an element that needed to be 'tackled'. Both NMs (3) and (4) also used sticks to symbolise either a problem or an obstacle. In addition, the importance of the nursery team and the dynamics of togetherness were discussed.

4.15 Summary

While each composition was different, commonalities were present. An essential activity of supervision identified by NMs (1, 2, 4, and 10) was setting and achieving goals linked to the supervisee's performance. In addition, NMs (1 and 2) also discussed how supervision provided an opportunity to discuss the supervisee's career progression. A multi-dimensional approach to problem-solving was highlighted as a function of supervision by NMs (1 and 10). Also, learning, happiness and positivity were perceived as an important output of supervision by NMs (5 and 9).

NMs (2, 6, 7 and 8) referenced the role of the environment, specifically that supervision should be a safe place whereby confidential and professional conversation can be conducted. Links were made to the aesthetics, that it should be comfortable and that the meeting should be unhurried. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) will be discussed in the next chapter as attending to the supervisee's needs was recognised as an essential aspect of supervision.

Overall, eight participants created their sand tray composition from a supervisor's perspective, while the remaining two managers did so from a supervisee's angle. This will be discussed in the next chapter, specifically, the frequency of supervision experienced by the eight NMs'.

5.0 Discussion of Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the key themes that emerged from the research data. Organisational culture, professional identity and well-being are interrelated concepts fundamental to this study and form the conceptual framework. These concepts will structure the discussion of the results. Each concept will be explored and cross-referenced to the research questions and themes derived from the three elements of the semi-structured interview, including the metaphor cards and the sand tray exercise.

The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of NMs' supervision experiences within the context of a large, private day-care provider. Four key questions were asked to gain further insight:

1. What is your experience of supervision?
2. How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?
3. How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?
4. How does supervision support well-being?

The results presented in the previous chapter highlighted the different approaches to supervision. The implementation of supervision varied across the ten nurseries. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the themes that were highlighted within the data and discussed in chapter 4.

Number	Theme
1	Terminology linked to supervision
2	What an ideal supervision should encompass
3	Supervision facilitates a safe space for professional practice
4	The role of the environment in supervision
5	Regularity of supervision
6	A coaching approach to supervision
7	Wellness
8	The impact of wider learning on supervision and the need for training

Table 5.1 Overview of research themes

5.2 Organisational culture

This section will discuss the relationship between organisational culture and supervision. The table below provides an overview of the four sub-questions and how they correspond to the themes presented in chapter 4 (see also table 5.1).

Research question		**Theme**
5.2.3	What is your experience of supervision?	Theme 1, 3, 5, 7, 8
5.2.4	How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?	Theme 1, 2, 3, 4, 8
5.2.5	How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity	Theme 1, 3 5, 6, 8
5.2.4	How does supervision support well-being?	Theme 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Table 5.2 Overview of organisational culture and corresponding theme

5.2.1 What is your experience of supervision?

The work of Schein (2004; 2010) informed my understanding of organisational culture and the impact this can have on professional practices at all levels. Data from the research highlighted that the experiences of supervision were disconnected from policy and lacked formal processes. A supervision policy was available for anyone in the organisation to access via an internal online portal. However, none of the NMs had read the policy or were aware of the content. According to the supervision policy, the organisation expects meetings to be held in person. Similarly, the policy refers to the ability to request a supervision meeting.

As discussed in chapter 3, the supervision policy was written by someone who works in the head office and, as a result, is removed from the daily challenges of nursery life. This is reflective of a subculture where a professional in their field, such as a lawyer, writes a policy but lacks contextual understanding of a nursery environment, which leads to a notable disparity of expectations and practices. It is also an example of how subcultures operate within an organisational structure and the unintended consequences, in this case, disengagement of the expectations set out in the policy. This lack of awareness suggests there is work to be done concerning the familiarisation of policies at all levels across the organisation. One way to address this, would be for NMs to be involved in the process.

Munro (2011) recognised that organisational culture could either promote or hinder effective supervision practices. The data from this study suggests that by omitting NMs from the policy design process of supervision can impact their perception, engagement and understanding of the practice. These insights may indicate an entrenched way of working within a subculture such as the head office or it may point to a lack of recognition and awareness as to the role NMs could play in shaping a professional practice such as supervision. Indeed, the Wave Trust/DfE (2013) recognised the interconnected nature of the organisations systems on the delivery of supervision. At present, it appears there is disconnection between systems and practice.

Professional identity is complex and evolves over time (Hall, 1990). It is a construct that is shaped by experiences, discourse and validation. Having a voice and being involved in professional discourse is an important element of identity formation. The research data indicated a lack of professional involvement concerning supervision practices. This could be due to supervision being an unfamiliar practice and therefore NMs lacked the confidence to voice their concerns or to insist on key stakeholder involvement. This finding presents an opportunity within the organisation for the meaningful involvement of NMs to construct their professional identity and debate what supervision should look like within their nursery and the wider ECEC sector.

At an organisational level, the research findings indicated an absence of a systematic approach to supervision. Despite this, all NMs delivered a form of supervision, and eight out of ten NMs involved in the study received either formal or informal supervision. This is a positive finding, although the sample size was small, it denotes a degree of progress concerning the implementation of supervision in comparison to Madeley's (2014) research about supervision, where 83% of participants were not in receipt of supervision. It is worth noting that Madeley's research was conducted shortly after the introduction of supervision (DfE, 2012), which may account for the high proportion of research participants not adhering to the statutory requirement at the time. Whilst the number of NMs involved in supervision within this study is encouraging, it is important to note that their experiences of supervision differed considerably. The data from the interviews show that all NMs delivered supervision, albeit in various formats. Unfortunately, within this study only eight NMs received supervision. This means that NMs (7 and 8) were delivering supervision to their team but did not have the benefit of supervision themselves. This raises concerns about a breach of the

statutory requirement as referenced in the EYFS (DfE, 2017). Furthermore, it highlights a lack of supervisory support, which may impact the NM personally and professionally.

The research was conducted in a large, private day-care organisation where organisational culture influenced supervision. The sample size was small and therefore generalisations cannot be made; however, it appears that guiding principles about supervision and core values as defined by Schein (2010) were weak. Across the ten nurseries, there was not a collective understanding of 'how we do things around here' as described by Martin (2002, p.3). This was evident in the inconsistent use of language of supervision. In chapter 4, it came to light via the interviews that negative connotations were associated with the term 'supervision'. NMs (3, 6 and 8) noted a preference towards the term 'one-to-one', as opposed to supervision, as they believed it to be less formal or frightening. This also reflects research by John (2012a), who commented on similar findings. Shared language is important as it provides clarity. At present, there is a disparate approach to the language used to describe supervision. To provide clarity and to promote alignment with Ofsted (2019) documentation and the EYFS (DfE, 2017) it would make sense to use the term 'supervision'. Ambiguity may have occurred due to a lack of a cohesive approach which has led to confusion within the NMs and their teams.

The language used to describe supervision experiences varied. There was considerable confusion concerning the definition of supervision. A possible explanation for this is due to the word supervision being used interchangeably throughout the EYFS (DfE, 2017), which for most NMs was their point of reference. The confusion about terminology and language is not isolated to the ECEC sector. Interestingly, the NMC (2018), which sets out the professional standards for Midwifery and Nursing, also referred to supervision in various contexts, such as the interchange between student and supervisor when engaged in study and patient supervision. This illustrates a vagueness associated with the term and can potentially lead to confusion instead of clarity. It is worth noting that Ofsted (2019) use the term supervision at inspections and registration visits. Because of a pending Ofsted inspection and wanting to support her team as much as possible, NM (5) decided to intentionally use the word 'supervision', so they were familiar with the term. Further clarity from an organisational perspective is required to remove the current ambiguity surrounding the terminology.

A breadth of supervision experience existed across the sample group. Some NMs completed peer observations as part of one-to-one meeting. Some NMs (1, 2, 5 and 9) favoured a structured approach that involved setting targets and saw supervision as a time to focus on the supervisee and their development. A different perspective was shared by other NMs (3, 4, 10), who concentrated on the importance of coaching or being coached in supervision. The differing elements of supervision are concerned with formal conversations about setting goals and development that are measured whereas a coaching approach seemed to be informal conversation. In addition, two NMs (3 and 4) felt that supervision should provide professional challenge and rigour. In comparison, NM (6, 8 and 10) stated that supervision was fundamentally about spending time with their teams. NM (10) defined supervision as 'time and trust' and emphasised the importance of relationships. When looking at the NMs' definitions of supervision, some responses (see table 4.2) reflect the statement in the EYFS (DfE, 2017, p.21):

> Effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children. Supervision should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement, which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues.
>
> 3.22. Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:
>
> - discuss any issues – particularly concerning children's development or well-being, including child protection concerns (added in 2017).
> - identify solutions to address issues as they arise.
> - receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness.

This link to the EYFS is encouraging as it shows that they are familiar with the statutory requirements of supervision. However, it is important that their knowledge is not limited by the statement above and that they nurture curiosity about supervision practices.

There was considerable disparity concerning the frequency of supervision and the formality of the practice (see table 4.2). In addition, different practices were in operation regarding whether nursery staff were informed in advance of supervision, such as NMs (1, 4 and 10). In contrast, NMs (5, 6, 8 and 9) did not share the information ahead of time to limit any stress and anxiety linked to the supervision meeting (5 and 9). Conversely, NMs (6 and 9) did not share any information due to a lack of planning.

5.2.2 How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?

A key finding from the research revealed an absence of in-house supervision training. This is concerning as all NMs delivered supervision to their teams but had not received guidance or information about its purpose or functions. While the company supervision policy stated that supervision training was available, this was not the case. The data shows a contradictory picture. The company did not provide guidance or training at an organisational level, albeit training was referenced in the supervision policy. Nevertheless, all NMs provided supervision to the best of their ability. NM (1) even designed and delivered training to her team. Positive findings from the data indicated that supervision was an active practice within the nurseries across the teams. This is reflective of the 'outstanding' status of the nurseries involved. The data indicates there is minimal support or resources for implementing supervision across the ten nurseries.

A lack of supervision preparation and training reflects the research findings conducted by Madeley (2014), Morris (2018) and Soni (2019). Findings from the research indicate a need for supervision training, both for the supervisee and supervisor. As the literature review identified, training is an essential element of supervision practice across other caring professions and is covered in social work, nursing and counselling qualifications. The BACP (2014) published a Counselling Supervision Training Curriculum to support the delivery of post-qualifications. The NMC (2018) sets out the training requirements for Nursing and Midwifery, and Social Work England (2020) outlines the professional standards and training for social workers.

