‘Key Discourses in Early Childhood Intervention: A Case Study of an Early Intervention City’

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To Catherine and Larry, who put the sun and the moon in my hand
and to Naoise, Sorcha and Lara for whom I would stand between the millstones.
Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on understanding Early Intervention as a discourse; how it is generated and reproduced and how it makes possible certain processes and practices and limits others. In particular the study explores the dominant discourses of neuroscience and evidence-based practice that are associated with the notion of early childhood and how these are translated in policy and practice. The thesis identifies approaches to Early Childhood Intervention being implemented in the community, considering what kind of evidence these are based on as well as exploring how dominant discourses from research and policy might support some approaches and inhibit others. This is explored through a single complex case study of a self-proclaimed Early Intervention City in Northern Ireland. The framework for the study uses Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ of ‘habitus’, ‘capital’ and ‘field’ to explore the ways in which Early Intervention discourses impact on young children, parents and communities as well as in the broader political and policy context. The study findings highlight the ways in which the policy discourse, claiming an evidence base from neuroscience and research, locates the origin of a range of social problems in a deficit model of neurological development in early childhood and advocates parenting programmes as a solution which will bring transformative change. The analysis of accounts from the field however demonstrated a high degree of critical engagement amongst parents/carers, programme providers and policy makers. Community based practice and ‘home grown’ initiatives struggle within the policy field for recognition, yet ‘home grown’ carries significant social capital within and across communities. Professional wisdom, experience and expertise also carries significant capital in communities and with parents, particularly when this is flexible and attuned to their needs. It is suggested that the most significant challenge in all of this however is that while ‘silver bullet’ claims from evidence based programmes persist and ‘home grown’ initiatives promise community contextualised solutions, social inequalities for young children in the case study area remain persistently intractable.
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Introduction

‘In the interstices of language lie powerful secrets of the culture.’

(Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born, 1976)

The currency of Early Childhood Intervention

Early Childhood Intervention is still an emergent field of practice and though its roots can be traced to initiatives in the United States from the 1960’s, the term has really only come into popular usage in other contexts over the last ten years. As the opening quotation from Adrienne Rich, drawn from her seminal work on motherhood suggests, when a term comes into common currency it is important to look beneath language towards underpinning social and cultural points of reference. The political impetus and drive behind the concept and practice of Early Childhood Intervention is an important area for exploration for those interested in young children’s care and development, not least because it could appear on the surface, as we move towards the second decade of a new century, that the needs and rights of young children have moved centre stage. Research from neuroscience has opened up new understandings of how sensitivity to young children’s needs and responsive interactions may impact on the physiology of brain development. Policy and advocacy has drawn on this knowledge to drive investment in prevention and early intervention. Multiple programmes have been developed to support young children and parents and numerous research studies, focused on the efficacy of these, have further informed the debate. As a practitioner and advocate in the field of Early Childhood, it is tempting to hold back from too much critical examination of a tide, which has brought new research, investment and political priority to young children. However, as I present this study, I would argue that it is not only desirable but also necessary that the discourse of Early Childhood Intervention is critically explored by those with insight and experience in the field.
Definition
The definition of Early Intervention that is most widely used is that developed by C4EO, the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services,

Intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families or with a population most at risk of developing problems. (C4EO, 2010)

This definition includes both interventions early in life with young children as well as interventions early in the development of a problem. It includes universal interventions that are offered to an entire population, and targeted interventions that are offered to particular children, young people and families in order to protect them from developing problems or to reduce the severity of problems that have started to emerge. Early Childhood Intervention Services, of which Sure Start 1 is probably the most well-known example, include an element of both universal and targeted work, with an increasing emphasis on targeted services for children and families most in need through social or other disadvantage. Given that poverty is associated with poorer outcomes for children in education and health, Early Childhood Intervention is therefore positioned as a key strategy for tackling poverty and social inequality, focused on narrowing the gap for more disadvantaged children.

The Popularised discourse of 'baby brain development'
Set alongside this focus in Early Childhood Intervention on targeting poverty and social disadvantage and the outcomes associated with these, there is a strong emerging discourse from neuroscience which when used in combination with psychology and biochemistry is popularly known as the science of 'baby brain

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1 Sure Start is a government led initiative aimed at giving every child the best possible start in life and which offers a broad range of services focusing on family health, early years care and education and improved well-being programmes to children aged four and under.
development’. The broader discourse is not restricted to early childhood professionals, researchers and policy makers, a popular example is Sue Gerhardt’s (2004) bestselling book, ‘Why Love Matters: how affection shapes a baby’s brain.’ Publications such as this have reframed the nature/nurture and attachment debates in the popular imagination and have emphasised the importance of the early years of life, not just from the perspective of nurturing or development but now with the added weight of neuroscience, the message that ‘early experience can alter the biochemistry of the brain’ (Gerhardt, 2004, p211). The 1990’s were heralded as the ‘decade of the brain’ and possibly the last ten years could be described as the ‘decade of the infant brain’ encompassing the time that that terms such as ‘Early Childhood Intervention’ and ‘Infant Mental Health’ have come into the regular language and usage of those who work with young children. Discourse based on the research on neuroscience, effectiveness as well as cost benefit studies of Early Childhood Intervention has meant that advocates of this approach have emerged not just in the field of early childhood but from also from politics, economics, criminology and other disciplines.

Policy and research focus on parenting programmes
Parallel and connected with the neuroscientific discourse has emerged a strong focus on parents and parenting with the view from research and evaluation that, ‘what parents do is more important than who parents are’ (Melhuish et al 2004, p.1). Interfacing with this discourse, dominant voices within public policy argue that Early Childhood Intervention, informed by research on brain development in the early years should primarily focus on programmes for improving the ‘quality’ of that central parent child relationship. Teaching parents how to parent differently, it is argued, will not only improve outcomes for children but will bring cost savings to society in later, more expensive remediation services in the areas of health, social care, education and justice. These cost savings have been estimated as that every $1 invested in Early Intervention will generate a saving to society of $17 (Heckman 2004, Rolenick and Grunewald, 2003, Belfield et al 2006). A crucial question which has emerged for policy makers is therefore how, given the wide range of parenting support programmes available, to make investment decisions about which of these
is most likely to improve outcomes or bring cost savings. This policy drive centred on efficacy has driven and resourced an increasing range of research studies focused on the effectiveness or 'what works' of Early Childhood Intervention.

An overall snapshot of the field such as is provided here would certainly appear very encouraging to those interested in advocacy or improving outcomes for young children. Society, it could be argued, is poised to address, perhaps even transform the intractable problems of poverty and disadvantage that have reproduced poor outcomes across generations. Recent developments in neuroscience and brain imaging have the potential for providing new insights into the complex world of infant and child neurophysiology and the significant resources partly mobilised by this research should make a real difference to addressing social disadvantage at an early age.

Just as any snapshot cannot capture the complexity of a living landscape however, the terrain of Early Childhood Intervention is much more complex than this picture suggests. The translation and dissemination of research from its academic or scientific genesis into policy and practice on the ground is inevitably a process of alteration and simplification. Indeed, the process of selection and valorisation of particular sets of ideas or approaches from the range of research and practice in the field merits further exploration. While there has been a significant increase in research in the field of Early Childhood Intervention, as stated above, this has in the main focused on evaluation of effectiveness, the 'what works' of intervention. The usefulness of examining Early Childhood Intervention as a discourse is that the process can potentially reveal some of these layers of interpretation, as well as the ways in which some ideas become dominant while others fail to gain traction.

**Rationale for the Current Study**

Hence the focus for this thesis, that seeks to move beyond the increasing abundance of evaluation studies towards an exploration of these 'layers of interpretation' from research to policy to practice. One of the journey metaphors that is widely known in the field was provided by Shonkoff (2000, p1) when he
described the passage from the neural circuitry of the child's brain to the expanding network of a child's social relationships as the connection 'from neurons to neighbourhoods'. Similarly, the discourses of Early Childhood Intervention have journeyed from different origins in fields of research to translation in different policy arenas and from policy into practice. Choices around what knowledge is selected, how this is translated and how it is put into practice are crucial in attempting to analyse the ways in which this evolving field has been and continues to be shaped. Most importantly, the ways in which this complex combination of research knowledge, policy and practice impacts on the lives of children and families is essential to the critical examination of the field of Early Childhood Intervention.

Research Questions
From the above, the following questions have shaped the focus for the present study:

- What approaches and perspectives on Early Childhood Intervention are identifiable from implementation in the community?
- What are the characteristics of these approaches and what kind of evidence are they based on?
- How do the dominant discourses from research and public policy impact on the implementation of Early Childhood Interventions?
- How might the dominant discourses contribute to supporting some approaches and inhibiting others?
- In what ways do these discourses contribute to the reproduction or transformation of social inequality?

Aims and Objectives
Overall Aim
This thesis aims to increase our understanding of the notion of Early Childhood Intervention as a discourse; how it is generated and reproduced and how it makes possible certain processes and practices and limits others.
With this in mind the thesis has the following core objectives:

- To analyse the existing research on the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention to identify key processes and characteristics.
- To examine the public policy discourse on Early Intervention using Critical Discourse Analysis.
- To identify the Early Childhood Intervention approaches being implemented in the case study context focusing on key processes and characteristics.
- To identify ways of communicating and connecting this knowledge back to practice in the field.
- To add to the theoretical understanding of the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention approaches in communities.

Transformation is a recurring theme throughout this study that retraces the journey of the theory, research and policy of Early Childhood Intervention towards actualisation within the particular practice context of a detailed study of one ‘early intervention city’. Transformation is a persistent echo throughout the policy discourse of Early Childhood Intervention, the aspiration for transformation of systems, departments, neighbourhoods and ultimately the lives of children and families. This discourse of transformation through Early Childhood Intervention is set against a reality of a worsening picture of intergenerational child and family poverty. The interaction between these discourses of transformation and reproduction in the case study of a city which has undergone significant political transformation made this context particularly interesting to study.

Outline of the main chapters of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is a review of the literature in the field, tracing the origins of the emergence of the key discourses of neuroscience and evidence in the field of Early Childhood Intervention in the wider context. This includes the key studies which defined the field as well as the more recent reviews and reconsideration of these. Alongside this is traced the emergence of the policy discourse particularly the influence of the Allen (2011) Report. The issues emerging from the review of the
literature are that while arguably young children now occupy a very prominent position within the discourses of neuroscience, research and public policy, does the direction of these discourses in early intervention suggest that we are moving closer to closing the gap between the disadvantaged and affluent child? Within the longitudinal and experimental studies in the field, there are core issues in relation to the application of programmes across social and cultural contexts. If an intervention is demonstrated to be effective in a different social, cultural and historical context, can we translate these gains to a new situation without substantive reflection prior to implementation? Scaling up of programmes presents new challenges for early intervention as does the roll out of programmes to fidelity. Indeed, the very notion of programme fidelity in characteristically different community and cultural contexts may be disputed. Within the neurological research there are some issues how this neurologically based discourse is interpreted with families and communities. Within the public policy context an important question raised by the review of other studies lies in the underpinning assumptions in cost benefit analysis applied to early childhood intervention and the future orientated view of the child.

Chapter 2 outlines the reasons for the orientation of this particular research within a Critical Realist paradigm. In order to develop this discussion, the chapter first outlines the approach to discourse proposed in the study in some detail. The consideration then moves to some of the key theoretical debates in the field particularly the ways in which Critical Realism bridges the gap between positivist and constructivist research and how this might relate to the exploration of discourse in relation to early childhood. A number of examples of Critical Realist research are then considered including work on early childhood on evaluation and on discourse which unpack the dualisms of agency/structure, subjective/objective, micro/macro and qualitative/quantitative. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that in particular the work of Bourdieu in straddling these dualisms offers a possible and practical framework appropriate to a Critical Realist approach. The proposed framework for the study is then outlined which uses the 'thinking tools' of habitus, capital and field as identified by Bourdieu to explore the ways in
which early intervention discourses might impact on young children, parents and communities as well as in the broader political contexts.

Chapter 3 outlines the overall methodological framework for construction and analysis of the field which was used drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory. The discussion then explains the reasons for the selection of a single complex case study of a city, Ballymore in Northern Ireland as the central focus of the enquiry. The implementation of Early Intervention in this context is where the field is constructed from, considering this in relation to the broader field of power, mapping the structure of relations and the analysis of the habitus of agents. The different levels of enquiry at city, neighbourhood and programme levels within the case study are outlined and the rationale for different programme contexts explored. The discussion then moves to the selection of methods selected for the study, the use of interviews and participant observation being two of the principal methods. The chapter concludes with a reflexive consideration of my own role and positioning as researcher within this field.

Chapter 4 outlines the Northern Ireland context more broadly, the social, economic and political events in a society emerging from conflict which have impacted on its citizens. Rather than engaging in detailed contextual analysis these are considered broadly and in relation to their potential impact on the different fields and discourses relating to early intervention. The specific context of the city of Ballymore is then considered, how contextual issues such as high unemployment and child poverty interact with other more specific characteristics such as a highly developed and vocal community sector in a city where social and cultural capital are significant drivers. The specific context of the Ballymore Regeneration plan and the specific focus on Early Intervention is then explained. From the city context, the focus moves to a consideration of the neighbourhoods: North River, East River, South River and West River where the initial scoping of the study, programme mapping and interviews were carried out.
Neuroscience as discourse is the focus of Chapter 5. This chapter first outlines the origins of the key debates in neuroscience as to the importance of the first three years, particularly how these have shaped the broader policy discourse in Early Childhood Intervention, further developing the themes which have emerged from the review of the literature. Using Bourdieu’s theory of ‘field’ the focus then moves to consider how the neuroscientific discourse has been drawn on in public policy in Northern Ireland. The emerging policy on Early Intervention from the fields of Health, Education, Social Care and Justice are then considered as competing discourses within the overall ‘field of power’ (Bourdieu 1992). By examining the overlapping and interdependent discourses in the policy field of Early Intervention in Northern Ireland we can consider how educational, cultural, scientific and economic fields compete, overlap, and are re-enforced by each other. Of particular interest are the different types of capital which are being contested within fields and how these are revalidated or dominated within the policy process. Following this analysis of how neuroscience has been interpreted in public policy, I will examine how it has impacted on commissioning, managing and delivering Early Intervention in practice in Ballymore drawing from the interview and observational data. In order to examine the ways in which the neuroscientific discourse contributes to reproducing or transforming social disadvantage it is important to examine all three levels, the policy level, the community level and the programmatic level. Using the Bourdiesian theoretical framework, the concepts of capital, habitus and field to explore the interpretation of the neuroscientific discourse reveals how this is operationalised to support some practices and inhibit others.

Chapter 6 is focused on ‘evidence’ as discourse and initially retraces some of the key debates on evidence from earlier chapters in the light of the data from the case study. In this way it is possible to trace the ways in which the discourse on ‘evidence’ has emerged, developed, been contested and integrated into policy and practice. There are three main areas of discussion within this chapter. The first of these is to expand on how the broader discourse around ‘evidence’ in early childhood intervention has emerged from and continues to be shaped by early
landmark studies in the US and UK which continue to hold significant knowledge capital particularly within the policy arena. Within this area of discussion, the debates in relation to policy around what constitutes ‘evidence’ are explored, the ways in which these have influenced, and to some extent polarised, debates in education and early childhood research. Drawing from Bourdieu’s theory of ‘field’ and ‘capital’, in relation to the interaction between knowledge capital, political and economic capital, it is argued that the ways in which policy makers have selected from and over simplified research evidence may have contributed to misrepresentations within this debate. The second area of discussion focuses on the particular policy context in Northern Ireland, how ‘evidence’ has been used and interpreted in this context and the ways in which it has interfaced with neuroscientific discourse. The impact of the dominant emphasis within the current policy discourse on evidence in Northern Ireland on short-term, programme-based solutions will also be considered as will the challenges of demonstrating evidence of impact of complex community based interventions such as Sure Start on broader social inequalities. The third area of discussion looks at the various ways that evidence has been interpreted in the case study context of Ballymore from commissioning, management, community, programme and parent perspectives. The field of relations in relation to the discourse of evidence at local level as well as the different types of capital involved to some extent contrasts with the field at policy level. At this local level there is a strong emphasis on community contextualised approaches focusing on building relationships with parents, children and families and providing support with professional and community expertise.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis and in this chapter the main findings of the study in relation to the outworkings of the key discourses in early childhood intervention of neuroscience and evidence are drawn together. The field analysis is drawn from the specific case study context of Ballymore, a city in Northern Ireland where early intervention is a catalyst programme within an overall regeneration plan. Using the Bourdieusian framework of habitus, capital and field, I explain how I have constructed an analysis of how these discourses operate in practice from in depth interviews with the various stakeholders as well as through observational studies of
programmes and practice. Importantly, as discourse is not a locally occurring phenomenon, this case study of Ballymore is located in the study within a wider field of relations and struggles for capital characterised by the operationalisation of the discourses of early childhood intervention in research, policy and practice within the regional context of Northern Ireland as well as in other contexts which are significant influencers. The chapter begins by revisiting the purpose of this thesis, the issues identified from the existing literature and theory which informed the aims and objectives of this study. The discussion then moves to the main findings of the study, elaborating on how the iterative process of interfacing the data with the Bourdieusian framework helped illuminate as well as challenge some of the key ideas. From here, the limitations and practical challenges of the study are discussed. The findings are then discussed initially in relation to the implications for practice and subsequently for further research and theory building.

**Positionality: Autobiographical Reflection**

I approached this thesis as a researcher but also from the perspective of having worked in the community for over twenty years in advocacy and practice focused on the rights of women and children, the last eight of which have been in the area of children in the early years. There were a number of ‘moments’ in which the idea for this study began to crystallise in my head. One of these was when, at a conference a number of years ago where I first saw the, now in/famous Bruce Perry images and was profoundly unsettled wondering about how it had happened that a policy discourse which many in the early childhood sector had welcomed, the emphasis on the importance of investing in young children, had come to be translated in these ways. The fact that the audience of early childhood professionals were clearly compelled by these images was even more unsettling.

The second was longer than a moment and was in the course of my first year of work with Early Years - the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland. The organisation had just embarked on a major Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) of a pre-school programme for 3-4 year-old children that seeks to increase awareness of diversity and difference among young children, practitioners and parents. The
experience of being involved in an RCT where academics and researchers were critically engaged with a voluntary sector organisation was challenging from both perspectives. Initial understanding of the methodology of trials was a challenge for community based practitioners. My impression was also that researchers needed to more fully understand the practice context. The experience of being involved in a trial did however leave me with a strong sense that critical engagement between empirically based research and practice was not only necessary but possible. The ‘robust’ nature of that critical engagement however is in my view as important as the robust measures of a trial. Descriptive, simplistic qualitative case studies that are used in an illustrative manner and are overshadowed by the statistical significance or otherwise of empirical findings do not constitute robust critical engagement.

My knowledge of the early childhood sector as I have stated previously was definitely an asset in gaining access to settings who generously facilitated this study. It was also an aspect about which I had to be continuously reflexive. As Bourdieu observed, proximity can be as much of an obstacle to knowledge as remoteness, and turning to study the historical conditions of the researcher’s own production is particularly important for the sociologist who chooses to study his or her own world (Bourdieu, 1988). Given that we are generally less aware of the games in which we are ourselves involved, it is necessary for the researcher to:

exoticize the domestic, through a break with his [sic] initial relation of intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him because they are too familiar’ (Bourdieu, 1988, p. xi).

One of the aspects, which emerged in the course of the study, where it was necessary to take a reflexive step back was in relation to the extent that, as an advocate, I had internalized aspects of the discourse of ‘the first three years’. From this aspect of my professional ‘habitus’, I had a natural affinity with those who approached the discourse from this perspective. It was really as I moved through the research process and thought about the discourse from the other perspective
that I came to better understand the discourse of family based approaches in the community.

The final and important reflection is that I approached this study not just as researcher and early childhood professional but also as a woman and a mother. Part of my own story and of the 'historical conditions of my own production' is that I came to motherhood early in life, unplanned and unprepared. Probably, for these reasons, deterministic discourses about young mothers and their children have always rankled. Of course, it is vital to reflect that my young age was only one aspect that impacted on my habitus. The secure and happy environment in which my first, second and third child were raised owes as much to the quality of support I had around me as to what I brought to the table, or cradle. Given the nurturance I had received, the journey to good enough parenting was not so far, what it is important to remember is that that journey is longer and more arduous for the many parents and children who don't start from that base. Their struggle to transform their circumstances is not enough without significant structural change and what they deserve is more of our support and respect, not less.
Chapter 1

A review of the literature and policy over the last decade 2000-2012 on Early Childhood Intervention.

1.1 Introduction

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, in the last decade there have been exponential developments in the inter-disciplinary field of early childhood intervention (Zigler 1983, Shonkoff 2000, Mashburn & Pianta 2008). These developments have impacted not only within the research community but in policy and practice across different social and cultural contexts. The principle of intervention in early childhood has gained currency beyond advocates in the field and is increasingly quoted by politicians and economists as a policy initiative that will not only bring benefits to disadvantaged children but will generate a significant economic return to society (Schweinhart 1993, Rolnick & Grunewald 2003, Allen 2011). In this chapter I will review the literature in relation to this evolving discourse in order to examine the journey of translation of the research basis for Early Childhood Intervention into policy and practice (Woodhead 1988, Reynolds 2001, Penn & Lloyd 2006).

At the beginning of the decade, a research group at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in the US led by Jack Shonkoff was established to integrate the emerging research on early brain development with the knowledge base from the behavioural and social sciences. The resulting report ‘From Neurons to Neighbourhoods’ was a landmark study bringing together work from a range of disciplines in the field of Early Childhood Intervention (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The NAS committee’s conclusion was that children are born neurologically wired for feelings and ready to learn, that early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential, that the needs of young children are not being addressed in the wider social and community context and that the interactions between early childhood science, policy and practice are problematic and demand dramatic rethinking.
In this chapter therefore, I will review the key discourses that have informed the field of Early Childhood Intervention in the decade since the publication of Shonkoff’s report in order to examine what have emerged as dominant discourses in the field. Three key areas have been to the forefront of recent discourse in the area: within the field of research and evaluation, priority has been given to trials measuring the effectiveness of interventions particularly experimental and longitudinal designs (Schweinhart 1993, Currie 2000, Reynolds and Temple 2001, Martin 2010); in addition, neuroscientific and behavioural research has highlighted the science of early brain development (Perry 1995, Schore 1997, Gunnar 1998); and finally public policy development has focused on the social and economic benefits of Early Intervention (Schweinhart 1993; Rolnick & Grunewald 2003; Belfield et al 2006; Allen 2011). In this chapter I will therefore consider the impact of international research particularly longitudinal and neurobiological studies, I will consider how these approaches have influenced the implementation of Early Intervention initiatives and consequently how they have shaped the public policy discourse on early intervention. Finally, I will consider how some of these dominant discourses are being questioned and challenged in order to set the context for the present study.

1.2 The Impact of Experimental Trials and Longitudinal studies
A key concern for researchers, advocates and policy makers in relation to early childhood intervention has been effectiveness - to what extent and increasingly at what cost interventions work. This emphasis has meant that experimental trials and longitudinal studies, informed specifically with the notion of measurable outcomes reflect a dominant element of the discourse regarding what counts as evidence in early childhood intervention. Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT) in particular, using methodologies adapted from medical/scientific models of research comparing outcomes of the ‘intervention’ and ‘control’ subjects have emerged as dominant in the field and thus are frequently referred to as the ‘gold standard’ of research. Our thinking in relation to measuring the impact of Early Intervention has been particularly shaped by a number of experimental trials and longitudinal studies of key interventions, the most prominent of which have been the Perry
Preschool study (Schweinhart 1993), the Abecedarian (Ramey & Campbell 1991) and the Chicago Parent Programme (Reynolds 2002). The first longitudinal study which defined the field was the HighScope Perry Preschool study (Berrueta-Clement 1984, Schweinhart 1993). The research on the Perry Preschool model programme has been the key foundation for the evidence base of long-term benefits of early education for children from disadvantaged families. The study began in 1962 with one hundred and twenty-three young African-American children living in poverty in Ypsilanti, Michigan who were assessed to be at high risk of school failure. The programme design emphasised teacher qualification, low adult child ratios, home visiting and daily attendance. The experimental study was longitudinal in design and researchers have compared children from the Perry preschool program with the control comparison group at ages 14, 15, 19, 27, and most recently at age 40. The latest report in 2004 documented a continuing pattern of positive long-term effects of high-quality early childhood care and education (Schweinhart 2005). The study was also significant in translating the positive benefits to children into the language of economics, a point which I will return to later when discussing the impact on public policy. Applying a cost/benefit analysis to the educational, employment and criminal justice outcomes the study, it is claimed, demonstrated a return to society of $17 for every dollar invested in the programme. This calculation was made on the basis of the savings in remediation, as the study documented that the adults who had the preschool programme had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have the programme.

This cost/benefit analysis was significant largely because of the documented effect of good quality preschool education on reducing male crime as well as the positive impacts on employment, and participation in education (Schweinhart 1993, Heckman 2000). Similarly, longitudinal designs have been applied in evaluating the impact of the Abecedarian (Ramey & Campbell 1991) and the Chicago Parent Programme (Reynolds 2002) and the cost/benefit analysis derived from the studies
has been widely referenced by early childhood organisations and advocates, by researchers and by politicians and policy makers.

A subsequent review carried out by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the University of London has re-evaluated the evidence presented in the Perry Pre School, Abecedarian and Chicago Parent programme longitudinal studies and raises interesting questions in relation to cultural context and cost/benefit analysis (Penn and Lloyd 2007). The systematic review team outlined some of the difficulties of generalising from these studies as well as the problem of extrapolating a cost/benefit analysis. They highlight that the population samples in these three studies were overwhelmingly African-American families in US inner cities, and were defined as living in poverty. The studies commenced in the late 60's and early 70's and all were based in the United States. Given this context, it is argued that the results of the three studies are not easily transferable, for example, to the current context in the UK. The review team recommended that the results should be read with the caveat of 'for the specific population in these studies' (Penn and Lloyd 2007).

The review endorsed the original evidence that centre-based early childhood interventions do have a positive effect on educational and cognitive outcomes and probably reduce the risk for those at high risk of becoming involved in criminal activity, but there are limits to this protective effect. In relation to the economic cost/benefit analysis, the review suggests that while the money invested in the interventions yielded a positive rate of return, the magnitude of the return is very sensitive to the assumptions made in the cost estimates. In this respect the potential long term impact and by extension the economic impacts are culturally influenced and may not be generalizable (Penn and Lloyd 2007).

In considering the three key longitudinal studies of Early Intervention – the Perry Pre-School study, the Abecedarian and the Chicago Parent Programme – the systematic review did not dispute that the children who received the intervention did better in the long term than those who did not. The authors accepted that
other studies, using different methods of analysis of longitudinal cohort data pointed in the same direction (Goodman & Sianesi, 2005). However, Penn and Lloyd also point to contradictory evidence in the studies as to what produced the change in the children. In relation to both economic claims and cultural context they emphasise that the studies relied on samples of African American children in ghettoized communities in the USA, where crime rates are notoriously high and where there are high rates of incarceration. Finally, Penn and Lloyd's review questions replicability in a different social or cultural context: 'We question whether longitudinal studies of early childhood interventions can ever be used to provide a replicable model of early education and care, because by the time the proof is obtained, societal values are likely to have changed considerably' (Penn and Lloyd 2007).

Conceptualising Early Intervention as generating an economic return to society by measuring the cost of remediation or incarceration against the cost of intervention needs to be examined sociologically. From a child rights-based perspective, weighing the cost of supporting young children and families against the future savings to society of remediation or incarceration is at odds with conceptualizing children as individuals with rights in the here and now; the right to equal opportunities in education or the best available health care. With this in mind, Penn and Lloyd (2007) suggest the development of an 'alternative cost/benefit analysis' for an Early Intervention approach based on the UNCRC. This approach is not further developed in the review but could suggest a possible direction for new cost/benefit approaches to early intervention.

Cost benefit claims in relation to the High Scope Perry Pre School study were also re-examined by Heckman in 2010 in the light of criticism which questioned the strength of its impact claims (Penn and Lloyd 2007; Hanushek and Lindseth 2009). Heckman locates the source of the problematic '$1 invested generates a saving of $17' claims in a two 'highly cited' papers. These are by Rolnick and Grunewald (2003) who claim a rate of return of 16 percent on the Perry program and Belfield et al (2006) which claims a 17 percent rate of return. Heckman states that having
examined these studies, 'the literature does little to assuage these concerns' (p. 116). Heckman’s concern was that in the 'highly cited' papers, all of the reported estimates of rates of return (Rolnick and Grunewald 2003; Belfield et al 2006) are presented without sensitivity analyses and without standard errors, leaving readers ‘uncertain as to whether the estimates are statistically significantly different from zero’ (2010, p. 116). Having re-examined the data in the light of this, Heckman (2010) is much more cautious in the claim of cost benefit concluding that:

Our estimates are robust to a variety of alternative assumptions about interpolation, extrapolation, and deadweight losses. In most cases, they are statistically significantly different from zero. In general, the estimated annual rates of return are above the historical return to equity of about 5.8 percent but below previous estimates reported in the literature...

Benefits on health and the well-being of future generations are not estimated due to data limitations (p. 128).

While there have been a range of longitudinal studies internationally since the Perry Preschool study perhaps the most significant longitudinal evaluations of children’s pre-school experiences in the UK/NI context have been the EPPE/EPPNI studies. In 1997 the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study was commissioned in England, with EPPNI as a sister project started in Northern Ireland in 1998. Both EPPE and EPPNI are longitudinal studies of the effects of pre-school experience upon children’s development and both were designed to produce evidence that could be used to inform policy and practice. The studies considered the impact of pre-school, the impact of type/characteristics of the setting, the impact of home setting on children’s development and whether effects of pre-school continued through primary school.

Findings from EPPE to date have reported that pre-school experience enhances cognitive and social development in all children. In relation to the type of setting the study reported significant differences between pre-school settings and their impact on children with high quality related to better intellectual and social development for children. In relation to the home learning environment, the
researchers found the quality of the home learning environment to be more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. The summary statement from the research team with regard to home learning was ‘What parents do is more important than who parents are’ (Melhuish et al 2004, p.1). This distinction between socio economic background, behaviour and environment is very interesting and merits further exploration in relation to the ecological context of children’s development within families and communities. It could be argued that ‘what parents do’ is strongly influenced by their context and background and that to fully understand and/or influence parenting behaviours or approaches requires an awareness of context. The study also noted that children did better in socially mixed provision; disadvantaged children attending centres that included children from mixed social backgrounds they showed further benefit than if they attended centres containing predominantly disadvantaged children. Again these findings have important implications for the implementation of early childhood intervention programmes. Is there a connection between ‘what parents do’ in communities or settings which have a mix of social backgrounds? Can we separate what parents do from who they are?

In considering these questions, we must look therefore not only to the research but to practice and implementation. How are research findings on Early Intervention being translated into practice or programme design? Research on the implementation science of Early Childhood Intervention is an important development emerging directly from the tradition of experimental and longitudinal studies. This work builds on, analyses and attempts to connect research evidence to practice. Odom’s (2009) study of the implementation science of Early Childhood Intervention identifies that a gap still exists between evidence based practice and the actual practices used in Early Intervention programmes. In Odom’s (2009) study, implementation science, is proposed as an additional research element which bridges the gap between developing evidence based practices or programmes and sustaining these positive outcomes on the ground. The study also
proposes strategies for promoting implementation through professional development.

Building from Odom’s analysis, Dunst (2009) provides a practical definition of evidence based practice, examples of different types of practice based research syntheses and outlines three possible models for conceptualising evidence based Early Childhood Intervention. Dunst (2009) proposes a middle ground between staunch advocates of Randomised Control Trials as best evidence and those who claim that experience and professional wisdom as a source of best practice should take precedence over research findings. Dunst’s proposed definition is that evidence based practices are ‘informed by research findings and demonstrate a relationship between the characteristics and consequences of an experience or opportunity that tell someone what they can do to produce a desired outcome’ (Dunst, Trivette and Watson 2008 pp 46). Dunst emphasises the functional relationship between the characteristics and consequences of a practice (experiences, opportunity, intervention, treatment) and the processes that explain the relationship between the practice characteristics that matter most (Babbie 2004, Cook and Campbell 1979). Though this definition appears straightforward, Dunst suggests that key questions remain, such as: what counts as evidence; and what kinds of research yield information about the characteristics that best explain the consequences of a practice? The method Dunst proposes to better understand this is through practice-based research syntheses. He also suggests that practice is best understood when placed in the context of a theory or model of Early Childhood Intervention.

Dunst outlines three possible intervention models: Guralnick’s developmental systems model (Guralnick 2005), Odom and Wolery’s Unified Theory Approach (Odom and Wolery 2004) and Dunst’s Integrated Framework Model (Dunst 2004, 2005). Dunst’s own model identifies four key components of early childhood intervention: children’s learning opportunities; parenting supports; family community supports; and family centered practices. The model also identifies three intersecting components: everyday learning activities, caregiver interactional
behaviour and participatory parenting opportunities. In identifying the key components of a model, Dunst emphasises the importance of contextual variables in determining the effectiveness or otherwise of a practice. One of the questions Dunst raises in relation to practice is that practitioners need to understand current thinking about what is considered the foundations of evidence based early childhood intervention and how different points of view can influence decisions about practice choice. Dunst also suggests that research findings and syntheses need to be examined in the context of a theory, model or framework and that the underlying assumptions need examined in order to determine effectiveness.

There are therefore a number of issues emerging from a social-ecological consideration of the key research studies of Early Childhood Intervention. We know that Early Childhood interventions bring benefits to children, families and communities but how we conceptualise and measure these benefits is critical. We know that context relates strongly to how we measure benefit and that this presents challenges in translating research particularly that which has a cost/benefit dimension across historic and cultural contexts. At a deeper level we must also consider our whole approach to measuring the benefits of early childhood intervention; should this be conceptualised as future savings to the public purse or a benefit to the child in the here and now? In relation to the impact of parenting and the home environment, can we separate parenting behaviour from social context; can ‘what parents do’ be isolated from ‘who parents are’? Then, in considering implementation in communities, are the key messages from research informing practice on the ground? Is there a coherent model of intervention operating that incorporates and translates key messages for practitioners and parents? Is this culturally contextualised and appropriate or is there a significant gap remaining between research and implementation?

**1.3 The impact of research in neuroscience**

These questions continue to resonate from a different perspective when we consider the second key area of discourse. This relates to developments in neuroscience and early brain development in relation to early childhood intervention. This field of research has provided insight into the neurobiological
basis of cognitive and social development in young children which has important implications for Early Intervention (Kotulak 1996, Masten & Coatsworth 1998, Shonkoff 2000). Neurobiological research in the 1990's redefined the parameters of the nature/nurture debate by demonstrating that a child's experiences early in life significantly affect the physical development of the brain. Emotional capacity as well as cognitive ability was evidenced as embedded into brain architecture and function (Schore 1997, 2001; Knudsen et al 2006). Neurobiological evidence has demonstrated that during the first year of life neural pathways within the brain which support vision, hearing, language and higher cognitive function are wired. From this perspective infancy and early childhood are characterized by what are described as 'sensitive periods' or 'windows of opportunity' during which synaptic connections are developed, significantly in the interaction between child and a parent or other caregiver.

In considering the mother-child dyad in infancy, it is argued from the neuroscientific perspective that in a nurturing situation during sensitive periods energy is high in both infant and parent for receptivity to each other's cues and for mutual adaptation (Brazelton and Cramer 1990). In contrast, when the environment is unsupportive and receptivity to infant cues is diminished, for example through depression, stress or mental illness conditions are not optimal for synaptic connections and healthy neurological development (Frazer 1998). Infants who have few opportunities for interaction with others or with their environment may not fully develop the basic neural connections that will facilitate their later learning and development (Hawley & Gunner 2000). The quality therefore of the early supportive environment for the mother-child dyad is crucial because if the mother's wellbeing is affected it is suggested this will have a biological as well as an emotional and cognitive impact on the child (Perry, Pollard & Blakley 1995). Building on the key concepts from behavioural psychology such as attachment theory (Bowlby 1969), neurologically based research on early childhood intervention focuses primarily on the mother-child dyad and the relationship between mother/infant interaction and synaptic development. Again, thinking about Shonkoff's original ecology, from 'Neurons to Neighbourhoods', these crucial
mother/infant interactions take place within a larger social and community context a perspective that is less considered within the neurologically based discourse. This gap in the neurobiological research is also identified in a recent paper on early childhood intervention in situations affected by conflict produced by a team at Yale University and the ACEV Mother and Child Foundation (Yale and ACEV Partnership 2012). This research draws the neurobiological evidence base into an ecological context with a particular emphasis on Early Intervention in situations of political or community conflict. The study focuses on the neurobiology of early life bonding and, in particular, the role of the neuropeptide oxytocin and its related compounds in bonding. Drawing from the neurobiological research and extrapolating into a community context, the team identify a significant gap in the generalizability of this research beyond the parent child dyad, ‘While the OT system is linked with bonding that is particular to the parent child dyad, the generalizability of this bonding across other relationships in families is not well understood. The degree to which the OT hypothesis can be extended beyond dyadic relationships and in-groups to the wider community must be explored further.’ (Yale and ACEV Partnership 2012, p11).

Neuroscientific research has also highlighted the area of infant mental health and the impact of what are termed ‘adverse childhood experiences’ in relation to young children’s levels of exposure to risk and development of resilience (Frazer 1998, Garbarino & Ganzell 2000). Research by Teicher (2002, 2006) addresses the neurobiology of child maltreatment and documents that children exposed to high levels of stress in infancy and early childhood experience an increase in cortisol which impacts neurologically as a state of hyper arousal. Children who live in circumstances where stress is persistent and where there is maltreatment are likely to develop self-regulation, anxiety and behavioural problems. Early severe stress and maltreatment however produce what Teicher (2006) terms ‘a cascade of neurobiological events that have the potential to cause enduring changes in brain development’. In this way, children’s neurological development is significantly impacted upon by the wellbeing of their parents. It is argued by extending the neurological discourse within the ecological context that adverse childhood experiences including parental mental health problems, violence in the home, alcohol and drug use will not only critically impair the interaction between child and
parent but and may also have a pervasive biological impact on the young child (Tiecher 2006).

The neurological research has also been strongly referenced in economic and political discourse on Early Intervention and skills development. From the basis of neuroscience this is conceptualised as a hierarchical process where higher level brain functions depend on and build upon lower level functions. This process is described by economist James Heckman as ‘skills beget skills’ (Heckman 2006). Heckman argues that the capacity for change in the foundations of skills development and neurological hard wiring is at its highest in early childhood. This capacity decreases over time and much of Heckman’s work on Early Intervention is focused on outlining the contradiction in public policy investment focusing at a maturational stage when plasticity and capacity for change is diminished (Knudsen, Heckman et al 2006).

Heckman developed the connection between neuroscience, economics and public policy particularly in the ‘Heckman equation’, which demonstrated the saving to society later interpreted by Rolnick and Grunewald 2003 as $16 and Belfield et al 2006 as $17 for every dollar invested in early intervention. The intersection of neuroscientific research, public policy and longitudinal research studies and the cost/benefit analysis merits further examination particularly when these empirical and economic claims have been contested and challenged. The way that these debates are popularised, the conceptualisation of Early Intervention as saving society the cost of remediation or incarceration as opposed to the benefit to the child in the here and now is challenging as is the representation in this discourse of the child as a brain or series of synaptic connections which are sustained or diminished by interaction. At the intersection of these discourses it is vital to question the image and agency of the young children under discussion. Do these discourses tend to conceptualise the young child as dollars to be saved or synaptic connections to be made or pruned? How does the young child with agency with family and community sit within this analysis?
Another concern in relation to this emerging neurologically based discourse is the relationship between the scientific community and wider society and how this discourse is mediated. This is recognised by Shonkoff in the recent paper 'Science does not speak for itself' (Shonkoff and Bales 2011). This study draws attention to the importance of knowledge transfer in scientific discourse on child development. Media and public misinterpretation of scientific findings is addressed in the paper, for example, the overgeneralisation of research on 'critical' periods described as 'fuelling the erroneous conclusion that human brain development is effectively solidified by the age of three years despite the fact that critical (versus sensitive) periods in the maturation of the human brain are the exception rather than the rule' (Bruer, 1999, Knudsen, 2004). In Shonkoff and Bales analysis the interaction between science and society is conceptualised as a communication issue with the objective 'the iterative construction of a core story of development, using simplifying models (i.e. metaphors) such as “brain architecture,” “toxic stress,” and “serve and return” to explain complex scientific concepts to non-scientists’ (Shonkoff and Bales 2011).

The examination of scientific discourse using a social ecological analysis is an important area of inquiry and may suggest that the issue is deeper than the construction of new metaphors for neuroscience. Clearly the target audience for discourse on early intervention is more complex than scientists and non-scientists. Science generally and neuroscience in particular holds high cultural and material capital held by a knowledge elite. Shonkoff's comments on audience and appetite suggest this: 'So we have a very rich knowledge base, science, that a large part of the population is hungry for, and particularly the more educated -- the more economically secure part of the population can't get enough of the science' (Shonkoff and Bales 2011). The problem here is that the focus of early childhood intervention is on more socially disadvantaged children, families and communities, and thus on addressing inequalities. If, as Shonkoff and Bates analysis suggests, the neuroscientific discourse connects primarily with the already advantaged and educated, is there a possibility that the discourse itself could contribute to the inequalities it is positioned to address? While the developments in neuroscience
represent a very significant area in furthering our understanding of early childhood development, it is important to consider the possibility that an elite neuroscience based discourse of Early Intervention may contribute to existing differentials of knowledge, information and power. In considering the translation journey ‘from neurons to neighbourhoods’ our analysis must be informed by an awareness of these differentials and their ability to alienate as well as connect.

1.4 The Impact on Public Policy

The translation of key research messages in early childhood intervention takes us next into a consideration of the impact on public policy. As already illustrated in the discussion of the Heckman equation, the application of cost/benefit analysis to longitudinal studies and the political endorsement of the scientific evidence base leads to the consideration of the public policy discourse on Early Intervention. Methodology, impact and evaluation in Early Intervention and how this connects to economics has become a key concern of government. Policy and decision makers are keen to identify impact for investment in Early Intervention. Melhuish's study of the impact of Sure Start in England for example (NESS 2010) showed only modest differences in outcomes in Sure Start areas with other comparable areas. The study also demonstrated a lack of coherence in methodologies for implementation and evaluation. Three recent reports published in 2010/2011, the Field Review, the Allen Report and the Munro Review illustrate how public policy in Early Intervention and in Child Protection must be culturally and economically contextualized. They show that discourse and perspectives on Early Intervention are politically charged and relate to broader ideas about how we view the relationships between the state and the private sector, between individuals and communities.

The relationship between the state, the private sector between individuals and communities was challenged in 2010 by Frank Field, a Labour MP and long term anti-poverty campaigner. Field's report (2010) proposed 'the biggest transformation of anti-poverty programmes in the UK since the war'. The report proposed a switch from the Labour government's anti-poverty measure, based on material income, to a 'set of life chance indicators'. The report argued that poverty was 'a much more
subtle enemy than purely lack of money' and questioned poverty as the dominant reason why disadvantage is handed down from one generation to another. Parenting, the report stated, was more important than income or schooling to a child's life chances.

The report commanded cross party support with findings strongly supported by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. David Cameron and Nick Clegg, in a joint letter to Field, praised the report as "a vital moment in the history of our efforts to tackle poverty and disadvantage". Field (2010) also suggested ministers should consider annually whether to withhold above-inflation increases in child tax credits and instead invest the money in early years education. He also suggested private companies should be given the chance to bid for Sure Start. The report stated that poor families got the worst deal from public services and that the investment in families since 1999 was producing only modest results. Field echoed Melhuish's earlier assertion in the EPPE report, 'What parents do is more important than who parents are' in the summation that

A healthy pregnancy, positive but authoritative parenting, high quality childcare, a positive approach to learning at home and an improvement in parents' qualifications, can ... trump class background and parental income (2010, p37).

Field's report also employs neuroscientific research to guide political investment:

By the age of three, a baby's brain is 80% formed, and his or her experiences before then shape the way the brain has grown and developed. That is not to say, of course, it is all over by then, but ability profiles at that age are highly predictive of profiles at school entry (2010, p5).

Among the report recommendations, Field proposes 'a new index of life chances' that would be monitored annually ensuring that poorer children in the future have the range of abilities necessary to secure better paid, higher skilled jobs. Following Field's report, in 2011, the Labour MP for Nottingham Graham Allen was commissioned by the UK government to write a report on Early Intervention. The
first of these – 'Early Intervention, the Next steps' – identified cross party support for Early Intervention based not only on the shared concern for children but the fact that late intervention is 'both expensive and ineffective' (p, v). The report identifies Early Intervention as providing, 'the social and emotional bedrock needed to break the cycle of dysfunction' (p37) giving a strong endorsement for evidence based programmes particularly those which have demonstrated impact through a Randomised Control Trial. The Allen Report contributed significantly to the renewal and reinforcement of the discourse that RCT's constituted the most significant form of evidence particularly in the publication of a list of recommended interventions all of which had demonstrated efficacy through an RCT. The discourse in the Allen Report draws heavily from the economic arguments put forward by Heckman and others in the US and again ties child outcomes to economic gains. Allen's report emphasises identifying the 'best proven' initiatives as well as the 'methodology and institutional arrangements required to make a much-needed step change in the way in which our society invests in its human potential' (Allen 2011). Specifically, the report recommends greater use of nineteen evidence based early interventions, all of which have demonstrated impact through a Randomised Control Trial. The report also suggests the designation of fifteen local communities as 'Early Intervention Places' which will make radical changes to children's services using evidence based Early Intervention policies and programmes.

The final recommendation from the report is that support for the developments comes from a new foundation that will provide independent investment advice. Within the report however there is a significant gap in the translation and transition from evidence based programme to Early Intervention Place. Also, the lack of a conceptual model of early childhood intervention that is socially and culturally contextualised and which translates the key processes in implementing early childhood intervention is a significant gap. Clearly communities need more than a 'menu of evidenced programmes' to choose from particularly when that evidence base may be drawn from contexts which are very different from the communities in which initiatives are implemented. There is also something to problematise in relation to the processes that lead to some programmes finding their way onto
Allen's select list of proven programmes. How is it that some attract RCTs and not others? In addition, we must ask what are the consequences of reducing Early Childhood Intervention down to a set of recommended programmes? A possible consequence is that a complex social and community process of change is reduced to programmes and activities with a focus on the parent child relationship rather than addressing the wider social circumstances.

The financing of Early Intervention is the focus of the second Allen report – 'Early Intervention, Smart Investment, Massive Savings' – published in July 2011. Firstly, Allen makes the case for a new, national Early Intervention Foundation and emphasises the importance of non-government money in financing Early Intervention, 'This is the bedrock of a new early investment culture. Without it, programmes will falter, outcomes won't be achieved, and investors will disappear' (Allen 2011). This foundation, together with the fidelity of evidence based programmes is described as the strategy to 'help build a new, scaled, fully functioning marketplace in early intervention' (p, xxv). The 'confidence of investors' is linked with programme quality and fidelity. As Allen puts it, referencing previous cost/benefit analyses, 'The public purse is stretched and so more intelligent public and private investment options are also needed' (p, xxv).

The other key social policy document of 2011 in relation to Early Intervention was the Munro Report on Child Protection in the UK. Munro's perspective on evidence based programmes in particular differs from Allen's as she is more cautious about their value in the child protection context. Commissioned by the Westminster Government to look at services in England, Munro's primary focus is to create a rebalancing between central government instruction and professional autonomy. Munro calls for a stronger emphasis on the professional judgement of senior social workers as opposed to a programmatic approach. The report comments: 'one-size-fits-all approach is not the right way for child protection services to operate' (p, 106). Top down government targets and too many forms and procedures are preventing professionals from being able to give children the help they need and assess whether that help has made a difference.” The review calls for government
to put more trust in professionals and to move away from the “tick-box” culture that has emerged in response to successive abuse scandals. The report also examines and critiques the use of evidence based programs in isolation from social work based expertise. Similarly, to Dunst (2009) Munro's report identifies the tension between staunch advocates of RCT’s and those who claim that experience and professional wisdom should take precedence.

In considering the emerging debates in public policy in relation to Early Intervention from a social-ecological perspective, a number of questions persist which relate to the research evidence more broadly. Given the exponential developments in the field from longitudinal, economic and neurobiological perspectives, it is likely that policy and practice have struggled to synthesise, analyse and implement at a similar pace. It may be that after a decade of enormous gains to our knowledge base the challenge is to synthesise these into flexible working models and practices that can be applied in different community contexts. There is a wealth of programmes to choose from, but are there models in which to frame these choices which can empower children, parents and communities to take ownership of the knowledge? Are the processes and components which underlie programme design adequately understood? Importantly will this understanding bring us any closer to closing the gap in outcomes for children in disadvantaged communities?

1.5 Conclusion

In the decade since the publication of Shonkoff's report, three key areas have dominated the discourse in Early Intervention: methodological approaches that have focused on the use of longitudinal, experimental and cost/benefit studies measuring the effectiveness of interventions; neuroscientific and behavioural research on early brain development; and public policy developments drawing from these discourses and focused on the social and economic benefits of early intervention. Each of these discourses has brought new insights validating the commitment to Early Intervention from different perspectives. Longitudinal and experimental studies have evidenced positive outcomes in relation to the impact of Early Intervention on inequalities, this has included highlighting the importance of
home environment contesting a simple correlation between family income and outcomes and supporting the view that ‘what parents do is more important than who parents are’. Neuroscience has significantly advanced the nature/nurture debate demonstrating that healthy attachment and positive interactions as well as building key relationships facilitate synaptic connections in the infant brain. We are more aware of the importance of sensitive periods in young children’s development and that adverse childhood experiences have an impact neurologically. This re-emphasises the importance of supporting parents and children from the earliest years particularly those experiencing multiple stressors. The public policy debates over the last decade have encapsulated key messages from the neuroscientific, experimental and longitudinal research on Early Intervention. There is a strong focus on children from birth in public health, social and educational policy with the shared message that Early Intervention makes social and economic sense and yet alongside these positive developments there emerge important areas of concern. Arguably young children now occupy a very prominent position within the discourses of neuroscience, research and public policy and at the intersection of these discourses is the concern that the potential of every child, from the earliest age is compromised by the compound problems associated with poverty and social disadvantage. The question which must be asked however, is does the direction of these discourses in Early Intervention suggest that we are moving closer to closing the gap between the disadvantaged and the affluent child? Within the neurological research there are some issues as to how these new insights apply beyond the mother child dyad and how this neurologically based discourse is interpreted with families and communities. In relation to the dominance of longitudinal and experimental studies in the field and the reinforcement of this discourse politically, the question must be asked as to what this means for other methodological approaches, does early childhood intervention become restricted to an approach which is limited to a ‘menu’ of programmes? There are also concerns in relation to the application of programmes across social and cultural contexts as well as the cultural assumptions inherent in cost/benefit analysis. If an intervention is demonstrated to be effective in a different social, cultural and historical context, can we translate these gains to a new situation without substantive reflection prior
to implementation? Scaling up of programmes presents additional challenges for Early Intervention as does the roll out of programmes to fidelity. Indeed, the very notion of programme fidelity in characteristically different community and cultural contexts may well be disputed. Within the public policy context there are concerns as to the selection, interpretation and translation of research and how political influence may result in some discourses or research methodologies becoming dominant while others are sublimated. Shonkoff’s journey of interpretation of early childhood intervention ‘from neurons to neighbourhoods’ is not a straightforward or a politically neutral one. What is emerging from the review of the literature is that this journey of interpretation of early childhood intervention merits further in depth exploration within a locality where the out workings of these discourses can be critically examined.

1.6 Research Questions

From the review of the literature, the following questions have shaped the focus for the present study:

- What approaches and perspectives on Early Childhood Intervention are identifiable from implementation in the community?

- What are the characteristics of these approaches and what kind of evidence are they based on?

- How do the dominant discourses from research and public policy impact on the implementation of Early Childhood Interventions?

- How might the dominant discourses contribute to supporting some approaches and inhibiting others?

- In what ways do these discourses contribute to the reproduction or transformation of social inequality?
1.7 Aims and Objectives

Overall Aim

This thesis aims to increase our understanding of the notion of Early Childhood Intervention as a discourse; how it is generated and reproduced and how it makes possible certain processes and practices and limits others.

With this in mind the thesis has the following core objectives:

- To analyse the existing research on the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention to identify key processes and characteristics.

- To examine the public policy discourse on Early Intervention using Critical Discourse Analysis.

- To identify the Early Childhood Intervention approaches being implemented in the case study context focusing on key processes and characteristics.

- To identify ways of communicating and connecting this knowledge back to practice in the field.

- To add to the theoretical understanding of the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention approaches in communities.
Chapter 2
Developing a Critical Realist framework for the study using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools'

'Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician.' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 86)

2.1 Introduction
The previous chapter traced the emergence, particularly over the last decade, of some of the key discourses in Early Childhood Intervention. From the assessment of these, a number of issues and gaps were identified which are reflected in the research questions, aims and objectives of this study. The purpose of this chapter is to set out and justify the theoretical orientation and framework adopted for this thesis in order to address these objectives. In this chapter therefore I will outline the reasons for the orientation of this particular research within a Critical Realist paradigm using a Bourdieusian theoretical framework for analysis. In order to develop this discussion, I will first revisit the term 'discourse' in order to explain its theoretical use in this study, moving beyond its use as a descriptive or linguistic term to explore how discourse relates to relations of power. I will then orientate the study in relation to some of the key theoretical debates within the field in particular the ways in which Critical Realism bridges the gap between positivist and constructivist research and how this might relate to the exploration of discourse in relation to early childhood. A number of examples of Critical Realist research will then be considered including work on early childhood on evaluation and on discourse which unpack the dualisms of agency/structure, subjective/objective, micro/macro and qualitative/quantitative. Moving from these debates, it is suggested that in particular the work of Bourdieu in straddling these dualisms may offer a possible and practical framework for micro and macro analysis appropriate to a critical realist approach. In the conclusion to this chapter, an outline framework for the study is proposed which uses the 'thinking tools' of habitus, capital and field as identified by Bourdieu as a possible relational frame to explore the ways in which early intervention discourses are being played out in reality at the different social levels.
2.2 The theoretical approach to Discourse proposed in this study

In the previous chapter, discourse has been mainly used as a descriptive term in order to trace the main developments historically in the literature on Early Childhood Intervention over the last decade. In articulating a theoretical approach to discourse from this chapter onward, it is important to critically examine the notion of discourse by drawing on the ideas of Foucault, Bourdieu and others. This chapter will therefore identify where Discourse Analysis sits within the theoretical framework and how it might relate to the overall frame of analysis using Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and capital. The Foucauldian idea of discourse (Foucault, 1976, 1980) differs from other approaches in that the focus is not solely on language but on power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices. Discourse, by Foucault’s definition naturalises the social world in a specific way and thus informs social practices (Kendall & Wickham 1999). The purpose of examining language and practice therefore is to unlock the hidden power relations which are constructed through both language and practice and to identify how social inequalities are reinforced and reproduced.

Power, importantly by this analysis is not simply a property of the state but is exercised through the social body at every level (Foucault 2002). The discourses of the Allen (2011) and Field (2010) reports, while dominant, will not be the only sets of ideas on Early Childhood Intervention. There may be resistance to these discourses and for this reason it is important to explore the different types of power attached to these discourses as these are outworked in practice in neighbourhoods and communities. Discourse can therefore be seen as ‘a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of resistance as well as those of domination’ (Diamond and Quinby 1988, p185). It is not merely replicated but can be challenged as power is not universal but relational, it is produced and is resisted. This is of particular importance when the discussion moves to examining the outworkings of discourse in practice at different levels and why analysis of discourse, for example, does not stop with policy. This is also where the ‘thinking tools’ provided by Bourdieu will come into play as a means of representing the
relational dynamic of how discourses operate at different social levels and how the macro/micro elements operate in practice.

Before this stage, it is important however to examine a broader theoretical canvas and trace some of the key debates within the sociology of education from a theoretical perspective and how this might relate to the exploration of discourse in relation to early childhood. The previous chapter outlined two key areas which have dominated the discourse in early childhood intervention over the last decade: neuroscientific and behavioural research on early brain development and longitudinal, experimental and cost/benefit studies measuring the effectiveness of interventions. These key discourses have been interpreted by public policy and advocacy focused on the social and economic benefits of early intervention as well as being interpreted and translated within the field of practice. Importantly, the way these debates on Early Childhood Intervention have been constructed, the interface of scientific knowledge with educational research, economics with public policy also demonstrate the outworking of an underpinning methodological debate which echoes longstanding broader debates in the sociology of education.

2.3 Key debates within the sociology of education

The differences and inequalities in social access to education is a central problem in the sociology of education. Researchers are concerned with how these differences are generated and reproduced, policy makers and programme developers are concerned with interventions to address inequalities and evaluators are concerned with the impact and effectiveness of interventions in bringing about change. Underpinning this simply stated cycle are complex and contested debates as to the epistemological perspective from which theories are developed, how differences and inequalities are viewed and conceptualised and how this relates to decisions around methodological approach. Often the debates in educational research have been approached from the methodological endpoint and conceptualised as a contest between quantitative and qualitative approaches. This binary descriptor in itself reflects a contrast between what have been constructed as positivist and interpretivist approaches. Critical Realism offers a different perspective, retracing
the debate from the methodological back to its epistemological and ontological origins. Debates on qualitative and quantitative research have in this way gained a new momentum from the influence of critical realism in the social theory of Bhaskar (1989). In this chapter I will outline some of the key ideas in Critical Realism particularly those of relevance to the debates in the sociology of education and consider how these might relate to early childhood intervention.

This interface of science, economics and public policy in Early Childhood intervention relates to wider debates in terms of what constitutes ‘quality’ or ‘what works and why’ in early childhood education and care. This is a contested area between cost effective, future orientated approaches to intervention services and researching early childhood from a broader sociological perspective. The critique of dominant political discourses in relation to early childhood and its relationship to both social and economic discourse is captured by Peter Moss:

> Early Childhood services are seen as necessary conditions both for competing economically in an increasingly globalised and marketised capitalism and for ameliorating its associated social disorders (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p30).

In discussing the construction of what constitutes ‘quality’ in early childhood services, Dahlberg and Moss challenge the dominant tendency towards quantification and measurement and outline the ‘influence of economic, cultural and scientific power which combine to produce dominant discourses which dictate that only certain things can be said or thought, as well as matching technologies of normalization such as measures of quality’ (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p6.)

These debates have earlier origins, for example in the so called ‘paradigm wars’ in sociology and education (Gage 1989, Hammersley, 1992) these were informed by the social movements of the 1970’s during which a range of critical theories including those of class, race and gender challenged a scientific positivism of cause and effect that had ignored the voices of those whose ‘problems’ it was poised to address. Educational research in the years that followed these developments took an interpretive turn, acknowledging that facts and values cannot be separated and that knowledge and understanding is socially constructed. Interpretivists rejected
the assumption of the uniformity of nature and 'linear causal models' and suggested that relationships are more contingent and diverse (Erikson 1986, Gage 1989).

Interpretivist and postmodernist research presented its own set of challenges. Archer, for example (2000) critiques the gap between a postmodernist academia 'where strident voices would dissolve the human being into discursive structures and humankind into a disembodied textualism' with the world outside of academia where 'ordinary people act in undemolished fashion - they confront the world, meaning nature and practice' (Archer, 2000, p. 2). From a different critique, Schwandt (2005) embraces an activist agenda arguing that instead of getting entangled in defensive debates about oppositional paradigms researchers would be better off going about the business of doing quality research pursuing 'activist agendas in social work, education, community and clinical psychology, public health, housing, agriculture and the like.' (Schwandt, 2005)

The latest chapter in the paradigm wars has been the re-emergence of empirical, scientifically based research in education over the last decade. This movement, as reflected in the previous chapter, has emerged as a dominant discourse within early childhood intervention. Indeed, the very concept of 'interventionist' as opposed to 'hermeneutic' approaches assumes a position in the debate. The current pre-eminence of scientifically based research is captured by St Pierre:

Whether we like it or not, the gold standard for educational research has become 'scientifically based research' (SBR) or evidence-based research (EBR) defined in the 2002 US No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Public Law No. 107-110) as research that is replicable, generalizable, empirical and preferably experimental' (St. Pierre, 2006, p 674)

Hammersley (2001, p 550) cautions that 'this instrumental view of the role of educational research may undermine effective practice because it privileges research evidence over evidence from other sources, including that arising from the experience of practitioners.'
St Pierre's critique of Scientifically Based Research (2006) acknowledges importantly however, that a metanarrative of a unified science does not exist. Science, she clarifies, is one way of producing knowledge and is re-described as different epistemologies and theories put into play. This opens up possibilities for dialogue across different epistemological positions. Critical Realism, I will argue in this chapter, is a theoretical approach which might facilitate the consideration of scientific enquiry alongside discourse, theory alongside practice in early childhood intervention.

2.4 Overview of Critical Realism.

The British sociologist Roy Bhaskar outlined the theoretical approach of Critical Realism to place the critical power of rational enquiry as a theoretical alternative to both positivist and postmodern approaches. Bhaskar himself did not initially use the term Critical Realism, this descriptor later emerged as an elision of Transcendental Realism and Critical Naturalism. Bhaskar emphasised the need to retain both the subjective, epistemological or 'transitive' side of knowledge and the objective, ontological or 'intransitive' side (Collier 1994). He developed a theory of science and social science which he thought would sustain the reality of the objects of science but could also incorporate the perspectives from social science that emphasised the socially situated nature of knowledge. Bhaskar viewed all social structures such as the economy, the state, the family, even language itself as depending upon pre-existing social relations: relations between capital and labour, ministers and civil servants, parents and children. He saw this way of approaching knowledge and theory as having emancipatory power:

The relations into which people enter, pre-exist the individuals who enter into them, and whose activity reproduces or transforms them; so they are in themselves structures. And it is to these structures of social relations that realism directs our attention - both as the explanatory key to understanding social events and trends and as the focus of social activity aimed at the self-emancipation of the exploited and oppressed (Bhaskar, 1989, p4).
Nash (2005) following Bhaskar (1998) suggests that there are three core elements to Critical Realism: firstly, the empirical world cannot constitute the totality of the social world; secondly, that the domain of the real is more extensive than the domain of the actual; and thirdly, that the social world is stratified. As such, the social world consists of different mechanisms at different levels and thus agents and structures have real causal powers. In this way, Critical Realism has brought a different perspective to the qualitative/quantitative debate in the social sciences by recognising the potential within the same theoretical perspective to recognise that an empirical dimension exists but this is influenced by social agents and structures. In applying a Critical Realist approach to the sociology of education, Nash (2005), quoting Bhaskar, acknowledges the impossibility of explaining the world from a positivist perspective yet recognises the existence of some elements which can be empirically tested:

the social world is an open system characterised by the complete absence of laws and explanations conforming to the positivist canon but there is no obstacle to the identification of systematic patterns of a kind that will allow the possibility of empirical controls for the purpose of scientific enquiry.
(Bhaskar 1998 pXV)

This positing of an alternative to the positivist/constructivist divide has in itself been contested. The spectrum of broader Critical Realist debates in sociology, economics and philosophy are, however, outside the scope of this chapter which will instead focus on the debates specific to the field of education and of early childhood education in particular.

2.4.1 Critical Realism in Educational Research

Scott (2000) and Wilmott (2002), following Bhaskar, demonstrated how Critical Realist perspectives extended to the discussion of theory and method in educational research. Scott’s (2000) interpretation of Critical Realism is anti-positivist particularly in relation to the use of statistical modelling in educational research. He argues, following Bhaskar, that given that the social world is an open system and that meaning and action are constructed therefore statistical analysis
cannot be interpreted as revealing causal relationships. He uses the association between poverty and educational attainment as an example, stating that the way that poverty is socially constructed is different for different people and groups and that this relationship therefore should not be explained or treated as causal:

The measures which are usually used to determine the relationship between poverty and achievement in school are approximations or proxies to the real variables which are implicated in the causal mechanisms which may or may not be operationalized. (Scott 2000, p44)

Nash (2005) responds to Scott by also employing Bhaskar's theory, though with a different emphasis. Nash argues from the standpoint of 'scientific realism' that the rejection of quantitative modelling by critical realists is unsound. He sees quantification in itself as having application outside the positivist framework and the possibility for combining statistical analysis with 'realist explanatory narratives':

Critical realism and scientific realism are closely related positions, but whereas many critical realists have concluded that statistical modelling must be rejected, scientific realists maintain that quantification is necessary to science and that the conventional epistemological assumptions of applied statistics can be surmounted. Scientific realists, for example, argue that the assumptions of positivism, often implicit in statistical modelling, are not inherent to quantification itself and that statistical techniques may be used to enhance realist explanatory narratives (Nash, 2005 p186)

Nash states the aim of sociological analysis is to consider social structures, individual dispositions to act and established practices. Using the example of poverty and educational attainment he describes the relationship as poverty being 'the state of being poor and as such it may be the cause of some other social state including relative educational attainment' (p.187). From Nash's perspective, the empirical relationships can be considered separately from the social processes; one can still demonstrate statistically what happens while not having complete explanations as to how or why it happens in this way. Using examples from the PISA dataset on poverty and educational attainment, Nash argues the need for
qualitative analysis to unpick quantitative data, seeing statistical models not as explanations but as ‘sources of information in constructing complex explanatory narratives.’ Statistical modelling Nash argues, may provide explanations at the programme level but it leaves ‘the processes and actions of people with certain dispositions as secret as they ever were’ (Nash 2005).

Scott’s (2007) view however that regardless of how sophisticated the subsequent statistical manipulation of data is ‘unless the data in its unanalysed form reflects in some sense the way the social world works then an inadequate account of social processes is likely to result’ (Scott, 2007, p142). It can be argued therefore that statistical data can never reflect the intricacy of the social world or alternatively that we need more sophisticated models/analysis that better reflect the social complexity of the real world.

2.5 Critical Realist Approaches to Evaluation

Some of the challenges and debates within Critical Realism as captured in the debate between Scott and Nash are also relevant to the area of evaluation. Here the complex epistemological and ontological debates are brought into a practical applied focus. Realist evaluation as defined by Pawson and Tilley (2004) is not about asking whether a programme or intervention works but ‘what works, for whom, in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?’ Pawson and Tilley outline an approach to evaluating programme interventions from a Critical Realist perspective. Programme interventions are considered as embedded into social systems that are thought to underpin and account for present problems. The effects of intervention are depicted within this theoretical framework as ‘Changes in patterns of behaviour, events or conditions generated by bringing fresh inputs into the system to disturb or rebalance’ (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p4).

It is through the workings of entire systems of social relationships that any changes in behaviours, events and social conditions are effected. Again, following Bhaskar (1989) from the perspective of Realist Evaluation the social world, the programme itself is seen as an open system:
Programmes cannot be fully isolated or kept constant. Unanticipated events, political change, personnel moves, physical and technological shifts, inter-programme and intra-programme interactions, practitioner learning, media coverage, organisational imperatives, performance management innovations and so on make programmes permeable and plastic. Such externalities always impact on the delivery of a programme and this entails that they are never quite implemented in the same way. (Pawson and Tilley 2004, p5)

From the Realist perspective it is not intervention programmes themselves that work but the processes and mechanisms within them. Pawson and Tilley (2004) emphasise the importance of qualitative methods 'in the elicitation of promising theory among programme architects and workers.' Equally they see qualitative approaches as important in considering the relationship between structure and agency and evaluating participants means of interacting with programmes.

2.6 Critical Realist approaches to Early Childhood

A participative approach to eliciting theory among programme designers and workers as proposed by Pawson and Tilley (2004) has resonance in the field of early childhood studies in relation to the co-construction of knowledge. Co-construction involves creating knowledge in relationship with others, both children and adults, where the indigenous knowledge base of those in the field is posited as an alternative to the notion of 'external expert' coming in to measure. This approach to the co-construction of knowledge has its social and political roots in the radical approach to early education and care originating in contexts such as Reggio Emilia in Italy (Rinaldi, 2005). The understanding of the practitioner or parent as researcher was produced in a very different social and political context to that which informs current policy and practice in Early Childhood Intervention. Future orientated, economically charged discourses contrast sharply with co-constructionist values of solidarity, interdependence, collaboration and democratic practice:
Research leaves or rather demands to come out of the scientific laboratories, thus ceasing to be a privilege of the few in universities and other designated places to become the stance the attitude with which teachers approach the sense and meaning of life. (Rinaldi, 2005, p148)

Current trends in evidence based policy-making have however little synergy within expansive research in early childhood which explores ‘the stance and attitude with which teachers approach the meaning of life’ or which situate reflexive practice as a bridge between preschool, home and community. This is in spite of the fact that a range of studies have shown that relationships between children and parents, children and teachers and teachers and parents are crucial in understanding the processes which contribute to the effectiveness of early childhood programmes, especially in relation to their life beyond the initial research context (Shonkoff 2000, Belsky, Melhuish and Barnes 2006).

The contrast in empirical and postmodern approaches to early childhood intervention lies partly in the empiricist perception of knowledge as an objective mirror of the real world, acquired through reason and unaffected by values and politics. Through this lens notions of ‘best practice,’ non-problematized notions of quality and the revelatory power of science are at odds with ‘community driven ECCD’ and ‘respect for local diversity’ (Dahlberg & Moss 2006).

It can be observed therefore that the division enacted in early childhood, mirrors that in education where the empirical, scientific perspective strives to find universal and objectively ‘true’ best practices, criteria of quality and methods of measurement and the interpretivist perspective embraces the realisation that there are many different understandings of childhood and of positive and purposeful work with children and families.

Alderson (2013) recognises that this division is a challenge for the early childhood research community; a challenge she proposes might be breached by the possibilities of a critical realist approach to early childhood research. Alderson suggests that the difference has its origins in the interdisciplinary debates between
psychology and childhood studies, mirroring the paradigm wars where the latter sees matters such as competence 'not as fixed and measurable facts but as shifting, contingent, social experiences, co-constructed between children and adults' (Alderson 2013 p10).

Alderson cites the importance of Bhaskar's (1998) identification of the 'epistemic fallacy'; the reduction and loss of reality into ideas as central to addressing the empirical/interpretivist divisions in early childhood research. The recognition of the epistemic fallacy is in the separation of being (ontology) from knowing (epistemology), recognising that real existence is separate from thought and imagining or put simply that real children, for example, exist independently of the conceptual framework, analysis and data of the researcher.

The Critical Realist perspective has the capacity therefore to act as critique to both empirical and interpretivist approaches. Here, Alderson draws on the way that the discourse of neuroscience and poverty measures are used for example in the Field (2010) and Allen (2011) reports on early childhood intervention:

Positivists tend to assume that data such as babies brain scans and different measures of poverty can be: 1) objective, self-evident facts separated from values; 2) understood apart from their social context and as separate variables and 3) Independent and pristine (whoever observes, reports or reads about them sees the same fact; 4) Their essential inherent qualities and 5) lasting reality 'out there' in the world remains unchanged when transferred across time and space; 6) positivist social research modelled on natural science can therefore discover general laws, replicable findings; 7) this confidence encourages assumptions that 'evidence based' findings can support self-evident conclusions about causes and effects in social life and provide solutions to public and private problems (Alderson, 2013 P32).

Interpretivist and postmodernist approaches however present their own challenges, not least in the capacity to challenge 'evidence based' policy making and influence dominant discourses in politics and economics. How, for example, Alderson asks,
can we tackle social and educational inequalities in early childhood if everything is constructed and everything is relative?

Interpretivists treat phenomena as if they have few or no essential qualities and no independent lasting reality that could transfer across time and space. If there are no universal values, if the history, politics and economics that invest our lives with meaning are deleted then human values and rights and the solidarity on which they rely are empty claims lost in cultural relativism. (Alderson 2013, p38)

Thus, Alderson argues, both positivism and interpretivism make the ‘epistemic fallacy’ that reduces being to knowing. She puts forward instead a set of key concepts from critical realism such as: the semiotic triangle (Bhaskar 1993, 2008); the open/closed system (Bhaskar 1998, 2008); and four planar social being (Bhaskar 2008), as a way of understanding early childhood.

The semiotic triangle is Bhaskar’s alternative to Saussure’s linguistic conception of the dual relationship between signified i.e. the concept of the child and signifier, i.e. the word ‘child’ or ‘enfant’. To this Bhaskar adds a third angle the ‘referent’ in the case of childhood, the real child or children as distinct from word and concept. Alderson describes this as a reminder that ‘however abstract and variable, they still refer to actual children, to the existence of childhood as a social state and status or to the real personal and political relations between children and adults (p 51).

In relation to closed/open systems, Alderson critiques public policy discourse in early childhood such as Field (2010) which sees parenting, for example as a closed system where terms like ‘positive’, ‘high quality’ are definitive qualities rather than an open series of interactions and relationships:

A healthy pregnancy, positive but authoritative parenting, high quality childcare, a positive approach to learning at home ... a child growing up in a family with these attributes, even if the family is poor has every chance of succeeding in life. (Field 2010)
Interpretivism's more complex, descriptive, inconclusive research which shows how things occur, but less often why they do so, in Alderson's view also has its limitations not least in its capacity to 'inform and influence public policy makers like Field who rely on positivism's seemingly closed certainties' (p57).

2.7 Constructing a Critical Realist framework for analysis using Bourdieu

So where does discourse analysis as described at the outset of this chapter sit in this Critical Realist theoretical landscape? Discourse analysis can be characterised as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. In this sense, Discourse Analysis can be seen as neither a qualitative nor a quantitative method, but a manner of questioning the underlying assumptions behind the method. Discourse Analysis does not provide a tangible answer to problems based on scientific research, but enables the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a project, a statement, a method of research to be accessed. Bourdieu in his description of the function of sociology as 'revealing what is hidden', made the connection between discourse and power relations:

The function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden. In so doing, it can help minimize the symbolic violence within social relations and, in particular, within the relations of communication. (Bourdieu, 1996)

Bourdieu also highlights the danger of separating discourse from structural and empirical realities however, advocating instead for thinking 'in and through' cases in a real world context:

Discourse on scientific practice is quite disastrous when it takes the place of scientific practice ... One cannot think well except in and through theoretically constructed empirical cases (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p 159)

Fortunately, Bourdieu also provides the researcher with a set of 'tools for thinking with': the interlinked concepts of habitus, capital and field. Used together, these provide an approach to exploring the operationalization of a discourse or set of
discourses in a specific setting. They are also particularly appropriate to the sociological study of early childhood as used together they help connect the first environment of home and family to wider discourses of economics and politics. Already within the discourse, we can see that parenting and the home learning environment are emerging as important areas of focus. Bourdieu saw that the acquisition of cultural as opposed to economic capital depended heavily on ‘the total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life’ (1979, p66). This as we can see from an initial exploration of the discourse is a much more nuanced transaction than it at first appears. Learning, in the Bourdieusian sense is much more than the capacity to count or read and relates to the ‘habitus’ and ‘capital’ in the home which includes, but goes beyond the economic capital or resources within a family or in wider society. As these concepts will provide a framework for the research study, it is worth outlining my understanding of them at this point in the study.

2.7.1 Bourdieu’s Concept of Habitus

Bourdieu developed his concept of habitus both from ethnographic work in his own birthplace of Bearn as well as in his studies in Algeria. Bourdieu defines ‘habitus’ as the ways in which individuals, groups or institutions have internalized the social world and which informs their ways of thinking about and acting in the world and thus becoming in this way a ‘structuring structure’. Habitus is structured by past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is also ‘structuring’ in that the habitus shapes present and future practices, that is how we act or what we do or don’t do:

I developed the concept of habitus to incorporate the objective structures of society and the subjective role of agents within it. Habitus is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behavior that people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example whether they are brought up in a middle class environment or in a working class suburb. It is part of how society reproduces itself (Bourdieu, 2000, p19).
For Bourdieu, the primary habitus created in early childhood is the basis for the development of the secondary habitus of the subsequent social structures such as school, workplace, professional or friendship groups which the individual enters into over the lifespan. In this way Bourdieu also incorporates the concept of 'embodiment' as for Bourdieu the habitus is 'embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.56). A simple example in relation to early childhood is if we consider the differences and similarities that might be present at home and in pre-school environment. The minutia of different ways in which young children are raised; what and how they eat, the types of play, the television programmes watched at home, the types of conversations that happen all interact with the social structures of the pre-school. The similarity or dissimilarity, not only of these environments but the dispositions and 'habitus' of the adults and other children there, mean that a child can feel like a 'fish out of water' or a 'fish in water' at pre-school. As an adult, this may be a more conscious process, for example we may go into a social environment and decide that it is 'not for the likes of me'. The child without that sense being explicit, will unconsciously have to attune to the different and unwritten 'rules of the game' which if very dissimilar to home means that considerable effort has to go into understanding these as a precursor to learning in that environment. The habitus however does not act alone however and Bourdieu does not imply that we are pre-programmed robots doomed to act in predictable ways as a result of our upbringing. The 'logic of practice, 'what we do, is a result of an unconscious relationship between a habitus and a field. The way that habitus interacts with field is dependent on access to the different forms of capital in social relations.' Bourdieu (1993; p. 76) summarised this relationship in the following equation:

\[(\text{habitus} \times \text{capital}) + \text{field} = \text{practice}\]

The fact that the concepts are expressed in this concise formula shows that they are interdependent thinking tools that can only be understood with reference to each other. The next interlocked concept which of capital will be explained next.
2.7.2 Bourdieu's concept of Capital

In everyday language, Capital is associated with money, economic resources. Bourdieu's use of the term while it includes this type of capital is much broader and conceptually distinctive. Capital includes economic, cultural and social assets. The idea of economic capital comes from Marx but is extended to also cover all types of economic resources. Cultural capital refers to the assets of what is considered legitimate knowledge and behaviour and social capital refers to the resources gained through relationships and networks with others (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital has three forms: in the embodied form in dispositions of the mind and body; in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalised state for example in the form of qualifications. Social capital is:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (1986, p248)

Social capital provides its members then with the backing of capital that is collectively owned, a 'credential' that they can draw upon. Bourdieu explained social capital in relation to his earlier study of 'gift-exchange' amongst the Kabyle tribesman of Algeria demonstrating the tradition of gifting of goods to particular friends and individuals creating social assets which could be drawn on later (Bourdieu, 1962).

All these forms of capital are made meaningful through symbolic capital. Bourdieu makes the distinction between economic and symbolic capital which includes sub-types such as cultural capital, scientific and literary capital depending on the 'field' in which they are located. For example, in the field of neuroscience, the robust empirical study that builds on the work of others in the professional discipline is a form of capital that will endow its author with status and credentials. Bourdieu's theory is that economic capital is transparent – a means to an end – whereas symbolic capital is often disguised with the claim of being of intrinsic worth. For example, a parent may take a child to cello lessons, not just because she enjoys listening to Elgar, (which is not really the experience of having a beginner string
player in the house) but because she knows that this cultural asset will stand to her
daughter in the quest to get into a high status school or because she will, at her
orchestra practice, mix and meet with others of a similar economic background.
The love of music in and of itself is not the only force at work here. The types of
capital are also relative to the field in which they are related. A neuroscientist may
not be able to mobilise scientific capital in a karaoke bar and a singer may be (or
not!), a fish out of water in an industry sponsored pharmacological conference.

2.7.3 Bourdieu's concept of Field

Bourdieu's first use of the concept of 'field' was in an article entitled 'Champ
intellectual et projet createur' (1966). His analysis of field expanded to look
specifically at education, culture, science as well as to the story of his own life. The
word 'champ' or field does not have a single definition; field has some of the
qualities of a battlefield, a football field, places where 'knowledge of the game' is
important. It can also suggest a field of knowledge or even a scientific force field
(Thomson 2012). In his work on field, Bourdieu also uses the term 'space' in two
different but interconnected senses. The first meaning is literal: a physical space,
such as the example I gave above of the pre-school. The second meaning is
metaphorical, where he speaks of space as also social. The social fields for example
in relation to Early Childhood Intervention could be as outlined as in the previous
chapter: the fields of science, education, health and economics. Agents, people or
institutions can occupy multiple social fields that together constitute the social
space. According to Bourdieu, the 'game' that occurs in social spaces is
competitive, with various agents using different strategies to maintain or improve
their position. This notion of field helps us to understand the complexity of how
discourse operates and can be used to map out the extent and reach of particular
discourses as well as the ways in which for example, discourses which are dominant
in one field may be resisted in another. Each field has its own logic or rules, so the
game and rules of one field are different from the game and rules in other fields.
What is at stake is the accumulation of capital: economic, (money, assets) cultural
(knowledge, taste, practices) social (networks, family, community) and symbolic
capital (things that represent other forms of capital for example academic
credentials, experts in the field). There are also cross-field effects where one field influences the other. This can again be seen in the previous chapter where the field of science has influence on the field of politics or economics. There are important 'homologies' or likenesses between social fields and relationships of exchange between fields which make them interdependent, for example, the schooling people get in the education field impacts on their positioning in the economic field. The different fields are therefore in a mutual process of influence and ongoing co-construction. Bourdieu saw the overall field as the field of power. It is important in relation to discourse that this is not the idea of a monolithic state. Power, importantly is not simply a property of the state but is exercised through the social body at every level (Foucault 2002). The fields that make up the field of power are not all equal however and Bourdieu maintained for example that all subfields of the cultural field were dominated by the economic field (Bourdieu 1994). Also, he noted that many strategies function as 'double plays' which operate in several fields at once. In his later work in particular Bourdieu emphasised the centrality of thinking in terms of fields in relation to sociological analysis.