Organisationally, there was no set guidance concerning the frequency of supervision. In comparison, qualified counsellors registered with the BACP (2020) undertake at least 1.5 hours of supervision training every month. The expectation is the same for counsellors in training that register with the BACP. The EYFS (DfE, 2017) states that supervision should occur 'regularly' (p.21). The results showed that this varied from every six weeks to once a term, depending on the NM. The development of an informative supervision policy is a key recommendation of this study and will be expanded upon in more detail in chapter 6. The policy needs to be revised with key stakeholder involvement to ensure relevance and consistency across the organisation. General guidance would negate against varied supervision experiences, such as frequency and whether they are informed of their meeting in

advance or not on the day. Not knowing when supervision is due to be held limits the level of engagement of the supervisee. It could reinforce a hierarchical management style, where the supervisor is in charge and the supervisee is subordinate. This does not seem to be conducive to a healthy supervisory relationship.

The data also highlighted a gap concerning expectations and career progression. When practitioners move into management roles, a change occurs from being a supervisee to a supervisor. Due to the absence of training, staff who move into management roles deliver supervision without any preparation. However, they do not have sufficient knowledge to do this in comparison to other caring professions. Henderson, Holloway and Millar (2014) recognised that supervision required a skill set above and beyond general nursery management. In addition, Creaner (2014) also points out that the delivery of supervision is a skill that needs to be developed and is different from general management. In this study, it was evident that the NMs' roles and responsibilities changed as they transitioned from one role to another.

5.2.3 How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity

At an organisational level, minimal attention had been given to promoting supervision as a professional practice. A lack of training or information about supervision has done little to reinforce supervision as part of a NM's professional identity. It is important to state the organisation does value professional development and this is reflected in the provision of a comprehensive training suite of accredited courses available for staff to access. However, it appears that supervision has been overlooked. This lack of training has impacted NMs theoretical knowledge and understanding of supervision. But, when NMs were asked about professional identity, they described the concept with words and phrases such as 'empathy', 'care', 'trust', 'visible leader' and 'responsible'. Moreover, NM (3) described how supervision was not an 'embedded' practice but expressed a desire for supervision to be a central facet of professional identity within the ECEC sector. She also expressed concern about the absence of supervision practices within early years qualifications. The provision of training would authenticate supervision as a professional practice and reinforce the organisations commitment to its statutory duty.

On a positive note, recent coaching training was discussed by NMs (4, 5, 8, 9, and 10). Attendance at a recent, two-day, in-house Business Coaching course may have influenced how some NMs (1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10) conducted supervision. While the course was not explicitly linked to supervision, the role of open questions, awareness of body language and how to coach for improvement were covered. Coaching is referred to in the statement about supervision within the EYFS (DfE, 2017). Similarly, Elfer (2012), Hawkins (2011), Proctor (1997), Proctor and Inskipp (2001), Scaife (2001) and Soni (2013) all recognised the role of coaching within individual and group supervision. A coaching approach was thought to empower staff and promote problem-solving skills and opportunities for professionals. The premise of a coaching approach is not to tell the supervisee what to do but rather, through open questions and skilled listening by the supervisor, the supervisee is encouraged to make decisions. There was an acknowledgement by NMs that for supervisees to progress and develop enhanced professional practices, they needed to acquire the ability to make decisions without being directed by a line manager.

5.2.4 How does supervision support well-being?

Most NMs believed that supervision supported well-being but identified several barriers to effective delivery, such as insufficient time and a lack of a confidential space to conduct supervision. At a micro level, all NMs delivered supervision in some format as they identified it as an opportunity to demonstrate care and empathy to staff, which helped enhance well-being. Out of the ten NMs, two were not in receipt of supervision and there did not appear to be a process in which to raise their concerns. Consideration needs to be given to the support provided to people delivering supervision, they also need to partake in supervision, and should this not occur it could lead to potential burnout, compassion fatigue and stress (Faulkner *et al*., 2016). Supervision for supervisors needs to be considered at an organisational level. It may be that group supervision provides a solution for NMs or that it is used as a method in which to encourage professional discourse. Non-management supervision may be a suitable alternative option whereby external professionals are paid to provide supervision to NMs'.

5.3 Professional Identity

This section will discuss the relationship between professional identity and supervision. The table below provides an overview of the four sub-questions and how they correspond to the themes presented in chapter 4.

Research question	**Theme**
5.3.1 What is your experience of supervision?	Theme 1,2, 5, 7, 8
5.3.2 How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?	Theme 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 8
5.3.3 How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?	Theme 1,2, 3, 6, 7, 8
5.3.4 How does supervision support well-being?	Theme 2, 5, 7

Table 5.3 Overview of professional identity and corresponding theme

5.3.1 What is your experience of supervision?

There was minimal awareness of supervision practices across the ECEC sector or models within other professions such as social work, nursing or counselling. Previous supervision experience was gained externally by NM (2), who had received supervision when working in children's services and NM (4), who had previously worked in a children's centre. None of the NMs referenced supervision functions, yet there was evidence that these were implemented to some degree. This echoes the findings of Madeley (2014), who also found there was a lack of awareness about the functions and models of supervision. However, in this study, there were areas of consistency that did emerge. The supportive function of supervision was evident across all aspects of the interview. It was clear that NMs used supervision to provide support and care to their supervisees.

Secondly, the managerial function was regularly applied to supervision meetings, where workload, development and objectives were discussed. Some NMs (1, 4, 5, 9 and 10) incorporated the educational aspect of supervision into a naturally evolving supervision cycle, which included reflecting on joint observations and looking at how practice could be improved. Reflective practice and opportunities for learning were a central tenet of this function.

In general, supervision meetings tended to focus on the supervisee and not the children. The EYFS (DfE, 2017) is clear that supervision should include professional discussions about children's development, their well-being and any safeguarding concerns. The absence of a supervision model may have contributed to the varied practices that were discussed by the NMs'. The results suggest a need for a ECEC specific supervision model that focuses on the supervisee, and the client, which in this case would be the children and their families. Without a framework or formal theoretical knowledge, the NMs in this study improvised and delivered their version of supervision which was based upon their experiences. This echoes the research of Page and Elfer (2013), whose research findings concerning an attachment-based approach to care and education found that while the team lacked formal, theoretical knowledge, and 'adopted a largely intuitive approach' (p.12). These results mirror practice highlighted within this study.

5.3.2 How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?

There were strong views about the importance of supervision. This was particularly pertinent concerning safeguarding and was illustrated by NM (10), who stated, 'I probably wouldn't do my job now without supervision'. She explained how vulnerable she felt at times in her role as NM. She talked about how supervision, but specifically the process of recording meetings with supervisees, protects against any form of accusations or staff grievance. Supervision was seen as a protective mechanism that afforded safety to the supervisor. This mirrored the findings of Munro (2010), Saltiel (2017) and Soni (2019), in which safeguarding was referred.

Conversely, it was clear from the interviews that little support had been offered by the organisation concerning supervision practices. There was a sense that this was not intentional as some NMs (1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10) recognised that the organisation had provided paperwork, referred to as the supervision pad. It appears that a lack of clarity and communication has contributed to confusion surrounding an agreed method of conducting supervision.

5.3.3 How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?

As discussed within the literature review, several key factors influenced the introduction of supervision to the ECEC sector. Significant high-profile activity took place between 2009 to 2011 due to a category of tragic situations (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011; Tickell, 2011).

Laming (2009) conducted a review following the death of Victoria Climbie. The review highlighted significant failure and recognised the impact a lack of supervision can have on social workers and recommendations were made to strengthen supervision. Shortly after the review conducted by Laming (2009) another serious case review was conducted by the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board (2010) into the failings of Nursery Z. The review highlighted significant failings concerning a lack knowledge concerning safeguarding, whistleblowing and how to raise concerns. The review acknowledged the absence of supervision within the nursery and went on to recommend supervision as an essential practice. The recommendations were influential to the review Tickell (2011), who also recognised its importance to the ECEC sector. Thereafter, at a similar time, Munro (2011) conducted a review of child protection in England. Once again, supervision was a central practice that was highlighted throughout the report as essential to the social work profession. The recommendations in the literature present a compelling case for supervision and as a result it was included within the EYFS (DfE, 2012). Despite the recognition and importance of supervision within literature there was some hesitancy from NMs in connecting the type of supervision practices of social work, nursing and counselling to the ECEC sector.

Professional identity was a core theme in the literature review and within the research data. Despite the inclusion of supervision within the EYFS (DfE, 2012) for over a decade, there were mixed opinions as to whether supervision formed part of NMs' professional identity or not. Saltiel (2017) states that supervision contributes to a sense of professional identity, this opinion was supported by NMs (5, 6, 7, 8, 10). The NMs believed supervision should be a key aspect of their professional identity and the ECEC sector but recognised that it was not an embedded practice like other professions. At present, NM (5) felt the delivery of supervision was very much a 'tick box' exercise and a process of going through the motions to fulfil a statutory duty. Despite NM (5) experiences, she was one of the NMs who expressed a desire for supervision to be a key practice within the ECEC sector.

There appears to be a shared agreement that supervision is important, and some believe it should form part of professional identity. Yet, this acceptance appears to be met with some caution from the NMs'. There could be several reasons for this apparent tentativeness, there was a strong commitment by the NMs to their staff teams and they took pride in supporting the supervisee both personally and professionally. Many of the NMs felt they were delivering supervision and were unsure as to what else they could do to fulfil the requirement of the

EYFS (DfE, 2017). The NMs demonstrated a strong sense of professional identity that was grounded in values that reflected care, education and support. The NMs experiences of supervision suggests practice is emerging as opposed to embedded and still in a state of development. Professional practice is limited to their own experiences and ad-hoc processes have been developed with good intentions. A dominant aspect of supervision practice involved providing support and care to the supervisee. NMs were comfortable with this element of supervision and NM (3) commented 'it was something she had always done'. There is a possibility that NMs did not see supervision as anything different to what they had always offered such as support and care.

Soni (2019) recognised that supervision is an unfamiliar practice within the ECEC sector. As such, it is possible that the construction of supervision as a professional discourse has been hindered due to a lack of visibility of supervision models, practice examples or professional dialogue with other caring professionals such as social work, nursing and counselling. A fundamental element of early years practice is that children should see images and learning resources that reflect their skin colour, ethnicity and family structure. Similarities can also be seen in the mirroring interactions that occur between a child and a mother (Winnicott,1971). The significance of the mirroring and exchange reinforces safety and the construction of personal identity. Just as it is important to promote positive images and narratives about children's identity, it is also critical that professionals in the ECEC can examine other caring professions and see how supervision is delivered. By doing this, they can reflect on practice and visualise how supervision becomes a core aspect of their professional identity.