The notion of field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual, even though one cannot construct a field if not through individuals...it is the field that is primary and must be the focus of the research operations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p107).

In order to operationalise Bourdieu's thinking tools as a framework to analyse practice, the agents, individuals and institutions must first be located in their current social fields, the structure of relations that differentiate and connect the agents, and the 'game' that is taking place among them. The game in the field comprises the struggle over the control of the different forms of capital that are valued and legitimised in the field. To understand practice, we must relate the regularities of social field to the practical logic of actors, where their 'feel for the game' is a feel for these regularities. The source of this practical logic, the logic of practice, is the habitus (Maton, 2012). In this way the conceptual framework developed by Bourdieu can be used to analyse the interaction of agency and structure in terms of habitus, capital and field.
2.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to outline the theoretical orientation and framework in which to understand the discourses set out in the previous chapter and to provide a basis for this study. At the beginning of the chapter the term ‘discourse’ was revisited in order to explain its theoretical use in this study, moving beyond its use as a descriptive or linguistic term to explore how discourse relates to relations of power. The importance of applying discourse analysis in the Foucauldian sense to both language and practice was emphasised in order to unlock the hidden power relations which are constructed through both language and practice. The discussion then moved to a consideration of the key theoretical debates within the field which have often been viewed as a contest between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Critical Realism is suggested as bridge between positivist and constructivist research and a number of examples of Critical Realist research were then considered including work on early childhood on evaluation and on discourse. Scott (2007) and Nash (2005) with differing interpretations of Bhaskar demonstrate how Critical Realist perspectives extend to the discussion of theory and method in educational research. Nash argues the need for qualitative analysis to unpick quantitative data, seeing statistical techniques as useful in enhancing ‘realist explanatory narratives’. Scott’s (2007) view is that the relationship between data and process is more complex unless the data in its unanalysed form reflects in some sense the way the social world works. In Realist Evaluation, Pawson and Tilley (2007) view the social world, the programme itself as an open system. Their view from a Realist perspective is it is not intervention programmes themselves that work but the processes and mechanisms within them. This was contextualised to early childhood by Alderson (2013) who proposes a Critical Realist alternative to the ‘epistemic fallacy’ made by both positivism and interpretivism, separating ‘being’ from ‘knowing’ in research with children.

In the concluding sections of this chapter, it is suggested that in particular the work of Bourdieu offers a possible framework for micro and macro analysis in this study appropriate to a Critical Realist approach. By employing the framework and thinking tools outlined by Bourdieu, the Critical Realist researcher can integrate
discourse with structural and empirical realities. This can be operationalized by thinking 'in and through' cases in a real world context. In real terms this means leaving the library or office and going into the field. Bourdieu described this process in his social science classes to students in Paris.

The data available are attached to individuals or institutions. Thus to grasp the subfield of economic power in France, and the social and economic conditions of its reproduction, you have no choice but to interview the top two hundred French CEO's...It is at the cost of such a work of construction which is not done in one stroke but by trial and error that one progressively constructs social spaces. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p232)

The Critical Realist orientation and Bourdieusian framework proposed for the study is the one best suited for the exploration of the outworkings of the key discourses in Early Childhood Intervention. A key question for the study was to better understand how these discourses operate not just in research and policy but in practice. The thinking tools of habitus, capital and field can be employed to understand the different but interlinked discourses which take place at the different social levels and allow for a more nuanced analysis than a simple association such as that of the dominant discourses with the power of the state. Having established a clear theoretical orientation and framework from which to explore the outworkings of Early Childhood Intervention discourses in practice, the next step was to develop a methodology from which to approach the construction of the field as well as methods to capture the discourse of practice. An exploration of the methods that will be used to do this provides the focus for the next chapter.
Discourse on scientific practice is quite disastrous when it takes the place of scientific practice ... One cannot think well except in and through theoretically constructed empirical cases (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p 159).

3.1 Introduction

At the close of the last chapter which outlined the theoretical framework and orientation of the study, the task of 'constructing the field' with reference to Bourdieu's thinking tools was identified as an exciting but rather daunting next step in the study. One of the challenges of embracing a Bourdieusian approach is that there is no explicit methodological guidance offered. Bourdieu himself took an open-ended approach to conducting research, guided by his philosophical orientation and using the thinking tools of 'habitus', 'capital' and 'field' that he had devised, but his work was not method prescriptive. Bourdieu's approach, as described by Wacquant, was of 'methodological polytheism', using whatever data production technique was best suited to the question at hand in his own research (Wacquant, 1998). Equally, Critical Realism has been described as 'a philosophy in search of a method' (Yeung 1997, p51). Moving then from the broader theoretical framework and orientation, the challenge is to find an appropriate methodology and methods to identify and further develop the emerging lines of enquiry.

While not specific about methodology or methods, Bourdieu does provide however a very explicit account of what it means to analyse a field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 104–107). The approach to field analysis is outlined in terms of three distinct stages. These stages direct the researcher to: 1. Analyse the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power; 2. Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is the site; and 3. Analyse the habitus of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type
of social and economic condition. The challenge this presents from a research perspective is primarily in identifying a context from which to ‘map the field’ of Early Childhood Intervention which is feasible as a single researcher while allowing in-depth analysis and, secondly, to identify an appropriate methodological approach and set of methods which will facilitate the exploration of the interaction of agency and structure in different fields.

In this chapter, I first will outline the overall methodological framework used for construction and analysis of the field drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory. The discussion will then move to reasons for the selection of a single complex case study of a city, “Ballymore”\(^2\) in Northern Ireland as the central focus of the enquiry. The implementation of Early Intervention in this context is where the field will be constructed from, considering this in relation to the broader field of power, mapping the structure of relations and the analysis of the habitus of agents. The different levels of enquiry at city, neighbourhood and programme levels within the case study will be outlined and the rationale for different programme contexts explored. From here, the discussion will move to the choice of methods selected for the study, the use of interviews and participant observation being two of the principal methods. The chapter will conclude with a reflexive consideration of my own role and positioning as researcher within this field.

### 3.2 Using Bourdieu’s ‘Thinking Tools’ and Critical Discourse Analysis

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical approach to discourse proposed in this study and the importance of discourse accounting for both language and practice. In this chapter I will outline more specifically the methodological approach to discourse in the study and how this relates to the ‘thinking tools’ of the Bourdieusian framework. Critical Discourse Analysis, of which Norman Fairclough (1995, 1999) was the most prominent proponent, was developed in response to the lack of a critical dimension in linguistic discourse analysis which made little reference to social hierarchy and power. The approach draws on critical social

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\(^2\) Ballymore is the name given to the city in Northern Ireland which forms the basis of the case study.
theory from a wide range of thinkers including Marx, Gramsci, Foucault and Bourdieu. Although Critical Discourse Analysis is sometimes mistaken to represent a 'method' of discourse analysis it is generally agreed upon that any explicit method in social science can be used in Critical Discourse Analysis, as long as it is able to adequately and relevantly produce insights into the way discourse reproduces or resists social and political inequality, power abuse or domination. Critical Discourse Analysis explicitly attempts to break down the reinforcing cycle of power through recognising the power dynamics within discourse and examining how this is mediated in the text or practice. Following from the work of Foucault in particular, (Foucault, 1976, 1980) the methodology is explicitly interested in relations of power and dominance within societies and cultures, how these are embedded in and reproduced through both language and practice. A Critical Discourse Analysis could involve examination of key Early Intervention policy documents as data, considering the broader socio-political culture in which they were created as well as the impact on practice. Beyond language, this sort of analysis attempts to understand how individuals view the world, looking at personal and institutional relationships, ideology, and politics.

A way into the discourse of Early Intervention, for example, would be to examine the key policy documents in Early Childhood Intervention such as the Field (2010) and Allen (2011) Reports and analyse these as data in relation to the wider political and social context. In this way the discourse of Early Intervention policy documents, for example addressing the intergenerational ‘cycle of dysfunction’ (Allen, 2011 p. ix, p.5, p.24, p.73), ‘low educational achievement’ (p. ix), ‘criminality’ (p. ix) through implementing ‘well-tested programmes’ (p. ix) which are ‘low in cost, high in results’ (p ix) can be critically examined. Bourdieu’s exploration of language as ‘symbolic power’ (1991) is central to his theory of practice and provides additional insight into discourse analysis. Bourdieu provides the would be researcher not only the ‘tools for thinking’ through his conceptual terms of field, habitus and capital, but also the basis for the reflexive method which is also central to his project. Language, he cautions, cannot be read at face value and in one interview article he warns the researcher to ‘beware of words’ (1989, p54). In an
article with Loïc Wacquant, published in *Le Monde* in 2000, and discussed by Grenfell in his paper of 2006, Bourdieu invites us to reveal the ‘misrecognitions’ which are apparent in commonly accepted terms, such as ‘governance’, ‘employability’, ‘multiculturalism’, ‘underclass’, ‘globalisation’ and ‘new economies’. He argued that an entire philosophy, often of neo-liberal economics is imported ‘Trojan Horse’ style often from the US to the UK, in the media and in policy (Bourdieu 2000, Grenfell 2006) when such language is used. The use of these terms, he argues, defines certain actions and behaviours and thus establishes the logics of practice that generated them in individuals. From this perspective, the language of Early Childhood Intervention is not politically neutral and must be critically examined in order that imported terms from other contexts and fields such as ‘cost benefit analysis’ from economics, ‘critical’ and ‘sensitive’ periods from neuroscience or ‘dosage’, ‘fidelity’ or the term ‘intervention’ itself from medical or scientific research trials are understood in relation to different logics of practice in which they were generated and those in which they are now used.

In Fairclough’s work with Chouliaraki (1999) discourse is combined with Bourdieu’s concept of field. The idea of position in the field, position with regard to capital and the ensuing struggle for power is related to the discursive aspect of the field. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) criticise Bourdieu for underestimating the role of discourse in the struggle within and between fields and offer Critical Discourse Analysis as a supplement to Bourdieu’s theory. They also suggest, importantly, that using a Bourdieusian conceptual framework can anchor discourse in the ‘logic of practice’ by combining discursive and non-discursive elements. This provides a method of analysis for example where there are different and possibly competing discourses within or between fields, as may be in the case of Early Childhood Intervention. In this way Critical Discourse analysis is a useful compliment to the theoretical framework and thinking tools of Bourdieu.
3.3 Grounded Theory

Critical Discourse Analysis offered a strong methodological approach to Stage 1 and Stage 2 of Bourdieu’s framework, analysing the different fields of power and mapping the objective structure of relations in relation to the policy discourse within the data. It is also vital to think critically about the interaction of agency and structure, Stage 3 of Bourdieu’s framework which focuses on the habitus of agents; and the dispositions they have acquired by internalising social and economic conditions. It should be noted of course, that Bourdieu’s framework does not represent discrete stages of analysis, as this takes place at all levels simultaneously. However, for the clarity of explanation here I will refer to these as stages in a process. Stage 3 involves the analysis of the habitus of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic condition. Amongst a range of possible approaches, using Grounded Theory as a methodology offered the possibility of systematically developing emergent insights and theories from data through constant comparative analysis as well as engaging participants from the field in theory building. It is possible this would be viewed by Bourdieusian scholars or staunch advocates of Grounded Theory as harnessing heterogeneous approaches in their attitude to the research object. Researchers such as Alvesson and Sköldberg, (2000) however, have already suggested that the distance between Grounded Theory’s focus on individual agency and Bourdieu’s construction of a social object and its empirical background is not as great as might first appear.

While Bourdieu’s constructionism and Grounded Theory seem removed from each other, even incompatible, a distanced view of both approaches allows their research potentials to come to the fore when both methods are used parallel to each other and related to concrete research aims. The approach proposed by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) and employed in this study is that Bourdieu’s theory becomes the ‘formal theory’ representing the deeper structure, the scaffold, if you like, and then that theory building using a Grounded approach leans upon this scaffold:
Considering Bourdieu’s ‘social object’ to be Grounded Theory’s ‘formal’ theory which reaches beyond the mere empirical basis of an individual study. In this case, formal theory would represent the ‘deeper structure’, while substantive theory would represent the ‘superficial structure’ on which it leans (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 34).

Exploring a Constructivist or Informed approach to Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006, Thornberg 2012) offered the potential for an iterative process between theory and data. This contrasts with traditional approaches to Grounded Theory where theoretical construction was discouraged and the literature review delayed until after the data was analysed. As my theoretical orientation for the study was already well developed and as I had been a practitioner in the field for over a decade with an ear for the competing discourses within the field, the option for beginning with the data with the clear slate of naïve empiricism was in any case not available to me. Grounded Theory in its more recent interpretations has moved towards an accommodation of researchers pre-existing knowledge, theories, experiences and hypotheses as necessary ‘points of departure’ (Charmaz 2006, p188).

The ‘second generation’ of Grounded Theorists over the last decade have significantly reshaped the methodology moving from pure ‘inductive’ reasoning incorporating ‘abductive’ reasoning, working between data and theory, as ‘a way of capturing the dialectical shuttling between the domain of observation and the domain of ideas’ (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003 p149). This can be compared with Bourdieu’s (1992) process of constructing the field, the ‘hermeneutic circle’ shuttling to and from the data. In contrast with classic Grounded Theory, Constructivist Grounded Theory assumes that neither data nor theories are ‘discovered’ but are constructed by the researcher as a result of his or her interactions with the field and its participants. Charmaz for example (2009) describes, not only how knowledge rests on social constructions, but that the role of both researcher and participants must be acknowledged in theory construction:
We construct research processes and products, but these constructions occur under pre-existing structural conditions, arise in emergent situations and are influenced by the researcher’s perspectives, privileges, positions, interactions and geographical locations (Charmaz 2009 p. 130).

This acknowledgement of the role of the researcher’s perspective was important in developing an approach which acknowledged my prior experience in the field and how that influenced my approach as well as the participant’s view of me as researcher. Thornberg (2012), building from Charmaz (2009), developed the definition ‘Informed Grounded Theory’ which makes use of pre-existing theories and research findings not to force deductions from the data but as a set of ‘sensitising principles’. New approaches to using Grounded Theory such as those used by Charmaz (2006, 2009) and Thornberg (2012) therefore suggested the inclusion of Grounded Theory as a methodology within a Bourdiesian Critical Realist framework where Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ of habitus, capital and field were used as ‘sensitising principles’ in developing the analysis. This approach of combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory within a Bourdiesian Critical Realist framework was adopted as an overall methodological approach to the research.

3.4 Identifying the Case Study
Looking back to this chapter's opening quotation from Bourdieu (1992) which emphasises the importance of developing theoretically constructed empirical cases to 'think through', the next stage was to identify and frame a particular context for the study. The case study would ideally reflect a cross section of the 'open system' as described in previous chapters with the possibility of 'identification of systematic patterns of a kind that will allow the possibility of empirical controls for the purpose of scientific enquiry' (Bhaskar 1998 pXV). Possibilities for this were looking at Early Childhood Intervention within a particular location or setting. Alternatively, the open system could also be the study of a particular programme, remembering Pawson and Tilley's (1997) observation that the programme itself is an 'open system'.
A case study is considered to be ‘a study of the particular’ (Stake 1994) it is not therefore a methodological choice but is the choice of the object to be studied. The metaphor of a funnel is often used to describe a case study as illustrated by Bogdan and Biklen (1992: p. 62):

The start of the study is at the wide end, researchers scout for possible places and people they think that might be the subject or source of data, find the location they think they want to study and then cast a wide net trying to judge the feasibility of the site or data source for their purposes.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a case study can be explanatory; offering realist narrative to explain an empirically observed phenomenon, such as an intervention programme, or it can be exploratory attempting to identify the underlying processes of how agents and structures interact with programmes or interventions in a real world context (Nash 2005, Scott 2007). As established in the discussion above in relation to the orientation of the study, the choice of case in relation to Early Childhood Intervention was about determining the location and context to begin a field analysis using Bourdieu’s framework. Identifying the boundaries of the case study is therefore a challenge because once we see a case as a system, for example a system implementing Early Childhood Intervention, it is necessarily connected with other systems.

3.4.1 Possible approaches to Case Study analysis

In defining a focus and boundaries for case study analysis, I considered three possible approaches: a comparative locality based approach, a programme based approach and a single complex case study looking at implementation within an open system. Within a comparative locality based approach, I explored the possibility of up to three potential case study areas or localities, two in different areas of Northern Ireland and/or one in the Republic of Ireland or other context. The advantage of the first approach was that it could allow the comparison of the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention in different localities, jurisdictions and within different policy contexts. Revisiting the research questions, it was clear
that comparison was not the central concern of the study which was to look at the overarching key discourses in intervention and how these influenced both policy and practice.

Alternatively, and within the second option of a programme based approach, I considered developing case studies organised around the implementation of particular Early Childhood Intervention programmes including indigenously developed models and programmes adapted from other contexts. Again, with regard to the research questions, this approach was potentially over-focused on programmes and the broader context and processes of implementation could not be examined in detail. Within a programme based approach, the study might also become a re-examination of 'what works' in Early Intervention, the subject of numerous existing studies rather than an examination of discourse and process, the fields of influence within a particular context. The case study was exploratory rather than comparative or evaluative, so in that sense, capturing the complexities in a particular context was more likely to facilitate in depth contextual analysis.

The third approach considered was to develop a single complex case study within an area larger than a locality and where a range of programmes were being implemented. The advantage of this approach is that potentially it could facilitate the study of implementation of Early Intervention as an 'open system' where all aspects from policy and commissioning to the implementation of a range of programmes in different localities could be observed. The case study area would be the focal point for the field analysis contextualised by the broader political and social environment. This approach would facilitate the complexity of exploring both structural and agency aspects while also being manageable within the scope of the research project and was therefore the approach selected for the research.

The Northern Ireland context was a particularly interesting context to examine in relation to the out-workings of key discourses in Early Childhood Intervention from a policy and practice perspective. For a variety of historical, political and social reasons which will be explored in the study, Early Childhood Intervention policy in Northern Ireland, while significantly influenced by policy in Westminster, also has aspects that are distinctive to the region which reflect the particular social and
political context. The ‘field of power’ in which the different social fields associated with Early Childhood Intervention are located has particular features, not least of which is that Northern Ireland is a region emerging from conflict. This context also presented significant challenges, not least those of capturing the ‘open system’ during a period of significant change and flux. In addition to the significant challenges, there were also important advantages in the context. Early Childhood Intervention was emerging as a significant policy driver at the time of the initiation of the fieldwork in 2014. Aspects of the Northern Ireland context that were distinctive included a highly developed and vocal community and voluntary sector with a significant voice at local and neighbourhood level. In order to examine how broader political and policy influences interacted at neighbourhood and local level it was important to identify a local context the case study would be drawn from.

3.4.2 Ballymore: locating the case study

A particular city in Northern Ireland, Ballymore³, was of potential interest as a location for the study as it was one of a number of places in Northern Ireland formulating an articulated focus at local level on Early Intervention. Other contexts included neighbourhood clusters and localities and a number of these had already attracted research interest from an evaluation perspective. Ballymore had interesting potential as an exploratory study in that the stated focus on Early Intervention was just beginning to emerge from the city’s Regeneration Plan in 2013. The context was not without its challenges of course. The fact that the discourse and structures were emerging made this a particularly interesting time to observe this process. However, this also meant that there was a fluidity in the system and uncertainty as to future directions of travel. The boundary of the case study, a city of just over 100,000 inhabitants, meant that this was also an ambitious context for a single researcher to undertake. Having stated that the case study, exploratory and qualitative in its orientation from the outset meant that a

³ Ballymore is the city which is the subject of the case study and in which the four neighbourhoods, North River, South River, West River and East River are located. Unless stated otherwise, much of the information drawn on with regard to Ballymore including demographic and economic trends and statistics has been derived from a number of publications which because of their focus on Ballymore have not been explicitly cited to ensure confidentiality. Certain details relating to the neighbourhoods and the city have either been removed or altered, or false ones added to maintain anonymity. Such details are not, however, significant to the overall argument set out in the study.
comprehensive evaluative approach covering all neighbourhoods and programmes was never a goal of the study. Another aspect which was both a strength and a challenge was that I was an insider in the context of having lived and worked in the city. Again, I returned to the Bourdieusian framework and decided that if I was reflexive from the outset about my own position in the field this would be understood and incorporated in the study. I will elaborate on this further in the chapter in the discussion self-reflexivity.

3.5 Outline of the Single Complex Case Study - Ballymore as an Early Intervention City

The next chapter will provide an in depth consideration of the Case Study of Ballymore as an Early Intervention City. For the purposes of this chapter therefore, I will provide an initial outline of the approach for the case study in relation to the theoretical framework and methodology before going on to discuss the specific methods used in developing the case study. The boundary of the single complex case study was of a small city, Ballymore in Northern Ireland with a population of 107,877 (2011 Census). The broader social and political context in Northern Ireland reflects an emerging focus on Early Intervention within the broader discourse. More specifically, a key aspect of the Regeneration Plan for the city of Ballymore is a catalyst programme entitled ‘Early Intervention City’. The city of Ballymore while embarking on a process of regeneration has significant challenges. These reflect the broader context of political and social change in a climate of economic recession. Ballymore has for example, the highest levels of child poverty at Local Authority level in Northern Ireland. The population of children under three is 6,472 of whom 3,644 (56%) attend one of the four Sure Start programmes in the city. These are based in neighbourhoods which for the purposes of the study are called, ‘North River’, ‘South River’, ‘East River’ and ‘West River’.

Developing the case study involved systematically gathering data at several levels in order to build up a picture of the field and the ways that individuals, groups and institutions interact within this systems and structures. The initial stage of data gathering involved developing an analysis of the public policy context using Critical
Discourse Analysis, stage 1 of Bourdieu’s framework, analysing the field in relation to the field of power.

3.5.1 Outline of the approach to the Fieldwork in Ballymore.
Alongside the Critical Discourse analysis of the policy at regional level, fieldwork commenced in Ballymore at the local partnership, neighbourhood and programme levels. Key informants were those who manage interventions - neighbourhood, programme and Sure Start managers, those who deliver interventions, family support workers and health visitors and those who participate in intervention programmes, parents, carers and children. Regional managers in health and social care were also interviewed to establish the connection from policy to practice locally. By interviewing multiple informants, the study incorporated different layers of meaning and experience in the interactions between agency and structure at different levels. The schedule is illustrated in the table, Figure 1 below.

The first phase of data collection, October - December 2013, comprised eight semi-structured interviews with Neighbourhood and Sure Start managers in four neighbourhoods as well as two interviews with manager/facilitator of a city wide home visiting programme ‘Starting Strong’ (n=10). The next phase of data collection, January - November 2014 involved observational studies of the following early intervention programmes (n=4) over a seven-week period, a description of which is provided later in the chapter: Wonder Babies, (n=23) and Nurturing in North River, (n=7) Family Eat and Enjoy in South River, (n=7) and the city wide Starting Strong Home Visiting programme (n=8). I also interviewed group facilitators (n=6) and held focus groups for parents at the close of each programme. In the same period January-November 2014, I also completed a third phase of data collection interviewing Early Intervention Partnership members (n=4) and Commissioners/Service Planners (n=2) in order to capture the picture at sub-regional level. Finally, I interviewed (n=2) young parents living in Sure Start areas who had not participated in Sure Start and had set up an online support group for young parents. These interacting sets of data of the practice of early intervention
provided an exploratory picture of the interaction of agency and structure in the field. A summary of the data collection is provided on the table Figure 1 overleaf.
3.5.2 Table summary of the data collection methods

Figure 1 Outline and summary of data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Programme Name (if relevant)</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Date data collection took place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi Structured Interviews</td>
<td>North River</td>
<td>Sure Start Managers</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 managers</td>
<td>October-December 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South River</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East River</td>
<td>Programme Managers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West River</td>
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<td>North River</td>
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<td>Wonder Babies</td>
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<td>January-November 2014</td>
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<td>South River</td>
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<td>Nurturing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>City Wide</td>
<td>Family Visitors, Parents and Children</td>
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<td>2 facilitators</td>
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<td>Starting Strong</td>
<td>7 parents 2 facilitators</td>
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<td>Early Intervention Partnership</td>
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I began the fieldwork at Neighbourhood Manager Level with SureStart managers and Neighbourhood Renewal Managers implementing Early Child Intervention programmes. This involved in depth semi-structured interviews as well as sourcing documentary information on programmes in the area. The rationale for commencing at this level was threefold, from practical and methodological perspectives. From a practical perspective, accessing data from participants at this level of local community management allowed me to complete an initial mapping of programmes and develop a broad overview of Early Intervention in a city-wide context. It also allowed me to negotiate access to participants at the micro level, the children, parents and families who were accessing programmes. From a methodological perspective, even though the starting point for interview data collection could potentially have been at commissioning level, from a Grounded Theory perspective I did not want this policy discourse to overly shape the data from an early stage in the absence of data from other levels.

As stated, the first level of data collection involved eight semi structured interviews (n=8) with SureStart and Neighbourhood Renewal Managers in four neighbourhoods of Ballymore: North River, South River, East River and West River. I also interviewed two managers (n=2) of an Early Intervention Home Visiting programme that operated on a city wide basis. These took place from October to December 2013. These interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed in full. I conducted a follow up meeting with each manager in order to complete an initial mapping of Early Childhood Intervention programmes. The template for this mapping is included in Appendix 1. This was completed by the managers using the template provided in order to capture broad programme details including programme title and focus, numbers targeted, delivery method, outcomes and evaluation. Most used their business plans to complete this. This enabled me to generate an overview and to plan the next stage of the data collection where I would identify particular areas and programmes in order to carry out the observational studies. Two initial observations were made at the outset from this mapping of programmes. Firstly, and in relation to number and scale, there were two hundred and fifty-three programmes mapped across the city. The
second observation from the mapping was that only a small percentage (less than 3.5%, or nine out of 253) were from the nineteen named RCT tested programmes listed in the Allen Report. This indicated at an early stage that there were multiple programmes and that the picture emerging in the area might have been at variance from the dominant discourse. It provided an early indication that the dominant policy discourse around evidence was not simply flowing through on the ground. From these initial interviews and mapping, I decided to focus the observational studies on three programmes in the areas of North River and South River; ‘Wonder Babies’, ‘Nurturing’ and ‘Family Eat and Enjoy’ as well as one city wide home visiting programme, ‘Starting Strong’⁴, four programmes in all. As the following chapter will discuss the case study in more detail, this section will focus on the rationale for and outline of the areas and programmes studied.

3.5.3 The Neighbourhood of North River

North River is a neighbourhood comprising three housing estates built to house the population overspill from Ballymore from the 1960’s, (the Oldlands estate) through to the 1980s, (the Liberties upper and lower). North River was of interest as it is the Sure Start area ⁵ that included the widest contrast in relation to deprivation. Within the five wards targeted in North River are one of the most deprived and one of the least deprived in Northern Ireland. This was due to the least deprived ward including pockets of severe deprivation at Super Output Area level.⁶ North River also had a three-year history of partnership working in relation to Early Intervention at neighbourhood level, a well-established Sure Start programme and a Family Support Hub⁷ which had been established for two years. I had the opportunity to

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⁴ Some Programme names which were location specific ie Wonder Babies, Starting Strong and Family Eat and Enjoy have been changed to protect participant confidentiality

⁵ Sure Start is a government programme which provides a range of support services for parents and children under the age of four, who live in disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland.

⁶ Super output areas (SOA) were designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics and are built up from groups of output areas (OA).

⁷ A Family Support Hub is a multi-agency network of statutory, voluntary and community organisations that either provide early intervention services or work with families who need early intervention services. The network accepts referrals of families who need early intervention family
observe two group based parenting programmes (n=2) within this neighbourhood, the first was an informal drop in programme for parents and babies 0-six months old, for the purposes of the research called ‘Wonder Babies’. The second was a manualised programme that had been subject to RCT testing, but which was not listed in the Allen Report (2011) the ‘Nurturing Programme’. In addition to observing the programmes over seven weeks, I interviewed parents (n= 14) in both programmes, the first informally and individually and the second in a focus group. This allocation of individual interviews and focus groups was made in order to attune the research process to parent’s availability and the programme structure. Wonder Babies was a flexible, drop in, unstructured programme which leant itself well to informal interviews and observation. Nurturing was structured and manualised where parents had childcare only for the duration of the programme therefore observation throughout with a focus group in the closing session was the strategy used. I also interviewed health visitors and family facilitators of these programmes (n=4).

3.5.4 The Neighbourhood of South River

The other neighbourhood focused on for the observational studies was South River. The old city of Ballymore comprises the neighbourhoods of Marshlands, Templetown and Valleyview. These together with the HighHill estate comprise the neighbourhood of South River. South River is a particularly disadvantaged neighbourhood, of seven wards in the area, four are among the most deprived in Northern Ireland. South River has experienced a high impact of conflict during the Northern Ireland troubles and includes an interface wall and enclave area. Politically, inter community tension has to some extent in recent years has been

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support and uses their knowledge of local service providers to signpost families with specific needs to appropriate services.

8 The Family Links Nurturing Programme is a parent support programme focusing on healthy relationships in families and with aspects of parenting confidence and self-efficacy.
9 Interfaces are a series of border barriers in Northern Ireland that separate Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist neighbourhoods.
superseded by intra community tension chiefly among dissident Republicans and supporters of Sinn Fein. South River also has a long history of community activism. The Sure Start project is managed by a community partnership and has a strong emphasis on a community and neighbourhood outreach as well as centre based approaches. The chosen focus in this Sure Start on communicating neuroscientific information in accessible ways in the community made it a particularly interesting context for the observational studies. In South River I observed a family nutrition programme which for the purposes of the research I will call, ‘Family Eat and Enjoy’ which had been adapted from a more widely used ‘Cook It’ programme. In addition to the observation over seven weeks, I interviewed parents in a focus group (n=7) at the close of the programme. Again the combination of observation and closing focus group was attuned to the programme structure and availability of childcare provision for parents. I also interviewed family facilitators of this programme (n=2).

3.5.5 The ‘Starting Strong’ home visiting programme.
Additionally, I felt it was important to observe an Early Intervention programme outside of group based Sure Start environment therefore I observed the city wide home visiting programme, which for the purpose of the study is called ‘Starting Strong’. In relation to this programme I observed eight home visits, (n=8) interviewed four family visitors and one manager (n=5). Finally, I interviewed young parents (n=3) who were living in Sure Start areas but did not participated in Sure Start and who had set up an online support group for young parents. This was important in gaining a perspective, albeit a limited one, of young parents who do not engage with Sure Start. This field work took place between January and

10 Irish Republicans who do not support the current peace agreements in Northern Ireland.

11 Sinn Féin is an Irish Republican party, currently the second-largest party behind the Democratic Unionist Party in the Northern Ireland Assembly where it has four ministerial posts in the power sharing executive.

12 The names of the individual programmes which are unique to this community have been changed to protect confidentiality with the exception of the widely used ‘Nurturing’ programme.
November 2014. The observational studies were documented with detailed written notes which were then transcribed and analysed. The same method was used for the home visiting programme. Interviews and focus groups were recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed. The questions for the interviews and focus groups are included in Appendix 2. While written notes do not have the same accuracy as voice or video recorded material, my view was that recording was potentially intrusive particularly in the home environment. A central concern in relation to the ethics of the research which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter was that as far as possible it was important to be aware of anything in my actions that might discourage a parent or child from taking part in a programme was to be avoided, for example video recording a home visit or group session.

3.6 Background the Programmes Selected for the Observational Studies

While the focus of this case study is exploratory rather than evaluative, it is important at this point to provide a brief contextual summary of the Neighbourhood based Early Intervention programmes which were the focus of the observational studies: The ‘Nurturing Programme’, ‘Starting Strong’, ‘Family Eat and Enjoy’ and ‘Wonder Babies’. These included a popular externally developed group based structured programme which had been tested through RCT (Nurturing), a locally adapted home visiting programme undergoing RCT testing (Starting Strong), an internally evaluated and adapted nutrition programme (Family Eat and Enjoy) and an informal unstructured drop in for parents and very young children (Wonder Babies). The range of these practice contexts provided an interesting cross section of the ‘open system’ of Early Childhood Intervention in practice, reflective of the real world setting. This in contrast to programme based studies, trials and evaluation which often see the programme outside of the context of multiple other initiatives which are happening in the community. This was very apparent from programme participants where over 70% of these with children under the age of two had participated in three or more programmes. This ‘real world’ multiple programme participation was an important feature of the social ecological context of the programmes studied for reasons explored later in the study.
3.6.1 Nurturing Programme

The Nurturing Programme is a ten-week programme originally developed by the UK based voluntary organisation Family Links. This structured programme involves 2 hour sessions each week for groups of 6-10 parents and aims to provide experiential knowledge and insight through the use of guided discussion, role play and home work. The four 'building blocks' of the programme are: Development of self-awareness and self-esteem, Appropriate expectations, Positive discipline and Empathy. The programme is founded on the belief that empathetic insight into emotional determinants of behaviour is important for both positive relationships and behaviour management. It aims to provide parents with insights into the origins of self-esteem and positive relationships by drawing on their own experiences as children. Parents are given a copy of the programme manual 'The Parenting Puzzle', and each programme is run by two facilitators who receive face-to-face supervision three times during the course of the programme from an experienced programme facilitator.

There is one documented Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) of the Nurturing programme involving 286 families in a deprived area of South Wales and documented by Simkiss et al (2012). This RCT concluded that primary and secondary outcomes showed no significant differences at 3 or 9 months between intervention and control group. The results of the trial therefore failed to show that the programme improved parenting or wellbeing more than could be expected by chance. (Simkiss et al, 2012). The summary of findings emphasises the challenges of implementing RCT's in real world settings particularly in community settings where existing parenting support is already available which could therefore 'contaminate' (i.e. positively bias) control group outcomes. Again the context of multiple programming in real world settings suggests that limitations of determining evidence based on empirical testing must be considered. In contrast with the lack of evidence found in a trial context, the Nurturing programme was very popular and well received throughout the case study area, not only in South River where the programme was observed. While programme managers and facilitators were
aware that the Nurturing programme was not on the 'Allen list' of tested programmes, none made reference to the RCT, which is interesting in terms of their approach to what constitutes evidence. The overall programme evaluation requires the use of two standardised measures the 'Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' in relation to parental stress, and the 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaire in relation to parental assessment of improvement child outcomes. While the measures data was not analysed for the purposes of this exploratory study, observation of the process of reflection on the measures data was considered in relation to parent perspectives on evidence.

3.6.2 Starting Strong

Starting Strong is a structured child-centred programme of information and practical activity for parents of children aged from birth to five years of age. It was originally adapted from a US based programme and as a result of feasibility studies and evaluations conducted between 1985 and 1990, the service was established in Northern Ireland. Starting Strong is delivered to parents in their own homes by trained, paid Family Visitors. Every parent who joins the programme receives a monthly issue based on the Starting Strong curriculum and a 30-60-minute home visit from a Starting Strong family visitor. Together the issues of the Starting Strong curriculum and the visit provide age-specific information on what parents can do with their child and what developmentally appropriate materials they might use. The home visit also offers the opportunity to discuss progress during the last month and focus attention according to the family's needs. The Starting Strong programme is based on a logic model and outcomes identified for parents include: increased knowledge and confidence, reduced parenting related stress and improved embeddedness in the community. Starting Strong's theory of change suggests that improvements in parent outcomes generate better child outcomes in terms of physical health and the acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, outcomes which have positive implications for future learning potential and life chances.
Starting Strong was being tested by independent evaluators at the time of the research through a randomised controlled trial (RCT) from 2008-2014 and the results of this were published during the time of writing. These showed that parents in the intervention group reported lower levels of parenting stress, greater knowledge of child development and higher levels of parenting confidence. These improvements were statistically significant indicating that the programme was effective in improving these parent outcomes. There were small, positive changes in four of the five child outcomes: better cognitive development, increased pro-social behaviour, decreased difficult behaviour and fewer referrals to speech and language therapy but these were not statistically significant. There were no differences between the control and intervention groups in community participation (social capital). The RCT was referred to and reflected upon by Programme Managers and facilitators as it was partly during a period coterminous with this study.

3.6.3 Family Eat and Enjoy

'Family Eat and Enjoy' has been adapted for parents by South River Sure Start from the 'Cook It' Programme. 'Cook it' was originally introduced to Northern Ireland in 1995 by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA). The programme was aimed to support people in the community who want to enhance their cooking skills and who have an interest in healthier eating, particularly when cost and budget is a consideration. The original 'Cook It' programme objectives were to provide practical hands-on experience of cooking and preparing healthy food; to enhance the participants' knowledge of healthy food and nutrition and to increase participants' awareness about the safe handling of food. The programme is designed to be practical and to encourage group participation. This includes group discussions and quizzes as well as the opportunity for hands-on cooking experience during the 6-8 week sessions and the opportunity to sample the completed recipes. Each week participants go home with a basket of fresh ingredients based on what they have prepared in the session so they can try this out at home. The

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13 The published RCT of 'Starting Strong' is deliberately not referenced in the bibliography as programme names have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.
management team at South River Sure Start having run and evaluated the ‘Cook It!’ programme for a number of years had a concern that in some instances feedback was adult orientated and focused on cooking meals for partners. The team decided that the focus on children and on children’s rights in particular needed to be stronger. The programme title was changed to ‘Family Eat and Enjoy’ and the content adapted with a focus on supporting children to make healthy choices, appropriate portion sizes, emotional and behavioural issues around food and eating as a family. Bespoke pre and post questionnaires focused on knowledge and behaviour in relation to food and nutrition were used for internal evaluation of the programme.

3.6.4 Wonder Babies

Wonder Babies is a popular drop-in group for expectant and new mothers with babies six months or under living in the North River Sure Start area. The informal drop-in nature of the group creates space for expectant and new mothers and their babies to meet socially and discuss concerns with their peers and health professionals. Open sessions for groups of 25 mothers and babies are often split between two rooms, 0-3 months and 3-6 months to facilitate practical arrangements and to share common concerns. Each room has a trained midwife present with another Sure Start staff member. Informal health education sessions are provided within the sessions which allow mothers to access information that is relevant to them and their babies. This includes information and advice on child development, feeding, weaning, sleep routines, immunisation and maternal health. The focus of the programme on pregnancy to six months old means that it attracts mothers who are working in the home as well as mothers who are in paid work and on maternity leave.

The scheduling of the case study research was deliberate in order that the iterative process reflected multiple perspectives in order that perspectives from a particular strata of the system did not dominate the analysis. What this meant in practice was that an interview with a service planner or manager could be taking place at the same time as an observational study with a group of young babies. Equally,
discussions of evidence and fidelity with commissioners were happening alongside interviews with groups of parents over soup and scones as part of a family nutrition programme. The data gathering process was a very layered and dynamic process. All of this captured very well for me the essence of what Lefstein and Snell (2011) describe as the ‘lurking and soaking’ of ethnographic research. I also found that I had many more offers of potential observation sites and programmes than I had opportunity to follow up and even in relation to the scope of the study at this point, the amount of data gathered could have potentially informed a number of studies. This brings me then to the discussion of the methods used, the strengths and limitations of which are the next focus of this chapter.

3.7 Methods used within the study

3.7.1 Documentation Analysis

Documentation analysis (Merriam, 1988, Bowen, 2009) is an important means of information gathering throughout the research process. Three main types of documentation were relevant to the study. The first were policy documents relevant to the area. These included a wide range of policies and strategies from different fields including health, education, social care, childcare and justice. One of the main challenges here was keeping up to date with information that was frequently in flux, remaining attuned to subtle shifts as well as broader trends in the discourse. Using Bourdieu’s field analysis was a very useful way of synthesising this information thinking about the discourses as emerging from different fields such as the scientific field, the field of education and with different forms of capital involved. This captured some of the complexity of the fields as well as a means of exploring the tensions of competing discourses. The second area of documentation was programme information such as programme manuals. In some instances, such as the ‘Starting Strong’ Programme and the ‘Nurturing’ programme this information was substantive and it was important to distil the aspects relevant to analysis cross referencing this with the observational studies. The third area of documentation included minutes of meetings and the emerging action plans of the Early Intervention Partnership. Again this documentation was constantly changing and it was more important to capture shifts of emphasis, processes and interactions
involved, rather than providing descriptions of content. The methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis and the Bourdieusian framework supported a critical interpretation of the documentation, focusing the analysis on examining the dynamics of field, habitus and capital underneath and through the language so that competing discourses within the copious policy and programme information in relation to Early Childhood Intervention could begin to be made visible.

3.7.2 Interviews
Interviews are one of the most common methods used in social research across a wide range of subjects, disciplines and approaches. Interviews can take many forms from highly structured questioning to informal conversations, one to one exchanges and focus group discussions. This range of approaches was used in the study in order to adapt the process to context. The purpose of interviewing is to involve the researcher and the respondent in an interactive process to generate responses from which perspectives, observations and analysis pertinent to an overall research agenda can be developed. In relation to this case study, perspectives and experiences were sought through a series of interviews from those who commission, manage, implement and participate in interventions in order to map the fields of operationalisation of Early Childhood Intervention within the context of a city.

There is substantial literature available on the organisation, process and analysis of interviewing which provides guidance for researchers in using this approach to gathering data. However, there is also significant disagreement across this literature regarding the most appropriate and purposeful ways to conduct interviews. This is often linked to differences in approach to social research and methodological underpinnings. Within a realist paradigm, Bourdieu’s approach to interviewing for example, requires the researcher to have substantial knowledge about the context of the respondent, in the present as well as in the past tense. This is in order for important explanations not to be left out through a narrow focus on the immediate moment. Using a Bourdieusian approach, the interviewer as well as the respondent presents his or her own interpretation of the situation, one
perspective being the subjective point of view of the respondent, the other the objectivating\textsuperscript{14} point of view of the researcher. In this way the ‘to and fro’ shuttling between these perspectives will lead to knowledge. Bourdieu suggests that the interview itself is, if you like, another kind of game and that the ideas and theories put forward by respondents should not simply be accepted at face value:

the vision that informants proposed [to him] when, in their concern to play the game, to be equal to the situation created by the theoretical questioning, they turned themselves as it were into the spontaneous theoreticians of their practice. (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 21–22)

This was important in the approach to the interviews as on occasions respondents put forward various working theories of why things were as they were. It is very tempting as a researcher to see this as the ‘authentic’ voice from the field. However, Bourdieu’s method reminds the researcher that this sits in the context of a number of competing theories, both those that are articulated and importantly those that are not.

Pawson and Tilley (1996) argue that interviews should be explicitly ‘theory driven’, in the sense that the subject matter of the interview is the researcher’s theory rather than the respondent’s ‘thoughts and deeds’. This is not intended to suppress the active role of the interviewee and at one point Pawson (1996, p 307) presents the research interview as a negotiation and dialogue in which the discussion is framed as, ‘I’ll show you my theory if you’ll show me yours’. In this way the theory-driven interview is based on the idea of the interviewer and the interviewee as possessors of different types of expertise, which together frame how their interaction is negotiated.

\textsuperscript{14} Bourdieu’s concept of objectivating is not the same as objective. Objectivating signals a process that the interviewer is trying to accomplish by understanding and explaining the “location” of the interviewee, while of course never being able to reach any pure objectivity.
The strength of this approach is that it allows the interviewer to help the respondent to think about the different aspects and the distinctive layers of the social processes the researcher is seeking to understand, and to do this in terms that both can recognise so that interviewee responses can throw maximum light on these features:

What I am suggesting here is that the researcher/interviewer play a much more active and explicit role in teaching the overall conceptual structure of the investigation to the subject, for this in turn will make more sense of each individual question to the respondent. In practice this means paying more attention to ‘explanatory passages’, to ‘sectional’ and ‘linking’ narratives, to ‘flow paths’ and ‘answer sequences’, to ‘repeated’ and ‘checking’ questions and so on. It also means being prepared to take infinite pains to describe the nature of the information sought and thus a sensitivity to the struggles the respondent may have in using what are ultimately the researchers’ categories (Pawson, 1996, p 305)

Pawson and Tilley’s account of the interview process can appear as overly didactic and theory driven, limiting the possibilities for a grounded approach, building theory from the bottom up. It also does not really account for the more tentative nature of theorising which in my experience is reflective of this stage of the process, tending to overstate the clarity of the conceptual framework deployed by researchers and underplay the challenges involved in moving between that framework and informants’ accounts.

It may also pre-empt the use of more indirect queries where an overt research agenda risks biasing responses or alienating informants who may be coming from a different perspective. This was crucially important in the case study in relation to the contested areas within the discourse, for example in relation to what constitutes ‘evidence’ in the field. It was important to firstly follow the logic of the informant’s perspective, for example, whether in support of, or in resistance to, the role of Randomised Controlled Trials in Early Childhood Intervention rather than
contesting or supporting either of these perspectives myself. I found that it was often the case that given this space and without prompting, informants began to explore the limitations as well as the strengths of their stated perspective. The limitations of interviews and their relationship with other methods should be acknowledged. Potential problems of interviewing as a research strategy and approaches to analysis of data generated have been discussed and critiqued at length from various theoretical perspectives (Graham, 1983; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). Knowledge about events and processes, causes and underlying conditions is not just the product of a conversation between interviewer and respondent. For interviews to yield insights into these aspects, the interview has to be informed by an appropriate analytical framework, which can guide questions, contextualise answers and suggest probes and directions for further discussion to enhance the depth and complexity of the data being developed. This is an important implication of Pawson and Tilley's (1996) concept of theory-led interviewing, taking into account the concerns about directiveness or didacticism discussed above. Accounts from interviews also need to be subjected to critical scrutiny not only in their own terms but also in relation to other sources, including observation, documents and other interviews. The data generated by interviewing should not simply be treated as a series of separate narratives but should be contextualised in relation to other sources of data, assessed in terms of their comparative adequacy or completeness, and on this basis used to test and develop theories.

3.7.3 Observational Studies

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) consider that all social research is a form of participant observation as:

we cannot study the social world without being part of it...participant observation not being a specific technique of research but a way of being in the world that is key to qualitative research (1994 p. 250).
Central to documenting observational studies is what Geertz (1993) terms 'thick description'. Denzin (1989) illustrates thick description as going beyond fact and surface appearances, ‘It presents details, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feeling and inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick description the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (1989, p. 83). The opening section of the concluding chapter is perhaps the most effective example of the use of thick description from the field in interaction with the theoretical framework, however to have examined each scenario in this degree of detail as well as engaging in broader analysis was beyond the scope of the study. In these ways however, observation with thick description in iteration with theory can afford the opportunity to critically reflect on what the implementation of interventions in context reveals about the dominant discourses, how these are experienced, promoted, replicated and potentially challenged.

In relation to observation in the early childhood setting it was important as a researcher to be aware of my own subjectivity inherent in the choice and documentation of what I observed. Observation is not value free and reflects the paradigm and conceptual framework of the observer. For this reason, it was important to share observations, for example, within a subsequent interview to seek clarity or a different perspective on the observed behaviour or event. Observational data can then be analysed in an iterative process with interview data. Interviewing in tandem with observation in the field gives an opportunity for triangulation of data as well as analysing and interpreting meaning from observations.

Bourdieu’s view of participant observation is that in spite of being a central strategy in ethnographic research, it amounts to being ‘in a sense a contradiction in terms (as anyone who has tried to do it will have confirmed in practice)’ (1990, p34).
Bourdieu's view is that while we may observe, we cannot truly see how the game feels from another position in the field:

One cannot live the belief associated with profoundly different conditions of existence, that is with other games and other stakes, still less give others the means of reliving it by the sheer power of discourse (1990, p68)

Here Bourdieu is aiming to a high level of authenticity in participant observation, the ability to get 'under the skin' of the research subject, to think as they think. Jenkins (2014) argues however that Bourdieu's 'strong' model of participant observation is not representative, with most participant observation in the field following a weaker model, trying to combine an insider view with the objectivity of an outsider's perspective. He also adds that most sociologists are not reliant on observation alone and tend towards a wider range in their use of data generating strategies:

from the social survey to unstructured interviewing to the use of videotape is more the rule than the exception. However, one defines participant observation it generally takes place alongside other techniques (2014, p 55)

Observed Practice in this study was one of a number of techniques used and observations took place in group settings with adults, in home settings, in group settings with adults and children. The study involved the observation of parents and facilitators in groups such as 'Nurturing' and 'Family Eat and Enjoy', parents and children together with facilitators in 'Wonder babies', and family visitors, parents and children on 'Starting Strong' home visits. These were all very different settings for observation and show some of the variety of contexts in which early childhood intervention takes place. There were useful insights in cross referencing the contexts and seeing a wider picture beyond the individual intervention programme which has been the limited focus of the majority of research in the field.
3.8 Access and Ethics

Information and Consent forms were completed for all participants in the study.\textsuperscript{15} Two versions of these were produced, one for service providers and another for parents. \textsuperscript{16} The version for service providers gave a more detailed description of the proposed research and included individual and organisational agreement. The version for parents gave a summary of the proposed research and included separate parent and child consent agreement. Before interviews and observations commenced this was discussed with participants individually or in small groups and a verbal summary of the proposed research was given. Interviews were arranged by phone with key respondents and information and consent forms were sent in advance of meeting. Following planning meetings with Sure Start and Starting Strong programme managers, possible programme contexts were identified for the observational studies and access and entry was negotiated. These were then discussed with facilitators, early childhood workers and family visitors to obtain their consent to be part of the study. Facilitators, Early Childhood workers and Family Visitors distributed information and consent forms to parents in advance so that clarity about consent was established before fieldwork commenced. The information and consent forms gave some background details to myself as well as summary details of the proposed research and what it would involve. This was then followed by a short verbal introduction and opportunity for questions on my first meeting with the parents. By using this range of strategies I ensured that formal access, entry, consent, data protection and confidentiality procedures were adhered to; that the study had organisational support and that parents and practitioners had an opportunity to exchange in a more informal way about the study.

\textsuperscript{15} These are included in Appendix 3
\textsuperscript{16} Parent Consent Forms are in Appendix 4
Informed consent of participants is of course the key to ethical research based on the view that we all have the right to determine our own best interests. Put this way however the statement masks the complexity of what it means to secure meaningful informed consent. All of the parents approached agreed for themselves and their children to be part of the study. The only exceptions were two parents who were happy to be involved and for their children to be observed but did not wish their children to be photographed as they were attending a programme in an area that was predominantly of a different community background. As this was specific to photographs only and there were no other issues of consent, this enabled data from all children and parents involved in programmes to be considered in the research.

Most studies of early childhood programmes are of necessity reliant on parental consent and the settings involved in the study were for children from birth to age three. From a child rights perspective, it is important to think reflexively about children’s consent. Is it possible, for example, to have the informed consent of young children to be observed or to participate in a study at all? As an aspect of the study was the observation of young children in context it was important to identify where there might be issues in relation to young children’s consent, for example if a child turns away from a camera, is unsettled by a stranger being present or does not wish to engage in an activity. Many studies make the assumption that formal written consent from parents is the only procedure necessary but an ethical, rights based approach to working with young children must go beyond this. In a simple way for example I asked the young children in the Starting Strong Home Visiting programme if it was okay for me to be there with them and watch them play, was it okay for me to write notes in my book? Children responded in various ways, some gave a definite yes or okay, others nodded, some appeared uninterested in the question, some were enthusiastic about someone new bringing toys and inviting me to play, others preferred to interact with familiar staff. Some children took the notebook themselves at various stages to add their own contribution. Can any of this be taken as consent from children for involvement the process? Perhaps the most important issue as a researcher is to be at all times keep the child in mind in
relation to any impact in the home or in the setting and consider that our ability to
determine the consent of young children being observed as research subjects is at
best partial and tentative.

3.9 Interpretation and analysis

Interpretation and analysis is arguably the most challenging stage of the qualitative
research process. Analysis is a combination of being systematic and organised in
the approach to managing data as well as intuitive and creative in making
connections in and through the data and between data and theory. Interpretation
requires a mix of creative thinking and systematic enquiry, an attention to the
overall formal theory and the emergent findings from the data. From that ‘to and
fro’ process of shuttling between theory and data the aim is to develop a coherent
and original analysis. Both systematic and analytical dimensions are important,
being organised and systematic gives validity and breadth and analysis and theory
building gives depth to the inquiry. Neither should predominate, for example
paying too much attention to the organisation of sections of data can give the
impression that analysis is more advanced than it is. However, from the other
perspective, paying too much attention to theory in analysis has its dangers also as
if this is foregrounded over the data there is a good chance that analysis is coming
from pre conceived ideas rather than being grounded in the data. Coding combines
both of these aspects, in that coding helps to organise but codes have also to make
sense and relate to analysis. ‘Coding and analysis are not synonymous, though
coding is a crucial aspect of analysis’ (Basit, 2003, p.145).

Although it is often viewed that analysis comes in the latter stages of a study, the
pathways to forming ideas begin to emerge from initial transcription and reading.
Identifying data that develops and builds on these and coding and analysing this
began at the start of research study and ended while writing up the results. In this
way the analysis is consistent with the overall orientation of the study as Merriam
(1998) states:
our analysis and interpretation our study's findings will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place (p. 48).

There is a wide range of literature which explains how to sift, code, order or classify qualitative data, using both manual and CAQDAS methods but there is little information which looks at how explanation is achieved at or how theories are generated. Most of the information in the field focuses on how qualitative data analysis is managed rather than on the analytical processes involved in generating findings from the evidence collected. Bernard (2006) states that analysis 'is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place' (p. 452). Coding is therefore a method that enables the researcher to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or 'families' because they share some characteristic – this establishes the beginning of a pattern.

Data analysis for this study involved initial lean coding (Cresswell 2007) into six broad coding categories which related to the discourses which had emerged as dominant in the policy field augmented by the categories that emerged as recurrent patterns in the data. The dominant discourses of neuroscience and evidence which had emerged from the literature review became initial coding categories. These initial categories were supplemented by an additional four categories emerging recurrently in the data. These were barriers in language and communication, the impact of poverty, building partnerships and changing intergenerational patterns. The data was then revised to expand the categories into sub categories. At this point axial coding was used relating sub categories and concepts to each other. This was done in diagrammatic form by hand before inputting this into the MAXQDA programme. I also used memos and journaling throughout the process. Coding is only the initial step toward analysis and interpretation and involves not just labelling but linking: 'It leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea' (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137). Ideas expand, deepen and change through the process and coding and analysis therefore was cyclical throughout the research process as each cycle filters, highlights, and focuses.
the important features of the data for generating ideas and concepts, or building theory. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) propose that 'coding is usually a mixture of data [summation] and data complication ... breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data.

Saldana (2012) describes qualitative codes as 'essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections'. He also quotes one of Charmaz's (2006) metaphors for the process when she states that coding 'generates the bones of your analysis. ... [I]ntegration will assemble those bones into a working skeleton' (p. 45).

Through coding therefore, the data is arranged in a systematic order, made part of a system and categorised. This meant that the data could be 'segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation' (Grbich, 2007, p. 21).

When the major categories of the data are compared with each other and consolidated in various ways, research can begin to move from the 'reality' of the data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical. At this point I also began to use elements of the 'formal theory' using Bourdieu's thinking tools to develop the analysis. Thinking about how the concepts of habitus, field and capital were seen through the data opened up interesting new possibilities for analysis that were still grounded in the initial processes. Using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' as 'sensitising concepts' meant that the theory was built in and through the data rather than imposed on the data. I had also made some use of in vivo coding using memorable phrases from the data such as 'that's a coffee pot moment' to describe something culturally alien or 'the community with the bad brain' using the neuroscientific discourse or 'people position themselves around an idea' to describe partnership dynamics. This latter in vivo code for example also related effectively to Bourdieu's concept of 'field' for example. The point of reaching theory from coding, analysing and integrating formal theory is a complex process to capture.
As I was a novice to using MAXQDA at the start of the study, I coded on hard copy printouts first, as recommended by Saldana (2012) and Bazeley, (2007) using Post-Its for notes and memos rather than doing this on the screen. As Saldana notes ‘there is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that give you more control over and ownership of the work’. After this initial hard-copy work, the data was transferred onto electronic files. At different stages in the analysis I also went back to some of these hard copies, notes and memos and even to the original recordings to think about the material in fresh ways. After attending ESRC advanced training on Conversation Analysis and ethnographic research in the summer of 2014, I was reminded of the importance of the more detailed characteristics of the original recordings for example, the use of tone, pause and more nuanced features that were not fully reflected in my original transcripts. At this point I examined some passages from the data in more detail using Conversation Analysis which revealed new interpretations.

3.10 Self Reflexivity

A final issue in relation to methodology and methods and one which has been touched on throughout this chapter is the importance of Self Reflexivity. A number of aspects were important for me as a critical researcher to be aware of in relation to my own position in relation to the study. The first of these is that professionally I have worked in the early childhood field and in the broader community and voluntary sector for more than twenty years. I was also conducting the case study research in my native city and would have been known to a number of respondents in the study in a professional role. One of the strengths of this was that it made negotiating access to early childhood settings including programmes which engaged with children and parents in the home easier on the whole as I was known to some of the organisations and individuals in the community. Alongside this of course there are important aspects to reflect on as an insider researcher in that participants’ responses may have been shaped by a view of myself, or the organisation I work for in different ways.
From the outset I decided that I would be critically reflexive in relation to this position rather than denying it. This was in part influenced by Bourdieu's self-reflexive method applied both in his study of his native community of Béarn (1962) as well as in his later work on reflexive sociology. Bourdieu emphasises the importance of a reflexive sociology in which researchers must pay conscious attention to the effects of their own position, their own set of internalized structures, and how these are likely to distort or prejudice their objectivity. The researcher, according to Bourdieu, must engage in a 'sociology of sociology' and conduct their research with one eye continually reflecting back upon their own habitus, their professional and educational dispositions. In practice of course this is much more difficult to do than to describe and because habitus operates in ways that are deeply embedded, ways of speaking, ways of seeing, values and attitudes are all important. A simple example of this is that having been raised in a home environment where the television was turned off when 'visitors' came in; I was aware of how this aspect of my habitus impacted when I was on home visits where the majority of the time the television was kept on during the visit.

When faced with the challenge of studying a world to which we are linked, often our first thought is to deny or minimise our own involvement. According to Bourdieu (1988), this 'concern to escape any suspicion of prejudice leads us to attempt to negate ourselves as 'biased' or 'informed' subjects automatically suspected of using weapons of science in the pursuit of personal interests' (p. 6). Contrary to this view that the researcher must put nothing of themselves into research, Bourdieu believed that a researcher should refer to their own experiences in a conscious way. In this very real sense, the critical researcher then also occupies 'a position within the game'. As Barnard (1990) in his study of Bourdieu describes, the objects of analysis within the field are 'the stakes in the game (capital), the strategies, the objectified histories of the agents (their positions and habitus) including, ineluctably, that of the sociologist' (Barnard, 1990, p. 78). Bringing my awareness to my own position in the game, rather than claiming a false position as a spectator was a valuable insight as well as a research challenge in developing the analysis.
3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the overall methodological approach to developing the case study of Ballymore which has emerged as the most appropriate position from which to construct the field of enquiry for this study. The case study, including the different levels of enquiry at city, neighbourhood and programme levels has been outlined and the rationale for the selection of the different programme and neighbourhood contexts explained. The appropriateness of Critical Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory as methodologies for constructing the field within a Bourdieusian theoretical framework was also outlined. Critical Discourse Analysis allowed for the examination of key policy documents as data, considering the broader socio-political culture in which they were created as well as the translation and impact on practice. Using a Bourdieusian conceptual framework allows discourse to be anchored in the ‘logic of practice’ by combining discursive and non-discursive elements. Grounded Theory enabled a process of building theory from the ground up drawing on the perspectives of key informants in the field as well as using Bourdieu’s more formal theory. These overarching methodologies provided the context for the employment of a range of methods of accessing data including documentary analysis, interviews and participant observation. The strengths and limitations of each of these methods have been discussed. The chapter concludes with a reflexive consideration of my own role and position in the field which is a conscious and recurrent theme in a study of this kind. The next chapter will now provide a more comprehensive picture of the case study context in order to orientate the reader for main data chapters that follow.
Chapter 4
Ballymore: An Early Intervention City

'Unlike molecules, adults and children are unpredictable, choice making intentional agents living in a precarious social world. Far from behaving in fixed patterns and 'constant conjunctions' they interact with many conflicting social influences and, in doing so, they change the world' (Alderson, 2013 p 56).

4.1 Introduction
The Early Intervention City of Ballymore in Northern Ireland was selected as the position from which to construct the field of enquiry and to examine the ways that the key discourses are translated from 'neurons to neighbourhoods' (Shonkoff, 2000, p.1). This case study enabled an 'open system' of the operationalisation of early childhood intervention to be explored using the theoretical framework with the data to examine the interaction of agency and structure at a number of different levels. As Alderson's (2013) comment illuminates, the interaction of children and adults with different social structures is complex and even the attempt to frame or boundary a case study is of course an artificial construct, especially when exploring discourse. Importantly however, from a realist perspective, the case study, although anonymised as Ballymore, is of an actual city with a particular political, social and economic history which has impacted on its inhabitants in ways that are relevant to this study as well as in multiple ways that are beyond the scope of the study.

Using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', as illustrated in the theoretical framework, I constructed a representation of how the key discourses in Early Childhood Intervention manifest in a specific context of a city. This was done by identifying key relationships and interactions between people and structures within the broader social and political space of the context. Bourdieu identifies this iterative process of constructing the field and identifying the different forms of capital involved as a 'hermeneutic circle':
In order to construct a field, one must identify the forms of specific capitals that operate in it, and to construct the forms of specific capital one must know the specific logic of the field. There is an endless ‘to and from’ movement in the research process that is arduous.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p108)

In using Bourdieu’s theory to explore social space in a case study the starting point is to gather data about significant institutions and field specific capitals. In this chapter therefore I will firstly outline the Northern Ireland context more generally, the social, economic and political events in a society emerging from conflict which have impacted on its citizens. Rather than engaging in detailed contextual analysis, these are considered broadly and in relation to their potential impact on the fields and discourses relating to Early Childhood Intervention. The specific context of the city of Ballymore is then considered, how contextual issues such as high unemployment and child poverty interact with other more specific characteristics such as a highly developed and vocal community sector in a city where social and cultural capital are significant drivers. The specific context of the Ballymore Regeneration plan and the particular focus on Early Intervention is then explained. From the overall city context, the focus then moves to a consideration of the neighbourhoods: North River, East River, South River and West River where the initial scoping of the study, programme mapping and interviews were carried out. Again these are considered in the context of the social change which has impacted on children and parents within neighbourhoods, how major policy initiatives focused on early childhood as well as those focused on neighbourhoods play out against a backdrop of deep rooted intergenerational disadvantage. The particular neighbourhoods of North River and South River which provided the context for the observational studies, parent and practitioner interviews and focus groups are then outlined in more detail.

4.2 Discourses of Reproduction and Transformation

Discourses of reproduction and transformation are recurrent at these different levels. On a broader social and political level, the context is of political
transformation post conflict and a number of the overarching policies use the term 'transformation', including some, which locate the potential for change in the early years of life. At city level the context is transformation through regeneration, with Early Intervention as a key theme and catalyst programme whereby the aspiration is that the city will become 'the best place to be born and grow up in’. This continues at neighbourhood level, where renewal 'will transform our area into a safe place which people will choose to live in’. This aspirational discourse is set against a backdrop in which the reproduction rather than transformation of social disadvantage is reflected in the empirical data. The case study will therefore use Bourdieu's (1977) 'thinking tools' of habitus, capital and field to explore discourses of reproduction and transformation at the different social levels.

It is important to re-emphasise at this point however, that the orientation of the case study is exploratory rather than evaluative. While a level of empirical and statistical data is provided at regional, city and neighbourhood level this is for the purpose of contextualising and grounding the study within a realist framework. The objective is not comparison or evaluation within or between neighbourhoods or programmes, but to consider the operation of specific discourses in the system as a whole. In this way, the case study bridges the divide between a focus on individual agency and a focus on structures. Reproduction, and potentially transformation, it is argued, takes place at different individual and social levels and therefore it is not sufficient to examine either of these in isolation. The fields operating from policy to neighbourhood level and the positioning of the different social actors and forms of capital operating frame the study. The in depth layers of the case study will then explore the ways in which discourses in early intervention impact on the habitus of parents, children and practitioners and how this in turn may reproduce or could potentially transform structures. The interaction with individual habitus and the broader social fields of the programme or setting will illuminate possibilities as to how the discourse is mediated at this level. In this way the broader political discourses can be contextualised and the dynamics of field, habitus and capital can be traced from macro to micro level.
4.3 The Northern Ireland Context

The political field is the site in which through the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created - products between which ordinary citizens reduced to the status of consumers have to choose thereby running a risk of misunderstanding that is all the greater the further they are from the place of production (Bourdieu, 1991, p171).

The city of Ballymore is in Northern Ireland. This was a particularly interesting context to examine in relation to the out-workings of key discourses in early childhood intervention from a policy and practice perspective. For a variety of historical, political and social reasons which will be explored in this chapter, Early Childhood Intervention policy in Northern Ireland, while significantly influenced by Westminster, also has aspects that are distinctive to the region which reflect the particular social and political context. The most notable of these is that Northern Ireland is emerging from conflict. Its political institutions and structures are underpinned by this in ways that are easily identifiable, such as the party politics of ministers and the demographics of communities. There are also aspects which are less easily identifiable such as the interaction between ministries and between ministers and committees and the implementation of policy at neighbourhood level.

The political context in Northern Ireland is also in a process of significant structural change, particularly within the public sector. Much of this change has been contested and the period of the study was often characterised by stalemate, resistance, and the struggle to sustain workable institutions in government. One of the challenges this presents from a research perspective is capturing a context that is both structurally in flux and politically contested. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the particularly Northern Irish 'rules of the political game' must be considered (Bourdieu, 1994). Fields of power and struggles over different forms of
capital: economic, social, and political are evident in the wider context as well as within policy relating to early intervention.

4.3.1 The Impact of Conflict

The Northern Ireland context is best known internationally for its association with intractable conflict and, more recently, for the Peace Process which after twenty-five years of ‘the Troubles’ culminated in the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement of 1998. While the ceasefires of 1994 and the subsequent Agreement brought a near cessation\textsuperscript{17} to physical violence, communities in Northern Ireland remain deeply divided. This is reflected in separate schooling systems, high levels of demographic and social segregation and a perception among many Catholics and Protestants that they belong to distinct groups. Northern Ireland’s population, according to the 2011 census, is forty-eight percent Protestant, forty-five percent Catholic with the remaining seven percent identifying as belonging to another religion or none. The legacy of conflict and community division impacts from government to neighbourhood level. While political allegiance in relation to ethnic group or party lines is a powerful discourse, it is not the only influence, there are important dynamics within communities such as intra group tensions in both republican and loyalist working class communities as well as allegiances across traditional lines that became evident in the case study.

Discourses of equality and human rights pitched against the maintenance of the status quo were central to the civil unrest that preceded conflict. Northern Ireland’s ‘Troubles’ began in the 1960s following the civil rights movement campaign for a more equitable access by the catholic/nationalist minority to political power, social provision and cultural recognition. This was met with resistance from the unionist majority and protest and rioting spilled onto streets and neighbourhoods. (Purdie, 1990, O Dochartaigh, 1997). In 1969 the Westminster government deployed the British army in an attempt to restore order. The focus of attention moved from civil rights and policy reform to the need to

\textsuperscript{17} There were exceptions to this, most notably the Omagh Bombing in August 1998 which killed 29 people.
remove the British presence and a rejuvenated militant republicanism, in the form of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), emerged from increasingly politicised and assertive Catholic working class communities. This in turn prompted violence from Protestant loyalist militants (Purdie, 1990).

The inter-communal rioting that characterised the late 1960s was gradually replaced by a triangular low intensity conflict. The protagonists were the British state, republican and loyalist paramilitaries (Ruane, 1996, Darby 2003). Since 1968, there have been between 3,600 and 3,700 deaths, half of which have been civilians (Morrissey & Smyth, 2002; McKeown, 2009). The number of people injured as a result of the conflict ranges from 8,383 to 100,000 (Breen-Smyth, 2012). The impact, therefore, has been extensive in a country with a population of only 1.8 million. Conflict has been part of everyday life for over four decades, and has occupied politics, employment, residential space, public space, movement and social and cultural activities. The Troubles were above all a human crisis with thousands of individual, family and community tragedies. The city of Ballymore was one of the areas of Northern Ireland most affected, it has been described as the 'crucible' of the civil rights movement and suffered a high impact of conflict.

Between 1974 and the ceasefires of 1994 there were seven attempts to reach a political and constitutional settlement. A number of pieces fell into place during the late 1980s and early 1990s to make a peace process possible. New legislation was introduced to deal with religious imbalances in education and employment. The 'long war' had exacted a heavy toll from republican and loyalist working class communities in terms of lives, prison sentences and quality-of-life opportunities. The development of a dialogue between the SDLP leader John Hume and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams eventually led to closer co-operation between a coalition of nationalist partners and the bringing of republicans into talks. The move towards a political approach was mirrored within loyalist paramilitary organisations. On 31 August 1994 the IRA declared 'a complete cessation of military operations', with the main loyalist paramilitary organisations following in October.
After several years of further negotiations and talks a referendum was held on 22 May 1998 to ratify the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement and new institutions were established. Seventy-one per cent of Northern Ireland’s voters supported the Agreement. The Agreement proposed that relations within Northern Ireland would be addressed by a power-sharing Assembly that would operate on an inclusive basis. All of the main parties would be members of a permanent coalition government and key decisions would be taken on a cross-community basis. This enforced coalition sought to ensure agreement in a political system which is based on national allegiance rather than on social and economic issues. This is a vital distinguishing factor in the UK and Northern Ireland political discourse, and has been a significant factor in decision making across policy areas.

4.3.2 The Impact of Conflict on children and young people

The impact of conflict on children and young people was one of the issues that emerged as a key area of focus in the years following the Agreement. Research by the Cost of the Troubles Study (COTTS, 1996) had systematically documented the human impact of the conflict on communities in Northern Ireland. The impact was found to be disproportionately borne by young people and those aged 24 and under accounted for around 40 percent of the total number of deaths during the Troubles (Fay et al.,1999). The situation of young people living in areas worst affected by the conflict was most acute. Ballymore is an example of one of these areas and a factor of note is that most of the parents in the case study area have grown up in this environment. There has been insufficient research in the area of the trans-generational impact of conflict (Templar and Radford, 2007). Initial presumptions however about the resilience of children and young people have been challenged (Horgan and Monteith 2009, Gallagher, 2012). Some argue that the violence that was externalised and socially accepted in the past is now being internalised through alcohol and drug abuse, misuse of medication and self-harm and/or suicide (McAllister et al., 2009; Tomlinson, 2012; Gallagher et al., 2012). In addition to the direct impact on children and young people during the conflict, research by Connolly et al (2002) demonstrated lasting attitudinal and behavioural
impacts of conflict and ethnic division on young children aged 3-6 years old, born after the ceasefires.

The different discourses around the impacts of conflict are beyond the scope of this study. In terms of a focus on the influence of scientific fields however, it may be important to note two broad areas of the discourse on conflict. These can be described as 'trauma focused' and 'psychosocial' approaches, (Muldoon and Downes 2007). Trauma-focused advocates emphasise the impact of direct war exposure on mental health over the impact of stressful social and material conditions. Psychosocial approaches focus on the repair of the social ecology. The two discourses are interlinked and as Muldoon and Downes (2007) point out, ‘those identified as having probable Post Traumatic Stress Disorder represent a particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged group in terms of financial, psychological and social capital’ (p149). This has some resonance in terms of the discourses on neuroscience and social and economic capital that will be explored within the case study. As mentioned in the earlier review of the literature, another important emerging area in the field of the study of the impact of conflict on children draws substantively on neuroscientific discourse which is significant in the context of this study (Britto et al 2015, Carter and Porges 2015).

4.3.3 Politics and positionings in Post Agreement Northern Ireland

It should also be noted that in Northern Ireland post Agreement, not all of those most affected have been socially marginalised. Some former combatants and victims of the conflict have augmented their social and political capital. Communities such as Ballymore which were devastated by conflict have gone on to embark on reconstruction socially and economically, and although many victims of the conflict remain on the margins of society, others now hold significant positions in government as well as in the community and statutory sectors. A report on restorative justice in the neighbourhood of South River in Ballymore captures this changing dynamic and change in positions in different fields of power in the observation:
yesterday's street-fighting guerrilla became a be-suited minister or local councillor or mayor, thus nullifying their value as role models for young people in marginalised communities with strong anti-authority impulses.

On a number of instances, those I interviewed working in the community referred to Ministers and MLA's on first name terms and some had family connections to prominent political leaders. In other instances, however, there was the sense that interviewees were excluded from networks because of different political positionings within neighbourhoods. In this case an interviewee talks about how her lack of connection to the political party who have power within a neighbourhood and her perceived affiliation to another party affects her positioning:

I wouldn’t have a voice within this community. There are certain people who would have a voice and they are the people leading it (Early Intervention). I’m not sure if they are the right people leading it ... You see, I am not allowed on the neighbourhood committee. We are the biggest provider of childcare in the area but nobody is interested in what I have to say. (Sure Start Manager West River)

Politics, power and positionings was also referred to by managers in other neighbourhoods, with regard to families accessing services:

There is a lot of resources in area but you always have that political element some people wouldn’t go near services (Neighbourhood Manager North River)

Positioning within the field was also recognised as critical for ideas to gain currency in communities:

For any of these things to get to groups you need one or two people in authority in either politics or well placed in the civil service or even someone
good within the community sector championing it. And once you sow a seed of doubt nobody wants to position around it (Neighbourhood Manager, North River).

4.3.4 The Northern Ireland Economic Context
Northern Ireland previously had a traditionally industrial economy, most notably in shipbuilding and the textile industry, (Hart & Harrison, 2002) both of which were historically key features of the economy in Ballymore. Today, however, most heavy industry has largely been replaced by the service industry. Similar to many aspects of life in Northern Ireland, politics has impacted on the economy (Teague 1987, Ruane & Todd 1996, Byrne 2010). Throughout the 1990s, after the Peace Process, the Northern Ireland economy grew faster than the economy of the rest of the UK, due in part to the rapid growth of the economy of the Republic of Ireland and the so-called ‘peace dividend’ (Byrne, 2010). The global economic recession including the food and fuel price rises of 2007, the financial crisis of 2009 and the subsequent public sector cuts however have had significant impact in Northern Ireland, particularly in its poorest communities (Hossain et al 2011). A large proportion of the population is registered as economically inactive, with social exclusion levels well above other parts of the UK. Almost half of the working age population in receipt of incapacity benefit have been diagnosed with ‘mental and behavioural disorders’ and a significant numbers of households have experienced intergenerational poverty or joblessness (OFMDFM, 2014). One of the most significant issues economically is the high level of public sector debt, which has resulted in significant reductions in public expenditure.

4.4 Child Policy in Northern Ireland
The environment for child policy making in Northern Ireland is a contested, continuously changing and rather crowded space. With an overall population of just over 1.8 million and a child population of 379,300 (2011 census) policy making for children and young people at the time of writing falls between five different
government departments 18 (currently the Departments of Education, Health, Social Development, Employment and Learning and Justice) with additional input from the Northern Ireland Executive (formerly OFMDFM) in specific areas such as child poverty, the children’s strategy, the childcare strategy and children’s rights. The definition of Early Intervention which has currency in Northern Ireland was developed by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services (C4EO) in the UK context:

Intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families or with a population at risk of developing problems. (C4EO, 2011)

By this definition of Early Intervention, the focus is on state intervention and the locus of the problem rather than structural issues of poverty or inequality is with parents and families. The C4EO report ‘Grasping the Nettle’ from which the definition comes is very clear in defining both the locus of the problem and of the solution:

what is needed is a whole society attitude shift to parenting akin to those achieved with seat belt wearing and drink driving. Instead of parenting being seen as a private matter which must not be invaded, it should be celebrated as a matter where achieving high standards is in everyone’s interest. (C4EO, 2011)

The move therefore in the policy discourse towards ‘intervention’ as opposed to family support, addressing social inequality or poverty is highly significant. It is therefore useful to trace the recent development and currency of the concept

18 The number of NI government departments is set to reduce from 12 to nine, before the 2016 election though specific responsibilities for child policy making have not yet been finalised at the time of writing.

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within the Northern Ireland policy context, in particular how this has been interpreted within the wide range of contexts for child policy development here.

While Early Intervention has been demonstrated to be a significant unifying policy concept in Northern Ireland, there are also areas of difference which emerge from a closer examination of the policy discourse which reflect the different logics of practice in the fields from which they originate. Early Intervention in the policy context can be viewed as the interaction with the concept of a number of competing policy ‘fields’ such as health, education, social care and justice. An outline of the key policies that have shaped the overall Early Intervention field will therefore be provided. In addition to different departmental perspectives, policy development has also been influenced by dominant political and economic discourses from other contexts particularly the US and Britain as well as from significant initiatives such as the Atlantic Philanthropies Prevention and Early Intervention Programme19.

While Early Intervention is not highlighted as a specific theme, the Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2011-2015 pledged to reduce child poverty, improve literacy and numeracy, implement a childcare strategy and ensure one year of pre-school education open to every family. The Executive’s vehicle for delivering these commitments is through the ‘Delivering Social Change’ Framework. This work is funded partly through government and part through philanthropy through the £118m Delivering Social Change Fund. The fund aims to facilitate joined up commissioning and delivery across the Departments. Under the Delivering Social Change Signature Projects a range of existing Early Intervention projects were identified for expansion including Family Support Hubs, Parenting Programmes, Nurture Units and literacy and numeracy projects:

19 The aim of Atlantic Philanthropies programme was to “build and sustain capacity for prevention and early intervention that promotes optimal outcomes for low-income children and youth, and increases their chances to be productive contributors to their communities and society at large” (Children and Youth Programme 2009).
We believe the most significant opportunities to improve people's health, well-being and life opportunities exist in the form of early interventions and services, particularly (but not exclusively) designed for children and young people. (Delivering Social Change 2012)

While the claim of Delivering Social Change was to 'break the long term cycle of multi-generational problems' and make 'children and young people central to every policy decision made by Government,' the aspiration in the policy has failed to make the impact promised, as evidenced in this consultation response by a leading children's charity:

In particular, we are seeing an increased focus on *talking* about collaborative working, strategic investment in areas of particular deprivation, and a need to consider impact of investment. However, we need to see evidence of this rhetoric being enacted. (NCB Response to Consultation on Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People 2014)

4.4.1 Child Policy under NI Executive Office

Delivering Social Change became the umbrella strategy which subsumed successive Child Poverty Strategies emanating from the NI Executive Office (formerly OFMDFM). The NI Executive Office under the portfolio of two Junior Ministers has responsibility for a range of child policy issues including Child Poverty, the Childcare Strategy, the overarching Children and Young People's Strategy as well as reporting on behalf of government on the implementation of the UNCRC. While this office has operated as a central coordinating unit within Government, a central problem is that it has no power to hold other Government Departments to account. As a result, a number of key functions and strategies have been ineffective with no clear lines of accountability against targets or outcomes. The Ten Year Strategy (2006 – 16) for Children and Young People, for example, has effectively not been operative since April 2011 when the last Action Plan ended. This lack of implementation of a national strategy supported by action plans, targets and measures charting progress is a major gap in relation to co-ordinated child policy.
In relation to child poverty, the picture is similar with a lack of co-ordinated planning against targets and measures. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) presents a bleak forecast that one in three children in Northern Ireland will be living below the poverty line in 2020 in spite of a succession of child poverty strategies. In 2014 a fourth attempt in eight years to reframe the Child Poverty strategy was launched. The proposed document ‘Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People: Consultation Document: Child Poverty’ attempted to merge a number of key policy functions including the Child Poverty Strategy, the annual report under the Child Poverty Act (2010) as well as taking forward the Children and Young People’s Strategy and delivering on reporting obligations under the UNCRC. After consultation, a decision was made to separate child rights and child poverty elements, however a new draft Child Poverty strategy for 2014-2017 had yet to emerge at the time of writing.

Similarly, in relation to children’s rights, in spite of stated ‘in principle’ commitment across a range of strategies, tangible gains in relation to the realisation of children’s rights have been slow to emerge. This has been impeded by a range of factors such as inconsistencies in how children’s rights were addressed in developing strategies, a lack of coordination and joined up government, inadequate data and research, and limited meaningful engagement with children and young people in making decisions on issues affecting them (Byrne and Lundy 2011). The particular consideration of rights of babies and young children in early childhood as identified in General Comment 7 of the UNCRC is not referred to at any point in policy and strategy in Early Childhood Intervention in Northern Ireland.