Historically, working with children has been perceived as woman's work (Cameron and Moss, 2020; Gilligan, 1982; Taggart, 2011, 2016). Indeed, Faulkner *et al*., (2016) pointed out how staff working with the youngest of children often had to contend with public perception that their work was merely 'babysitting' and not deemed important (p. 22). Conversely, in this study, the NMs were confident and proud of their work and the teams they lead. Many NMs referenced their outstanding Ofsted inspection grades as an endorsement of the high-quality provision and of the important work they do. The data from the study highlighted a fundamental commitment of all NMs to the ethics of care. The dedication to their teams was notable as it went above and beyond the general requirements of the NM role. Caring for their teams was seen as a strength and part of who they are as professionals.

It would be remiss to not highlight that professional identity does not stand alone as it is entwined with personal identity (Benveniste,1987; Ibarra,1999). Therefore, following this line of thought it would suggest that personal and professional identities are interconnected and therefore how supervision is enacted by NMs will be nuanced as it will reflect their personal and professional constructs and values. The NMs in this study conducted supervision as they thought best in the absence of any type of model or framework. They had limited representation of supervision from the organisation or the sector as to what supervision should embody. This lack of representation was reinforced by a lack of supervision training, books, and general resource. While there are academic articles on the subject, they are not always accessible without paying a fee, or if they are downloadable, they may be unsuitable for daily use.

NMs are still negotiating their sense of professional identity concerning supervision. It appears there is much work to be done for this to be solidified as an integral part of their core identity. One way to support the formation of professional identity is the provision of high-quality training. Currently, the subject of supervision is not included in Level 2 or 3 early years' qualifications, resulting in a lack of awareness or understanding of the practice from the outset. Moreover, research conducted for the literature review highlighted the absence supervision within the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree and module overviews. This was commented upon by NM (3) who suggested that supervision should be included in all early year training. The ECEC sector would benefit from clear training expectations and mandated supervision hours per month for both the supervisor and supervisee, similar to registered counsellors (BACP, 2018).

5.4 Well-being

This section will discuss the relationship between well-being and supervision. The table below provides an overview of the four sub-questions and how they correspond to the themes presented in chapter 4.

Research question		Theme
5.4.1	What is your experience of supervision?	Theme 2,3,4, 5, 7
5.4.2	How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?	Theme 2,3,4,6, 7
5.4.3	How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?	Theme 3,5, 6,8
5.4.4	How does supervision support well-being?	Theme 2, 3,4,6, 7,8

Table 5.4 Overview of well-being and corresponding theme

5.4.1 What is your experience of supervision?

Susman-Stillman *et al.,* (2020) recognise that entrants to the ECEC sector are motivated by a desire to care for others and make a positive difference in the lives of children. The literature recognises (Beddoe and Davys, 2010; Elfer, 2012; John, 2012; Tickell, 2011) that for ECEC staff to provide high levels of education and care to children and their families, they need to be recipients of support too. Nonetheless, while there is no question about the importance of caring for children, Eaves Simpson, Robinson and Brown (2018) found that the ECEC staff struggle to maintain their own levels of well-being.

The NMs involved in this study demonstrated heightened awareness concerning the well-being of their teams. Some NMs (2, 3, 4, 6, 9 and 10) acknowledged increased mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, burnout and depression. Consequently, they felt the need to provide well-being sessions which exemplify NMs' commitment to their teams. It is therefore unsurprising that the most popular metaphor cards chosen were linked to being listened to, supported and challenged, and finding solutions to problems and therapy. The latter point about supervision being compared to therapy by NM (3 and 6) was an interesting insight as both referenced how they found supervision therapeutic. She commented on the reflective nature of supervision and how it enabled her to appreciate her own career journey. Similarly, she found satisfaction is seeing others develop, she stated, 'I don't just come into work to work' and then explained how much she cared for her team. By the same token, NM (7)

talked about the benefits of sharing problems and subsequent relief this brought her. She also commented on how supervision can also promote self-esteem. Both NMs talked about how cathartic it was to have a safe space to share their concerns, and in NM (6) case, she described her supervision experience as ‘healing’ and a form of replenishment.

In chapter 2, effective supervision was defined by Beddoe and Davys (2010) as a discussion that ‘shapes a process of review, reflection, critique and replenishment for professional practitioners’ (p.21). John (2012) discussed the importance of ECEC staff recognising when they need to contain their emotions and not transfer them to others. Effective supervision can provide structure and an outlet to share concerns, reflect on practice and critical self-reflection. All NMs spoke at length about their team and the supervision they delivered rather than the supervision they received. This is indicative of their caring nature and how they put others first.

Some sand tray compositions provided insight into their supervision experiences. Supervision was referred to as a ‘safe space’ by many NMs (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10). This applied to more than the physical environment. Safety, boundaries, a contained and confidential space, aesthetics of the environment and time for planned supervision were commonalities in the sand tray compositions. Heffron and Murch (2010) also recognised that the environment should be 'marked by safety, containment and mutual respect' (p.5) for the supervisee. The physical and emotional environment were considered important by NMs when thinking about where to hold supervision meetings. The results from this study show that supervision practices differ considerably across an entire subculture, in this case, a geographical region.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) was used as a framework to support the findings of this research (see figure 5.1). The diagram illustrates the ideal elements that need to be present in supervision. The first three layers, physiological needs, safety and social, reflect the need for emotional safety, connection and containment. These are found in the supervisory relationship and Winnicott’s (1960) concept of the 'holding environment' (p.592). The supervisor and environment act as space that ‘holds’ and ‘contains’ (Bion, 1962) the supervisee and all they discuss. Critical to this is the need for clear expectations and

boundaries.

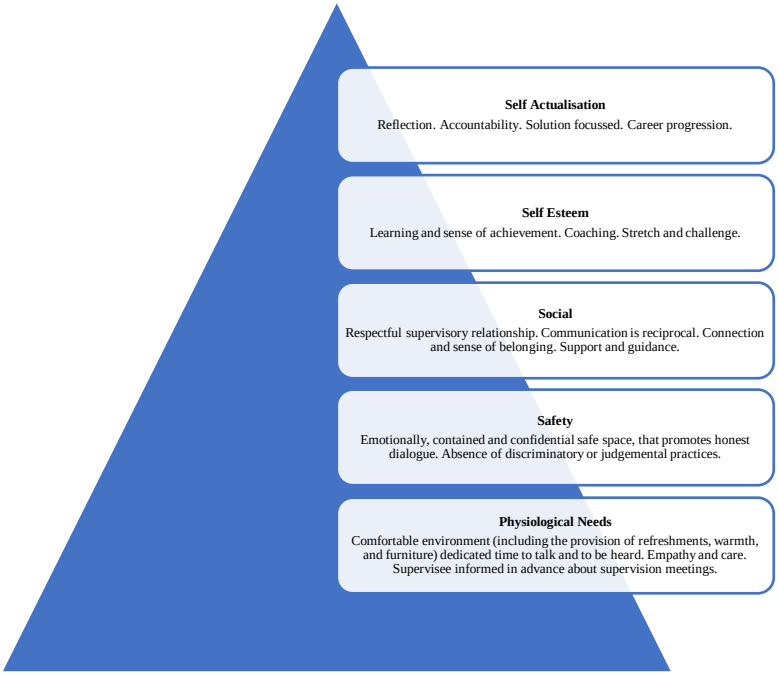


Figure 5.1 – Key features that need to be present in supervision (adapted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 1943).

The findings reveal a disparity between what Winnicott (1960) describes and what is happening on the ground. For example, in some cases, supervision was conducted in various places such as the staff and cot rooms. Restrictions concerning a lack of physical space were referenced by NMs (2, 3, 5, and 7). Some nurseries did not have designated or private spaces where supervision could be conducted without interruptions. Occasionally, NMs (2, 3, 5 and 10) would try to conduct supervision off-site, but this proved problematic due to staffing ratios needing to be maintained in the nursery. Those NMs (6, 8 and 9, 10) who had space recognised that furniture placement was significant in nurturing trust and facilitating a conversation. Tables were consciously moved to the side or removed so as not to create a barrier between the supervisor and supervisee. The room temperature was also considered, and the aesthetics, such as displaying flowers, made the space welcoming.

5.4.2 How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?

Current practice suggests that more consideration at an organisational level needs to be given to the design of future nurseries to incorporate a designated space for supervision. A designated space would enable the NM and nursery team to create a comfortable and safe

environment. This would establish supervision as a core practice, whereas at present supervision is conducted in spaces that lack privacy and are not conducive to confidential conversations. By doing so, would enable NMs to address key features that need to present in supervision, as identified via the research data.

5.4.3 How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?

Supervision facilitated an environment that nurtured a range of professional practices. It was considered a space to discuss the supervisee's professional growth. As expected, there was an opportunity to discuss work-related issues. Moreover, most NMs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10) actively encouraged discussion of personal issues and well-being. Several NMs (1, 3 and 5) supported well-being by signposting external services such as counselling (NM 1). At the same time, NM (5) recognised the need to support well-being through structured meetings conducted outside of supervision. Interestingly, the NMs (4, 8, and 10) who spoke of the interconnected nature of work and well-being were also the same NMs who adopted a coaching approach in supervision. NMs (6, 7 and 10) stated that supervision had impacted favourably and aided a greater depth of relationship with the team.

Hawkins and Smith (2006) recognised the value of coaching within supervision. This is also reflected in the EYFS (DfE, 2017), which states that ‘effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner’ (p. 26). Coaching was discussed by NMs (4, 5, 8, 9, and 10). Emphasis was placed on asking questions that develop the supervisee’s thinking. A coaching approach was thought to empower staff and promote problem-solving skills and opportunities for professional growth. While there are many benefits to coaching, it is essential to recognise that it may take time for staff to adjust to this approach. Caution and patience may be required as staff develop confidence in responding to open and thought-provoking questions. The premise of a coaching approach is not to tell the supervise what to do but rather, through open questions and skilled listening, supporting them to find solutions and take ownership of their decisions. Coaching was referenced in conjunction with autonomy and accountability; both were intertwined. There was a recognition that for supervisees to progress and develop enhanced professional practices, they needed to acquire the ability to make decisions without being directed by a line manager.

Attendance at a recent, two-day, in-house Business Coaching course may have influenced how some NMs (1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10) conducted supervision. While the course was not explicitly linked to supervision, key concepts such as contracting, the role of open questions, awareness of body language and how to coach for improvement were covered. There are similarities to Elfer's (2012) Work Discussion model, whereby contracting or setting clear boundaries at the start of each group, supervision was encouraged and promoted the critical professional practice. The concept of contracting reflects Winnicott's (1960) idea of the holding environment; both are concerned with boundaries and providing a safe space. Similarly, Hawkins (2011), Proctor (1997), Proctor and Inskipp (2001), Scaife (2001) and Soni (2013) all recognised the role of coaching within individual and group supervision. A coaching approach was the closest reference to a supervision framework applied by NMs'. On reflection, this is not surprising as elements of coaching closely align to supporting the development of others to maximise their potential and encapsulates the NMs professional identity.

5.4.4 How does supervision support well-being?

The well-being of staff teams was high on the agenda, which is positive to note. Supervision was referred to as a 'safe space' by many NMs (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10). The concept of well-being was discussed by NMs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10). They had noted a significant increase in nursery staff managing complex family situations and stress concerning finance and debt. Furthermore, anxiety, depression, and mental and physical health concerns were discussed in supervision. This reflects McMullen, McCormick and Lee's (2018) research that identified nine areas that can negatively impact well-being. Due to NMs' (2, 3, 5 and 10) concerns, in addition to supervision, well-being meetings were implemented. This is interesting to note as it implies the supervision provided was not sufficient, hence the need for additional meetings, specifically focused on well-being. While the support offered was nuanced, all NMs demonstrated a commitment to their teams through either formal or informal supervision and, in some cases, well-being meetings. There are similarities to Nodding's (1984) work about the ethics of care and the role that ECEC professionals assume in caring for others.

In 2019, Ofsted included the following statement in the inspection handbook:

> Leaders ensure that highly effective and meaningful engagement takes place with staff at all levels and that any issues are identified. When issues are identified – in particular about workload – they are consistently dealt with appropriately and quickly. Staff consistently report high levels of support for well-being issues (p.40).

This new emphasis on support and well-being is important to highlight. While Ofsted has not been explicit nor made links between supervision or well-being, there is a connection. To achieve an Ofsted (2019) outstanding grade, NMs must demonstrate and provide high levels of support to their team.

Supervision was a positive experience promoting learning, reflection, safety, and personal and professional growth. Saltiel (2017) also referenced reflection as an essential aspect but contends that it is often absent from supervision. It was therefore encouraging to note that reflection was deemed an essential element of supervision. Brandon *et al*., (2008) supported this by affirming the benefits of reflection in supervision, stating it 'helps practitioners think, explain and understand. It also helps them cope with the complex emotional demands of work with children and their families' (p.106).

Supervision facilitated an environment that nurtured a range of professional practices. It was considered a space to discuss the supervisee's professional growth. As expected, there was an opportunity to discuss work-related issues. Moreover, most NMs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10) actively encouraged discussion of personal issues and well-being. Several NMs (1, 3 and 5) supported well-being by signposting external services such as counselling (NM 1). At the same time, NM (5) recognised the need to support well-being through structured meetings conducted outside of supervision. Interestingly, the NMs (4, 8, and 10) who spoke of the interconnected nature of work and well-being were also the same NMs who adopted a coaching approach in supervision. NMs (6, 7 and 10) stated that supervision had impacted favourably and aided a greater depth of relationship with the team.

While it is evident that supervision encourages a range of professional practices, there is a pressing need for an ECEC sector-specific professional body that sets clear expectations and raises the profile of supervision. Other caring profession such as social work, nursing and counselling have some form of professional body whereas the only point of reference for ECEC sector is the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and the one statement concerning supervision. Whereas the NMC (2018) sets the ‘professional standards of practice and behaviours’ (p.1). It promotes professional trust within the caring sector by having high standards around training and supervision. In addition, the NMC (2018) considers the code as a method of 'reinforcing professionalism' (p. 1). In counselling, the BACP (2020) governs and sets clear expectations

concerning supervision delivery and engagement. In addition, for counsellors who choose to register with the BACP (2018) they are required to commit to their ‘physical and psychological health' to support the client to the best of their ability. The professional standards of the BACP (2018) advises them to supervise their wellness, enabling them to care for and supervise others. In comparison, the EYFS (DfE, 2017) makes reference to the supervision of others and neglects to reference any measures that need to be implemented to care and safeguard supervisors from experiencing emotional burnout.

As discussed in chapter 2, as first conceptualised by Hochschild (1983), emotional labour recognised the toll on workers, manipulating their feelings to meet customer or societal expectations. At the same time, Tronto (1993) identified the emotional toil required to build and sustain relationships with others, all pertinent to the ECEC sector. While the research participants discussed the time-consuming nature of supervision, they did not share any animosity towards the supervisee. On the contrary, they recognised the importance of building a relationship with their supervisees, similar to Goldstein (1998). Many NMs went above and beyond to support their team by offering additional meetings. There appeared to be tacit knowledge about how to implement supervision functions, even though there was a lack of theoretical awareness across the entire participant group. Indeed, their commitment was reflective of Hargreaves (2008) research that found professionals, in some instances, derive satisfaction from undertaking emotional labour. This commitment and duty to caring for others was reflected in the comment made by NM (10) who said she would feel guilty if she did show due regard for her team.

The commitment to well-being demonstrated by the NMs in this study, reflects Nodding’s (2003) ethics of care. In some instances, such as NMs (7 and 10), there was genuine commitment to building relationships with their team. Indeed, the depth of care described by the NMs overall reflected Winnicott’s (1960) concept of the holding environment. This was evident is the attention given to the environment to ensure it was safe and welcoming, in addition to the support and care extended to the supervisee. Winnicott considered the act of holding as 'a form of loving' (p.592). This level of dedication could also be referred to as an expression of professional love and is reflective of Page’s (2018) research. NMs act as a container and represent a secure base. This research showed that supervision was an activity to cultivate and demonstrate professional, loving practice. Page (2018) notes that the construct of professional love is complex and his was demonstrated through numerous

actions and expressed in different ways; taking time to consider the environment was comfortable (NMs 7 and 8) and providing a range of refreshments (NMs 7, 8 and 10).

Furthermore, the sand tray compositions illustrated how supervision provides a 'safe space' (NMs 2, 4 and 9). Similarly, care was expressed via the provision of support, time and attentive listening. The experiences of NMs in this study suggest that supervision does support well-being, conversely, this implies that a lack of supervision may have a negative impact on a person's well-being.

5.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the key issues and concepts from the research data. The experiences of NMs indicate that changes need to be made at an organisational level concerning aspects of supervision practice. A systematic and strategic approach is needed to ensure statutory requirements are being met in all nurseries. Furthermore, agreement in the form of guidelines concerning terminology, frequency and approach to supervision will address the disparate practices.

A key finding of the study was a lack of training provision and consistency in supervision practices across the sample group of ten nurseries. In addition, weak guiding principles about how supervision is delivered has resulted in a lack of clarity. It appears there has been minimal investment or credence given to the implementation, delivery and support of supervision practices. An absence of a supervision framework may also have contributed to inconsistency of experiences.

In chapter one, an overview of the professionalisation of the ECCE workforce and drivers of policy relating to supervision was examined. Of notable absence was the voice of the ECEC professional in the debate concerning the professionalisation of the sector and the introduction of supervision. This absence is reflected at a macro level, but the research data also illustrates an oversight at an organisational level too. The omission of NMs voices and opportunity to engage in professional discourse is in direct conflict with Friedson's (1988) work on professional identity and the 'right to control its own work' (p.71).

In the first instance it appears that the organisation missed an opportunity in which to engage with NMs about the introduction of supervision or recognised its significance in the construction of their professional identity. In addition, the NMs did not seek to participate in this significant change. Their lack of engagement was probably due to limited knowledge or awareness of an unfamiliar practice, it is difficult to be assertive about something unknown. There was an acknowledgement by the NMs that supervision was yet to be fully embedded as part of their professional identity, nonetheless, there was a desire to understand and adopt the practice. Instead of seeking clarity, the NMs delivered supervision in the absence of training or any guidance from the ECEC sector or the organisation.

A strong ethic of care was demonstrated by NMs towards their teams. Salient findings included feelings of guilt experienced by NMs if they were unable to provide sufficient time for supervision. The NMs reported working out of hours to find answers to domestic problems by researching other services to sign post the supervisee to enhanced support. Care and thought were expressed through the attention given to the physical environment and the provision of drinks, snacks and flowers to enhance the supervision experience. Some NMs provided supervision without being in receipt of it themselves. Even still, a construct of care was evident in all supervision experiences, it was a common thread throughout the interview. It appears that in the absence of a framework or guidance, NMs have trusted and leveraged their deep, professional value of care in which to deliver supervision. There is evidence to suggest that an attached-based approach to the delivery of supervision is present albeit in a formative stage of formation.

The next chapter will offer a summary of the key findings. The methodological approach will be reviewed for its effectiveness, and the limitations of the study will also be explored. In addition, recommendations for future practice will be discussed.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will reflect on previous chapters within this study and consider whether the aim of this research has been achieved. It will provide an overview of the key findings and review their significance to this study and the wider ECEC sector. A review of the methodological approach applied to this research will be included and consideration will be given to recommendations for future research. The first section will set out the original research aim, and the core questions asked, which have framed the research. In addition, I will address the two points related to research output, the first linked to raising awareness of supervision in the ECEC sector and the second linked to research methodologies. Thereafter, recommendations will be made based on key insights and the contribution of new knowledge as a result of this study. The final section will include key reflections on conducting educational research and the impact of this both in a professional and personal context.

6.2 Study aims and research question

A professional curiosity about the experiences of supervision within the ECEC sector influenced my subject choice for this study. My professional interest in supervision came about when working as an Assistant Head of a large Children's Centre. Supervision had been made a statutory requirement of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) and I was required to deliver and receive supervision. From the outset, I was interested in gaining more understanding about how supervision was understood, implemented and experienced by NMs across the ECEC sector. When planning the research, a key objective was to deepen my understanding of supervision practice and therefore, decided on a case study approach.

This research sought to explore NMs supervision experiences within the context of a large, private day-care provider. The purpose of the research was to ascertain how supervision was being implemented in accordance with the statutory requirement, as outlined in the EYFS (2017). To find out more about NMs supervision experiences, four questions were asked within the semi-structured interview:

1. What is your experience of supervision?
2. How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?
3. How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?
4. How does supervision support well-being?

In addition to the core research questions, it was my hope that this study would lead to the following research output:

1. Raise awareness of the importance of supervision within the ECEC sector and add to the body of literature that is, at present, in short supply.
2. Use creative research methods that are playful and engaging.

6.3 Review of methodology

To gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of supervision, this research was conducted from the lens of a qualitative paradigm. From this premise, a case study was used to provide a boundary for space and time (Stake, 1995). A principal strength of this thesis was the mixed method approach. This approach is characterised by its use of different techniques and is practical in design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). An important aspect of the research design was to apply a playful dimension to data collection and to explore the supervision experiences of NMs in an engaging way. Mann and Warr's (2017) methodical toolbox and the use of creative methods were used to gather information. This was achieved by apply a three-phased approach to the semi-structed interview. Ten NMs took part in the research as discussed in previous chapters. The interviews were conducted in the Spring of 2019, all were recorded with permission using a Dictaphone and were then fully transcribed verbatim. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model was applied to the results. In addition to the primary data collection methods and to increase the rigour of the data, documentary methods were used to review important documents, as explained in chapter 3. To complement the primary research methods, documentary methods were used to review a range of documents such as Ofsted reports, the supervision policy and corresponding paperwork.