Another area of policy making that has been slow to emerge from the NI Executive is a comprehensive childcare strategy. As the previous childcare strategy had ended in 2004, in December 2012, OFMDFM published ‘Towards a Childcare Strategy’ for consultation. This was followed in September 2013 by ‘Bright Start - The Executive’s Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare’ which set out the framework, principles and key first actions with the aim of publishing the substantive and more detailed Strategy for Affordable and Integrated Childcare in
2014. This was finally opened for consultation in late 2015 with a focus on making childcare services more responsive to the needs of parents, including the need for more flexible care, and examining ways of promoting awareness and uptake of financial assistance for childcare costs. The Childcare Strategy is also part of the Executive’s Delivering Social Change framework.

4.4.2 Policy in Health and Social Care

From the perspective of Health and Social Care one of the key strategy documents is Transforming Your Care (2013) which outlines the strategic way ahead for health and social care services in Northern Ireland. One of the twelve key principles is ‘a focus on prevention and tackling inequalities’. The strategy puts particular weight on the importance of parental education, with proposals in place for increased pre- and ante-natal care and on early parenting programmes and support. The regional family and parenting strategy, Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland (2009) emphasises Family Support and gives priority to prevention and Early Intervention services to meet the needs of all families, across all ages and stages informed by the model developed by Pauline Hardiker (1991). The development of ‘Families Matter’ signalled a significant shift from the previous child protection orientated direction of child care policy and the beginning of an articulated policy focus on Early Intervention. The Families Matter strategy (2009) prioritises the availability of universal support to impact positively on all children and young people, therefore reducing the need for higher tier services. The strategy ‘Healthy child, Healthy future’ (2010) is a framework for the Universal Child Health Promotion programme and is based on the principle of ‘progressive universalism’ and the ‘emerging evidence on the critical nature of the early years, and the potential effect on a child from issues such as maternal mental health and parental substance abuse’. The framework utilises a universal ‘early screening and surveillance approach’ to identify early social, emotional and developmental issues, and alongside this advocates delivery of ‘universal evidence based parenting programmes’. The Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership Early Intervention sub-group oversees a Northern Ireland wide delivery model for early
intervention with the aim of more efficient linking of early intervention strategies across the key departments.

The Public Health Agency, under their key priority 'to give every child and young person the best start in life', chairs the Child Development Project Board. This board has a focus on early intervention, and is seeking to develop an integrated pathway of 'evidence based intervention and support for those aged 0-18 in Northern Ireland'. As part of this remit, the Public Health Agency have developed a strategy on Infant Mental Health, and are in the process of implementing a number of 'evidence based' training programmes, including the Solihull Approach, Video Interactive Guidance, and the Tavistock programme 'Infant mental health: early years development'. The Health Strategy Fit and Well: Changing Lives 2012-2022 aims to promote 'a safe and supportive family environment' through 'evidence based parenting programmes', parental information and support through Family Support Hubs, pre, post & peri-natal support for the most vulnerable mothers through programmes such as Family Nurse Partnership, services for those children living with special needs, mental health issues or family members with such needs.

4.4.3 Policy in Education, Employment and Justice

In education, the Department of Education strategy, 'Learning to Learn' 2012, recognises the contribution of early years learning to wider educational outcomes, and seeks to support a range of universal and targeted Early Intervention services to contribute to these aims, therefore improving outcomes for children and young people. This includes wider provision for the Sure Start programme, which transferred to the Department of Education in 2011 as well as a parenting information campaign, 'Education Works' to highlight the critical nature of the home environment in a child's education and refocusing of Extended Schools money to address barriers to learning.

The Department of Justice strategy, 'Reducing Offending: Towards a Safer Society' (2012) sets out to 'reduce offending and create a safer society is a focus on prevention and diversion'. This strategy highlights that 'evidence links criminal
behaviour back to early life experiences’ and that intervening early will be efficient (saving money over the longer term), effective (saving children from entering the criminal justice system) and will produce fewer victims of crime. This approach it is stated will not only benefit individuals, but will benefit society as a whole.

4.4.4 Early Intervention Transformation Programme

Finally, in this elaborate and complex picture of interlocking strategies overseen by a multiplicity of departments and structures, a cross departmental approach has been pursued in an overarching programme, The Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP). This programme is part of the Delivering Social Change and Atlantic Philanthropies20 Signature Programme. The aim of this Programme is ‘to improve outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland through embedding early intervention approaches’. Collectively funded over a four-year period by six government departments (DE, DHSSPS, DEL, DSD, DOJ, OFMDFM) and the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Early Intervention Transformation Programme also seeks to ‘transform mainstream services to children and families in order to deliver a long term legacy of improvement’. There are three ‘Workstreams’ within the programme: Workstream 1 aims to ‘equip all parents with the skills needed to give their child the best start in life’ and will focus on three key parenting stages, Getting Ready for Baby, Getting Ready for Toddler and Getting Ready to Learn; Workstream two aims ‘to support families when problems arise before they need statutory involvement’ and will deliver five new flexible Early Intervention Services across Northern Ireland, which will deliver ‘a range of practical and therapeutic supports to families’; and Workstream 3 aims to ‘positively address the impact of adversity on children’ and will focus on initiatives such as securing permanent adoption or foster care for looked after children from an early age.

20 Atlantic Philanthropies is a US based Charitable Foundation with a strong focus on supporting Prevention and Early Intervention. In keeping with the founder’s ‘Giving While Living’ philosophy, they believe in making investments to solve urgent problems now, so they are less likely to become larger, more entrenched and more expensive challenges later.
The intended direction of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme was to utilize the learning from an extensive ten-year investment programme valued at over one hundred million pounds by the US based philanthropic organization, Atlantic Philanthropies across the island of Ireland, the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (Rochford et al, 2014). The initiative was characterised by a strong emphasis on the ‘rigorous evaluation of effectiveness’ principally through experimental trials, a future-orientated approach to cost savings in remediation and the centrality of a neuroscientific approach (Rochford et al, 2014):

At the heart of prevention and early intervention work is the understanding that a child’s early years are critical in terms of their brain development, which can have a major impact on their future outcomes. (Rochford et al, 2014, p6)

Due in part to the influence of the Atlantic Philanthropies programme, as well as policy influence from the UK and US contexts, there has been a distinctive cross departmental policy move towards prevention and early intervention in recent years in Northern Ireland. This can be seen across a multiplicity of strategic documents where Early Intervention is a unifying policy concept. There is a strong emphasis, particularly within the field of health on evidence-based programmes drawing from a neuroscientific discourse. The focus on neuroscience is also echoed in other policy and strategy areas and in overarching programmes such as the Early Intervention Transformation Programme. Within the field of education, the orientation is less neuroscientifically based and in relation to evidence, draws principally from a key longitudinal study (EPPENI, 2001) particularly in relation to the role of parents in home learning, reflected in the summary statement ‘what parents do is more important than who parents are’. The discourse has also been influenced by other policy contexts, principally the UK and US in initiatives such as the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative.

The exploration and analysis of these discourses within this will be looked at in depth in later chapters where they will be conceptualised as competing discourses,
informed by different types of capital within the overall field of power. The lack of policy progress on fundamental issues such as child poverty and children’s rights should also be noted as well as the lack of a robust coordinating governmental body to hold departments to account. It is also of importance that many of these policies and strategies have changed, been revised and shifted in a relatively short time as Government Departments charged with the delivery of the policies are in flux as Northern Ireland embarks on a radical restructuring of the public sector.

4.5 Public Sector Reform

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 created a momentum for radical public sector reform and in 2002 the Government-appointed Review of Public Administration was launched to examine governance arrangements and to propose reform options. The expectations of the Review of Public Administration were enormous with claims made that structural reform (e.g. reorganising health, education, and local government) would be ‘transformative’ and lead inexorably to better quality public services in Northern Ireland. Instead, reforms became part of a wider political struggle some of which remain unresolved and have tested the effective working of the Northern Ireland power-sharing Executive (Knox 2012). The proportion of the workforce employed in the public sector in Northern Ireland (29 per cent) is only slightly lower than it was when devolution was restored (31 per cent). As a comparison, the public sector accounts for 21 per cent of UK-wide employment and 20 per cent of employment in the Republic of Ireland. Two-thirds of public sector employees work in health, social services and education. The NI Executive is now preparing to reduce the public sector workforce by 10% over the next four years and Government Departments will be reduced from twelve to nine in 2016. Large-scale ‘transformation’ and reform programmes are therefore moving slowly ahead across the public sector with frequent stalls in progress and shifts in approach. This is an important aspect of the climate that forms the backdrop to the study as cuts will impact on all of the departments and sectors involved in Early Childhood Intervention.
Local Government has also undergone significant change and again after frequent stalls in the process and different shifts in proposals about number and boundaries has seen the formation of the 11 new councils in 2015, along with the transfer of social, community and planning powers. Local government in Northern Ireland however, unlike other areas of the UK has little power and even with new responsibilities from 2015 will still fall far short of the wider remit of other jurisdictions. This has significant implications in relation to Early Intervention as can be seen in the case study, where a lack of local decision-making powers significantly impacted on the capacity to mobilise resources. In the period of the study, Ballymore itself has moved from being a single council area to a new ‘Super Council’ area merged with another local authority. This will have impact in relation to the boundaries and remit of current work on Early Intervention and Regeneration within the city. There exists the potential for the overall concept of an Early Intervention City to be abandoned or re-conceived as an Early Intervention Region or sub-region. This is a graphic example of how the fluid boundaries in the construction of a case study are impacted upon by real world political events and shifts. For the purposes of this study however, it would be premature to go beyond the original city context, as this was the position of the Council boundary at the time the fieldwork took place.

The contextual picture at Northern Ireland level, therefore, is of a society emerging from conflict, with significant economic challenges, a multiplicity of strategies and still unwieldy structures of governance. Change, as can be seen in the case of Public Sector reform is often contested and the political structures are frequently vulnerable to the threat of suspension of the devolved structures as was the case from 2002-2007. While there has been a very significant decrease in physical violence, tensions and divisions remain at political and community level and decision making still reflects a political system based on national allegiance rather than on social and economic issues.

4.6 The City of Ballymore - the context for the case study
The case study is of a small city, Ballymore in Northern Ireland with a population of just over 100,000. The city has experienced a significant impact of conflict during the Northern Ireland troubles and while the direct impact of violence is substantively reduced since the 1998 Peace Agreement, the city, like the rest of Northern Ireland remains highly separated residentially and educationally with some 90% of families living in communities which are relatively homogenous in relation to religious or community background and 95% of children attending schools with those of the same religious and community tradition. The city of Ballymore is predominantly Catholic and the demographics of the city have been a significant factor in its past and present. At the 2011 census, in response the questions as to what religion they were brought up in, determined by the denomination of the primary school given Northern Ireland’s divided system, 75% were raised as Catholic, 22% Protestant and 3% other. 21 There is a history of strong political discourse in the city partly due to its positioning and significance in relation to the Civil Rights movement and the significant impact of the conflict.

4.6.1 OECD Report on Ballymore

In 2012 the OECD, under its Local Employment and Economic Development Programme produced a report profiling the City of Ballymore22 which informed the development of the Regeneration Plan. In the report, the potential for transformative change was set against the backdrop of structural and political challenges:

It is a city deeply affected by political and economic circumstance. The 1998 Peace Agreement marked a new era, and since that time, the city has sought to redefine itself. The socio-economic legacy of “the Troubles”, economic restructuring and physical peripherality have meant that the decade of


22 The full title of this report is not included in the referencing or bibliography as to do so would compromise the anonymity of the city.
economic growth which benefited other parts of the region have not brought about significant change in the city.

(OECD 2012)

The City is also described in the report as ‘a resilient City’ with ‘strong political leadership and a genuine commitment to reshaping its economy based on principles of ‘equality and sustainability’. The following extracts from the OECD report provide a statistical overview of the city context in relation to key indicators relevant to Early Intervention such as unemployment and deprivation, health and education outcomes.

In the 15 years before the economic crisis, the labour market grew by 10,000 peaking at 50,000 in 2008. In 2008, the city had a working age employment rate of 59.4%, however it still had a ranking of 86th out of a total of 86 UK areas. In 2010, the working-age employment rate had dropped to 55.4%, compared to 65.8% in Northern Ireland. Almost 40% of the workforce is employed in the public administration, health and social work and education sectors. In February 2012, 8.4% of the total working age population claimed benefits compared to a Northern Ireland average of 5.4%. The annual incapacity benefit rate per capita was GBP 240 which placed the city as the worst affected of all 86 UK areas. In April 2008, 12.5% of GP patients in the city were being prescribed drugs for mood and anxiety disorders, compared to a Northern Ireland average of 11.5%.

The city has ‘one of the youngest demographics’ on the island of Ireland with almost 40% of its citizens under the age of 25. In 2009/2010, 78.9% and 79.0% of school pupils achieved key stage 2\textsuperscript{23} level 4+ in Maths and English respectively. This was slightly below the average for Northern Ireland, which was 82.5% and 81.4% for Maths and English respectively. In 2010, 24.7% of the population aged 16-64 had no qualifications compared to a Northern Ireland figure of 20.4%. In relation to Health and Wellbeing, in 2010, a total of 10 of Northern Ireland’s 50 most deprived wards

\textsuperscript{23} Key Stage 2 is the assessment at the end of Primary School education at age 11. Assessments are graded at levels 1-6.
were situated in the city. In 2010, the child poverty rate was 38% compared to a rate of 9% across Britain in 2009. The population of children under three is almost six and a half thousand and over half of these children (56%) attend one of the four Sure Start programmes in the city. The percentage of the population who live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas, representing the top 10% of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland is 45%. A 2009 resident survey revealed that within the top 10% disadvantaged communities, over 75% of residents had lived in the neighbourhood for more than ten years.

4.7 Ballymore Regeneration Plan

By 2008, local leaders in Ballymore agreed that existing plans for the regeneration of the city were 'not progressing fast enough due to a lack of any guiding coalition and ownership'. As a result, a process of engagement and analysis began with key stakeholders in the city about the future and almost two and a half years later, this process culminated in the production of the 2011 Ballymore Regeneration Plan. The plan was an ambitious and far-reaching local development strategy with a time horizon of just under a decade with the ambitious claim of being "place-shaping and life-changing" for the city and its people.

The plan was commended by OECD in three aspects: the 'highly inclusive' process of collaborative endeavour and stakeholder involvement, the local leadership structure to take the plan forwards and the engagement of central government in developing the programme of support necessary to implement it. This was in line with the overall objectives of OECD Regeneration planning as a means to 'translate visions, values, and ambitions into practical programmes of governance, investment, and project management linking the aspirations of politicians and citizens into one shared plan with practical delivery arrangements'.

The contribution of Regeneration planning to the discourse of the city is acknowledged, where plans are described as:
a communication tool that link past, present, and future and tell the story of
the city and its development in ways which are visible and practical and
allow stakeholders and citizens to imagine the future of the city. (OECD
2012)

The social, political and economic history of the city is acknowledged in the mission
is to deliver ‘a stronger and more vibrant economy with increased prosperity’ but
also ‘in ways which ensure that opportunities and benefits from regeneration are
targeted towards the most deprived groups in our communities.’ The perspective
in the plan is therefore, underpinned by the two guiding principles of
‘mainstreaming equality’ and ‘embedding sustainability’. Structurally, the plan is
designed as a set of interconnected projects that would help re-orientate the city
towards a new trajectory of ‘inclusive and transformative’ economic growth.

The overall framework proposes local development interventions organised into
five ‘transformational’ themes and 11 catalyst programmes of which ‘Early
Intervention City’ is one. These are described as ‘game changers’ for the City. The
word ‘transformation’ is frequently used in the wider public policy context in
Northern Ireland and a similar discourse is repeated here at city level and again at
neighbourhood level. From the perspective of Bourdieu and in relation to
reproduction and transformation an important question is: when the ‘rules of the
game’ are so deeply rooted at individual and structural levels and where
intergenerational inequality is deeply entrenched, can a catalyst programme really
be a game changer?

Two tensions are acknowledged in relation to the competing discourses within the
plan in the OECD report. These have resonance within the broader case study.
Chief amongst these is ‘the notion that the equality agenda and the economic
growth agenda are somehow alternatives or in tension with each other’. The
suggestion proposed is that ‘It is more helpful if all parties can adopt a notion of
equality and growth, rather than seeing it as an either/or’. The same goes for the
While it is essential that the historical conflict, divisions and inequalities of the past are recognised and acknowledged, it does not help to remain prisoners of the past. The community need to take ownership of their future, and see themselves in the role of agents of change.

The report also points to the need to 'spend more time on building trust, confidence and self-belief'. This issue of trust building was identified by a neighbourhood manager as being evident from the beginning of the process and reveals some of the dynamics that were beneath this surface of cooperation. Interestingly, he uses the terms 'marking' and 'positioning' to describe the process:

Not everybody trusts everybody else, there are political differences, there are social differences, there are geographical differences. We were there through the regeneration plan and right across that people were marking each other. We had to position ourselves, in this area there were ten sectoral working groups, rather than going to the one you were interested in, we had to make sure we had somebody in every one. (Neighbourhood Manager, South River)

It is unclear whether the 'we' refers to neighbourhoods or political parties. However, what is clear is that strategic positioning was as important as partnership. To some extent the discourse in the plan reflects the issues of trust, identifying the need for 'exceptional and continued participatory leadership, relationship brokering' and for 'more translators and matchmakers'.

Ownership of the Regeneration plan, crucial to its success, is also highlighted as being unclear:

It is not clear the extent to which the plan is owned by the City Council and the political parties represented on the council. Similarly, the community
and voluntary sector seem to have not yet decided whether they can take co-responsibility for the plan. Who speaks for the city? Many people still seem to speak for their own organisation or constituency, rather than being able to talk-up the city as a whole. (OECD 2012)

It is interesting that the site of contest is described as within the discourse, the question of ‘who speaks’ and the importance of ‘talking up’ as a strategy for influencing structural change. The role of central government is identified as the single biggest factor in how far the plan is successful. As was described earlier in this chapter, in Northern Ireland, central government holds a very high concentration of financial, political, and institutional authority, much higher than in most OECD countries.

The baseline information depicts a community with many challenges to meet, the Regeneration Plan states that ‘many of our economic, social and equality indicators remain towards the bottom of various city-region socio-economic league tables’ and yet the tone of the plan begins with significant spirit and optimism, stating ‘Ballymore’s citizens have much to celebrate and be proud of: its extraordinary history, vibrant youthful population, its university and outstanding schools, its setting in a beautiful rural hinterland with a community and voluntary sector that is active, innovative and engaged’. Ballymore, against the odds, declares itself ‘a place of hope, optimism, determination and ambition.’

On closer examination of the profile of some neighbourhoods in the Council area, some of Ballymore’s residents have much to be hopeful and optimistic about. Ballymore is a city of marked contrasts, which can be seen in the variation across its 30 local authority wards. As well as having five of the most deprived wards in relation to multiple deprivation indices, the city also has five of the least deprived wards. In relation to children on Free School Meals, Ballymore has six wards that are among the lowest levels in Northern Ireland of children in receipt of Free School Meals as well as five wards that have among the highest numbers of children receiving Free School Meals. Educational attainment also reflects this disparity with
five wards having the highest levels of attainment at GCSE in Northern Ireland and five wards with the lowest levels.

The challenges in addressing economic issues and social inequality for Ballymore are considerable and while the pledge of the regeneration plan is to be ‘transformative’, a word often used in relation to Early Intervention policy and programmes, it is also declared that ‘it will not solve generational problems overnight’. The City, should the plan be realised, would ‘at best’ move into the mid-table of the UK urban economies across most economic indicators, a substantive change from its current position at or near the bottom. It is also stated that many of the plan’s real benefits, particularly early years and physical space interventions will only truly be felt beyond the ten-year modelling horizon.

**4.8 The Early Intervention Strategic Partnership**

A key aspect of the Regeneration Plan was focused on Early Intervention and a cross sectoral partnership, the Ballymore Early Intervention Strategic Partnership was established to steer that process. This was comprised of statutory representatives from health and social care, education, local government and social development, community and voluntary sector representatives. Most of the partnership members had been involved previously in the Regeneration Sectoral Working Groups (SWG). There was a small budget made available to support the secretariat of the group though no other additional funding was allocated to the partnership with an emphasis instead placed on establishing cross-sectoral working and collaboration.

From the outset there were issues of leadership. Initially the partnership was led by the Local Authority who itself had little experience and no statutory duty function in the area of Early Intervention. The Local Authority almost immediately handed over the Chair of the partnership to a small health (though not Early Intervention focused), community led interagency partnership which also provided the secretariat support to the partnership for the small budget allocated for this. A
number of interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the leadership of the partnership:

Was ‘Ballymore Healthy Futures’ right to lead this? I don’t know... Most of the community people didn’t think so. Part of the problem was that nobody else within the statutory sector wanted to bite. (Neighboorhood Manager, South River)

I had the opportunity to join the partnership as a non-voting member and this insider aspect of my role is reflected upon in the previous chapter. There were clear advantages to having access to the meetings and process of the partnership. However, there were also disadvantages to the research process of being viewed as an insider. From a Bourdieusian perspective however, the researcher is always viewed as having a position in the field and since theory is always constructed from a particular position within the field, the researcher’s point of view reflects the construction of the field, the researcher’s habitus and the position they occupy (Hardy, 2012). It could be argued however, that in joining the partnership therefore I was engaged in, rather than a spectator to the game.

4.8.1 Positioning in the field
Positionings in the sense of the field and the game were very evident in the Early Intervention partnership from the outset. Principal amongst these were the positionings around the definition and priorities of Early Intervention. Early Intervention was defined as having a dual function: ‘intervening in the early stages of life from 0-6 years and also intervening early as soon as an issue arises, for children, young people and their families’. The tension between these two elements emerged at the early stages of the process. This is evident from the perspectives below:

While I do align myself in order to function within some of those partnerships and I understand that some people say it’s about intervening as soon as a problem arises, but that’s not what I think Early Intervention is
about. I think Early Intervention is very much about the early years of a person’s life and their family’s life when they are in that phase. (Sure Start Manager and EISP member, South River)

From our point of view it’s about how we intervene early to support our children, young people and families across the community in issues that arise that cause difficulties in their life and which if not supported and tackled at an early stage can exacerbate and have negative consequences in later life. (Neighbourhood Manager and EISP member, North River)

There was fracture within the partnership as to which of these had priority and the accommodation of both perspectives was more of a struggle to achieve than was evident from the vision statement. This was described by one of the participants as ‘positioning yourself around an idea’ (Neighbourhood Manager, North River) or ‘aligning’ as in the case above. The positioning at this point was around ‘intervening early in life’ or ‘intervening early in the stages of a problem’ is, as I will discuss in later chapters strongly connected to interpretations of the neuroscientific and evidence discourses, particularly as to the significance of the timing of intervention. As ideas are also connected to resources, the potential though not actual economic resources that the partnership might have access to and the existing human resources in areas were also affected:

When people get a whiff of resources it tilts the debate and they start positioning around this. (Sure Start Manager West River)

In the case of the Early Intervention partnership the speculation and positioning was around future and, to an extent, existing resources. Existing neighbourhood resources tended to be community youth workers and an ‘ideas shift’ to early intervention down the age range it was suggested could potentially displace these:
The shift in funding we see going into Early Intervention is taking funding away from the other end of the scale which is youth work. There is a bit of resistance on that front. (Neighbourhood Manager, East River)

Equally, the shift to what was described as a more ‘scientific’ focus in early childhood, i.e. adopting the dominant discourse in neuroscience and evidence, had potential impacts on the workforce:

If the focus changes, we would have to mould the people. Sure Start have a lot of people involved, child-minders and the like and we have people involved mainly youth workers. The difficulty for us and for Sure Start is if the shift goes more scientific, and we might have twenty people already employed. Instead of taking on a new challenge they position what they have around the idea, mould the idea to what they have. (Neighbourhood Manager South River)

From the outset therefore there is a real sense of ‘positioning within the field’ in the Early Intervention Strategic Partnership: positioning around resources, economic capital as well as around ideas, cultural capital. There were, from the outset, groupings around those who organized around the discourse of Early Childhood Intervention in the early years and those who organized around the discourse of Early Intervention in the emergence of a problem in a family context.

Unsurprisingly, these positions reflected the contexts and work backgrounds, the ‘habitus’ of the different agents, perhaps more surprisingly, the positions crossed community/statutory alignments: neighbourhood managers and statutory sector representatives involved in Family Support Hubs supporting one discourse and those involved in early childhood from statutory and community sectors supporting another perspective. They also crossed traditional political alignments in communities. Ultimately, the alignments, though of course this was not immediately apparent, reflected the outworkings of the discourses in neuroscience and evidence in the different fields.
4.8.2 The Early Intervention Framework and Action Plan

The development of the Early Intervention Framework and Action Plan was a process coterminous with the case study. The case study is not an evaluation of either of these documents which were still in draft form at the time of the study, but it is useful to reflect on the main areas of discourse that were emerging from this process. The vision statement for the Early Intervention Framework reflects the optimistic and ambitious tone of the Regeneration Plan:

This city and district becomes the best place to be born and grow up in by providing opportunities for every child and young person to reach their full potential. (EISP Framework document 2014)

Given the statistical backdrop in relation to social and economic deprivation and child poverty in particular, the ‘best’ place to be born and grow up reflects a transformative vision of change. Three strategic priorities and key outcomes are identified as the route towards this change: firstly, to connect early attachment and communication programmes across the area; secondly to create a shared commitment to family support and nurturing; thirdly to build the resilience and capacity of children, young people and families to cope with life changes and challenges. The promotion and communication of the neuroscientific discourse with a focus on attachment is central to strategic outcome one: ‘promote the early attachment message to communities and agree and disseminate consistent key messages to be shared with families on a universal basis’. Apart from a brief mention of programmes in outcome one – ‘assess & disseminate current provision of early attachment programmes and initiatives’ – there is little mention of evidence-based programmes which is interesting in that this is a powerful discourse at the regional level. There is however, a strong emphasis on workforce development which again is interesting given earlier observations about the ‘move towards the scientific’ and the skills base in communities. The processes of how this translates and outworks in communities will be discussed in later chapters.
I have attempted to capture in brief the operation of key discourses at a particular point in time within a specific geography. The point in time is characterised by Early Intervention becoming a prominent discourse within the city in the context of regeneration. At this point there was also a clear sense of different social actors positioning themselves in a field and the language of 'positioning' was used by a number of people. The Early Intervention Partnership represents a middle tier of the system. That middle tier had key weaknesses in relation to its relationships with the tiers above and below: regional decision making and community based practice. Local representatives on the Partnership had little or no control over commissioning and resources as this happened at regional level. The middle tier was also at some distance from practice, even from a community perspective:

I have been in meetings where there is nobody in the room who actually works with families, people in education are talking to teachers, not families, people in the community are managers and don’t do family work themselves so you have the design being done by those who are three steps removed from practice. (EISP partnership member)

In order to examine practice therefore at this level the case study must move next to the neighbourhood context.

4.9 The Context of Early Intervention at Neighbourhood level

Much of the broader context in relation to the neighbourhoods of North River, South River, East River and West River has already been outlined within the profile of Ballymore. As stated, over forty-five percent of Ballymore’s residents live in what are termed ‘Neighbourhood Renewal’ areas and the four ‘River’ areas represent real neighbourhoods which are both Neighbourhood Renewal and Sure Start areas. All of these neighbourhoods are socially deprived, however the history and character of each neighbourhood is different. The old city of Ballymore comprises the neighbourhoods of Marshlands, Templetown and Valleyview. These together with the HighHill estate comprise the neighbourhood of South River. Templetown is a strongly Unionist/Loyalist neighbourhood and Valleyview is strongly
Nationalist/Republican. An Interface or Peace Wall separates Templetown and Valleyview. The conflict has shaped the patterning of urban development in Ballymore, in other less visible ways. The housing estates of Highhill in South River and Oldtown in North River were built to house the growing population that could no longer be accommodated in the old city. In the 1960s the new estate of HighHill was included in the South River ward in order to maintain electoral boundaries so that the Unionist minority could politically retain control the Nationalist majority. This practice, known as 'gerrymandering' precipitated the civil rights movement in the city. This is not the only narrative in relation to sectarian division that exists in the city however. It should also be noted that since the 'troubles', less than five hundred Protestants now remain between the South, West and North River neighbourhoods combined; less than three percent of the eighteen thousand housed there in 1969. The majority of these live in the small enclave area of Templetown in South River with the remaining Protestants of Ballymore now living in East River and the surrounding area. Discourses of historic structural discrimination and minority alienation are still present in the city and there is a strong pattern of residential segregation though the rioting at interface areas and other flashpoints prevalent even in the decade following the peace process has substantively decreased. There is a strong tradition of community relations work in the city which has contributed to changing this dynamic and there an emerging sense of co-operation at neighbourhood level across traditional boundaries. This includes partnership in the area of Early Intervention, where locally developed initiatives and programmes in other neighbourhoods have gained currency and there is a sense of developing knowledge sharing and support:

24 The peace lines or peace walls are a series of border barriers in Northern Ireland that separate Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist neighbourhoods.

25 In the process of setting electoral districts, gerrymandering is a practice that attempts to establish a political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating district boundaries to create partisan advantaged districts.
They (in North River) have a terrific Family Support Hub. They are getting really positive results. We are still at an early stage; they are one step ahead. To be honest our Family Support Hub in East River is very statutory orientated, there’s is far more community based. We are going to extend their ‘Little Talkers’ communication programme they have developed over here. People are becoming more willing to look at the picture outside of their own immediate area now. There is a shift, not a huge shift, it’s baby steps really but we are definitely building on that. (Neighbourhood Manager East River)

The field of relations at neighbourhood level is different from the wider policy arena where statutory bodies and evidence based programmes have strong political capital. In relation to the different discourses at neighbourhood level, the knowledge base in the development of Early Intervention programmes that are locally informed and community managed would appear to have stronger traction within the neighbourhood context than externally developed and statutory based programmes.

4.10 Policies at Neighbourhood Level - Sure Start and Neighbourhood Renewal
The different perspectives on Early Intervention at neighbourhood level have been influenced by two key policies which have been referred to but not outlined in detail to date. These are Neighbourhood Renewal and Sure Start. Neighbourhood Renewal and Sure Start have been key influencers in the discourse in communities around addressing economic inequalities and supporting children and families for more than a decade. Sure Start, introduced in Northern Ireland in 2001 was based on the model in the UK by the Labour government in 1998, of ‘giving children the best possible start in life’ through improvement of childcare, early education, health and family support. Sure Start in the UK context had in turn been modelled on the much earlier Headstart Programme in the US, where much of the early cost benefit studies discussed in earlier chapters originated. The emphasis is on the early years of life and the underpinning rationale for these programmes is that investment and
support for disadvantaged children will bring individual, social and economic benefits. The Sure Start Programme was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2000/01 by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). Policy responsibility for Sure Start transferred to the Department of Education (DE) in 2006. Sure Start is now funded by DE and administered by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and will move entirely to DE in 2017. Sure Start is currently provided in the top 20% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland and Ballymore includes four Sure Start areas; North River, South River, East River and West River. It is described as 'the only universal, early years intervention in Northern Ireland, focused on both the needs of children and parents/families who live in disadvantaged areas' (2015, p. 6)

'People and Place – A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal’ was launched in June 2003. The ten-year strategy aimed to target those communities throughout Northern Ireland suffering the highest levels of deprivation by bringing together the work of all Government Departments in partnership with local people to tackle disadvantage in all aspects of everyday life. Four areas of focus were identified: community, economic, social and physical renewal. Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) were identified from the most deprived 10% of wards in Northern Ireland as defined in the 2001 Multiple Deprivation Measure. Thirty-four NRAs were identified using this method and four of these were in Ballymore. Like Sure Start, Neighbourhood Renewal was a policy initiated by the Labour government in the UK context.

Both Neighbourhood Renewal and Sure Start have been subject to evaluation at the time of the case study. Both evaluations note the lack of impact on health and educational inequalities and both initiatives have been criticised for lacking robust systems of measurement against outcomes. The evaluation of Neighbourhood Renewal (2014) identifies that, on the whole, the gap between Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) and non-Neighbourhood Renewal Areas has not narrowed. The data highlights that whilst the gap has not been closed, relative improvements have taken place in relation to a number of key social and economic indicators. A
review of the relative measures of deprivation shows that there has been little change in the top 50 most deprived urban wards. During the lifetime of the strategy only 8 wards located within the NRAs have moved out of the top 50 most deprived wards.

The recent evaluation of Sure Start (2015) documents that despite some improvements in health and well-being statistics the educational achievements of children in Sure Start areas have actually declined since the introduction of the initiative. A review of the available educational statistics (2004 to 2013) showed that overall the educational attainment of pupils in schools in Sure Start areas at key stages 1 and 2 has declined with a number of areas experienced significant decreases (2015, p.7). There report criticises the lack of consistency across Sure Start Projects on what outcome evidence or data is collected or when it is collected (p8). Information is collected on activities and outputs such as registrations, demographics, parental employment status, religion, ethnicity, disability and type of feeding for new-borns. While not in any way a critique, the review does recognise some of the tensions in the discourse around outcomes, pointing out for example in a footnote that ‘It should also be noted that assessment of pre-school children is also regarded as difficult and controversial’ (p8). In a statement that its internally contradictory, the review, while criticising the rigour within Sure Start itself relies on anecdotal data collated from parents, preschools and other key stakeholders as providing ‘strong evidence of the effectiveness of the services provided’ (p19).

4.11 Conclusion
The outline of the case study of Ballymore gives an overall picture of the city with some detail of the wider social economic and political context in which it is situated and of some of the neighbourhoods that make up the local community. There is, already a definite sense of competing discourses within the different fields and at the different social levels, the political and policy level, at the mid-level of the Early Intervention Partnership and at Neighbourhood level. These are not, of course, discrete spheres of influence: neighbourhood managers are talking with ministers;
communities co-operate across political divides; programmes and policies shift and change; and social actors position and reposition themselves around ideas and around resources. There is however a definite Bourdieusian sense of the different fields and rules of the game and of individuals, groups and institutions positioning and competing for different forms of capital, be that political capital, economic capital in the form of resources or the cultural capital of knowledge and ideas. It is also interesting to note that the dominant discourses at policy level, for example those around 'evidence' may not necessarily translate unaltered to practice on the ground. This illustrates the importance of looking at discourse in relation to policy and practice. Early Intervention practice in the field of the neighbourhood may well be coming from a different logic of practice with different forms of capital at stake and different rules of the game. This will be explored in more depth in the chapters that follow, acknowledging that this broad overview of the positionings at macro level leaves key elements unexplored which will emerge as a more detailed focus of subsequent chapters. These key elements include the interactions of parents and children with the programmes and initiatives that are happening at neighbourhood and community level and which are key to the operationalisation of the discourse of Early Intervention. The focus of the case study at programme level will therefore be on exploring the interaction of individual 'habitus' as identified by Bourdieu as well as the interaction of habitus with social field and with different forms of capital.
Chapter 5
Neuroscience as discourse in Early Intervention

Scientific power relations are power relations that are set up and exerted in particular through cognitive and communicative relations. (Bourdieu 2004 p55).

5.1 Introduction
A well-known speaker on Early Intervention is giving a public lecture in Ballymore on the subject of Infant Mental Health.26 A former economist and criminologist, he is snapping his fingers every second as he speaks to illustrate the point he is making about the rate at which the infant brain develops synaptic connections:

The answer is, just imagine this (snap, snap, snap) ... every second, a baby is adding more than a million new connections (snap, snap, snap) every second of its life from birth to age three. Just remember, next time you are looking at a tiny baby, that is what is going on, whatever is happening in its life, the environment around it, whether it is one of love and nurturing, or being completely ignored, or being shouted at or abused or damaged in some way it is creating one million new connections, (snap, snap, snap) actually the real figure is 1.7 million per second, which is creating the architecture of the brain which will last throughout its whole life. A three-year-old baby has twice as many synapses as anybody in this room. It’s downhill from age three onward, I’m sorry to say, because from age three onward the brain prunes and gets rid of synapses based on the principle of ‘use it or lose it’.

(Infant Mental Health Seminar, Ballymore 2014)

26 This public lecture was made available on the website of the Health Trust at the time of the research and a CD recording was made by the Health Trust and distributed for training. This recording was the source of the data from the seminar used in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study.
Neuroscientific research demonstrating that a child’s experiences early in life significantly affect the physical development of the brain has become a dominant discourse in early childhood intervention (Masten & Coatsworth 1998, Perry 2000, Shonkoff & Phillips 2000, Gunnar et al 2001). Findings in neuroscience have highlighted particular developmental opportunities and vulnerabilities in early childhood which have been interpreted both by and beyond the scientific community. Of particular interest to this study is the way the discourse has been translated and interpreted in policy and practice, the way in which public policy which establishes the basis for intervention in early childhood, draws its claims from neuroscience, particularly, claims in relation to the first three years. Areas of difference between the scientific research and the policy interpretation of these are particularly important where research in the area which is often tentative and cautious in its claims to knowledge about the developing mind and brain of the young child is translated into popularised absolutes such as ‘use it or lose it’. From the perspective of discourse, the ways in which neuroscientific research has been used, altered, simplified, mis/interpreted in policy and popularised in advocacy is arguably as important as the original research on which the discourse makes its claims. The power of the scientific discourse as an influencer, the processes by which some ideas gain traction and become dominant while others are sublimated, the ways in which this policy and advocacy discourse is consequently interpreted by practitioners and by parents, merits further levels of analysis. It is therefore the aim of this chapter to uncover some of these layers of interpretation from science to policy to practice, to reveal some of the ideas about young children’s developing minds and brains which have been imported, as Bourdieu says, ‘Trojan horse’ style into the discourse of early childhood intervention.

This chapter will first outline the origins of the key debates in neuroscience as to the importance of the first three years, particularly how these have shaped the broader policy discourse in Early Childhood Intervention, further developing the themes which have emerged from the review of the literature. Using Bourdieu’s theory of ‘field’ the focus will move to consider how the neuroscientific discourse has been drawn on in public policy in Northern Ireland. The emerging policy on Early
Intervention particularly from the fields of Health, Childcare and Justice and how neuroscience is employed as 'capital' within these will be considered as competing discourses within the overall 'field of power' (Bourdieu 1992). Bourdieu defined the overall social space as the 'field of power' consisting of multiple fields such as the economic field, the education field, the scientific field and the health field. Both agents and institutions compete for legitimate forms of authority of which the field is a site, in this case particular attention is paid to the power of the scientific discourse in the field of early intervention and the way scientific claims are used as capital in the field. The role of different types of capital is important, as the fields that make up the field of power are not all equal. Bourdieu maintained, for example, that all fields were dominated by the economic field and that many strategies function as 'double plays' which operate in several fields at once, for example science, politics and economics. (Bourdieu 1994). By examining the overlapping and interdependent discourses in the policy field of Early Intervention in Northern Ireland we can consider how educational, cultural, scientific and economic fields compete, overlap, and are re-enforced by each other. Of particular interest are the different types of capital which are being contested within fields and how these are revalidated or dominated within the policy process.

Following this analysis of how neuroscience has been interpreted in public policy, this chapter will examine how it has impacted on commissioning, managing and delivering Early Intervention in practice in Ballymore drawing from the interview and observational data. One of the direct ways in which neuroscience discourse impacted on practice in the case study context is the division reflected in the Ballymore Early Intervention Partnership between adherents of the 'early in life' and 'early in the emergence of a problem' approach to intervention. This tension in the field reflects a competing tension in relation to the interpretation of the neuroscience between those who support the view that neurological development early in life presents a key opportunity and vulnerability and those who view neurological plasticity and opportunity at different stages of development informing practice with children and families. The tension between these positions is reflected to some extent in the habitus of the agents though this is not absolute.
Health professionals, as part of their organisational and institutional habitus, tended to support a neuroscientific or medical model of intervention, early childhood advocates also tended to support the importance of neuroscientific development the first three years, whereas community activists and social workers tend towards a focus on family support for problems emerging at any stage of the life cycle.