The methods used were selected to provide a range of opportunities in which to gather in-depth information about supervision. The use of metaphor cards mirrored Sutton's (2011) research. NMs were asked to choose cards that resembled their supervision experience or a card that resonated with them. The card activity was designed to be playful and dismantle any

potential barriers. In addition, it highlighted that all NMs believed supervision should provide support as previously discussed in chapter 4. The semi-structed interviews provided flexibility and sufficient scope to follow up on questions or lines of enquiry, if required. The final method used as part of the 'methodological toolbox' was the sand tray. As discussed in chapter 3, the sand tray was pioneered by Lowenfeld (1979) as a therapeutic play technique. The sand tray was used as a therapeutic tool in the context of this study. The NMs were invited to represent an optimal supervision experience using a range of loose parts materials. Applying a qualitative paradigm was appropriate for this study as the topic in question required an interpretative style of research. The mixed method approach used within the case study generated a significant amount of data which in turn enabled me to gain insight into the supervision experiences of NMs'. Furthermore, the use of secondary research materials provided further rigour and an opportunity to triangulate data.

6.4 Limitations of the study

There were numerous factors that could have potentially impacted on the validity of this study. Primarily, the research was conducted within busy, operational nurseries and therefore, the pressures and responsibilities of leadership were evident when trying to organise a suitable date to visit. The realities of conducting educational research were far from neat and tidy but, 'messy' as described by Mellor (2001, p. 465). Appointments were rescheduled and interviews were occasionally interrupted due to an incident or another pressing concern within the nursery. There was also tension about the lack of space in which to conduct the interview. In addition, it was a challenge to find ten NMs, that led 'outstanding' nurseries, who were based in a similar geographical area and had capacity and the willingness to engage in research.

Metaphorical thinking was central to the methodological design and influenced my decision to use creative research methods. The metaphor cards were posted to the NMs ahead of the interview, along with instructions on how to use them. I made an assumption that all NMs would complete the task ahead of the interview as requested. Thankfully, all NMs did review the cards beforehand but there was a notable difference across the sample group in relation to how much time and effort had been applied to the activity. Even still, the metaphor cards provided a talking point at the beginning of the interview and an opportunity to discuss supervision using prompts. On reflection, if using this method again I would make several

amendments and reduce the number of cards provided in the pack as there may have been too many options. I would also refine the instructions and set out clear expectations concerning the number of cards that need to be selected.

The sand tray provided another opportunity for the NMs to explore their ideas and experiences of supervision. Furthermore, it provided rich and insightful data to aid my understanding of supervision experiences. When planning the sand tray activity, I was aware that it was different from traditional research methods, as such, the NMs were informed of the activity in advance. I assumed that all NMs would be comfortable with sand and loose parts as they are materials used every day within their nurseries. However, NM (3 & 7) were initially hesitant and further clarification was provided. I made it clear that they did not have to complete the activity however, once reassured they took part. This was an example of the importance to constantly re-check and clarify the NMs willingness concerning informed consent. It was difficult to predict how the NMs would respond to the sand tray.

I was mindful that I had to conduct the research with care and integrity. The first was concerned with the sensitivities of conducting research from within the organisation (Costley *et al*., 2010) of which I was employed at the time. Thomson and Gunter (2011) discussed the notion of multiple identities assumed by someone conducting research from within the organisation. I was unsure if this would impact me, however on reflection, it was evident that I had adopted a dual sense of identity, one as a researcher and the second as senior leader within the organisation.

I experienced some discomfort with other senior colleagues in the organisation that wanted to be informed as to who was involved in the research and their opinions about supervision. At times, there was a tangible tension as I explained to colleagues that I could not disclose the interview content or the positive or negative supervision experiences of the NMs'. Other tensions were more nuanced, for example, the observation of a friendly exchange between NMs at company conference fuelled a range of questions about the how I knew them and if they were involved in my research. The previous examples highlight the expansive nature of ethics and illustrates how ethical considerations in a research study extend beyond the data collection stage of a project.

As a senior leader within the organisation, the NMs taking part in the research may have felt compelled to provide appropriate answers, which were complementary to the organisation, rather than provide an overview of their current practices. I worked hard to assure the NMs that the research had not been commissioned by the organisation but rather the study was a requirement for an Educational Doctorate. In addition, to mitigate against bias or influence their response about supervision, none of the NMs were known to me and therefore were able to respond freely. Their engagement in the study did not indicate that my role compromised the research or influenced the results. The NMs were generous with their time, provided detailed responses, were confident and articulate. The opportunity, privilege and exclusive accessibility far surpassed the notable tension concerning my position as a researcher (Floyd and Arthur, 2012.)

For the study, a series of prerequisite requirements were set out as part of the purposeful sampling criteria. A core stipulation was that the NM led an outstanding nursery, as I assumed this would equate to a level of knowledge and experience regarding supervision. These prerequisite requirements may be considered a limitation. While I recognise that it may have been interesting to have a cross-section of NMs from various Ofsted rated settings and compare practices, it was not the focus of the research. The rationale determined the premise of applying purposeful sampling, that NMs of outstanding settings would have some understanding and experience of supervision, as it is both a requirement of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and referenced within the Ofsted (2019) inspection handbook.

On reflection, I made some assumptions about NMs knowledge of supervision. I was influenced by their experiences of leading outstanding nurseries and concluded that would equate to expert knowledge of supervision practices. I surmised that NMs would have some level of theoretical knowledge about supervision or about other professions that deliver supervision. However, this was not the case and as a result, during the interviews I had to provide a brief overview of professions such as social work, nursing and counselling. Furthermore, I also assumed that NMs would share my passion for formal supervision which was an oversight on my behalf.

A final limitation of the research is related to the choice of case study methodology and the sample size of NMs that participated in the study. Case study research is characterised by the boundaries within its ‘real life context’ (Yin, 1984, p.23) and time (Stake, 1995). The

advantage of case study research is it allows for 'thick description' (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) but as a result, does not lend itself to making generalisations about the findings. However, the premise of this research was to gain insight into the supervision experiences of NMs (Cohen *et al*., 2011; Robson, 2002) as opposed to gathering more generic data.

On a practical level, while it was immensely valuable to travel to the participating nurseries and meet the NMs who took part in the research, it was also physically and emotionally tiring. The visits also required me to transport all the equipment used for the sand tray exercise. On reflection, I would not change this due to the richness of the data gathered using this approach, but I would allow more recovery time required between each visit.

The research was approved by the University of Reading's ethics committee. I also adhered to BERA (2018). Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. Informed Consent was sought throughout the research process. From the outset NMs were aware of the aim and purpose of the research. I was transparent about the nature of the study. NMs were made aware and reminded that they could withdraw their consent at any point and without any repercussion (Costley *et al*., 2010). Contact details were provided and NMs were informed that they could make contact at any point in the research and on completion of the study. In addition, multiple checkpoints were added into the research process to ensure ongoing informed consent. For example, all NMs were involved in reviewing and amending where necessary their interview transcript for accuracy. All photographs that are included in this thesis have been approved by NMs too. In addition, to maintain anonymity and confidentiality all NMs were assigned a number so that they could not be identified.

6.5 Key findings of the study

This study set out to gain insight into the supervision experiences of ten NMs'. Research themes were identified through the application of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis model. In chapter 5, the themes were systematically discussed in conjunction with the three concepts of the conceptual framework: organisational culture, professional identity and well-being. This next section will bring together key findings of the research and will be presented under the four sub-questions.

6.5.1 What is your experience of supervision?

I anticipated there would be a range of nuances across the sample group, but I did not expect there to be such inconsistency amongst the NMs in how they understood and delivered supervision. Also, NMs shared two perspectives on their experiences of supervision, one as a supervisor and the second as a supervisee. Within the interview, more time and emphasis were spent discussing the experiences of being a supervisor which was reflective of how they placed others before themselves, and a theme that was woven throughout the interview. This study found that all NMs delivered supervision in some format to their staff team. In addition, 8 out of 10 NMs were in receipt of supervision.

There was a notable disparity in the experiences between NMs who had adopted a formal approach to supervision and NMs who favoured a more relaxed method. This was evidenced by NMs who planned and informed staff in advance of their supervision meetings. There was a significant difference in the frequency of supervision provided by NMs, with some delivering it every six weeks and others providing it on a termly basis. There were also variations in the language used to describe supervision for example, 'one-to-one' and a 'catch up'. Furthermore, some NMs used supervision to demonstrate their care to others and address concerns about well-being, while others focused on performance and setting goals. NMs were comfortable in talking about delivering supervision but spoke less about their experiences as a supervisee. The sand try activity encouraged reflective dialogue about what it felt to have supervision or not. It was also found to bring replenishment to those NMs that maybe felt depleted.

There was limited knowledge or prior experience about supervision. Overall, it was clear that NMs were improvising and delivering supervision to the best of their ability and level of experiences, of which was limited. This research has highlighted a gap in knowledge, but I am confident this can be addressed through training and experimental learning.

6.5.2 How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision?

The research data indicated a relationship between the organisational culture and an inconsistent approach to supervision. Findings from the literature (Heffron and Murch, 2010; Johns, 2003; Madeley, 2014) and research by the Wave Trust/DfE (2013) highlighted the interconnected nature of organisation culture in supporting the implementation of supervision in an organisation. This research has revealed that organisational culture can directly impact the delivery of supervision. The data suggests that the organisation did not involve any key stakeholders in the development of the policy or consult with NMs on how to best implement supervision. As a result, the research shows that across the ten nurseries, a range of supervision practices evolved. Data from the sample group indicated a lack of engagement in organisational artefacts such as policies and processes (Schein, 2010). Floyd and Fuller (2014) note that culture is constructed and therefore can evolve; from this premise, it is possible for the organisation to re-construct its identity.