In unpacking the next layer of practice - the translation of ideas from neuroscience at community and family level - another interesting contrast emerges. While the interpretation in public policy primarily reflects what can be described as a 'deficit-based' view of the neuroscience where the potential impact of extreme neglect and adversity predominates, at community and programme level there is evidence of the emergence of an 'assets-based' interpretation of the neuroscientific discourse with parents and in communities. This process of interpretation and translation is complex however and the ways in which both 'deficit-based' and 'assets-based' interpretations of neuroscience interact in practice ultimately shows the potential shortcomings of either in addressing or transforming social disadvantage. Both tend to place the locus of responsibility for change with parents alone. In following through the framework to think about the translation of the discourse with parents, the 'habitus', it can be argued of parent and child impacts on their receptivity to neuroscientific discourse and there may be potential for this to further, rather than to reduce inequalities. Using the Bourdieusian theoretical framework therefore, the concepts of capital, habitus and field to explore the interpretation of the neuroscientific discourse reveals how this is operationalised to support some practices and inhibit others. Some aspects of the field dynamics, such as the high status of perceived 'scientific' discourse persist from policy to practice and from government to community level. In other ways there are important shifts in the ways in which different discourses are validated. In order to examine whether the neuroscientific discourse contributes to reproducing or transforming social disadvantage it is important therefore in this chapter to examine all three levels, the policy level, the community level and the programmatic level.
5.2 The Policy debate around intervention and ‘the first three years’

Three key interpretations frequently made by policy makers and advocates that are claimed to originate from neuroscience are particularly significant in relation to the overall rationale for intervention in early childhood (Bruer 1999). The first of these, as compellingly communicated in the opening passage to this chapter, relates to synaptogenesis in early childhood followed by later synaptic pruning. Although there is much talk and graphic illustration in policy and advocacy about synapses and circuits, much less is known about how biological phenomena at this level contribute to young children’s development and learning (Bruer 1999; Spelke 1999; Blakemore and Frith 2005). A crucial gap is therefore yet to be bridged before research in neuroscience can inform efforts to influence children’s learning and development. Beyond the biology of rapid synaptogenesis, the child’s developing cognitive systems must be understood at a functional level, and cognitive development must be related systematically both to developing brain function and to practice in education and care of young children. Neuroscience itself is more cautious in its interpretation of this phenomenon. Dawson, Ashman and Carver (2000) for example, observe that although rapid synapse growth occurs early in development and there is a correlation with behavioural change, the causal mechanism linking synaptogenesis and behavioural change remains unclear. These more complex debates where neuroscience interfaces with cognitive psychology and child development, have failed to gain the same traction in policy and advocacy as the brain ‘starting to prune at age three’ or ‘use it or lose it’.

The second area of importance in the neuroscientific discourse relates to brain plasticity and the identification of particular ‘critical’ or ‘sensitive’ periods in development. The original research on ‘critical periods’ was based on animal studies, based on monocular deprivation in kittens (Wiesel and Hubel, 1965) and originally used to denote the period in development when lack of normal experience would cause permanent, irreversible damage to the developing organ, structure, or behaviour. In the original experiments by Weisel and Hubel (1965),
one eye of a new-born kitten was stitched shut and when it was re-opened after
three months it was found not to regain function. When this experiment was
repeated in kittens of over three months old, the effects were less significant and
there were no effects when this was done with adult cats. The irreversible
consequences of early visual deprivation are often cited as evidence for the
importance of early childhood intervention (Chugani, 1998, Kotulak, 1996). In
recent years, most developmental scientists as well as educationalists and early
childhood advocates have moved away from using the term ‘critical’ altogether and
talk instead about ‘sensitive’ periods in which normal experience is required for
normal development. In the policy discourse however the materialist structure of
the brain is conflated with the child’s social and emotional development and a
nuanced process and to use the phrase in the Allen (2011) Report becomes the
‘architecture for life’:

The early years are a very sensitive period when it is much easier to help the
developing social and emotional structure of the infant brain, and after
which the basic architecture is formed for life (Allen, 2011, p6).

The third concept relates to the importance of enriched and stimulating
environments for the development of young children. Again, the concept of
enriched environments was originally based on animal studies, (Rosenzweig et al
1972) and while it focuses on the impact of deprivation on the brains of rodents, it
tells us little about the effects of enrichment in young children and therefore is
subject to over-interpretation or misinterpretation. Well known, and now
contested, examples of the misinterpretation of enriched environments were the
phenomenon in the 1990’s of parents using flashcards or Mozart CD’s with infants.
Another aspect of the misinterpretation of the effects of enrichment is to cite
examples of environments of extreme deprivation and neglect as in the case of the
images from the work of Dr Bruce Perry (2002) which will be discussed in relation to
popularised images from neuroscience.
As is evident from the periods in which the original research upon which neuroscientific claims are frequently made, dating from the mid 1960's onwards, much of what is claimed from neuroscience has its origins in much earlier work in behavioural science as observed most notably by Bruer (1998, 2011):

If one examines the science cited in policy papers from the mid-1990s through today, one finds that more behavioral science – psychology, psychiatry and sociology – is cited than is neuroscience. Neuroscience was chosen as the scientific vehicle for the public relations campaign to promote early childhood programs more for rhetorical, than scientific reasons. (Bruer, 2011, p2)

Bruer’s critique, originally developed in ‘The Myth of the First Three Years’ (1998) and expanded in a recent (2011) review of the subject considers the political context of the interpretation of neuroscience. Indeed, the critique itself has also been there within the discourse for some time. While one of the impacts of this has been that neuroscientists concerned about misinterpretation became more careful in their interactions with the media, this has not stopped advocates and policy makers continuing to draw on a limited selection of studies dating from the 1960’s to the 1990’s as ‘new neuroscience’. This is demonstrated in the discourse in policy and advocacy examined in this study. This perspective lends itself well to the application of a Bourdieusian framework, where the discourse of neuroscience can be examined in relation to the field of power, scientific, cultural and political. The subject of this chapter is not therefore to debate the neuroscientific evidence itself, a subject best left for the neuroscientist, but to examine how, in what ways and for whose benefit the science has been interpreted, communicated and used to influence policy in the Northern Ireland context and practice in the case study area of Ballymore.

5.3 The deficit discourse in neuroscience

The neuroscientific discourse of Early Childhood Intervention has emerged primarily over the last two decades though it builds on earlier child development discourse
from behavioural psychology and attachment theory (Bowlby 1969, Ainsworth 1978). The potential insights from neuroscience in relation to infant development are significant and have added to our knowledge of young children’s development in relation to attachment, social emotional development, physical development, communication and language. Increasing knowledge, for example, of brain plasticity in infancy has been described as providing ‘immense opportunities and weighty responsibilities’ (Shore 1997, p36). The way in which the opportunities and responsibilities have been conceptualized and communicated in policy and by neuroscientific based advocacy is only occasionally through assets-based approaches, which portray neurological opportunity. Policy and advocacy which drawing on claims from neuroscience much more commonly uses a ‘deficit-based’ approach focusing on the neurological impact of adversity and susceptibility to damage. An example of this, from the same seminar quoted at the beginning of this chapter is illustrated below. The speaker treads a well-worn path which begins with the neuroscience and moves towards a deterministic trajectory:

More than 3,000 babies under one in Northern Ireland are living with a parent who is a substance abuser, over 1000 babies under one have domestic violence going on at home, 4,500 have a parent with a mental health problem and nearly 4,000 will develop disorganized attachment...

These are the children who will be the future disruptive children, the future criminals, the future people who have got serious mental health problems, the future children who won’t be able to cope with academic work at school, the children who will suffer from terrible pangs of emotional self-doubt and inner pain and we are churning them out every year at nearly four thousand across Northern Ireland and I bet somebody somewhere is cutting the budget right now to deal with those children.

(Infant Mental Health Seminar, Ballymore 2014)

From a child rights perspective, this discourse is deeply problematic. The infant brain, rather than the child, needs to be stimulated; the child born in adverse circumstances is ‘churned out’, certain to embark on a pathway of...
underachievement, mental health problems and criminality. The research ‘evidence,’ drawn from longitudinal studies as well as neuroscience on which this is based is quoted later. The script is well worn and now so familiar that it is rarely subject to critical scrutiny, even amongst early childhood and social work professionals who comprised the large audience for the seminar. The construction of a discourse which claims credential from neuroscience has significant power as an influencer and it is clear that deterministic views of children supported by neuroscience are gaining significant traction in defining the field of early childhood intervention.

5.4 Popularised interpretations and translations of neuroscience
Bourdieu’s exploration of the interrelations between science and how science is used and communicated and the power dynamics of knowledge production and translation is of relevance here in revealing the importance of popular science in the discourse:

Symbolic power of the scientific kind can be exerted more widely among ‘lay persons’ (as a power to make them see and believe), only if it has been ratified by other scientists-who tacitly control access to the ‘public’, particularly through the ‘popularisation’ of science. (Bourdieu 2004 p57)

The popularisation of neuroscientific discourse also references other discourses, such as those around evidence and measurement, as seen for example in one of the popular texts in the field, Sue Gerhardt’s account ‘Why Love Matters, how affection shapes a baby’s brain’:

Science has finally reached a point where it can measure and quantify emotion - up to a point. In neuroscience new scanning techniques have enabled scientists to make a map of the brain’s activity when emotions are being experienced – making it possible for the first time, to have some sort of technical measurement that corresponds to emotion. (Gerhardt, 2004, p4)
In the translation of science whether in the policy or popular context, Bourdieu identifies two types of capital at work: scientific and social:

the strategies of the agents engaged in the field are inseparably scientific and social, the field is the site of two kinds of scientific capital: a capital of strictly scientific authority, and a capital of power over the scientific world which can be accumulated through channels that are not purely scientific. (Bourdieu 2004 p57)

In Bourdieu's view, the autonomy of science is being encroached upon by other political and economic forces, 'channels that are not purely scientific' a state of affairs leading him to decide that 'in short, science is in danger, and for that reason it is becoming dangerous' (p58).

The confluence of neuroscientific, political and economic discourse in Early Intervention is clearly seen in the imagery used on the front cover of the Allen Report of 2011 as shown in Figure 2.
Mis/interpretations of the concepts of ‘critical periods’ and ‘enriched environments’ together with the contested costs benefit analysis are fused in this ubiquitous image which features in policy, in child development textbooks\textsuperscript{27}, in popular science and in public output on Early Intervention. This extreme example of the neurological impact of the lack of stimulation during a ‘critical’ period has become the visual touchstone of the neuroscientific based discourse.

The acknowledgement on the report reads as follows:

The images on the front cover illustrate the negative impact of neglect on the developing brain. The CT scan on the left is from a healthy 3-year-old child with an average head size (50th percentile). The image on the right is from a series of three 3-year-old children following severe sensory-deprivation neglect in early childhood. The child’s brain is significantly smaller than average and has abnormal development of cortex (cortical atrophy) and other abnormalities suggesting abnormal development of the brain.

From studies conducted by researchers from the Child Trauma Academy (www.childtrauma.org) led by Bruce D Perry, MD, PhD.

The acknowledgement does not specify that the image of ‘extreme neglect’ on the right is of a child from a Romanian orphanage suffering from global neglect and deprived of language, touch and interaction with others. The implication is that young children who have a ‘bad start’ (p.3) and ‘generate major costs, financial and social, for their families, local communities and the national economy’ will have brain development resembling the right hand image. Here neuroscience provides the empirical backdrop to a focus on individual parental responsibility rather than on government responsibility to address poverty or invest in the welfare state, housing or childcare. The child, particularly the developing brain of the child within

\textsuperscript{27} Examples of textbooks include Cortvriend, V, 2008, Advanced Early Years For Foundation Degrees and levels 4/5 and Gerhardt, S, Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a babies brain.
the discourse is decontextualized in the Allen Report as its use of the following quote illustrates:

The exceptionally strong influence of early experience on brain architecture makes the early years of life a period of both great opportunity and great vulnerability for brain development. An early, growth-promoting environment, with adequate nutrients, free of toxins, and filled with social interactions with an attentive caregiver, prepares the architecture of the developing brain to function optimally in a healthy environment. Conversely, an adverse early environment, one that is inadequately supplied with nutrients, contains toxins, or is deprived of appropriate sensory, social, or emotional stimulation, results in faulty brain circuitry. (Harvard Center on the Developing Child quoted in Allen 2011)

The neurological potential of the child is portrayed as the sole responsibility of the parent, 'An unhappy, unresponsive adult carer limits a baby's ability to develop their social and emotional capabilities' (Allen 2011 p14). The potential social or structural reasons behind 'unhappiness' such as poverty, debt, poor housing, lack of opportunity are not contextualised here. The problem, rather, is seen as one that is located and can be remedied within the mother/child dyad.

The images used by Allen (2011) are from studies conducted by researchers from the Child Trauma Academy led by Dr Bruce Perry. Speaking at the Margaret Mc Cain inaugural lecture in London in 2010, Perry states that the 'biological gifts' that make early childhood 'a time of great opportunity' also make children very vulnerable to negative experiences:

These adverse effects could be associated with stressed, inexperienced, ill informed, pre occupied or isolated caregivers, parental substance abuse and or alcoholism, social isolation or family violence. (Perry 2010)

The example which is used to illustrate the impact of adversity on the brain is, like the example of the orphanage, a very extreme one:
the most extreme and tragic cases of profound neglect, such as when children are raised by animals, the damage to the developing brain – and child – is severe, chronic, and resistant to interventions later in life’ (Perry 2010, my emphasis added).

Again, the dominant discourse presents the duality of the nurtured child/brain against the neglected child using the extreme imagery from a Romanian orphanage or of a child raised by animals. There is an opposition formed, the nurtured, stimulated child raised in a relationally and cognitively rich environment emerges as a self-regulating, thoughtful and productive member of family, community and society. In contrast the child raised in a chaotic, unsupportive environment may require special educational provision, mental health or even criminal justice intervention. The antithesis of the thinking productive, reasoned subject is the chaotic, poorly regulated unreasonable subject and the policy discourse constructs this dual image of the child and, by inference, of the parent.

The Bruce Perry image featured on the front of the Allen Report is also used as one of the slides at the Infant Mental Health Seminar in Ballymore and introduced in the following way:

The brains of abused children are significantly smaller than normal children, many areas appear darker on the CT scan. The limbic system which controls emotions can be smaller and the hippocampus which controls memory is smaller. Many of you will have seen this chart by a man called Dr Bruce Perry of the difference between two children. It is an extreme example but other children lie somewhere on the continuum between these two extremes of a normal brain and one which has suffered extreme neglect.

(Infant Mental Health Seminar Ballymore 2014)

The reality that most children are on a continuum is acknowledged here, the problem is that it is not a continuum which is presented at any point nor has it any power in the discourse. What is reified and has power is a deliberately
decontextualized image, a polarised duality of two brains representing the ‘normal’ and the ‘neglected’ child.

5.5 Polarisation within the neuroscientific discourse

The pervasive influence of this image shows the limitations of using discourse analysis that is solely linguistically or textually based. Discourse Analysis as previously discussed includes two broad approaches, that which draws inferences from structural and linguistic features in texts and discourse analysis informed by the work of Foucault (Taylor 2004). Foucault’s theorisation of the constitutive and disciplinary properties of discursive practice within socio-political power relations goes beyond how language works in isolation to produce meaning to consider how it constitutes particular kinds of objects and subjects upon whom and through which relations of power are realised (Luke 1999). In this way, Graham suggests, text work through discourse analysis informed by Foucault attempts to identify ‘the discourses of true and false...the correlative formations of domains and objects...the verifiable falsifiable discourses that bear on them and...the effects in the real to which they are linked’ (1980 p237 emphasis added)

In relation to bringing a closer analysis of the particular use of the two Bruce Perry images of children’s brains, I will draw on Foucauldian discourse analysis to look not only at how scientific language works within power relations but importantly how the discourse of neuroscience constitutes particular objects and subjects upon whom relations of power are realised. The objective is not to consider whether scientific claims about synaptic development in early childhood are ‘true’ as such but to explore neuroscience as a discursive formation which involves mapping the system by which particular objects are formed and the ‘statements’ or ‘type of enunciations’ implicated (Foucault, 1972). How is it, for example, that an oppositional discourse of ‘good’ and ‘poor’ parenting is created with MRI images of babies’ brain scans? How are the sources of the problem identified? How are the proposed solutions described?
Foucault describes the ‘statement’ not as a linguistic unit like a sentence but as ‘a function’ (Foucault 1972 p98). Graham (2005) uses the metaphor of a ‘discursive junction box’ in which words and thing intersect and become invested with particular relations of power, resulting in an ‘interpellative’ event (Althusser 1971, Butler 1990) in which one can ‘recognise and isolate an act of formulation’ (Foucault 1972 p100). The statement ‘enables the object to appear...to be placed in a field of exteriority’ (Foucault 1972 p100). Statements in the neuroscientific discourse such as: ‘Physical connections between neurons, synaptic connections increase and strengthen through repetition, or wither through disuse (Perry 2010) make the proliferation of synapses and their pruning ‘reified’ even though the science of synaptic development and pruning is by no means as clear as ‘use it or lose it’ (Bruer 1999). Arguably, the synapses within the brain are more real within the discourse than the body and mind of the child where this is happening. This displacement of the real child by the scan of his or her brain is problematic, even more problematic is the association of children who are socially disadvantaged with the scan of the child’s brain who has suffered very extreme abuse and neglect.

As Graham suggests, in her work on the application of Foucault to the analysis of education policy, work through discourse analysis informed by Foucault attempts to identify ‘the discourses of true and false...the correlative formations of domains and objects...the verifiable falsifiable discourses that bear on them and...the effects in the real to which they are linked’ (1980 p237 emphasis added) In order to examine the impact in the communities studied, ‘the effects in the real to which they are linked’ (1980 p237) we must turn next to the policy and practice within the case study. Through this initial analysis we can see a highly problematic underpinning discourse, supported by extreme examples emerging, which is drawn from neuroscience but re interpreted by policy makers depicting polarised duality of the nurtured and the neglected child. Poverty and social disadvantage is conflated with adversity in a deterministic, biologised and dehumanised discourse supported by the most extreme of examples. Looking next to the policy context of Northern Ireland we can examine to what extent the discourse from the US and UK has been appropriated or challenged.
5.6 The use of neuroscience in the policy discourse in Northern Ireland

Early Intervention in the policy context is comprised of a number of competing ‘fields’ such as health, education, social care and justice. There are different types of capital at stake within these fields as well as field discourses which have independent and interdependent aspects. It could be argued that occupying the place it does within the discourse, Early Childhood Intervention can be represented as a ‘temporary social field’ (Rawolle 2006) producing cross-field effects as the different policy fields of education, health, social care and justice interact.

Rawolle’s study which uses this term focused on the effects of the media on education policy in which the ‘knowledge economy’ as a powerful mobilising discourse constituted a temporary social field. It could also be argued using Bourdieu’s terminology that the state, the political field itself constitutes a sort of ‘meta capital’ that goes across and between fields (Bourdieu 1996).

In spite of being widely used in other contexts, Bourdieu’s field theory has been little used in the examination of public policy. Dubois’ recent work (2007, 2014) has developed this analysis using the principles of field sociology to give an account of the space of production of public policies. Building on Dubois’ framework in this chapter, I will use a relational analysis to account for the modes of domination and legitimisation at work in public policy in Early Intervention in Northern Ireland.

Initially, I will survey the key policy documents in relation to Early Intervention considering the different discourses, exploring key questions: What types of capital are at stake within the fields? Are discourses from the different policy fields consistent or are there tensions between fields? How is neuroscientific discourse appropriated and used? Does this constitute a type of scientific capital? How does the discourse of economics and economic capital operate within fields? And how does the meta field of politics dominate or legitimise within all of this?

Early Intervention as a unifying policy concept has been further defined in Northern Ireland in the five years since the publication of the Allen report (2011) in the UK context. Building from the prior investment by the US based philanthropic organisation, ‘Atlantic Philanthropies’ across the island of Ireland in 2004 focusing on
prevention and early intervention and strongly endorsing the neuroscience and evidence based practice approach, the concept has quickly gathered significant policy momentum, serving to galvanise support from different policy fields in health, education, social care as well as justice. This cross-sectoral, cross departmental approach, the capacity to mobilise institutions, bureaucracies and importantly resources is a central feature of Early Intervention as a unifying concept or 'temporary social field'. The Northern Ireland Executive’s programme for Government through the Delivering Social Change Framework (2012) outlines a clear commitment to cross departmental working in Early Intervention:

We believe the most significant opportunities to improve people’s health, well-being and life opportunities exist in the form of early interventions and services particularly but not exclusively designed for children and young people (DSC 2012).

Underneath the unifying concept as discussed in the previous chapter there are however different positionings, political perspectives, different language revealing different ‘logics of practice’ in the respective fields. It is worth exploring these briefly in relation to three policy contexts, or fields, in turn. These are policy in Health, in Childcare and in Justice.

5.6.1 Early Intervention Policy in Health
As discussed in the previous chapter, the definition of Early Intervention which has currency in Northern Ireland is; ‘Intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families or with a population at risk of developing problems’. (C4EO, 2011, p.1). The focus is on state intervention and the locus of the problem is with the child, family and community. Defining ‘a population at risk of developing problems’ immediately suggests that there are symptoms, characteristics in that population who are identified as ‘at risk’. These indicators of adversity listed, for example in the 2015 Infant Mental Health Framework and Action Plan are ‘very premature births, domestic violence, mental health problems or drugs and alcohol misuse’ (p.3). There is also reference
made to intergenerational aspects, 'for those who themselves have had very
difficult starts to their own lives' (p.3) as well as to poverty and social disadvantage
'living in difficult social and economic circumstances' (Infant Mental Health
Framework and Action Plan 2015, p.3). The underpinning idea, the hidden
discourse, is of the intergenerational 'transmission' of inequality using medicalised
language of disease and illness locating responsibility with the individual for
structural and social issues. Indeed, the term 'Infant Mental Health' with regard to
the foetus in the womb and the newborn child is a recent development in the
language of policy and serves to locate the origins of mental ill health with infancy
in a powerful association.

This chapter is not an exploration of the research on adversity, risk and resilience in
young children but an analysis of how this research evidence has been used and
interpreted in the policy discourse. The negative impact of adversity of these kinds
on expectant mothers, infants and young children has been well demonstrated
(Brazelton and Cramer 1990, Hawley & Gunner 2000, Shonkoff 2000). The issue is
in identifying 'a population at risk' whenever it is also evidenced that prematurity,
domestic violence, post-natal depression, mental health problems, drugs and
alcohol misuse cut across social, economic and geographical boundaries. The
association by conflating multiple adversities with poverty and intergenerational
'transmission' of disadvantage suggests that the population at risk can be located in
areas of disadvantage and subsequently 'treated' with the intervention. An example
of this is the location of a population at risk of poor health outcomes and
prescribing a 'treatment' of parenting programmes to improve attachment. The
locus of the problems is ascribed as familial, psychological and problems of
attachment rather than structural problems of poverty.

The discourse in health in the Infant Mental Health Framework and Action Plan
2015) has also been heavily influenced by the policy and evidence base from the UK
(Field 2010, Allen 2011) and US contexts (Shonkoff 2000, Perry, 2002, Heckman,
2005). This deterministic discourse conceptualises early childhood adverse
experiences as predictors of negative outcomes in adulthood and thus Early
Intervention, as described in the contested claims attached to the ‘Heckman Equation’ (Rolnick and Grunewald 2003; Belfield et al 2006) as constituting a saving to society in the cost of remediation in terms of health, welfare and particularly judicial and detention costs.

The opening paragraph of the strategy declares that:

There is now a wide body of evidence which demonstrates that disadvantage for some children starts before birth and accumulates throughout life’ (IMH 2015: p.3).

The strategy lists a range of adverse experiences such as premature births, domestic violence, mental health problems or drugs and alcohol misuse and then suggests that the neurological consequences may be life long and life threatening:

Such experiences may disrupt brain development and lead to emotional problems and potential life-long difficulties with self-control, engagement in high-risk health behaviours, aggressive behaviour, lack of empathy, physical and mental ill-health and increased risk of later self-harm or suicide.’ (IMH 2015: p.3)

The economic argument immediately follows: ‘As well as the human cost there are increased economic costs to society in terms of healthcare, child welfare, education, unemployment, policing, juvenile justice and prisons.’ (IMH 2015: p.3)

Within the document itself there appears to be a recognition that the issues are more complex and the correlations not straightforward, as this is immediately followed with the note in parentheses: (It should also be recognised that for some people their mental health conditions are not in any way related to early childhood experiences) (p.3). The central theoretical basis for the Infant Mental Health strategy is attachment theory (Bowlby 1969, Ainsworth 1978) augmented by newer neuroscientific arguments. Attachment and neuroscience are referred to fourteen times in the document; ‘evidence’ is cited twenty times. Again, it is important to
emphasise that this chapter is not a discussion of the relative merits of attachment theory or neuroscience but an examination of how it operates as a policy discourse. So, broadly speaking, the policy discourse in health attributes longer term costly social problems such as aggressive behavior, physical and mental ill health and risk of suicide largely down to poor attachment, adversity and consequent neurological impairment in early childhood. The locus of the problem is individual, poor attachment and a life-long difficulty with self-control but the consequences are social, cost to society in welfare, unemployment and prisons. The types of capital that are evident in the examination of this policy discourse are scientific, the application of knowledge from neuroscience and attachment theory and economic, these interventions will bring cost savings to society. Therefore, within the policy field of health, scientific capital and economic capital are the locus of power within the field.

5.6.2 Early Intervention policy in Childcare

So, by the logic of this practice in the field of health, it is acknowledged that attachment and consequent neurological development/impairment is of crucial importance. It is interesting then to look in contrast at another early childhood policy framing the Northern Ireland context in Early Intervention, the childcare policy ‘Brightstart’ published in 2012. This policy has emerged from the economic field with a focus on employment:

We want to ensure that no parent who wants or has a need to work or acquire workplace skills is prevented from doing so because the quality, reliable childcare they rightly demand is not accessible to them. (Bright Start 2012, p.1)

From the outset, the logic of practice is coming from a very different basis. The emphasis on attachment neuroscience and brain development is absent; none of these concepts are referenced at any point in the document. Instead, the focus is economic, the need for parents to work longer hours, to take on more
responsibilities at work. The impact on attachment and bonding, the discourse that was so central to the Infant Mental Health strategy does not feature at all:

Many parents today want or need to work; to work longer hours; or take on more responsibilities at work. Many want to train for work, or to study in order to improve their prospects. Often, however, parents find they are hindered from working, training or studying through a lack of adequate childcare. These are the people we want to help. (Bright Start 2012, p1)

In the phrase 'these are the people we want to help' there is the implication that there may be another type of parent, less hard working, less ambitious, perhaps not interested in working outside the home at all that government may be less willing to help.

The different discourses emerging in these fields of health and childcare can be viewed as competing practice logics in different fields of power. On one hand, lack of attachment and poor parenting is a cost to society, on the other hand parents who want to work longer hours and take on more responsibility are a benefit to society and contribute to economic growth. The capital at stake is both cultural - 'many want to train for work, or to study in order to improve their prospects' (p1) - and, of course, economic. The scientific capital from public health strategies is not in evidence; it does not support the economic argument and is therefore dominated by the validation of economic capital. In the Infant Mental Health Strategy, neuroscientific capital was combined with economic capital through a powerful policy argument. Here, in the childcare strategy, cultural capital emphasised as 'study, improving prospects' leads ultimately to economic capital, in the form of work. This suggests that regardless of the discourses of their respective field, the dominant discourse in the field of power is economic. As stated above, Bourdieu maintained that the fields that make up the field of power are not all on a level playing field: some such as the economic have dominance over other fields. (Bourdieu 1994).
5.6.3 Early Intervention Policy in Justice

Dubois (2014, p. 16) suggests that public policy should be regarded as 'the product of the practices and representations of the agents involved in it, these practices and representations being determined by the social characteristics, interests and objective positions of the agents and therefore the structure of the relationships among them'. Bourdieu also noted that many strategies function as 'double plays' which operate in several fields at once. If we look at another strategy that comprises the portfolio of Early Intervention policies, the Department of Justice Strategy, 'Reducing Offending' (2012), it is interesting in that it takes an early childhood focus and draws heavily from the discourse in health and economics. It also adds a new variation and emphasis within the discourse; intervening early to 'save children from a life of crime'. Early Intervention is frequently referred to in the justice policy and the section on prevention draws heavily on the economic discourse associated with this. The Perry Pre-School Study and the contested interpretations of cost benefit as outlined in the review of the literature in this study (Rolnick and Grunewald 2003; Belfield et al 2006; Heckman 2010) are both cited in the Department of Justice strategy. The proposed trio of efficiency, effectiveness and evidence presented in 'Reducing Offending' combine a powerful economic discourse with saving children from a life of crime:

Efficiency: Investing to prevent offending will save money over the longer term. For example, Family Nurse Partnerships have generated significant cost savings in the United States, ranging from $17,000 to $34,000 per child by the time they reach 15, with a $3-5 return for every $1 invested.

Effectiveness: Research evidence demonstrates that, by intervening early in childhood to tackle key risk factors, children can be saved from a life of crime.

Evidence: The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development notes poverty, along with family criminality, daring or risk-taking behaviours, low school attainment and poor parenting are the most important childhood risk factors at age 8-10 for later offending.

(DOJ Reducing Offending, 2012)
Within this discourse in health, economics and justice therefore we can see the construction of a working class or unemployed subject position where children as a result of poor parenting are vulnerable to neurological impairment, suicidal tendencies and delinquency. This is in contrast with the middle class subject position of the working parent who contributes to the economy by working longer hours and whose children deserve quality childcare. This persistent duality throughout the discourse reflects the Foucauldian construction of the subject or the 'two types of brain' reflected in the neuroscientific discourse. So the policy fields in health and justice are drawing on a similar, neurological discourse while the policy in childcare is drawing on economic discourse. Beyond this, the other important area of policy is early year's education. Is the neuroscientific discourse reflected in education policy in early years, is the 'learning brain' a feature of this policy, or is it coming from a different logic of practice?

5.6.4 Early Years Policy in Education
The discourse in education, reflected in the Learning to Learn Strategy (2013) contains a single reference to neuroscience or brain development and this is in the opening paragraph:

A child's success in school and life is significantly determined at a very young age, and before they start school. Today we know more than ever about the importance of positive and supportive environments and their impact on brain development, and we understand more than ever how much the first years of a child's life can shape the rest of their life. (p.1)

Although the discourse is deterministic, in fact the words 'determined at a young age' are used; Learning to Learn defines the problems and barriers to learning as primarily structural, the inequalities associated with socio economic background and the approach to families is seen as 'support' rather than intervention:

The understanding of the wider influences on a child's development, such as family, socio-economic background, and the impact of barriers to learning is
increasing. The need to identify and address potential barriers to a child’s
development as early as possible, lay important foundations for lifelong
learning and to provide additional support to families, children and
communities is acknowledged by the Executive. (Learning to Learn 2012,
p.1)

There is a distancing from the economic focus of Brightstart and the conflation of
early years education and care:

Parents increasingly expect to be able to access early years education and
learning services at times and in ways that suit them. Early years education
is an important phase of education and for many children, and their families,
the first experience of the education environment. It is not, however, day
care (p.14).

The alternative ‘evidence base’ of the strategy focuses on the quality of the pre­
school environment drawing on the EPPE NI longitudinal study of the effects of pre­
school education. ‘Effective Pre-School Provision (EPPNI) provides evidence that
high quality pre-school education makes a difference to the cognitive and
social/behavioural development of children (Learning to Learn 2013). The EPPE
study findings were that ‘what parents do is more important than who parents are’
and consequently Learning to Learn’s message to parents is ‘Get involved, because
education works’ aiming to get more parents involved in their child’s education, and
providing practical examples to help parents read, count, play and talk to their
children. This will be discussed more fully in the subsequent chapter on the use of
evidence in Early Childhood Intervention.

5.6.5 Summary of the impact of neuroscientific discourse in policy
What is clear from tracing the different neuroscientific discourses in policy through
this chapter and viewing these in terms of Bourdieu’s theory of ‘Field’ and Capital’ is
that within Early Intervention there are a number of competing fields, competing
forms of capital within these and that the relational position of these can be seen
within the overall field of power or public policy making. This analysis has illustrated the policy fields of health, childcare, justice and education, the interplays between these fields and the different forms of capital: scientific, cultural, social and economic. Some of these fields, for example health and justice, have drawn on scientific capital supported by economic arguments to consolidate their position on early intervention. These have been very significant in influencing public policy. Other fields such as social care and education which have drawn on social capital models of family support have been less successful in gaining traction. However, the social capital model with the focus on inequality is still visible though sublimated within the discourse. Interestingly, different forms of capital are weighted differently depending on the fields in which they are located and the other forms of capital at stake. Scientific, particularly neuroscientific capital is heavily weighted when reinforced with economic arguments in the field or justice but holds little weight when competing with the pull of economic capital for example in the childcare strategy. By applying Bourdieu's field sociology to the analysis of public policy in Early Intervention we can get beyond the idea of political decision makers selecting from a range of competing ideas and approaches. By examining the dynamics of capital and field at work we can analyse power relations between fields and between each of them and the field of policy production. Also, if we combine these ideas with the sociology of the State as a 'meta-field' (Bourdieu 1994, Dubois 2007, 2014) whose power can be exerted by means of the accumulation of capital in different fields we can begin to see how certain policy concepts in Early Intervention are validated while others fail to gain traction.

5.7 Neuroscience as Discourse in Communities

The next stage of the discussion is to consider the ways in which neuroscientific discourse has been interpreted and used in community and practice contexts. Is the predominance of a deterministic, deficit-based discourse evident in practice in the field? How are individuals and communities engaging with neuroscience? The fieldwork data from interviews and focus groups with parents, health and social care professionals and community workers on first examination appeared to show a mainly positive disposition towards the neuroscientific discourse. On closer
examination through discourse analysis, this demonstrated the different ways that individuals and groups are positioned in the discourse and how this has been internalised, challenged and interpreted.

The combined symbolic power of neuroscientific and economic discourse is evident in the following extract from an interview with a Public Health Manager where scientific capital is directly associated with economic capital and resource allocation:

It (neuroscience) has been a really powerful enabler for the policy makers and service planners because suddenly here comes this very clear and unequivocal piece of information. It has garnered all that huge resource and provided compelling arguments to the decision making process about where we put our money. From the prevention end we have always had a hard battle with the treatment people about where we put our resources. We couldn’t prove that what we do makes a difference. Then suddenly there is this piece that says the first three years... it really has allowed us to take off. Without the research we would be on a slower train.

(PHA Commissioner)

From a community based perspective the response is more equivocal. There is a caution as to how ideas and concepts will be received and translated in the community and the sense that it is not just about ‘compelling arguments’ to convince those who hold the economic capital but that ‘the tone of it’ is important and you have to ‘bring everybody along’. As indicated below, the discourse of neuroscience is positioned as a challenge to the intergenerational personal discourse of the family and community, the ‘ould’ ways:

Scientists, you know, they say what they say, but I think you have to bring everybody along and I’m not saying that some of the ould ways worked but when somebody presents you with something I think there is an onus on them to say, well not the reverse or anything. The neuroscience stuff isn’t saying anything bad but they are saying if you do this it will improve and
some of the things, like, I fully believe, like if you stick your child in front of a video from Monday until Sunday like that literally can't be good for them but, I just think you need to be careful, I think the tone of it, like if you do them things you are harming your child’

(Neighbourhood Manager North River)

While there is an element of challenge in ‘the tone of it, like if you do them things you are harming your child’ ultimately, there is symbolic violence in the acceptance of the positioning within the discourse of parents in the community and the association with ‘harm’. This becomes more explicit in the next sequence:

So early intervention in itself particularly around the development of children and coping children better for school and for life is good, but to prove that that is good I think the science at times is there pointing up sort of well, to say something is good you have to show what not doing would do. So the very point is, the sort of, the ‘good brain and the bad brain’ for want of a better term. But if you are living in a situation that your child is coming from a community that is likely to have the bad brain, there’s social and economic issues, there is alcohol in the home there is whatever, whatever... know. I think in one sense we need to be careful of doubly punishing.

(Neighbourhood Manager, South River)

The speaker, a community development manager acknowledges the power of the dominant discourse: ‘early intervention ... is good’. The discourse around evidence base comes to the fore here, ‘to prove that it is good’. The speaker is not critiquing, as such, the scientific discourse or the evidence based discourse, in fact he acknowledges the power of both. In framing the challenge, he is aware of the purchase of the discourse he is trying to oppose and chooses not to refute the scientific discourse in its own terms. Instead he acknowledges the subordinate position in the discourse, ‘the good brain and the bad brain’.
Butler (1997) describes as ongoing subjugation ‘the very operation of interpellation that continually repeated action of discourse by which subjects are formed in subjugation’. In this respect, the transition where he extends the ‘bad brain’ from individual to community is particularly important. The individual brain is now a common community brain. The children in one geographical area are aligned with the ‘bad brain’ of children raised in Romanian orphanages or children raised by animals. The transition from ‘you’ to ‘we’ acknowledges his own position, aligned with the dominant discourse, ‘we need to be careful of doubly punishing’. The use of the word ‘punishing’ is interesting from a Foucauldian perspective as the discourse which constitutes the object also constitutes the ‘knowledges and practices through which the object is disciplined’ (Foucault 1977, p.194)

The early intervention knowledges and practices through which the children and communities with the ‘bad brain’ are ‘disciplined’ is through the provision of parenting programmes. In the discourse, the locus of the neurological problem is in poor parenting, not in any broader social context such as poverty, unemployment or poor housing therefore the remedy is in parental education.

Graham (2005) in her discussion of children with ADHD and schooling describes the connection between discourse statements and practices derived from them:

The dominance and dispersion of such statements privilege a particular constituting field of power knowledge which not only prepares the ground for the practices that derive from the statements but also disguises the exclusionary logic of such practices by re articulating the conditions of exclusion (Graham 2005 p11)

The neuroscientific discourse is communicated as a polarity between the nurtured and neglected brain, this is interpreted by policy as placing the locus of blame and responsibility on parents. Parenting programmes, focusing on interaction and nurturing emerge as the practice solution to the scientific and social problem. What
is the impact then of neuroscientific discourse on parenting programmes in the community?

5.8 Neuroscientific discourse at programme level in communities

Within the community, there is clearly critical reflection on and struggle with the dominant discourses. One perspective from a Sure Start manager stressed the importance of critical reflection on the neuroscience interfacing the empirical information from science with observations from practice with regard to resilience. This analysis, while validating the neuroscientific, the ‘irrefutable evidence’, challenges the empirical causality of this approach:

'Some of that is based on the evidence that exists but I have become more critical of that, all the stuff around neuroscience that exists again seeing it as the silver bullet, if only we could understand brain function then we could sort everything else out. No, it's not as simple as that unfortunately, but at least some of it is based on the fact that there is irrefutable evidence that the combination of genetics, and early childhood experience actually influences an awful lot of your life pattern. Now that's not for everybody and I do think the whole concept of resilience is really important, alongside early intervention, because there are lots of children who actually do well despite very difficult circumstances, in their early years.'

(Sure Start Manager South River)

There is a challenge to the dominant discourse emerging here; 'its not as simple as that.' There is also a departure from the internalisation of the subjected position, the shared community ‘bad brain’, in the statement ‘now that's not for everybody and I do think the whole concept of resilience is really important, alongside early intervention, because there are lots of children who actually do well despite very difficult circumstances, in their early years’. There is a break from the determinism of the discourse here, it is not a matter of the poorly parented child or indeed the poorly parented community with the 'bad brain'.

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The Sure Start programme in South River has placed a particular emphasis on the communication of neuroscientific information within the community. This is the same geographical community that was described by the Neighbourhood manager as having the 'bad brain'. The interpretation of the neuroscience is assets-based, emphasising what parents can do to support brain development. Their newsletter shown in Figure 3 below describing the ‘Baby Grow Early Years Festival’ uses a mock up road sign beside the picture of a baby declaring, ‘Brain Building in Progress’:

![Mock-up road sign](image)

Figure 3: Cover of Sure Start Newsletter in South River

This cover stands in stark contrast with the cover of the Allen Report showing the CT scans of a ‘normal’ and ‘neglected’ child in a Romanian orphanage set against the gold bars to represent the economic savings to society. What, if anything has
changed in the interpretation of the discourse? Does this discourse of neuroscience have the potential to be transformative?

There are, of course, key shifts from this image from the Allen Report. The real child, rather than the CT scan, is centre stage, engaged in sensory play with a large sand tray. The sign uses a roadworks image to explain that brain building is taking place. Inside the newsletter are ‘Five Simple Guidelines to help your child’s brain development’. These are:

1. Understand and respond to your baby’s needs and cues. 2. Take care of yourself so that you can care for your child. 3. Talk, sing and read to your child. 4. Provide a warm and loving environment and 5. Create good routines and a predictable world around them.

(Child Brain Development, Sure Start Newsletter South River)

Each example is supported by information in layperson’s terms, underpinned by the neuroscience, for example ‘Ignoring your baby’s needs can do harm by causing stress levels to rise’ or ‘It is important to take care of yourself. Get support from family, friends and community Organisations like Sure Start’ or ‘Helping your child to feel safe and secure is the key to healthy brain development’. While on the whole the discourse is presented from an assets-based perspective, the basis of the discourse is unchanged. Responsibility for healthy baby brain development is in the hands of the parent and the ability to create good routines, provide a secure home environment and access support in the community is all within reach of the parent. The underlying assumption behind this sort of messaging is, to use the Bourdieusian term, that by changing ‘habits’, we change habitus. The two are distinct terms and, in making this clear, Bourdieu asserts: ‘I said habitus, so as not to say habits’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p122). Bourdieu explains the difference in the two terms thus:

The notion of habitus can refer to something that is close to what is suggested by the idea of a habit, while differing from that word in one
important respect. The habitus, as the word implies is that one which is acquired but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions.

(Bourdieu 1993, p86)

Bourdieu argues that to focus on regular practices or habits rather than the principles underlying or generating these practices is to miss those 'invisible relationships' which may not be immediately apparent to the untrained gaze. He directs the researcher to attempt to look under the surface of an empirical phenomena towards a generative principle which is more than the practices to which it gives rise. By using the concept of habitus, we can attempt to unpick why deceptively simple changes in habits may not result in deeper change taking place, much less the kind of transformative change suggested in the early intervention literature. In short the deeply internalised social structures that generate the habits are not easily changed, particularly when change is restricted to the interpersonal rather than the broader social context.

It is not a simple assumption that is being made here however. There is definite reflexivity and critical thinking about neuroscience, practice and the power of messaging evident in the manager’s approach in South River, the idea that there is, as she said, ‘no silver bullet’. When broaching the subject of who does not use early intervention services in the community, her response was interesting:

The experience of families and particularly for families who are at the hard end of the economy and that the hard end sometimes of communities, people with learning disabilities or with their own health issues, people living in domestic abuse situations, addictions, I think they would see very little connection. And that includes Sure Start as well, they see it as maybe something ‘we went to that place once or twice’, or somebody came out and gave them a wee bag but it actually isn’t making a lot of difference at all in terms of their experience of life or their child's experience of life unfortunately. And I think that's a huge challenge.

(Sure Start Manager, South River)
From her perspective, the strongest purchase in relation to bringing about change with individuals in communities was not neuroscience however, but nutrition. Habitus in relation to eating and food was a subject which occurred frequently within the case study and which also a focus of Bourdieu’s (1984) seminal work: 

a lot of our work is done to the lens of nutritional work because a lot of people are very interested, 'I can do something about that you’re not asking me to think about neuroscience', you’re not even asking people to think about behaviour management which can be very complex, but something as simple as routines around mealtimes, who is purchasing what, that gives people back some power, the whole notion of sitting around as families, communication, early communication. But you know nutritional messages just aren’t there, and that creates difference very early on.

(Sure Start Manager, South River)

The nutritional programme in question ‘Family Eat and Enjoy’ will be discussed in the following chapter which focuses on the evidence base of programmes.

5.9 Translating and Interpreting neuroscience in community based programmes.
Knowledge translation, the interpretation of a more simplified assets-based approach rather than challenges to the discourse was very evident in the communication of the neuroscience in the other programmes observed. Family visitors and midwives were clearly engaged in communicating the information from neuroscience and making it accessible to parents. In this way, an elite discourse is made more accessible to parents and used to explain changes in infant behaviour such as in this example from ‘Wonder Babies’, where a Midwife is explaining when an infant breaks the communicative gaze with the parent:
I was showing them with a six-week old baby the 'dance of reciprocity', and he broke the sequence, he needed to process what was happening and then he came back to me and they were all 'I noticed that too, and I thought it was that he doesn’t like me'.

(Midwife, North River Sure Start)

Her colleague echoes this observing, clarifying the difference between the 'message' around baby brain development, communication, attachment and the 'method' of critical reflection:

it is not just the same message but the same method is being used. They, the parents are being asked to think and reflect for themselves, they are being empowered as human beings, as mothers. We are not like school teachers telling them what to do. They want the best for their children but sometimes they haven’t got the information. Other times it’s that they haven’t got the confidence to stand up to other more powerful voices in their families in the community. We don’t mind then if they blame us and say 'Well at Sure Start they don’t say that.'

Here another aspect of habitus is revealed that not only does the parent have to change habits that may conflict with family and community but also have the confidence to defend these against other opposing voices. This aspect of challenging grandparents, in laws and extended families’ ways of doing was something that arose very frequently in programmes, like the young parent who was confronted with: ‘why would you breastfeed and put yourself through that. None of you were breastfed and it didn’t do you any harm’ or the isolated parent living in a rural area with her mother in law at the end of the lane being told, ‘he will

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28 The dance of reciprocity in the EI programme the 'Solihull' Approach describes the interaction between a baby and an adult where both the baby and the adult are involved in the initiation, regulation and termination of the interaction.
never learn how to behave properly if you let him take all out of the cupboards like that'.

This translation of the neuroscientific messaging was also evident in the Starting Strong home visiting programme, where in this example, the family visitor, Jackie, uses metaphors such as 'wee word bank' to explain cognitive development in this case to Rebecca, the parent of seven-month old baby Owen, who is preparing to return to work. Rebecca responds in similar tone with another metaphor, 'like wee sponges'. In this way the communicative distance between professional and parent is reduced. There is also acknowledgement of the child's agency and position in the discourse. The parent says that they want the child to be a 'wee talker':

Jackie: Adult Interaction is vital for his brain processing words. Remember what I said to you about his wee word bank, when he goes to school he will remember all those activities, nursery rhymes, songs. It's hard to believe what the brain takes in.
Rebecca: Aye they are like wee sponges...
Jackie: and babbling is great for the voice box
Rebecca: That's what we are looking for, a wee talker.'
Jackie: That wee sensory part of his brain is developing now, you see the way he is exploring putting his feet in his mouth....

Jackie (with different child) 'That wee part in the brain for decision making - shape sorters are great for that, the peg board is good for stimulating decision making, great for mental maths.
Teresa: Aye that makes sense

In the act of translating the discourse it is important to consider what, if anything, changes. The locus of the problem remains with the parent and the practice solution is improving parenting skills and knowledge. The power relationships remain unchanged. Also in simplifying the neuroscientific evidence it is likely that the more popularised approaches of 'synaptic pruning' and 'critical windows' for
development will dominate over more nuanced approaches. Interestingly, if we consider the information from the ‘Starting Strong’ Programme curriculum that the Family Visitor is drawing from here, there is no mention of neuroscience. The foundations of the programme are in ‘age appropriate, evidence based information on child development shared with parents.’ However, in this case the communication of the discourse between the family visitor and parents is strongly referenced to neuroscience, rather than child development perhaps because the Family Visitor views this as a more powerful and engaging discourse. Bruer (2011) describes this as moving from a ‘mentalist’ communications perspective to a ‘materialist’ perspective. The former focuses on subjective, abstract mental experiences: thoughts, feelings, emotionality while the latter emphasizes the physical changes that take place in a child’s brain such as connections pruning, wiring and circuits.

If we examine another contrasting interaction between a family visitor and parent, again as part of the ‘Starting Strong’ home visiting programme, this time there is no reference to neuroscience. Unlike the earlier session in which the family visitor talked about adult interaction being ‘vital for his brain processing words’ referencing nursery rhymes and songs, this neuroscientific references are of little use in this context and the Family Visitor struggles to find a common language. Hani has moved to Ballymore in the last year from Somalia with her daughter Ayaan aged 5 and her son Amir aged 3. She is parenting alone and describes her situation to me as ‘no any family, no friends, no English’. She is clearly pleased to see her family visitor Michelle and tells me that she helps her a lot. Her family visitor Michelle suggests that she employ simple strategies with Amir to help his language,

Michelle: You can get him to help you with things like setting the table and counting and naming the colours of cars on the way to Sure Start, you don’t have to read books to do those.

Hani: I can no read books in English, I can speak now better.

Michelle: Are you still going to that class in the Women’s Centre?
Hani: Only two people there, Chinese, good English, that class...the (searches for word, gestures up high with her hand)

Michelle: level?

Hani: Yes, level...different, not for me. Time change now 12-2, Sure Start I get Amir half past twelve. No work.

Michelle: You are doing really well with the speaking anyway. I think you are brilliant. I brought this book of Nursery Rhymes for Amir, they will be the same as what he is doing in Sure Start, this one is Humpty Dumpty.

Hani: Hum...Tee (laughs)

Amir stops playing with crayons and paper Michelle has brought and goes over to Michelle to have a look at the book.

Michelle: Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, all the kings' horses and all the kings' men...

Amir returns to the crayons and paper

Michelle: Couldn't put Humpty together again. Do you like that one Amir?

Amir nods, smiles and crayons heavily.

Hani looks puzzled and laughs.

Michelle: Humpty Dumpty is an egg. Like you would eat for your breakfast. It's a bit mad really.

Hani: aaah...egg! (laughs again)

Michelle: Aayan will know all of these from school. She can read them to Amir from the nursery rhyme book when she gets home.

Amir has moved and started to crayon now on the nursery rhyme book.

Hani lifts this and puts it out of reach.

What is most evident from this example goes beyond the communication of neuroscience and relates to the overarching role of cultural and linguistic capital in relation to habitus and to early intervention approaches. This is explored by Brooker (2015) in relation to the role of the state in determining 'school readiness' and thus in preserving and reproducing the culture of dominant groups. While Michelle is a charismatic family visitor and clearly she, Hani and Amir have a positive and friendly relationship, ultimately it is in the transmission of the cultural
capital which she knows that will be valued in school readiness ie English nursery rhymes, no matter how archaic or to use her phrase ‘mad’, knowledge of colours, counting that Amir and her intervention will ultimately be measured. Knowledge of Somali nursery rhymes or songs was never discussed by parent or family visitor as it is acknowledged that this cultural capital is not valorised in this context.

The following interaction between three parents at the Wonder Babies programme in North River show another way in which neuroscientific discourse is interpreted and how this interfaces with habitus and social class. The first parent, Maria is a teacher on maternity leave and is talking during the tea break about her concern at her five-month old daughter Hannah’s reaction to television and the possible impact on her development. Gemma and Lynn are both stay at home mothers whose children Noah and Sophia are also 5 months old and are attending Wonder Babies:

Maria: I have been coming since ante-natal. I find myself remembering now some of the things they talked about there about their brain development that make sense now since she was born. It really stays with you, like the thing that children under 2 shouldn’t see screens at all. You know like TV and computers and all. I mean I would always have the TV off when she’s awake but in my mother in law’s house the TV is on all the time and I would notice if I was carrying her through the living room there she would turn her wee head to try and look at it, it just shows you.

Gemma: Aye but you don’t have to go over the top and worry like that. The TV won’t do her any harm, like my wee boy loves all those wee programmes like cbeebies and all. He loves all them wee children’s programmes.

Lynn: Aye there’s no harm in that as long as it’s suitable. You can get something done, like I would let her watch the TV so I can get a wee hour of ironing done.
All of the children are five months old but clearly the information in relation to neuroscience and child development interfaces with other aspects of these mothers' habitus. Lynn's use of the local term 'a wee hour' of ironing in relation to her five month old watching TV as opposed to Maria's over concern about her child glancing at TV in passing show the different habitus, circumstances, expectations and demands in these women's lives. The examination in depth of the instances from practice shows the complex and layered way that the discourse operates. The 'empowerment' that is possible through drawing on neuroscientific discourse relates to the circumstances and habitus of the individual. Moreover, if the public policy discourse points towards the 'good' and 'bad' parent as evidenced by the good and bad infant brain, rather than recognising the different and unequal positionings it is difficult to see how the discourse can be transformative.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the neuroscientific discourse from its emergence in the broader research and policy context, to its iteration within the Northern Ireland policy context and through to its interpretation at practice level in communities. I have used the Bourdieusian framework of Capital, Habitus and Field as well as drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine the ways in which the discourse has supported some practices while sublimating others. This has highlighted the ways in which neuroscientific knowledge has been drawn upon selectively and sometimes misleadingly in both popularized and policy orientated readings. Using Foucault's theorisation of the constitutive and disciplinary properties of discursive practice, I have looked at the emergence of the discourse and how it constitutes and reifies particular kinds of objects and subjects, such as the bad brain, the poor parent, the neglected child. The conflation of social disadvantage with extreme adversity and the use and re-use of a polarised embodiment of the science mis/represents a complex, nuanced and emerging area of science as a closed certainty. Within the discourse also, a 'materialist' perspective dominates over a 'mentalist' perspective. The latter focuses on subjective, abstract mental experiences: thoughts, feelings, emotionality while the
former emphasizes the physical changes that take place in a child’s brain such as synaptogenesis, synaptic pruning, wiring and circuitry.

Using Bourdieu’s theory of ‘field’ the chapter then moved to consider how the neuroscientific discourse has been drawn on in public policy in Northern Ireland. The emerging policy on Early Intervention from the fields of Health, Education, Social Care and Justice were considered as competing discourses within the overall ‘field of power’ with intersecting discourses in health and justice drawing on the neuroscience and attachment theory and childcare policy focusing on a dominant economic discourse. Following this analysis of how neuroscience has been interpreted in public policy and using Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, I examined how it has impacted on commissioning, managing and delivering Early Intervention in practice in Ballymore drawing from the interview and observational data. I have examined how this discourse in reinforced in interpellative statements in policy and practice contexts and the symbolic violence of when these are accepted in terms such as ‘the community with the bad brain’.

The analysis of accounts from the field however is not only one of subjugation within this discourse. The research in the field has also identified instances in which the discourse is beginning to be challenged and reinterpreted from an assets-based perspective, where individuals and communities are repositioning themselves, reframing the parameters of the discussion rather than accepting a position dictated by powerful voices in public advocacy and government. An observation however, was that whether neuroscience was interpreted from a deficit based or asset based perspective, it still positioned power and responsibility for change with the individual parent rather than more broadly in society. A strategy employed in the community was messaging parents around neuroscience to encourage them to adopt or adapt parenting practices. A problem, it is proposed, with this approach is that it focuses on the more superficial change of habits rather than addressing the embedded structures involved in habitus.
In the next chapter I will explore the implications of this in relation to interpretations of evidence based practice. The implementation of parenting programmes works in tandem with neuroscientifically based approaches with an aim of addressing inequalities and improving outcomes for children. The neuroscientific deficit is the problem; the parenting programme or intervention is the solution. The claim is that together these will bring about transformative change. By using the theoretical framework next to examine what constitutes evidence in relation to early intervention at the levels of policy, commissioning, community and practice we can further understand how these discourses operate together to support some practices and to suppress others and ultimately whether their effect is to reproduce or transform social inequality.
Chapter 6
What constitutes ‘Evidence’ in Early Childhood Intervention?

The space of positions functions as a space of possibles, the range of possible ways of doing science, among which one has to choose; each of the agents engaged in the field has a practical perception of the various realisations of science, which functions as a problematic. This perception, this vision varies according to the agent’s dispositions, and is more or less complete, more or less extensive; it may rule out some sectors, disdaining them as uninteresting or unimportant (scientific revolutions often have the effect of transforming the hierarchy of importance)

(Bourdieu 2004 p. 59)

6.1 Introduction

On a recent occasion delivering training in Early Childhood education in the Balkans I was struggling to explain the term ‘evidence’ in observing and documenting outcomes for children. The literal translation in the Balkan context was that of a ‘crime scene’ and practitioners were puzzled as to the application and usage of this term in early childhood practice. It is not only in the act of translation however that the term ‘evidence’ has a breadth of interpretations. The use of the term, for example, within the policy discourse on Early Childhood Intervention in Northern Ireland discussed in the previous chapter demonstrates different, contested and sometimes conflicting meanings. Health and Social Care policy focuses on ‘evidence-based intervention’ (Infant Mental Health 2015, p.24), implemented through ‘evidence based programmes’ (p.9); Childcare policy states its ‘robust evidence base’ (p.15) drawn from ‘surveys to statistically analyse childcare needs and parental preferences’ (Bright Start 2012, p.15); Education policy quotes a longitudinal study as ‘providing evidence that high quality pre-school education makes a difference to the cognitive and social behavioural development of children’ (Learning to Learn 2012, p.10). Perhaps closer to the crime scene analogy, justice policy cites ‘evidence linking criminal behaviour to early life experiences’ (Reducing Offending, 2012, p.6).
In order to examine the discourse of what constitutes ‘evidence’ in the field of Early Childhood Intervention and to consider, as the initial quotation from Bourdieu suggests, what is valorised and validated within the fields of scientific and academic research, policy and practice, this chapter will focus on three main areas of discussion. The first of these is to consider definitions of evidence and how the broader discourse around ‘evidence’ in Early Childhood Intervention continues to be shaped by early landmark studies in the US and UK which still hold significant knowledge capital within the policy arena. This will include a discussion of how policy interpretations of evidence have influenced, and polarised, debates in education and early childhood research and how over simplified research evidence may have contributed to misrepresentations within this debate. The second area of discussion will focus on the policy context for Early Childhood Intervention in Northern Ireland, how ‘evidence’ has been used and interpreted in the context of education policy and in relation to Sure Start in particular. The impact of the dominant discourse on short-term, programme-based solutions will be considered as will the challenges of demonstrating evidence of impact of longer term complex community based interventions such as Sure Start. The third area of discussion will look at the various ways in which evidence has been interpreted in the case study context of Ballymore from commissioning, management, community, programme and parent perspectives. The discourse around evidence at community level contrasts with that at policy level and is coming from a different logic of practice. At the local level there is a strong emphasis on community contextualised approaches focusing on building relationships with parents, children and families rather than implementing RCT tested programmes. The most significant challenge in all of this however is that while ‘silver bullet’ claims from evidence based programmes persist and ‘home grown’ initiatives promise community contextualised solutions, social inequalities for young children in the case study area remain persistently intractable. What constitutes evidence in all of these contexts must therefore be critically re-examined including identifying what may be important points of convergence as well as sites of contest.
6.2 Definitions of Evidence

As is clear from the overview of the use of the term 'evidence' in policy, the terms ‘evidence-based’ and ‘evidence-informed’ are defined and used differently in different contexts and have evolved to reflect a broader range of evidence as well the complexity of practice (Simons 2010). These evolving and contested definitions are also reflected in education research as to what constitutes ‘evidence based’ or ‘evidence informed’ practice. Pring and Thomas (2004) for example draw on Levi-Strauss' (1962) distinction between the ‘bricoleur’ and ‘engineer’ to describe different approaches to evidence, the ‘bricoleur’ gathering evidence ‘within broad parameters and using the least delineating rules, expecting to uncover prima facie information while additional corroborative evidence is sought’ (p. 5) and the engineer, ‘bound within strict theoretical frameworks developing a blueprint that will be closely followed’ (p. 5). They continue, however, to say that the processes of gathering evidence are not as distinct or as polarised as the metaphors of ‘bricoleur’ and ‘engineer’ imply. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the area of greatest contest is in relation to the application in educational contexts of empirical testing and evidence from trials (Biesta 2007, Hammersley 2007). Partlett and Hamilton (1987) for example, contest the claims of evidence in education derived from trials to be controlled, exact and unambiguous. Hammersley (2007) asserts that as educational research is focused on social interaction in a way that medical research is not, the production and use of generalisations about ‘what works’ are problematic in the education field. Interestingly, and with parallels in this case study, Gallagher and Hammersley (2007) document teachers' resistance to evidence of certain kinds, particularly those seen to be imposed by authority. Thomas and Pring (2004) conclude that many kinds of evidence exist in different forms of discourse and have validity in their own contexts. Thomas, (2004) for example refers to the ways that professionals collect evidence deliberately and reflexively ‘evidence informed practice’ as reflecting the interconnected nature of professional knowledge (Schön 1991) stating that practical trust in these processes may be at the root of resistance to other types of evidence. Pring (2004) concludes with an appeal for the possibility of reflexivity alongside experimental research and a discourse that can accommodate both.
It is perhaps useful at this point to identify and explain some of the practically applied definitions of 'evidence based' or 'evidence informed' practice which are used in the case study context. The following definitions of evidence relevant to the Northern Ireland context were developed by The Centre for Effective Services (CES, 2014), a not for profit, intermediary organisation connecting policy, practice and research across the Island of Ireland and are chosen, not because they are definitive or uncontested but that they provide a useful reference point, reflective of work in policy, research and practice in the Northern Ireland context. CES describe evaluation as 'a process of systematic investigation, preferably done using scientifically robust research methods, and used to assess the processes, outcomes and impacts associated with a programme, service or intervention'29. Evidence Based Programmes are described as 'programmes that have consistently been shown to produce positive results by independent research studies that have been conducted to a particular degree of scientific quality'.

In both these definitions, the word 'scientific' associated with the words 'quality' and 'robust' revalidates the current dominant discourse of empirical scientifically-based research and by implication disassociates non-scientific research from quality and robustness. The definition of Evidence Informed Practice is interesting however in that a middle ground is accommodated between experience and research. This is defined as 'practice based on the integration of experience, judgement and expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research'. This marks a shift in the discourse which is also echoed by commissioners and others in the case study context. In addition to these broader definitions of evidence, Experimental Design is defined separately as 'the set of specific procedures by which a theory about the relationship of programme activities to measurable outcomes will be tested. This allows conclusions to be made about how strongly the programme’s activities influenced the outcomes that have occurred. Experimental methods always include the use of a control or comparison group'. Outcomes are defined as 'changes that occur as a result of interventions. Outcomes

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29 CES Glossary of terms http://www.effectiveservices.org/resources/glossary
may be short-term or immediate, medium-term or intermediate, long-term or end. Short-term outcomes may include changes in knowledge, attitudes or simple behaviours; long-term or end outcomes are likely to be the result of many or sustained interventions and include changes in complex behaviours, conditions (e.g. risk factors), and status (e.g. poverty rates).’

The glossary is undoubtedly useful in explaining and demystifying some of the terminology to a non-research audience, for example, policy makers or practitioners in the field. There is a definite revalidation of the dominant discourse around scientific method and experimental design. There is also, however, an important shift in the acknowledgement of practice based on the integration of experience, judgement and expertise with the best available external evidence. In the discussion of outcomes, changes in outcomes are solely seen in the context of programmatic interventions, when of course in the real world setting outcomes for children may change as a result of a host of other factors such as a change in family circumstances, a parent getting a job, a new relationship, a pre-school teacher who is more attuned to the child. External factors, such as are documented in chapter four of this study, also impact on child outcomes such as changes in schools and neighbourhoods, job losses during a recession or as in the case of Northern Ireland for previous generations, the impact of armed conflict in communities. An important distinction however is made between short, medium and long term outcomes such as poverty rates. In the discussion of policy and strategy in the previous chapters, it was noted how frequently children’s policies and strategies in Northern Ireland in crucial areas such as Child Poverty or the overall Children’s Strategy are revised, reframed or abandoned before they reach a point where long term outcomes can be measured. Short term programme outcomes while they may be politically popular as a quick fix will not translate into longer term outcomes which impact on poverty and social inequality without sustained and significant structural change.

Importantly, the overall picture of the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention at policy, city and community level observed in this case study is at
some variance from the model of systematic implementation of evidence based programmes and practice impacting on long term outcomes of poverty and inequality for young children in disadvantaged communities. Indeed, the existence of such models in real world contexts is questionable, as for example Allen's (2011) vision of 'Early Intervention Places' remains aspirational five years after the report was written. By examining this variance between the envisaged systematic implementation of Early Intervention and the real complexity of communities in terms of field, habitus and capital we can better understand why externally developed interventions might meet with resistance in communities as well as the need to engage in a real way with the individuals, families and communities whose problems interventions propose to address. Evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices are an important part of the discourse, however as we will see from the exploration within the case study, these must also be responsive to children and families' cultural backgrounds, community values, social and individual circumstances (Biesta 2007, Davies, 2007).

6.3 The on-going influence of the Allen Report in the evidence debate

Arguably the most dominant policy document to influence the discourse in what constitutes 'evidence' in Early Childhood Intervention remains the Allen Report of 2011. Allen's report emphasises identifying the 'best proven' (p.117) initiatives as well as the 'methodology and institutional arrangements required to make a much-needed step change in the way in which our society invests in its human potential' (Foreword, p. x). Specifically, the report recommends greater use of nineteen evidence based early interventions, all of which have demonstrated impact through a Randomised Control Trial.

The lack of a conceptual model of Early Childhood Intervention that is socially and culturally contextualised and which translates the key processes in implementing early childhood intervention are significant gaps in Allen's proposal. There is a dominant programmatic focus and Allen's intention of sorting the effective from the ineffective is stated clearly in the Foreword to the report, which is very explicit in its according of status to some programmes over others. In the Bourdieusian
sense this maps out the positions in the field quite explicitly by according ‘status’ and ‘kudos’ to a specified ‘menu’ of programmes. These programmes then embody a type of knowledge capital, supported by RCT testing which is accorded high status in the field:

Many programmes and policies across the world have been given the title and kudos of ‘early intervention’. Not all of them deserve this status. In this Report, I wish to reserve the term Early Intervention for the general approaches and the specific policies and programmes which are known to produce the benefits described here for children aged 0–3 and for older children up to 18 who will become the better parents of tomorrow. For that reason, I have generally turned it into a proper name, with capital letters. In some contexts I use ‘early intervention’ in its everyday general sense, without capitals. (Foreword xi)

The ‘menu’ of 19 Level 1 evidence based Early Childhood Intervention programmes selected by an expert panel from the Dartington Institute and external (all US based) advisors were identified as follows:

For a programme to be accorded Level 1 status, i.e. one of the nineteen top programmes:

All of the Level 2 criteria must apply plus, programme gets a ‘best’ on evaluation quality and/or impact criteria. In the case of evaluation quality this means that any of the ‘best’ criteria must apply, while in the case of impact criteria both of the ‘best’ criteria must apply. (2011, p. 120)

To be accorded Level 2 status:

All of the Level 3 criteria must apply plus, programme meets all evaluation quality criteria. (2011, p. 120)

To be accorded Level 3 status:

The programme must have one randomised controlled trial (RCT) or two quasi-experimental designs (QEDs); programme must have a positive impact on an Allen Review outcome; the programme has no iatrogenic effect; and there are no obvious concerns about intervention specificity or system readiness. (2011, p. 120)
The Allen Report has been widely used as a point of reference in defining ‘evidence based practice’ and to some extent contrary to the intention of its authors (the report states that the list was not intended to be definitive) has contributed substantively to a ‘menu’ based approach to the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention. The ‘knowledge capital’ of the identified programmes has also translated into economic capital by giving policy decisions around resourcing and funding the convenience of an identified list. This has been seen in Northern Ireland for example, in relation to funding decisions for Early Intervention initiatives under the Social Investment Fund\(^3\), which made reference to the Allen list. In this way the dominant discourse is enforced through its high status position in the field and the capital associated with it. The discourse validates a scientific, empirical perspective on Early Intervention, an example of which is the use of the term ‘iatrogenic’, a very specific term borrowed from medical discourse to describe a side effect induced inadvertently by a physician or surgeon by medical treatment. While the intention may be in layperson’s terms to ‘do no harm’ there is no understanding reflected of what this may mean in a community context, still less any critical reflexivity as to the possible limitations of a menu based approach.

In the case study context, some statutory sector managers are navigating a middle ground between the discourses at policy and at community level, recognising the strong association of ‘value for money’ attached to the evidence base in the discourse as embedded by Heckman (2000), Allen (2011) and others while maintaining an openness to local practice:

> We are pushed down the road of evidence based basically because we need to ensure value for money but we do need to take on board what is happening locally and if it is producing good outcomes I wouldn’t rule it out.

(Health and Social Care Board Manager)

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\(^3\) The Social Investment Fund (SIF) was set up to deliver social change. It aims to make life better for people living in targeted areas by reducing poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. The fund will run until March 2016 and has been allocated £80million by the Northern Ireland Executive.
There was also the sense of the capacity to influence policy, where those commissioning and implementing services were also challenging policy makers (including Allen) on interpretation. Again there is a sense of a shift – ‘changing the conversation’ – in relation to evidence:

> It is early days. After the Allen Report in 2011, I had been in touch with them because the Family Links Nurturing programme was not there. They informed me that they had never intended it to be a definitive list of programmes, which I took reassurance from. But people read it as that- we have to get this or nothing. We are trying to change that conversation.

   (Health and Social Care Board Manager)

6.4 The cultural context in relation to evidence in Early Childhood Intervention

As discussed in the opening chapters of this study, our thinking in relation to the evidence base for early intervention has been shaped by a number of experimental trials and longitudinal studies, the most prominent of which historically were the Perry Preschool study (Berrueta-Clement 1984, Schweinhart, 1993); the Abecedarian (Ramey & Campbell 1991) and the Chicago Parent Programme (Reynolds 2002). These longitudinal, Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT’s) were fundamental in shaping policy thinking around both evidence and cost/benefit analysis of Early Childhood Intervention. They formed the basis for the claims attached to the much-quoted ‘Heckman equation’ (2000). As explained in earlier chapters, this was constructed not by Heckman, but by interpretation of the data in subsequent studies (Rolnick and Grunewald 2003; Belfield et al 2006). These claimed a gain to society of $17 for every dollar invested in Early Intervention. These claims have since been contested by other researchers (Hanushek and Lindseth 2009) and most importantly have been examined by Heckman himself (2010) who concluded that:

> the estimated annual rates of return are above the historical return to equity of about 5.8 percent but below previous estimates reported in the literature (p.128)

As discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, a review of the original studies also raised important questions in relation to cultural context and cost/benefit
analysis (Penn and Lloyd 2007). The systematic review outlined some of the difficulties of generalising from these studies as well as the problem of extrapolating a cost/benefit analysis. They highlighted that given this particular set of social, political and historic circumstances of the population samples, the results of the studies are not easily transferable to other contexts and the results should be read 'for the specific population in these studies' (Penn and Lloyd 2007). The review of these landmark studies outlines some of the challenges of establishing an evidence base in relation to early childhood intervention that is culturally and contextually transferable. It is also interesting to note however, that the systematic review, one of the set of 'scientific' methods often subject to critique, in this case was the method which provided the knowledge base to critically examine these studies in relation to cultural context.

Vandenbroeck, Roets & Roose (2012) have added to this critique in relation to context, pointing out that highly publicised more recent studies of the effectiveness of 'evidence based' programmes have also been drawn from contexts marked by high child poverty, substantial inequality and ill-performing welfare states. They emphasize that in these countries, 'care as usual', the circumstances of the control group within an RCT, may mean that there is a lack of care, or that the care provided is of poor quality. Therefore, in a similar vein to Penn and Lloyd's review of the 'landmark studies' they conclude: 'the obtained results of these studies cannot be generalised as 'what works' beyond the borders of these countries' (p. 541).

The issue of cultural context and adaptation was raised in a different way within the case study by both parents and practitioners. An initial observation from the mapping of Early Childhood Intervention programmes in Ballymore was that only a small percentage (less than 3.5%, or nine out of 253) were from the 19 named RCT tested programmes listed in the Allen Report. All of these were 'Incredible Years'.

The Incredible Years programme is designed to prevent and treat emotional and behavioural difficulties in children aged 3 to 10 years. The programme was developed in the University of Washington in Seattle by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton.
programmes operating in Sure Start or through a separately funded International Fund for Ireland\textsuperscript{32} programme in the community. A previous audit in 2012 of the implementation of the Incredible Years programme in Northern Ireland commented on inconsistencies in relation to the delivery in practice of the programme and concluded:

It is clear that Incredible Years is being delivered as a stand-alone programme and not fully integrated into the community infrastructure. Consensus amongst practitioners confirms that there is a gap between the programme outline and delivery and this needs to be rectified if the outcomes are to be achieved (NCB, 2012, p.10)

The audit, while mentioning fidelity of programme delivery and integration into community infrastructure does not specifically mention cultural context. In the case study of Ballymore, practitioners raised the necessity of adaptation of Incredible Years in relation to cultural context:

We also deliver Incredible Years but I would say in relation to fidelity it is more loosely connected. Some of the vignettes they use are quite dated and very American. It's not culturally equivalent to our experience here so that is an issue.

(Sure Start Manager North River)

This illustrates how adaption is being practiced through cultural reflexivity on programmatic content. This is a very different perspective from that reflected in the audit quoted above which implies that departure from the script, or from fidelity is a problem to be 'rectified'. This example shows the importance of research on implementation capturing qualitative reflexive information from practitioners as to why a programme has been changed or adapted, the rationale for this, as well as the possibility that adaptation can mean that a programme is strengthened by being more culturally contextualised. Within the case study there

\textsuperscript{32} The International Fund for Ireland is an independent international organisation which was established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986.
was not only resistance to, but also a reflexive questioning of, the dominant discourses around ‘evidence based’ programmes:

The whole notion of importing programs and bringing them in for us is important- ‘if only we would do that and stick to it and stick rigidly with in the programme plan’, particularly recently within Incredible Years that was quite challenging for us

(Sure start Manager, South River)

The issue of cultural context was not only raised by practitioners but also noted by parents, who had developed their own shorthand for Americanised terms, the ‘coffee pot moment’ to describe practices that were culturally unfamiliar. This was frequently used as a jovial alert within the programme when they came across terminology or practice that jarred culturally. They talked, for example, about how within manualised parenting programmes, the family sitting around to talk about ‘issues’ was something artificial they did not feel suited their home or cultural context:

Tina made a wee comment last week that we are not the ‘all American family’ you see on TV. We call it a ‘coffee pot moment’. (the group’s shorthand for the all American family sitting down together and chatting about issues). They are made to look all perfect and you think it’s the road you have to go in.... It’s not realistic.

(Carrie, Parent North River)

Another parent described how she had tried an approach suggested in the programme manual which emphasised the importance of the family sitting down to breakfast together and how this had not worked for her family:

I tried the whole ‘lets sit down to breakfast together’ thing and it was an absolute disaster for us. The way we worked it before was that Sean would get up first with the wain and feed him. I would get a wee extra half hour in my bed. Our Emer who is fifteen would eat a bit of toast while she was straightening her hair and putting on her eyeliner before school. In the book it was all insistent about eating breakfast as a family so I tried it out.

33 Colloquial term for baby
Everybody hated it...I missed out on my half hours peace before I started the
day and Emer was ragin, in the worst of form, that she had no time to get
ready

(Maria, Parent North River)

What is happening is that the proposed programme model of family life is at odds
culturally with the habitus of families. This example exposes terms such as
‘achieving high standards’ in parenting (Wave Trust 2010, quoted in C4EO, p.3) for
being the constructions that they are. Brooker (2015) describes this as recognising
the ‘damaging effect of the cultural arbitrary in families outside of the dominant
group and the symbolic violence that is employed in enforcing it’ (p. 52). It is
important to note also that not all parents questioned or resisted the discourse, a
parent who had a very difficult upbringing commented:

I use the family rules with my wee boy. He knows them off by heart and he
knows if he breaks them he will not get a sticker

( Parent, North River).

The problem with this approach is that, as Bourdieu (1990) points, most of the
actual rules by which society operates are invisible and unspoken and the
knowledge capital from a taught programme may be more or less transferable in a
real world situation.

6.5 Shifting perspectives on evidence

The ‘gold standard’ perspective on evidence as outlined in Chapter Two, while
dominant, is not uncontested or unmoving as can be seen in the shift from
‘evidence-based programmes’ to include ‘evidence-informed practice’ as will be
further demonstrated from the perspectives in the case study. Hammersley (2001)
had previously highlighted that the prevalent instrumental view of the role of
educational research may undermine effective practice because it privileges
research evidence over evidence from other sources, including that arising from the
experience of practitioners (p. 550). This issue of democracy in what constitutes
‘evidence’ and the importance of practitioner and parent voice within this, has
more recently been raised by Vandenbroeck (2012), here quoting from Biesta,
raising the question of the democratic role of practitioners in evidenced based education:

Evidence based education seems to favour a technocratic model in which it is assumed that the only relevant research questions are questions about effectiveness forgetting that what counts as effective crucially depends on judgements about what is desirable. On the practice side, evidence based education seems to limit severely the opportunities for educational practitioners to make judgements in a way that is sensitive to and relevant for their own contextualised settings (Biesta, 2007, p.5)

As can be seen from the case study, managers, practitioners and parents are exercising their own judgements and making decisions that are sensitive to context. Unofficial adaptation however may not have the capacity to challenge the dominant discourse and is likely to be dismissed as a lack of adherence to fidelity. In order to really shape and have power in the discourse, practitioners must have input into programme design and adaptation in a way that is recognised and validated as legitimate practice. If the activities and outcomes of a programme are pre-set by a researcher or programme architect in the US, are these necessarily replicable in a very different cultural context such as Northern Ireland. Should it not be a requirement that prior to implementation that these are revisited by those with grounded experience?

Vandenbroek (2012) takes an even more challenging view of these questions, questioning the assumptions inherent in the measurement of predefined outcomes as the most valid form of research and raising the 'democratic problem' of who defines the desirable outcomes, is it researchers, practitioners or parents and children? He also asks important question as to who owns the problem definition. In relation to Early Childhood Intervention, for example, is the problem, dysfunctional families or poverty, are educational or health inequalities an issue of inadequate parenting? Are broader social factors being sublimated within the discourse? All of this points the discussion back to where the discourse of 'evidence' relates to the discourse endorsed in public policy, in neuroscience and
research and to Bourdieu's notion of struggles within different fields for control of
different forms of capital. The scientific, empirical perspective on evidence has
been endorsed by policy makers and politicians as a dominant discourse, often
through a process of simplification as is the case in the Allen (2011) menu of
programmes. This resultant positioning or polarisation within the educational
research community of proponents and opponents of experimental trials may
however preclude the exploration of other possibilities. An example, of what may
be possible, is that practitioners may be critically engaged in the process of cultural
adaptation of externally developed programmes as standard, or even further, that
practitioners are involved in the design of research trials as has been suggested by
Connolly (2015). In the case study context for example this was demonstrated in
the 'Starting Strong' programme where managers, staff and parents were critically
and reflexively engaged with the RCT process, and to a large extent aware of its
limitations as well of its strengths.

6.5.1 Critical Realist perspectives on evidence
Critical Realism, as is argued in the previous chapter, is a theoretical approach
which might facilitate this possibility of the consideration of empirical, scientific
perspectives on evidence as one form of knowledge alongside interpretative and
practice based perspectives on evidence in Early Childhood Intervention. Different
educational theorists from a Critical Realist perspective have placed different
emphases on the empirical and the interpretative dimensions. Nash, (2005) for
example, sees the possibility for combining statistical analysis with 'realist
explanatory narratives'. In relation to Early Childhood Intervention for example,
this would suggest that a parenting programme could be tested, for example
through an experimental trial to examine effectiveness or 'what works' but that the
processes of 'how' it works must be examined through qualitative explanatory
narratives. Scott's (2007) contrasting view is that regardless of how sophisticated
the statistical manipulation of data is 'unless the data in its unanalysed form reflects
the way the social world works then an inadequate account of social processes is
likely to result' (Scott, 2007 p142). The approach of initially engaging in an
exploratory manner, as is the case in this study for example, has revealed dynamics
and processes that are very different than if this study had been about evaluating effectiveness. Connolly (2015) also suggests a possible integration of methodologies proposing that more RCT's should be encouraged to include qualitative components and engage explicitly with theory. The theoretical dimension is vital in order that qualitative components are not limited to simple illustrative accounts, which do not account in any way for social processes. Pawson and Tilley (2004) were among the first to develop this critical realist analysis further towards a practical applied focus to evaluation asking not just whether a programme or intervention works but what works, for whom, in what circumstances and how. Following Bhaskar (1989) the social world, the programme itself is viewed as ‘an open system, which cannot be fully isolated or kept constant’ (2004, p.5). While the ‘open system’ analysis challenges the whole concept of replicability and programme fidelity which is central to scientific based approaches to evidence and implementation, an ‘open system’ approach also presents different challenges for example in relation to measuring impact on long term outcomes such as poverty or inequalities. This is illustrated for example in the evaluation of Sure Start in the UK and NI contexts where the ‘open system’ is a challenge to evaluate and the impact on inequalities has not been evidenced. This challenge in relation to evaluation of complex interventions was also reflected by practitioners in the case study context:

One of the strengths of Sure Start is that it is different in every community which makes it challenging to evaluate.

(Programme Manager, Starting Strong)

Another perspective is however that by placing the emphasis on programme evaluation, scientific or otherwise masks the reality that without effective structural and policy commitment to addressing child poverty for example, long term outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas, despite multiple Early Intervention programmes, will remain unchanged.