A notable finding from the research was the absence of supervision training which may account for the ad-hoc and inconsistent approach to supervision across the ten nurseries. As discussed within chapter 5, the organisation did value professional development and offered a wide range of professional development opportunities to its staff, however, it appears to have overlooked supervision training. The omission of supervision training is a direct contradiction of the company's supervision policy. It may be that the absence of training has contributed to the lack of theoretical knowledge and awareness of supervision models. A learning culture that values professional practices needs to be cultivated to develop and embed supervision across the organisation, as highlighted by Munro Review (2011). Without training, ECEC staff remain ill-equipped to deliver supervision. The research also highlighted a gap in support and training for people who move from a non-managerial position to a managerial role where they are required to provide supervision to others. Both NM (7 and 9) had less than 12 months experience in the roles of NMs and neither had been trained to deliver supervision. Again, inconsistency was present as NM (7) did not receive supervision, yet NM (9) did. Despite the lack of training and inclusion of key stakeholders in the professional discourse of supervision, NMs were committed to the delivery of supervision as they saw it as an opportunity to support their staff team. I was struck by their willingness to go above and beyond even when they were unsure of the expectations.

6.5.3 How has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity?

In chapter one, the notion of professional formation was discussed. Specifically, the idea that the ECEC sector had accepted an unfamiliar professional practice without being trained to deliver it. While the inclusion of supervision was made with good intention and called for by various academics (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011 and Tickell, 2011) and findings from SCRs, the implementation of the practice lacked consideration. The consequences are far reaching and can impact the level of support provided to the supervisee, it can also affect the well-being of children and being a statutory requirement, if not implemented, can result in an inadequate Ofsted grade (Ofsted, 2019). Unfortunately, ten years on, there is still an absence of literature and training to support ECEC professionals.

This research found that the organisation had missed an opportunity to support and reinforce the professional identity of the NMs who lead nurseries. As previously discussed, this was evidenced via the absence of their voice in the construction of the supervision policy and the development of practices. As a result, NMs were not involved in any of the decision making processes and as such, there was a lack of understanding and ownership of administrative resources such as the supervision paperwork or awareness of the supervision policy.

This study has found that although all NMs believed supervision should provide support and recognised its value, they did not feel supervision was a core part of their professional identity. Therefore, this study advocates for greater emphasis to be placed on supervision as a professional practice both within the organisation and across the ECEC sector. To support this, a shift is required in how supervision is perceived and subsequently, invested in across the sector. The NMs that took part in this study were unfamiliar with supervision models or of other caring professionals that engaged in supervision. It is therefore unsurprising that supervision practices and understanding lacked theoretical underpinning.

The lack of a professional body similar to NMC (2018), Midwifery, and Social Work England (2020), BACP (2020), may have contributed to the narrative of supervision being an ‘unfamiliar’ practice within the ECEC sector. As discussed in chapter 5, there has been a lack of representation within the sector concerning supervision. A supervision model specifically

designed for ECEC professionals would support the construction of professional identity and also provide a shared understanding about the practice.

6.5.4 How does supervision support well-being?

Hochschild (2012) has written about the impact of emotional labour and how this can lead to physical and emotional depletion when exerted throughout a day, week and month without any form of replenishment. The data from this research suggests that supervision may be particularly helpful in addressing stress and potential burnout. This is an important finding as the ECEC sector is rewarding but can also be emotionally demanding. It is therefore important to provide support and a space where staff can be reflective.
This research has found that supervision supports well-being; this is important as Hall, Dollard and Coward (2010) reported that practitioner well-being could impact children's well-being. Therefore, the provision of effective supervision has the potential to have a wider impact on children and their families. The findings of this research suggest that supervision provides a space that promotes psychological safety and is a factor in stress reduction. In addition, it can also provide a space where staff can reflect on their practice, be coached, ask questions, and receive support. Supervision provided an opportunity for NMs' to express care towards others (Noddings, 2003) and, in some cases, demonstrate professional love (Page, 2011).

6.6 Recommendations

This next section will set out key recommendations as a result of the research. Each recommendation will be systemically addressed under the respective sub-heading. Suggestions will be made to the organisation where the research was conducted. Thereafter, a proposal will be made to the awarding bodies who design and endorse professional qualifications. Finally, as a result of this research a proposal will be made concerning potential changes to the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and Ofsted inspections.

6.6.1 Organisational culture

Findings from this research highlighted a lack of awareness concerning the supervision policy or company expectations. Therefore, a key recommendation for the business is for them to consider their approach to supervision from an organisational perspective. This involves

much more than re-writing policies or making tokenistic changes. Adopting an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005) approach to supervision would provide an opportunity to assess what is positive and going well. The AI model would provide a framework in which various stakeholders such as NMs and practitioners could participate in thinking about supervision. The '4-D Cycle' (p.25) used in AI would act as framework for positive change. The first phase is the 'Discovery' element of the cycle, in this instance, the focus would be on how to effectively implement and deliver supervision.
The 'Dream' stage requires the participants to imagine what the future could look like, drawing on positive practices and engage in professional debate. Thereafter, the 'Design' stage focuses on the construction of a new envisioned organisational structure. Finally, the 'Destiny' phase represents the end of the inquiry and the beginning of an 'appreciative learning culture' (p.37) which is reflective in nature.
While there is a supervision policy, it was clear that the NMs had neither accessed nor engaged with it. Change is required but unless thoughtfully addressed with the representation of key stakeholders, ownership of the supervision process will not be embedded.

The second area that needs to be addressed is the absence of training. The development of a training suite would enhance the supervision experiences of the supervisor and supervisee. The training could be modular in design, whereby each module builds on another. For example, all staff would complete an *Introduction to Supervision* and *The Purpose and Functions of Supervision* and NMs would complete a module about *The role of the Supervisor*. The training suite could also include a glossary of key terminology to reduce any ambiguity and provide a company-wide stance regarding the language used to promote consistency. In addition, an outline addressing the responsibilities of a supervisor would raise awareness and remove ambiguity and inconsistency. As discussed in chapter 1, the Tickell Review (2011) made several recommendations that unfortunately were not implemented. The introduction of practice examples and a range of case studies designed to reflect the unique nature of the ECEC sector would support the effective delivery of supervision. Furthermore, a coaching approach was favoured by some NMs and referenced within the semi-structed interviews. Coaching is also referred to in the statement about supervision in the EYFS (DfE, 2017), therefore, the organisation may choose to include a coaching approach to supervision. Supervision that adopted a coaching approach was perceived to promote supportive feedback and professional growth.

The final recommendation is related to the physical and emotional environment created by the supervisor for the supervisee. Bowlby (1988) and Winnicott (1960) discussed the relationship between the environment and positive development. As such, the organisation would benefit from conducting a range of focus groups to explore the factors deemed important when preparing for supervision. While it is important that NMs have a level of autonomy, as professionals, having a guide to best practice would aid clarity and reduce inconsistency.

6.6.2 Qualifications and Awarding Bodies

This research has highlighted the lack of literature related to supervision in the ECEC sector. In chapter 2, a review of undergraduate Early Childhood Studies degree programmes raised concern due to the absence of supervision within the course module descriptors. The omission of supervision in both Level 2 and Level 3 Early Years Educator does not prepare staff to work within the sector.

As a result of this research, it is a recommendation that supervision becomes a mandatory unit in all ECEC qualifications. The inclusion of a core mandatory module on supervision will prepare and enable staff to meet their statutory requirement in the delivery supervision.

6.6.3 Department for Education

The Department for Education is responsible for writing the EYFS and for any amendments, in response to changes in legislation or as deemed necessary. As an output of this research the following recommendations will be made to the DfE concerning changes to the EYFS:

1. To reduce any ambiguity concerning the interchangeable use of language within the EYFS (DfE, 2017) as identified within chapter 2. At present, the word ‘supervision’ is used 7 times, with reference to supervision of children, and the practice of supervision. To aid clarity and to reduce confusion, supervision needs to be referred to as a professional practice and different terminology applied to having oversight of children.
2. At present, reference to practitioners’ well-being within the EYFS (DfE, 2012; 2014; 2017) is ambiguous. To reinforce the role of supervision in supporting well-being for ECEC staff the statement needs to be re-written for clarity.

The EYFS (DfE, 2017, p.21) states: (recommendations made in ***bold italics***)

> 3.21. Providers must put appropriate arrangements***** in place for the supervision of staff who have contact with children and families. Effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children. Supervision should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement, which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues. ***Supervision also provides the supervisee with an opportunity to discuss any well-being concerns.***
>
> **** Guidance: supervision for full-time staff should be conducted every six to eight weeks for the minimal duration of one hour. For part-time staff, every six to eight weeks for the minimal duration of 45 minutes.***
>
> 3.22. Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:
>
> - discuss any issues – particularly concerning children's development or well-being, including child protection concerns (added in 2017)
> - identify solutions to address issues as they arise
> - receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness

3. Guidance needs to be developed that outlines a range of scenarios in relation to the frequency of supervision. At present, the phrase within the EYFS (DfE, 2017) states that 'providers must put appropriate arrangements in place' (p.21), this is vague and open to interpretation. Instead, it would be helpful to have recommendations about the frequency of supervision in relation to whether staff are full-time or part-time. As discussed in chapter 2, counsellors who register with the BACP they are required to receive monthly supervision (at least 1.5 hours).

I would recommend that the DfE commission the development of a sector-endorsed accredited training programme about supervision. There is already a requirement for staff with Level 2 and 3 Early Years (Gov.UK, 2022) qualifications to hold a recognised Paediatric First Aid course within 12 weeks of starting work, if this is not achieved then the qualification is not considered full and relevant by the DfE, and they cannot be counted in ratio. A similar arrangement could be applied to the completion of an accredited course about supervision. Furthermore, as supervision is a statutory requirement, the completion of the course should be mandatory for all supervisors.

6.6.4 Ofsted

Recommendations made to the DfE concerning changes to the EYFS would have a direct impact on Ofsted as they are the regulatory body that inspects and regulates educational standards. In line with the recommendations made to the DfE, I advocate that Ofsted place a greater emphasis on supervision when inspecting nurseries. Furthermore, I would also recommend that the Ofsted (2019) inspection handbook is updated to promote greater clarity concerning the terminology used to describe supervision.

6.5 Dissemination of the research

The dissemination of the research findings dovetailed with significant organisational design and changes within senior management. As such, there was an openness to address the lack of supervision training and consistency. Policy changes were made that set out the expectations of supervision, including the frequency, format, use of paperwork and length of the meeting. However, there was tension throughout this process as the changes were made at speed. As a result, I felt there was a lack of authentic engagement which was demonstrated by a lack of collaborative working, which resulted in missed opportunities to support and reinforce supervision as a professional practice.

More recently, I have moved to a different early years organisation and have more influence in setting the education and training remit across the business. When I was interviewed for the role, I was questioned extensively on the findings of this research and asked how I would implement them within the organisation. Reflecting on the core findings, I was able to explain the importance of an organisational approach to the implementation and training of supervision. By explaining that supervision is a relatively new professional practice and that for many, in its formal sense, is unfamiliar. Therefore, consideration and engagement from key stakeholders such as NMs in professional discourse to ascertain important concepts such as a shared meaning of supervision is essential to the construction of professional identity. I concluded the interview by placing emphasis on the fundamental importance of a systematic approach to supervision, whereby the supervisor and supervisee both receive supervision. training.

6.6 Contribution to the research community

As highlighted, there is limited research about supervision in the ECEC sector. Indeed, much of the literature about supervision either is unpublished doctoral research (Madeley, 2014; Morris, 2018) or work conducted by academics who have a rich, educational heritage (John, 2012a, 2019; Soni, 2013, 2019; Taggart and Elsey, 2013). Professional discourse concerning supervision is limited.

This study contributes to professional knowledge as it has provided insight into the supervision practices of ten NMs that work within the private sector. The context of the research was unique and only possible due to being an employee and an insider researcher. In addition, the creative mixed methods applied within the study provided a different lens from which to gather rich and in-depth data. The findings add to the body of educational research about supervision in the ECEC sector. Further to the proposed dissemination of research, there is sufficient scope to investigate the impact of training on the delivery of supervision. Specifically, how the provision of training facilitates a company-wide, shared understanding of the purpose and functions of supervision.

6.7 Personal reflections

Studying for an Educational Doctorate has been instrumental to my personal and professional development. Engaging in research has not been without its challenges, studying during a global pandemic was difficult, due to the uncertainty, loss and changed that occurred.

Ethical consideration was given to all aspects of the data collection process, including allowing additional time if required following the interview, due to the therapeutic nature of the sand tray activity. However, I did not anticipate the affect or impact the supervision experiences of NMs would have on me. I was moved by the NMs commitment, and the genuine care extended to their teams. Since completing this research, I now receive regular coaching that draws on supervision theories. In addition, I engage with online group supervision. I am part of an online supervision community that is committed to raising awareness of well-being. Now more than ever, I believe that supervision is a critical element of early years' practice. It provides a space where practice can be challenged, concerns discussed, solutions sought, actions implemented, and results celebrated. It allows for professional discourse and reflective practice.

7.0 Reference List

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8.0 Appendix

8.1 Ethical approval form and risk assessment form for research activities

University of Reading

Institute of Education

Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2015)

Tick one: Staff project: _____ PhD ____ EdD ✓

Name of applicant (s): Gemma Pawson

Title of project: An exploration into the discourse of supervision within the context of Early Childhood, Care and Education (ECEC) - a single intrinsic case study.

The case: Centred on the issue of supervision and how this is carried out within a large, nursery provider in the South of England.

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Rev Dr Geoff Taggart & Dr Helen Bilton

	YES	NO
Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:		
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	✓	
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	✓	
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	✓	
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	✓	
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	✓	
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	✓	
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	✓	
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	✓	
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included, and their name provided	✓	
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants	✓	
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	✓	
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	✓	

Please answer the following questions			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on the blackboard to ensure this).	✓		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	✓		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?		✓	
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx)?	✓		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?	✓		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	✓		
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the headteacher or other relevant supervisory professional?	✓		
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?	✓		
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			✓
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data[1], or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	✓		
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?	✓		
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		✓	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			✓
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?		✓	
13b) If the answer to question 13a is "yes", please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.			✓
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		✓	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is "yes":			✓

[1] Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			
A: My research goes beyond the 'accepted custom and practice of teaching' but I consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	✓		
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g., teachers, parents, pupils etc. Interviews: 10 Nursery Managers (NMs) Total members of staff: 10			
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting: An exploration into the discourse of supervision within the context of Early Childhood, Care and Education (ECEC) - a single intrinsic case study. The case: Centred on the issue of supervision and how this is carried out within a large, nursery provider in the South of England. 1. For this study, supervision is not about appraisal or managing the behaviour of staff. 2. In 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced a revised version of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), (2008) curriculum. Of significant importance, was the inclusion of a statutory requirement to provide supervision for all staff that work with children and families. The purpose of the research is to investigate how supervision is perceived, delivered and experienced by the supervisor. 3. Ten nurseries will be selected by the Operational Director (OD) based on their recent Outstanding Ofsted inspection grade. I will interview 10 NMs (each will manage a different nursery). 4. OD to provide a list and I will then make contact - letters to NMs will be distributed via their work email. 5. My role within the organisation is Head of Professional Development. I am responsible for the			

design/facilitation/delivery of training for both nursery and support staff. I do not have a direct relationship with the research participants.

- I recognise that while I do not know the NMs, they may be aware of my role within the organisation and therefore I will need to be explicit and sensitive to the dynamics of power in the relationship. However, as the participants are all NMs the power dynamic, while still present, is not as significant or explicit in comparison to interviewing RLs.
- I am conducting the interviews in the NMs environment – I am going into their domain. In addition, I do not line manage or work within the operational context. My role and line management responsibilities are within the support function.

6. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the NM who is responsible for delivering supervision within the nursery. In total, 10 NMs will be interviewed.

   Pictorial cards will be sent by post to the nursery, to ensure receipt of delivery. The cards will be used to facilitate discussion around metaphors related to supervision. All NMs will be asked to reflect on them before the interview – an information sheet will be included (example attached).

   Finally, towards the end of the interview participants will be invited to 'tell' their story of supervision via the medium of a sand tray and small world figures. Participants will use their self-selected pictorial card to reflect on their current experience of supervision – they will be asked to narrate what they would like supervision to be, through the sand tray activity. This method has been employed in research linked to supervision (Fall and Sutton, 2004; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Stark, Frels & Garza, 2011).
   *Due to the nature of the final activity, additional time will be allocated if needed. It would be unethical if a participant was sharing their story and then was stopped due to time constraints.
- All interviews will be recorded using a Dictaphone
- Once the interviews have been transcribed, I will return to the NMs for validation. Where necessary, amendments will be made accordingly, to ensure full accuracy.
- Photographs will be taken of the sand tray activity, again, all photographs will be shown and discussed with the NMs before they are included (photographs that are not being used or those that have been rejected by NMs will be destroyed) – this will ensure NMs have ownership of interview content and photographs. Note: The photographs will capture the sand tray activity and not the NM.
- Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data.
- Confidentiality will be maintained at all times unless disclosure is made which is related to safeguarding or child protection. It would be my duty to report the disclosure, which would result in confidentiality being terminated; all participants will be made aware of this when I share with them the ethical agreement.

7. A maximum of 10 NMs will be interviewed, and it is hoped that all NMs will complete the prerequisite metaphor activity.
8. As discussed above, nurseries will be selected by the Operational Director (OD) based on their recent Outstanding Ofsted inspection grade.

9. The interviews will be conducted in a ‘parent room’ within the nursery; the purpose of the room is to provide parents space where they can meet with nursery staff or external agencies and have a confidential conversation. The environment has been designed to be welcoming and comfortable – this is where the interviews will take place.

10. Once the nurseries have been identified via the OD, I will send the letter to the NMs via their work email address. I will share information about the research with the NMs and provide an overview of the project. Informed consent will be sought from those who want to be involved.

11. All participants will be given reassurance that the identity of the setting and information they provide will be treated anonymously. Furthermore, they can withdraw from the research at any point, which will result in the data they provide be omitted from the project. In addition, it will be made explicit that should they wish to withdraw from the research, there will be no adverse consequences.

Data collection will begin in January and will conclude in late February 2019.

B: I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g., teachers, parents, pupils etc.
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words. 1. title of project 2. purpose of the project and its academic rationale 3. brief description of methods and measurements 4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria 5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary) 6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with then. 7. estimated start date and duration of project

C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed: Print Name: Gemma Pawson Date: 30.12.2018 (resubmission)

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: Print Name…KAREN JONES Date 28/1/2019

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative) *

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

University of Reading
Institute of Education

Risk Assessment Form for Research Activities February 2014

Select one: Staff project: PGR project:
Name of applicant (s): Gemma Pawson

Title of project: An exploration into the discourse of supervision within the context of Early Childhood, Care and Education (ECEC) - a single intrinsic case study.

The case: Centred on the issue of supervision and how this is carried out within a large, nursery provider in the South of England.

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Rev Dr Geoff Taggart & Professor Helen Bilton

A: Please complete the form below

Brief outline of Work/activity:	In addition, the study will involve interviewing Nursery Managers' (all of whom manage and lead outstanding settings). Furthermore, pictorial cards will be sent by post to the nursery, to ensure receipt of delivery. The cards will be used to facilitate discussion around metaphors related to supervision. The participants will be asked to reflect on them before the interview – an information sheet will be included. Also, participants will be invited to 'share' their experience of supervision via the medium of a sand tray and small world figures. All interviews will be recorded using a Dictaphone. Once the interviews have been transcribed, I will return the fully typed interview transcript to the participants, so they can validate or change the content. Where necessary, amendments will be made accordingly to the transcript, to ensure accuracy. Photographs will be taken of the sand tray activity, again, all photographs will be shared and discussed with all participants before they are included (photographs that are not being used or those that have been rejected will be destroyed) – this will ensure ownership of the interview content and photographs. Note: The photographs will capture the sand tray activity and not the participants. The settings will be selected by the Operational Director, based on their recent 'Outstanding 'Ofsted inspection grade. In addition, all settings identified, are established and fully resourced; this will enable NMs to take part in the research without it causing unnecessary staffing issues. - I recognise that while I do not know the NM's, they may be aware of my role within the organisation and therefore I will need to be explicit and sensitive to the dynamics of power in the relationship. However, as the participants are all NM's the power dynamic, while still present is not as explicit as the interviewing RLs. - I will draw on the work of Noddings (2003) when writing about ethics and will adopt a 'caring' approach.

Where will data be collected?	I will travel to 10 different nurseries within the South of England. The interviews will be conducted in person. All interviews will be conducted in an assigned 'parent' room. These spaces are private and designed to be away from the nursery office.

Significant hazards:	None identified. In accordance with Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, EYFS (DfE, 2017) and company policy, the nurseries have a duty to maintain a safe area of work at all times. **Feedback from the ethics committee commented that the question about wellbeing might be emotive.** If it is apparent that the question about wellbeing is emotive to the NM, I will offer support and the opportunity to discuss further. If appropriate, I will make contact with the NM the following week from a well-being perspective.

Who might be exposed to hazards?	N/A

Existing control measures:	All rooms within the nursery are in the scope of the setting's Health & Safety responsibilities.

Are risks adequately controlled:	Yes

If NO, list additional controls and actions required:	Additional controls	Action by:

B: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

I have read the Health and Safety booklet posted on Blackboard, and the guidelines overleaf.
I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm risks have been adequately assessed and will be minimized as far as possible during the course of the project.

Signed: Print Name: Gemma Pawson
Date: 14th October 2018 (resubmission 30th December 2018)

STATEMENT OF APPROVAL TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR (FOR UG AND MA STUDENTS) **OR** BY IOE ETHICS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE (FOR PGR AND STAFF RESEARCH).

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: Print Name…KAREN JONES Date 28/1/2019

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

8.2 Letter to request permission to carry out research

Gemma Pawson
Email:
Tel.

University of Reading

Strategic Operational Director Information Sheet

Research Project: An exploration into the discourse of supervision within the context of Early Childhood, Care and Education (ECEC) - a single intrinsic case study.

The case: Centered on the issue of supervision and how this is carried out within a large, nursery provider in the South of England.

Project Team Members: Mrs Gemma Pawson

Dear Strategic Operational Director,

I am writing to invite ten Nursery Managers within your operational scope, to take part in a research study, about supervision in the early years.

What is the study?

The study is being conducted by the University of Reading and aims to investigate how supervision is being carried out in the workplace. To do this, I will explore the perceptions and lived experiences of supervision practice from the perspective of ten Nursery Managers. I will use the sub-questions to shape the semi-structured interview questions.

Sub-questions:

1. How do you perceive and experience the practice of supervision?
2. How is the implementation of supervision supported through training and development within the nursery?
3. How does the practice of supervision support high-quality pedagogical practice within the nursery?
4. How does the sense of wellbeing relate to the practice of supervision?
5. How does the perception of professional identity appertain to supervision?

The study will involve interviewing Nursery Managers' (all of whom manage and lead outstanding settings).

The study will involve interviewing managers. In addition, pictorial cards will be sent by post to the nursery, to ensure receipt of delivery. The cards will be used to facilitate discussion around metaphors related to supervision. All participants will be asked to reflect on them before the interview – an information sheet will be included.

All interviews will be recorded, transcribed and anonymised before being analysed.

Why has your operational scope been chosen to take part?

Your operational remit includes many Ofsted 'Outstanding' nurseries'; you have therefore been identified as a senior gatekeeper, from whom I need to seek permission to conduct the research. Your involvement in the identification and selection of ten 'Outstanding' nurseries is pivotal to the project.

Does the Nursery Manager have to take part?
It is entirely up to you whether you permit the nurseries to participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project, without any repercussions to you or those involved, by contacting Gemma Pawson Tel:, email:

What will happen if the nursery takes part?
The manager will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes at a mutually convenient time. An Information Sheet will be shared with identified participants and informed consent will be sought from those willing to take part.

The purpose of the interview and pictorial activity is to ascertain how supervision is perceived and to inquire into the practice of supervision within the ten selected nurseries.

Finally, towards the end of the interview participants will be invited to 'share' their story of supervision via the medium of a sand tray and small world figures. Participants will use their self-selected pictorial card to reflect on their current experience of supervision – they will be asked to narrate what they would like supervision to be, through the sand tray activity.

I would also be grateful for a copy of the nursery's supervision policy.

If you agree to nursery participation, once you have provided me with a list of the potential nurseries, I will seek informed consent from all those who take part.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?
The information given by participants in the study will remain confidential and will only be seen by the research team listed at the start of this letter. Neither you nor the nursery will be identifiable in any published report resulting from the study. Information about individuals will not be shared with the nursery or yourself.

I anticipate that the findings of the study will be useful in improving supervision processes and systems that operate within the nursery. The research will also identify possible training needs and highlight effective practice.

What will happen to the data?
Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you, the children or the nursery to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym and will be referred to by that name in all records. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer and only the research team will have access to the records. The data will be destroyed securely once the findings of the study are written up, after five years. The results of the study will be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles. I can send you electronic copies of these publications if you wish.

What happens if I change my mind?
You can change your mind at any time without any repercussions. If you change your mind after data collection has ended, I will discard any data that has been collected from the nurseries.

What happens if something goes wrong?
In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact Rev Dr Geoff Taggart, University of Reading; Tel: 0118 378 2643, email: g.taggart@reading.ac.uk

Where can I get more information?
If you would like more information, please contact Gemma Pawson
Tel:, email:

I do hope that you will agree to your participation in the study. If you do, please complete the attached consent form and return it via email for convenience. This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

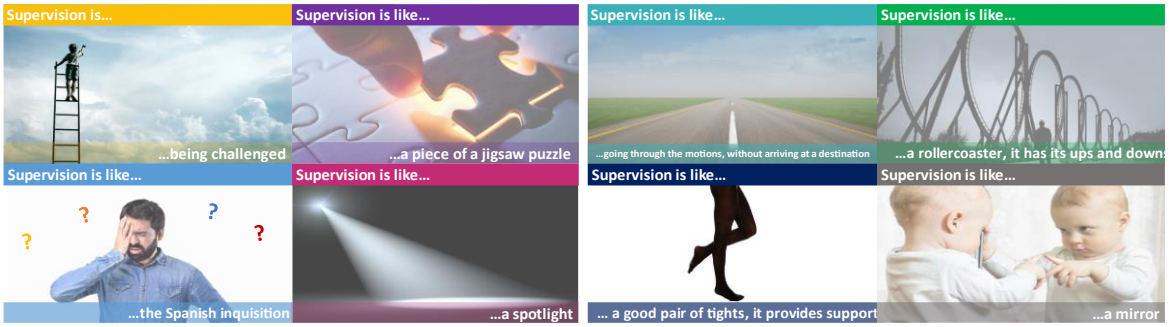
Gemma Pawson

Appendix 8.3

Interview Schedule for Nursery Manager	
Introduction	***Build rapport*** Thank NM for being involved. Introduce myself, the role and have in the company and my interest in supervision. Informed consent ***Overview of interview*** As a reminder, there are three elements to this interview. We will begin with the cards that you were sent in the post. Then the interview, followed by the sand tray activity. ***Timeline*** The three elements that make up the interview will take about an hour. Check that the NM has allowed sufficient time for the interview before commencing.
Overview of Research	**As a reminder:** The focus of this research is on supervision. What are NMs' experiences of supervision within the context of a large, private day-care provider? *Do you have any questions before we begin?*
Metaphor Cards	I am glad you received the set of cards. Did you have an opportunity to look? Did any of them resonate with you about your experience of supervision? **Prompt** Can you expand on your choice of card? How does it reflect your experience of supervision?
Interview	**Start with the basics:** How long have you worked at the organisation? And within the ECEC sector? When did you become a Nursery Manager? Alternatively, tell me about your management journey. What does supervision mean to you?
Organisational Culture	***Research question:*** What is your experience of supervision? What type of supervision model do you use? How does your organisation support the delivery of supervision? **Prompt** What training have you been on while employed at the organisation? How frequently do you receive or deliver supervision? Is there a standard format that you use?
Professional Identity	***Research question:*** Has supervision contributed to your sense of professional identity? **Prompt** Can you provide an overview of your career in the ECEC sector?

	Supervision is a familiar practice in social work, counselling and nursing. Do you see supervision as part of your professional identity now that it is a statutory requirement?
Well-being	*Research question:* How does supervision support well-being? **Prompt** Can you think of an example whereby supervision has helped you or someone else? What is your focus within supervision?
Sand tray	To provide context, link Loose Parts if seen when taken on the nursery tour. Explain the role of play and exploration when engaged with the sand tray. Emphasise there is no right or wrong way to use the equipment. Invite the NM to create a scene in the sand tray and ask to indicate when they had finished. Ask them to indicate once they have finished and invite them to explain the composition. The post-creation stage allows the NM to reflect on the scene and then discuss the items' significance. ***Consent*** Check with NM if photographs can be taken of the composition and included within the final thesis. ***Prompt*** Can you show me what a positive supervision session would look like? Alternatively, select three objects to represent supervision. ***Check-in*** Take time to check in with the NM following the activity.
Close Interview	***Thank you*** Thank you for taking the time to be involved in the research. I appreciate how busy you are. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experience of supervision. I have also valued the opportunity to look around your nursery – thank you for the tour. ***What happens next?*** The interview will be transcribed verbatim (exact words used) and then shared with you to confirm the accuracy and provide approval or request amendments. Check NM has my contact details and reiterate that they can make contact at any time.

8.4 Example of metaphor cards and guidance



University of Reading

Gemma Pawson
Email:
Tel.

March 2019

Dear Nursery Manager,

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in the research.

As mentioned in the information letter, please find enclosed a set of supervision cards. Please can you review the cards and take some time to see which image or statement reflects your experience of supervision.

There is also space on the back of the card for you to record key words or thoughts linked to supervision. If none of the cards resonate with you, I have included a blank card for you to create your own.

The cards will be used to facilitate discussion around metaphors related to supervision. They will be used during the interview.

I am looking forward to meeting you and gaining your perspective on supervision.

Kind regards

Gemma Pawson

8.5 Overview of selected metaphor cards

Metaphor cards	NM1	NM 2	NM 3	NM 4	NM 5	NM 6	NM 7	NM 8	NM 9	NM 10	Overall result
Supervision is an opportunity to talk and be listened to	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	100%
Supervision is like a good pair of tights; it provides support	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	70%
Supervision is a checklist exercise	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓			50%
Supervision is problem-solving			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	50%
Supervision is being challenged				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	50%
Supervision is like therapy	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					50%
Supervision is like a roller coaster; it has its ups and downs					✓		✓		✓	✓	40%
Supervision is like a piece of the jigsaw puzzle	✓				✓			✓		✓	40%
Supervision is like having a cup of tea with a good friend			✓		✓	✓				✓	40%
Supervision is a safe place				✓	✓				✓	✓	40%
Supervision provides space for me to think	✓			✓				✓		✓	40%
Supervision is like a spotlight		✓						✓	✓		30%
Supervision is like cracking open the lid of Pandora's box	✓		✓						✓		30%
Supervision is like oxygen to the body; without it, I couldn't do my job	✓			✓						✓	30%
Supervision is like a mirror					✓					✓	20%
Supervision is like…			✓								10%
Supervision is like being in a boxing match								✓			10%
Supervision is like being on a journey with an expert map reader											0%
Supervision is like wading through treacle											0%
Supervision is like the Spanish Inquisition											0%
Supervision is like going through the motions without arriving at a destination											0%

8.8 Example of codes

Themes	Major	Minor
Trust	Time to talk and open up	Honest conversation Dedicated time to talk Therapy Support Confidential Wellbeing
	Develop relationships	Reciprocal
	Care	Increase in anxiety Sign post to services
	Invested in	Supervision as a staff benefit Aids retention Staff feel valued Sessions are individualised
Coaching approach	Listen to staff	Ask thought provoking questions Coaching conversations Aid understanding Not telling Open forum Collaboration
	Empowerment	Team Peer support Responsibility Voice Opportunity to talk and be heard
	Learning	Autonomous thinking Identifying mistakes Opportunity for growth
	Organisational culture	Principles - Accountability, Teamwork and Respect Knowing team is a strength.

8.9 Example of sub-themes