6.6 Implementation Science: perspectives on fidelity.

The ‘scientifically based’ perspective to this problem of the gap between outcomes intended and outcomes achieved is outlined in the ‘Implementation Science’
approach focused on the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence into routine practice, in order to improve the quality of services. This includes the concept of ‘fidelity’ as previously discussed, the degree to which the activities undertaken in a programme are true to the design of the original programme on which it is based as well as the organisational and systemic factors involved in implementation in context. Is Implementation Science the solution to the gap that still exists between evidence-based practice and the actual practices used in Early Intervention programmes in communities?

Alongside the dominant discourse on evidence, implementation science is emerging as a dominant discourse in relation to the ‘scaling up’ of programmes beyond the testing phase. Odom (2008) describes implementation science as the link between evidence based practice and outcomes: ‘The tie that binds EBPs to positive outcomes for children in families is implementation in classrooms, homes, and communities’ (2008, p.7). Implementation science (Fixen and Blasé, 2005, 2013) puts forward the view that much research to date has focused on how to develop and evaluate evidence-based intervention programs but the factors involved in successful implementation of these programs are not as well understood. Again, in the Northern Ireland context, the Centre for Effective Services has taken a central role in liaising between research and policy in relation to Implementation Science. A strong emphasis is placed on Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention and In 2011, the Centre for Effective Services established the ‘Implementation Network of Ireland and Northern Ireland’ with the purpose of creating opportunities to promote and share learning about effective implementation of policy and practice within and across health, education and social care sectors in Ireland and Northern Ireland and internationally.

At one of these seminars which occurred at the time of the initial data collection for this study I had the opportunity to hear from one of the leading proponents on implementation science, on the subject of a complex community change initiative focused on Early Intervention. As I viewed a very detailed flowchart representation of highly structured, detailed and complex approach to implementation of evidence
based programmes, I thought about how different the equally complex qualitative data was emerging from this case study and wondered if these could be different representations of the same phenomena. Does implementation science impose a regulating framework on a context that fails to capture the variation in the 'open system' or is there also the possibility that qualitative work with its focus on contextual detail can occlude underpinning deep structures and regularities? Are these approaches coming from oppositional paradigms or is there a place for both?

Perspectives on implementation in the case study context varied. The commissioning perspective on programme implementation from the Public Health Agency unsurprisingly emphasised a strong adherence to fidelity to uphold the 'what works' claims of evidence based programmes:

The evidence says- this programme works provided that you do A-B-C-D-E and you do it this way and this way and this way, as long as you do that, the evidence holds, the 'it works' holds, because you are replicating it the way it was done. But if someone is to take that training and cherry pick the nice bits they like and leave out other bits, calling it '******' and then say, 'the evidence base says it works', then the evidence base doesn't say that works.'

(PHA Commissioner)

However, as will be discussed later in the chapter, there were also signs of shift and change emerging, even from strong adherents of 'what works' approaches.

6.7 Approaches to Evidence in NI Policy Context

How are these broader debates around evidence, research and implementation reflected in the Northern Ireland Policy context? The previous chapter outlined in some detail how the discourses in relation to early intervention policy, particularly in the areas of Health and Justice in Northern Ireland, draw substantively on a neuroscientific discourse which determines the cause of social problems on inadequate parenting and proposes evidence based interventions focused on improving parenting as the solution. These contrasted with Childcare policy, which
contrastingly sublimes the discourse on neuroscience and attachment in favour of a dominant economic discourse around getting parents into employment. It is perhaps unsurprising that health policy, drawing from neuroscience, would favour an approach to evidence that has its roots in the medical model, where the idea of evidence-based practice was initially developed in the early 1990s (Biesta 2007). Again, practitioners were critically reflexive about these policy issues, this manager in the case study context for example related dispositions towards medical or social models to organisational background or what Bourdieu would term 'habitus':

Within the statutory sector even we have the medical model and the social model, which is in conflict. A main part of it is how people were professionally trained. It is how they view and understand the world. People coming from the medical model are generally trained in scientific based approaches. The very language of it, the RCT's are based on the medical model, dosing, effects, epidemiology, that's how you test drugs and that's why they think, well this is science, we are proving this therefore they are better than everything else that is not capable of using these methods.

(Starting Strong manager, Ballymore)

In this way, the discourse is exposed by insightful practice reflection; the scientific knowledge capital has been cut off from practice wisdom, as community practitioners are 'not capable of using these methods'. The reality however that is emerging, and as the 'Starting Strong' programme demonstrates, is that community practitioners not only understand but are beginning to engage with these methods and bringing a much needed reflexivity to discussion of evidence in a way that policy makers repeating simplified and decontextualised interpretations of a small number of studies could take note.

6.7.1 Evidence in relation to Sure Start
Rather than repeat the discussion of policy covered within the previous chapter here, I will extend the discussion to some of the other policy contexts where 'evidence' is differently defined, such as within Education policy and most recently
in relation to the Department of Education evaluation (2015) of Sure Start. While the influence of the Allen (2011) Report and the Dartington Social Research Unit Standards of Evidence (SoE) which underpins it is significant in Early Intervention policy and practice in Northern Ireland, there is an emerging critique at research, policy and practice levels. The recent ‘Knowledge Review of Best Practice in Delivering Sure Start Services’, by the Centre for Effective Services which accompanied the main evaluation, (Sneddon, Walker and Cross, 2015) includes the menu of effective programmes drawn from the Allen Report as an appendix but also takes the perspective that this form of evidence needs to be contextualised:

Some services and approaches have been rigorously evaluated as to how effective they are in improving outcomes for specific groups of parents and children. Examining these can be useful in terms of highlighting what is likely to work in Northern Ireland, but one needs to consider whether these have been developed and tested with similar populations and in similar service delivery contexts.

(Sneddon 2015 p. 33)

The report also acknowledges that many effective services are already being operated in Northern Ireland and ‘just because an approach being used locally has not yet been evaluated, this does not mean it is ineffective’ (2015, p. 33). The decision on programmes or approaches needs therefore to be about more than the strength of the evidence base as tested in other contexts:

The fit with client needs and characteristics in addition to service delivery characteristics also need to be considered before deciding if an approach should be implemented (2015 p. 33).

34 The Dartington Social Research Unit (DSRU) developed a ‘what works’ Standards of Evidence (SoE) for policy makers. Variations of these standards have been adopted by the Allen Review, the Early Intervention Foundation, NESTA, the US Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development and Investing in Children in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.
The Department of Education Independent Review of the Sure Start Programme (McClure Watters with Melhuish, 2015) which the Knowledge Review accompanies, takes a view of ‘evidence’ that appears to both support and contest the perspective reflected in the Allen (2011) Report. Sure Start is described in the report as the ‘only universal early years intervention in Northern Ireland’ (p.6). Arguably, Sure Start is a complex, geographically varied system of interventions and support that does not easily lend itself to empirical evaluation.

On the one hand, the report highlights the lack of systematic evaluation of effectiveness in Sure Start, criticising the focus on activities and outputs:

Significant information is collected on activities and outputs. This information is useful in tracking the utilisation of resources on an on-going basis but does not provide the data needed to assess the effectiveness of the support provided.

(DE 2015, p.8)

The lack of consistency across Sure Start projects on ‘what constitutes evidence or how or when data is collected’ is also noted. The data collected in relation to the outcomes in services is described as mainly ‘qualitative in nature, for example parental satisfaction surveys and strengths/weaknesses questionnaires’ (p.8).

On the other hand, however, there is an interesting shift in the status accorded to qualitative data in the evaluation report itself. The qualitative data gathered by the investigators in the production of the report is described as ‘strong evidence’ (p. 213):

Qualitative data that was collated as part of this review from parents, preschools and other key stakeholders provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of the services provided. For example, 75% of nursery school teachers interviewed noted that Sure Start made a difference or significant difference to children making them more school ready than those who didn’t attend Sure Start (p. 213)

Interestingly, the report makes reference to some parents during the research process for the evaluation itself, becoming ‘very emotional in focus groups when
they spoke about how they were barely coping before attending Sure Start' (p.19). The power of this discourse is acknowledged as it is presented as part of the constituted 'evidence' of the report. However, this 'evidence' is most definitely qualitative and achieved without the aid of statistical analysis. Importantly, the quantitative statistics quoted in the report show a different reality, that the picture for children, parents and families in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is worsening, not improving, in relation to outcomes. The focus on robust statistical measurement appears to have shifted ground in the production of the report itself.

What constitutes 'strong evidence of the effectiveness of the services provided' (p.19) for the research team, the feelings of parents, the views of teachers, would likely be dismissed as anecdotal if accrued by practitioners. This suggests different positionings even for researchers themselves in relation to knowledge capital within the field, utilising different interpretations of evidence in different contexts to reflect their position in different fields.

Perhaps the most significant area of concern which the report highlights is the lack of evidence of impact on educational outcomes. This lack of 'evidence' is problematic for a theory of change that supports Early Childhood Intervention impacting on attainment or inequalities. The 'evidence' reflected in relation to educational attainment is that rates have decreased since the introduction of Sure Start:

*Overall the educational attainment of pupils in schools in Sure Start areas has decreased since 2005; attainment rates at KS1 decreased across the majority of Sure Start areas and a small number of areas experienced significant decreases (p.7).*

This problematic finding is of course part of a picture in relation to 'evidence' of Early Childhood Intervention that is complex and contested. If educational attainment is decreasing in deprived communities, is this attributed as a failure of the intervention? Can the effectiveness of a complex intervention such as Sure Start be measured by educational assessment and statistics alone? What in the
external environment of the ‘open system’ has had an impact on both the intervention and on children’s educational attainment more widely? Can Early Childhood Interventions mitigate against significant structural features such as economic recession and increased poverty, which surely impact on children’s outcomes? Or does the very nature of what is proposed as intervention, need to be re-examined?

Sure Start in Northern Ireland, is currently administrated by the Department of Education. Interestingly, the Department’s ‘Sure Start Team’ has, since the publication of the review, changed its name to the ‘Early Intervention’ team. Does this indicate a more explicit endorsement of the evidence base of Early Intervention from other policy environments such as Health and Justice or is the discourse in the field of education coming from a substantively different direction?

6.7.2 Evidence in other Education Policies
The main ‘evidence base’ of Learning to Learn (2012), the key Early Years Education strategy focuses on the quality of the pre-school and home learning environment and draws on the Effective Pre School Provision (EPPNI, 2006) longitudinal study of the effects of pre-school education. The policy quotes the Effective Pre-School Provision (EPPNI) 2006 as providing ‘evidence that high quality pre-school education makes a difference to the cognitive and social/behavioural development of children’ (Learning to Learn 2012, p. 10). The EPPNI study findings in relation to the home learning environment were that ‘what parents do is more important than who parents are’ (p. 10) and consequently, Learning to Learn’s message to parents is ‘Get involved, because education works’ (p.2) aiming to get more parents involved in their child’s education, and providing practical examples to help parents read, count, play and talk to their children. The emphasis in the strategy is on raising standards in education and, in doing so, to reduce educational underachievement. There is an understanding of ‘the wider influences on a child’s development, such as family, socio-economic background, and the impact of barriers to learning’ (p.2) an acknowledgment that barriers may be structural. While there is one reference to ‘brain development’ (p.1) there is no recourse to
arguments around neurobiological causes of underachievement. There is however a very limited reflection of holistic child development in the early years in the strategy and a limited definition of outcomes focused on 'improving attainment and reducing underachievement, especially in literacy and numeracy' (p.1). The other key focus of the strategy is on parental involvement: 'Get Involved because Education Works' (p. 2). The emphasis is not on addressing the structural causes within the education system, which reproduces inequality (Bourdieu, 1990), but the onus is, similar to the messaging from health in Early Intervention, on the parent:

As a parent, you are your child's first teacher so you have a vital role to play. With your support your child can achieve in education and improve their life chances. During the early years of your child's life, just spending time doing everyday activities with them can make a big difference to how well they do in school. By playing, talking, reading and counting with your little one, you'll not only both have fun, you'll help them learn new skills and give them the best start in life.

(DE Campaign35, Get Involved because Education Works)

The problem with this analysis, drawn from the key message from the evidence in the EPPNI (2006) study that 'what parents do is more important than who parents are' (p. 10) is that again, habitus is reduced to habit and there is no acknowledgement of the imprint of structural conditions on parents, who want the best for their children but through poverty, worry, stress, their own literacy problems might be inhibited from 'playing and having fun with their little one'. In order to better understand the interaction of parental habitus, field and capital in relation to evidence, we will now look in more depth to the case study context of Ballymore.

6.8 Learning from the Case study in relation to what constitutes 'evidence'

35 http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/education-works
6.8.1 The advocacy discourse on evidence

The same speaker, who delivered such a compelling picture of the insights from neuroscience in Ballymore, in this extract, turns his attention to research evidence. He does not quote from the Perry Pre School or Abecedarian studies, instead focusing on another longitudinal study, the Dunedin Study done in 1972 in New Zealand:

Every child born that year, there were 1000 born every year had a battery of tests. Children at age three were watched for 90 minutes by a nurse who didn’t know the children but who divided them into the ‘at risk’ and ‘normal’ children. When compared at the age of 21 they found that the ‘at risk’ children had nearly two and a half times as many with two or more criminal convictions, the type of offences were 55% of a violent nature compared with 18% in the normal group... Just imagine nurses watching three-year old children at play could already identify with high statistical accuracy the future violent criminals, the future domestic violence perpetrators...

(Infant Mental Health Seminar, Ballymore, 2014)

The speaker continues to explain his interpretation of the gendered dimension to the Dunedin research:

Far fewer females became conduct disordered. An amazing fact came out... not one of the conduct disordered girls who came from the ‘normal’ group had become a teenage mother but 30% of the conduct disordered girls from the ‘at risk’ group had become teenage mothers and nearly half had violent partners... By 1993, in Dunedin, immature mothers with no strong parenting skills and violent partners had already borne the next generation of ‘at risk’ children.

(Infant Mental Health Seminar, Ballymore, 2014)

This short extract demonstrates compellingly the powerful double play involved in the mis/representation of the discourses previously from neuroscience and now from research evidence that combine to pathologise the poor, biologise
disadvantage and harness ‘evidence’ to statistically support a deterministic discourse that completely ignores structural influences such as poverty and unemployment, and reduces parents and children to non-speaking subjects.

6.8.2 The perspective on evidence from Managers and Commissioners

This discourse, while endorsed through the support of the statutory agencies in Health sponsoring the seminar represents only one of the multiple discourses around evidence encountered in Ballymore. The field of relations with regard to the discourse of evidence at local level, as well as the different types of capital involved, to some extent contrasts with the field at policy level. At community level, there was a strong emphasis on relationship building, on professional expertise, particularly within Sure Start and resistance to the ‘menu of programmes’ approach:

The whole notion of importing programs and bringing them in for us is important- ‘if only we would do that and stick to it and stick rigidly with in the programme plan...then things will be different’. Well, actually, ‘no’, you need to have a relationship with people, the same is true of the programme for two-year-olds, actually you need to build a relationship first.

(Sure Start Manager, South River)

At this local level there is a strong emphasis on community contextualised approaches focusing on building relationships with parents, children and families and providing support with professional and community expertise. This practice, rather than being ‘evidence-based’ through independent research and evaluation could be described as ‘evidence informed’ based on the integration of experience, judgement and expertise with external evidence from research.

The most striking observation from the initial mapping of Early Childhood Intervention programmes in the case study, was the very small percentage (less than 3.5%, or 9 out of 253, all ‘Incredible Years’ programmes), which are from the top 19 RCT-tested programmes listed in the Allen Report. There was however a
significant investment of professional training, for example in Solihull\textsuperscript{36} and other approaches which was incorporated into professional practice:

The majority of programmes in Sure Start areas wouldn’t be connected with RCTs but the reality of what is happening within communities in Sure Start areas is that we have accessed a great deal of training and that is informing practice.

(HSCB Manager)

Some of the ‘training’ however, it should be noted, is in the form of seminars such as is quoted above. Also, while overwhelmingly the examples drawn upon in the discourse presented in these seminars are in relation to extreme adversity, risk and neglect, the audience is principally those who are doing preventative work in disadvantaged communities:

We are not targeting the higher need we are trying to do preventative work – the combination of practical programmes and the evidence based ones. It is always difficult to measure prevention especially when we are working with very young children - difficult to measure development at a very young age

(HSCB Manager)

The different perspectives between the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency were apparent in the interviews. From the perspective of the Public Health Agency, the discourse on evidence in the initial stage of the interview emphasises the sense of a clear demarcation between programmes as well as the usefulness of this from a commissioning perspective. There was also a sense of the usefulness of this discourse to justify ‘decommissioning’ programmes considered ineffective:

\textsuperscript{36} The ‘Solihull approach’ was developed in Solihull England by a team of registered professionals within the National Health Service in the UK, working with practitioners and parents to develop new resources to support emotional health and well-being in children, families and adults. It is widely used in NI and is currently undergoing RCT testing.
What it (*establishing an evidence base*) has allowed us to do is to take the programmes that there is a very good chance are going to make a difference and to stop doing the others - instead of having ninety-nine different programmes all sort of vaguely going in the same direction.

(PHA Commissioner)

The risks of this approach to community-based practice were also acknowledged however:

The downside of it is if you want to do something and there isn't an evidence base it becomes very difficult to justify doing it, consequently we lose stuff that has been around and where anecdotally we see results around us but it hasn't been evaluated and so it gets lost.

(PHA Commissioner)

Even from a PHA perspective, the shift from 'evidence based' to 'evidence informed' was acknowledged and seen as an accommodation of the need to have a less restrictive definition than the one offered by Allen (2011) and that evidence-informed offers more flexibility than evidence based:

There has been a shift in public policy since the Allen Report in 2011. There has been a move towards not just evidence-based but evidence-informed, realising that evidence-based has a downside because of all that we could lose.

(PHA Commissioner)

In the next comment, there is the acknowledgement that even beyond evidence informed there has to be scope for 'good' or 'promising' practice in areas where the evidence base has not been established:

In some areas of work the evidence base is robust and has breadth, in other areas you come to a place where there isn't enough of an evidence base. If you set in stone, you must use the evidence base, you inevitably come to a
place where there isn’t an evidence base. That is where we have to be able to say: good practice, promising practice, to have the scope to do that in places where the evidence base doesn’t exist.

(PHA Commissioner)

This perspective from commissioning however still differs considerably from the practice perspective, where the acknowledgement of the importance of relationships, structures and social context was emphasised by Sure Start managers on the ground:

You cannot deliver an evidence-based programme without the structures around it. I know that you need the relationship; you need access to people outside the two hours in the week. You need to have more. You need preferably to know the person before they start the programme; they need to have some trust in you. There needs to be so much more than just the programme.

(Sure Start Manager North River)

There was however also caution raised by the same manager however, that before fidelity and manualisation there may have been a previous culture of ‘anything goes’ in parenting programmes:

I do remember when I started as a health visitor in the 1990s and a whole lot of people were delivering parenting programmes and nobody really was questioning where these programmes were coming from or at what level facilitators were at to deliver these programmes. ...How do you measure that? how do you make sure that there isn’t dangerous stuff being delivered to families? People could be being told all sorts of things, but for a long time they had a lot of credence in communities.

(Sure Start Manager, North River)

6.8.3 The perspective on evidence from practitioners and facilitators
Overall amongst practitioners and facilitators, while there is some recognition in limited instances of the validity of the empirical evidence base, from the practice base there was a much stronger emphasis on the importance of professional wisdom and listening to parents. An interesting perspective raised by practitioners was whether the 'what works' perspective was about validating the programme first and the needs of the parent or client second. This echoes to some extent Vandenbroeck’s (2012) earlier question about democracy:

That (evidence based) is coming from a different perspective, lets prove this works, scientific - the programme is the most important thing there. Where we are coming from is client centred, we are responding to, reflecting, anticipating need, we are bringing people with us... and yes, if the programme works, fabulous but we have to make sure it works for those people as human beings.

(Facilitator Wonder Babies and Nurturing programmes, North River)

Interestingly, when a focus group of practitioners who had previously been very vocal in their critique of RCT’s were asked how they persuaded parents for example in relation to weaning or the appropriate use of technology with young children, they agreed resoundingly:

You present the evidence, you say there is all this research that says they are going to nursery with really poor communication skills or you say that might have been done with weaning when we were babies but it is different now, there is all this scientific evidence that supports delayed weaning.

(Facilitator, Wonder Babies, North River)

This suggests that when the field changes, when facilitators of programmes are with parents, then a broad definition of ‘evidence’ has the capital to persuade. However, in relation to the policy field, where the sort of approach or evidence they are using may not meet the ‘gold standard’ validated by policy makers, they employ
a critique of the evidence replacing it with the capital of experience or professional wisdom.

There was also a distinction made between the evidence base of ‘a programme’ and ‘an approach’ as is reflected in this discussion amongst Maire and Eilis, both programme facilitators in North River. Eilis is a trained midwife and facilitates Wonder Babies and Maire is a trained Health Visitor facilitating both Wonder Babies and Nurturing:

Maire: We need to have a balance between structured and unstructured programmes to offer a balance to parents. There are lots of things of value that have not been proven to have value. I got an e-mail this morning that just made the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. It was all about evidence based programmes and I thought, ‘how can you respond to individual human beings if you have a prescription here that fits all?’

Eilis: We are doing Solihull though and it seems to work, it is evidence-based but it is an approach a method not a programme.

CB: What is the difference?

Eilis: Solihull is an approach to help people sort out their problems, their issues as opposed to what we think they need help with. For example, the other night with my ante natal group, normally I would do four planned sessions but instead I started with, ‘what is worrying you?’ and we ended up covering everything I would have but it was a different process. They felt comfortable, they felt ownership, they owned the programme. That’s the difference.

6.8.4 Parents Perspectives on evidence

From the perspective of parents, there was little interest in the issue of the ‘evidence base’ indicating that they were not engaging or being engaged much in this discourse. The most important quality from a parent perspective was the professional knowledge, flexibility and communication skills of the facilitator:
Flexibility is the most important thing. They (facilitators) have to be flexible to be able to adapt all the content to each individual child. Everything we could work around the individual child. There was always something that they could pull out of you that was actually going on at that time. So you were going home with answers rather than feeling what the hell am I going to do?

(Parent, Nurturing Programme, North River)

There was also debate over the term ‘professional’ in the group. The group valued the expertise of trained midwives and Health Visitors while making a clear distinction between being professional and being ‘a professional’:

They need to be human be that professional. You can be professional without being a professional, does that make sense? They need to be on the ground. Don’t need to be sitting back dictating to you, they are parents first before they are facilitators, they have walked in your shoes and know how you are feeling, putting it in layman’s terms for everybody

(Parent, Nurturing Programme, North River).

The facilitators' support in relation to parents’ interface with other less accessible professionals, for example doctors and teachers, was also important to parents. What seems to be happening here is that professional facilitators, who are often qualified midwives and Health Visitors by sharing knowledge capital with parents, enable parents to be more powerfully positioned in their communication in the field:

Letting you know you can talk to a health care professional like a person, not just like a number. It's your child and you know everything about your child so that's why I felt, I don't have to go by what the doctor said, I could say 'I want this done for my child now'. That's what I ended up doing and my son is now getting sorted

(Parent, Nurturing Programme, North River)

6.8.5 The Nurturing Programme - what really counts as evidence?
Throughout the four Sure Start areas of Ballymore, the Nurturing programme had the most positive reception by managers, facilitators and parents and occupies a strong position within the discourse locally. This is a manualised programme developed in the UK, it is not one of the Allen (2011) specified programmes but is widely used in the case study context in all the Sure Start areas. This particular programme had a very particular, and powerful appeal for parents as reflected in the following comments:

Now I know what it’s about, *(the Nurturing Programme)* and the secret handshake you have to get into it *(all laugh)* (Parent, Nurturing, North River)

I met a girl in the street and she said to me, ‘I wish to God I was back in the Nurturing programme’ (Parent, Nurturing, North River).

I was searching for somebody to help me. I was saying, ‘could you bring Supernanny37?’ One of the men from Sure Start called at the house and said ‘the Nurturing programme would be good for you’ Best thing ever happened to me (Parent, Nurturing, North River).

In the closing session of the programme, parents expressed concern about moving on. Some parents had done the programme more than once with different children and one parent had already enrolled herself for another ‘Nurturing’ programme at her child’s nursery. So is the enduring appeal of the programme a testimony to evidence of effectiveness? Is there a concern when parents have a strong attachment or dependency on a particular programme? Or is something different going on? The following comment from a Sure Start manager from a different neighbourhood and context to the parent testimonies given above, refers to the programme as being ‘transformative’:

One of the best things we have is the Nurturing programme. It’s not an accredited programme but it really should be at that level. It allows the parent to stop and say, you can’t nurture the child unless you nurture yourself. I have seen so many parents who have come out of that

37 Popular TV show where 'expert' nanny makes an intervention in the home to address problem behavior.
programme and it has transformed them. One parent I can think of in particular, my staff didn’t recognise her. Her hair was cut and a wee colour put in it, her make up done. She was a different woman. She said that it was the Nurturing programme that brought her to that place. That was all it took, 10 weeks. I even had a couple of staff on it and they were transformed. Sometimes your staff come from the community as well and they have needs as well. It’s about being up front about that.

(Sure Start Manager West River)

The evidence of ‘transformation’ is interesting in that it draws more from a popularised discourse of makeover shows than parenting capacity, although the statement, ‘a different woman’ as an indication of deeper change. At the final session of the Nurturing programme in North River, having observed the programme, I witnessed parents’ evaluation, both the verbal feedback and the completion of the two questionnaires- the ‘Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale’ in relation to themselves, and the ‘Strengths and Difficulties’ questionnaire in relation to their children. After completing this, the group were returned a copy of the initial questionnaires they had completed at the outset of the programme and invited to compare the two. This reflection and the ensuing discussion were arguably more interesting and reflexive than an external analysis of the data they had generated. Clearly the process of evaluation and reflection on their journey was of value to the group:

Carla: This is so depressing, this first one. I had no energy at all to be even interested in other people no interest in anything...definitely everything is on the increase.

Maggie: I was very detached from people and I didn’t even know, I was going back to work then. I was really struggling.

38 The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a scale of 14 positively worded items, with five response categories, for assessing a population’s mental wellbeing. Warwick and Edinburgh Universities were commissioned to develop it in 2006

39 The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a self report inventory behavioral screening questionnaire for children and adolescents aged 2-17 years old, developed by Uk child psychiatrist Robert Goodman.
Sharon: All I had before was 'none of the time', now it is 'some of the time'...
Emer: My biggest thing was being interested in new things, before I was just a mum.
Maggie: Did you say 'mom'? (laughs at the American intonation)
Facilitator: That is solid evidence in front of you. 'I really did feel like that', look where you are now. The physical change I can see it in your faces, they have opened up.

The facilitator's claim of 'solid evidence' was directed at parents themselves rather than external evaluators and this was supported by parents' reflexivity and ownership of the data and part of the overall process of change. After this experience I decided to look at the documented research evidence for the Nurturing Programme, given its significant popularity and apparent evidence of change from the questionnaires. I sourced one documented RCT of the programme funded by the Welsh Government and documented by Simkiss et al (2012). In the evaluation they concluded that primary and secondary outcomes showed no significant differences at 3 or 9 months between intervention and control group:

Our trial has not found evidence of clinical or cost utility for the FLNP in a universal setting. However, low levels of exposure and contamination led to reduced power to detect effects; combined with issues relating to the application of RCTs in this setting means that uncertainty remains.

(Simkiss et al, 2012)

This sort of instance, where there is a clear contradiction between the research evidence and evidence from practice leaves commissioners, managers and practitioners with different choices which arguably they make according to their different logic of practice and the interaction of field and habitus. Researchers, commissioners and policy makers may listen to the evidence from the trial, though none referred to this. Managers, facilitators and parents may be more likely to listen to the experience in their community.

6.8.6 'Starting Strong' Implementing an RCT in the Community
The instance where an empirical evaluation or experimental trial (RCT) is being carried out on a programme developed in the community, is a less frequent occurrence but an important area of discourse. This was the case with the Starting Strong programme which at the time of the case study was coming to the close of a five-year RCT. At management level there was a high degree of critical engagement with the research. The Programme Manager, acknowledged the contested nature of the discourse as well as consciously recognising the political capital represented by trials:

The whole idea of scientific, empirical approaches is contested. There is this confusion of people saying qualitative doesn’t, can’t...well that’s just nonsense. It has to go through that other sieve, if you like, because policy makers have very little knowledge about this, so they rely on what they think as ‘scientific’.

(Programme Manager, Starting Strong)

The acknowledgement of the co-existence of a scientific approach alongside a process evaluation or explanatory narrative is clearly outlined in the information about the RCT on the organisation’s website:

In order to scientifically establish if the Starting Strong\textsuperscript{40} programme could actually make a difference to parenting and child outcomes in ways that would improve children’s life-chances, it was rigorously tested by independent evaluators through a randomised controlled trial from 2008-2014. Alongside the trial a qualitative process evaluation was conducted to explore the pathways through which the programme works (in other words not only if it works but how it works!)

(Starting Strong, Programme Information from website)

\textsuperscript{40} Name of the programme has been changed to protect confidentiality of participants in the case study data.
I was interested to know how the process of taking part in an RCT had impacted on staff and parents and asked a family visitor her view of how parents had viewed the trial:

A mixture, some people just didn’t want another person coming into the house and the researcher was that other person. Some people didn’t mind, it was feedback on their child’s development and important to them to know what their child is doing. To funders it will make a difference, but to parents who we are visiting, I’m not so sure, I really don’t know. It will do no harm to be able to say that it is proved.

(Family Visitor, Starting Strong)

She continued to observe how the process of randomisation had meant that she herself had the opportunity to experience implementing the programme with more affluent families outside of the area she normally worked in:

I can see a need with them all... that was something that the RCT showed when we were going to some of the more affluent families, there is just as much need there but their needs were different. Some of them might have been doing everything by the book that they have that anxiety. It was about reassuring them that it was normal.

(Family Visitor, Starting Strong)

She was also clear about what she was there to do, the focus being on the programme rather than a range of other family issues. Interestingly in relation to ‘Starting Strong’, staying with the programme script appeared more acceptable in a locally developed programme as opposed to fidelity to an externally developed programme:

A lot of it is child development, that’s the big thing that I can help with, other problems like financial that I can’t help with and I don’t really go down that road. I would make it clear that I am not here to fix everything. I’m just
here to deliver the programme and I’m only trained to deliver the programme.

(Family Visitor, Starting Strong)

The home visiting method of the Starting Strong programme was described as a key factor in reaching families who were less likely to avail of group based services, who also might be the families most in need:

Another reason why home visiting is important is that people where children are most at risk are the last people to go to a centre seeking parenting support. We have seen this so many times, areas where you can’t get in, but once the Family Visitor has got in they say that’s really good what I’m learning here and suddenly you are overwhelmed because they know they are not being targeted.

(Starting Strong Programme Manager)

This capacity to access more needy families was also mentioned by the Family Visitor:

Sometimes I can get into houses the Health Visitor can’t get in to, the Health Visitor will tell me that she has been there six times and can’t get in. I have had occasions when the parent has texted me to say that they are in the granny’s house across the street and the Health Visitor was there earlier and they didn’t let them in.

(Starting Strong, Family Visitor)

6.8.7 Single Programme focus of trials, multiple programme participation in the community

Another important observation from the case study was that while the focus of trials and longitudinal studies tends to be of the impact of a single programme and determining that the outcomes are attributable only to that intervention, parents in the case study area tended to participate in multiple programmes. Much of the research on parenting programme effectiveness focuses on the effect size of a single programme (Schweinhart 1993, Currie 2000, Reynolds and Temple 2001,
Martin 2010). Although it was a small sample size, of the parents involved in the structured group parenting programmes observed (n=14), over 70% (n=10) had participated in three or more previous programmes. Some had participated in five programmes by the time their children were two years of age.

The positive, incremental aspects of this were acknowledged in Sure Start by managers and facilitators who often made the connections between programmes:

you will have covered that part about choices and consequences in the Nurturing programme (Facilitator, Family Eat and Enjoy).

Often the parents had participated in a number of programmes with the same group remaining more or less intact:

We have been together since we were pregnant. We did the pregnancy classes, did the baby classes, we are now doing the toddler classes and then some of us will be back to do the pregnancy classes again (laughs).

(Parent, Family Eat and Enjoy, South River)

Its kind of a run on from previous programmes not a run on but an add-on. And we have done others together so we are comfortable with the people we are doing it with as well.

(Parent, Nurturing, North River)

The same pattern was evident in the unstructured programmes:

After Ava was born I did the breastfeeding group, did the baby massage, baby aqua and this group till she was 6 months, then we had to leave, we had to graduate her (laughs) then we did the Baby Amazing programme which lasted almost 9 months. Now I'm back with this wee one

(Parent, Wonder Babies, North River)
The participation in multiple programmes as a group points to the creation of another important form of capital, social capital within the group itself, what Bourdieu describes as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (1986, p. 248).

The social capital created in parenting groups also extended to the children. When the parents were reflecting on the impact on their children during the evaluation of the programme, they commented on children having made friends and being more connected:

I knew that there was a change in Abbie, I realise what it was now, she has at least one good friend. When we are here, she would say to Maya, who is Danielle's wee girl, 'Don't you worry, your mummy is just having a cup of tea with my mummy'.

(Parent, Nurturing, North River)

While this was clearly a strong and supportive experience for the parents who were taking part in the programme, it also raises questions that if the same group of parents are taking part in multiple programmes, connecting and linking, augmenting their social capital, what about the less connected parents in the community who are not in the room? Is there a possibility that the uptake of multiple programmes by parents in less need could make the gap wider with those who are more marginalised? How inclusive are group parenting based programmes once a core group is established? As one of the key challenges for Sure start services is targeting 'harder to reach' parents, I asked the group about why they thought others did not participate:

Joanne: Their own perceptions. People who are not comfortable to go and meet other people. There are a couple of people I would try to get to come
to courses. I would be at them ‘why don’t you?’ trying to introduce them to everything, thinking that one thing will stand out and they will do it, but ...
Orla: I think some people have a lot of support.
Fiona: No, I know people who just sit at home and don’t do anything.

There was also a recognition that younger parents, 18-25 did not tend to access the groups:

Joanne: I suppose if I think too on my group first time around, most of us were in our mid-thirties there weren’t many younger mammies and by the time you get to that age you would have a bit more confidence to go.
Michaela: I think a lot of the people who come to classes are usually a wee bit older. We seem to find it easier. There are very few, like 18-25-year-old mums.
Orla: Is that true, I didn’t notice.

The participation in multiple programmes also raises important questions about the validity of determining the evidence base dependent upon the impact of individual programmes. It is clear from the case study that in the real world situation, programmes are in an ‘open system’ and multiple programmes, multiple approaches and influences are being implemented in communities. This presents challenges as to the usefulness in the real world context of programmes, which have demonstrated outcomes in controlled conditions as well as for their on-going implementation. Another and perhaps more important underlying question in relation to small numbers of parents participating in multiple programmes, is what does this mean in relation to the gap with more marginalised parents and children in communities who don’t participate?

6.9 Parents and Children who don’t access Programmes
This leads to an important issue to reflect upon in relation to evidence and early intervention which is regarding the majority of children and parents who do not access programmes, evidence based or otherwise. They also are an important part of the broader statistical picture of the evidence, or lack of evidence of impact in
Sure Start and Neighbourhood Renewal areas. A number of Neighbourhood and
Sure Start Managers referred to families who were not accessing services:

The experience of families and particularly for families who are at the hard
down of the economy and that the hard end sometimes of communities,
people with learning disabilities or with their own health issues, people
living in domestic abuse situations, addictions, I think they would see very
little connection. And that includes Sure Start as well. They see it as maybe
something 'we went to that place once or twice', or somebody came out
and gave them a wee bag but it actually isn't making a lot of difference at all
in terms of their experience of life or their child's experience of life
unfortunately. And I think that's a huge challenge.

(Sure Start manager, South River)

This manager goes on to describe the smallness of a programme intervention
against the scope of families' problems, as well as acknowledging the difficulty of
'really understanding' someone's experience:

Who are we to offer the 10-week solution to their problem? You really need
to stand in their shoes try and think about where they are coming from.
When we have angry parents, which doesn't happen a lot, it has been really
useful for us to step back and try to work out where she is at, why is this
parent coming at us like this? What is it that she is feeling? And it's like 'I'm
annoyed that youze did not do something, you let me down', even though
our expectations may not have been the same.

(Sure Start Manager South River)

One strategy employed in South River is in the 'evidence informed' initiative of an
experienced community based midwife, a tuned-in professional who refuses the
terminology of 'hard to reach':

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I saw that with one of our midwives, when she would talk to other community midwives, she would do an awful lot of work for us and the way that she would put it across I suppose it's kind of in a crude sort of way, she would say 'give me your bothers, anybody that you are worried about, have concerns around they are in our area, I can take them, I have got a bit of time I could support them that wee bit more'. And other midwives have said to her 'Josie you are mad, why do you bother' and I think that's about the pressures that people face and the task orientated nature of a lot of work we also have to do compared to the reflective, the planned, evidence-informed work as well. 'Give me your bothers' it's like a far better term than 'harder to reach' and all those sort of things.

(Sure Start Manager South River)

The issue of language is important here in terms of how the policy discourse of 'harder to reach', or the 'intergenerational cycle of dysfunction' is navigated in communities, as 'give me your bothers' or as another manager commented, 'no one is hard to reach if you have the right strategies and the time...government and funders are looking for a quick fix always' (Neighbourhood Manager, North River). The Neighbourhood manager in North River also acknowledges that many of the families who do finally reach the Family Support Hub services for the most needy families have never accessed support before. Here again, relationships and trust has priority over programmes:

It's about who is not attending rather than who is attending. A lot of the families who have come to the Family Support Hub have never participated in Starting Strong or Sure Start, or some had but hadn’t stayed with it.... I don't offer no programme, it's building the trust and relationship first. Practical needs need sorted first and there are few family programmes. Strengthening Families is one we have done. Those programmes only

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41 Family Support Hubs offer families support services at the earliest opportunity, helping to prevent the need for referral to statutory social work services. Hubs are made up of statutory, community and voluntary organisations which provide support services to families.
suitable for some, certain times have had two or three on Strengthening Families who were ready to participate. The most vulnerable have multiple issues debt, marital problems, domestic violence that need worked through first. This is time and resource intensive no one gives you resources to build trust you are dictated by outcomes, quick wins, results. You can’t put a timescale on a family.

(Neighbourhood Manager, North River)

Measurement, evidence, outcomes are counterpointed with meeting need, taking time, being flexible, reaching the most vulnerable:

We don’t have the resources to measure and track our programmes properly. We are flat out providing the service to families. I think if we had we would see impact. As it is we are always in pilot mode.

(Neighbourhood Manager, North River)

Again we can see the tension between the focus on children and families and the focus on outcome measurement. Resources follow the evidence base and outcomes measurement but hard-pressed services in communities may have neither resources nor the capacity to engage in the process of establishing an evidence base for their work.

Struggle, if not transformation, was evident in different measures at all levels of the system at neighbourhood level. The Neighbourhood Manager in North River explained this as some families’ being in ‘fight mode’ in dealing with statutory agencies:

We have clients that totally love their kids but they have been through the care system themselves and they are so protective. They are in fight mode; they are just fighting to survive but that is not what is appropriate when you are dealing with agencies. We have to sometimes go on in there with them as advocates as they are constantly in fight mode.

(Neighbourhood Manager, North River)
6.10 Struggles to acquire capital for home grown programmes

The struggle with statutory bodies does not however end there. The same manager then spoke of her own struggles in communication with the statutory bodies in the attempt to develop a home grown Early Intervention programme, 'Little Talkers'. The ironies of the situation are all too apparent here as the community organisation were prohibited by the Health Trust from using the words 'speech' or 'language' in relation to the programme, 'Little Talkers', an early communication campaign for the area:

We were basically told by the Trust that we should have nothing to do with speech, language or communication, we were not the professionals. It should be left to the Trust. As a community organisation we had employed former Trust staff, qualified Speech and Language therapists who were working privately on the 'Little Talkers' campaign. We were told by the Trust not to use the words 'speech' or 'language' in any of our communication. I had to redraft the whole action plan which the whole community had come together to develop early years communication in our area.

(Neighbourhood Manager North River)

Here, the statutory body not only has control of the knowledge capital in relation to the evidence base of programmes and the power of commissioning, it also controls this by controlling the discourse itself, restricting the use of the words 'speech and language' to evidence based programmes run by professionals in the field and prohibiting their use for home grown programmes. This challenge is reflected not only in North River but across the different neighbourhoods, where positioning within the field of power with a lack of the legitimated knowledge capital also has implications for economic capital:

If you are working with the health board they are just hung up on evidence based programmes and when you are trying to grow your own it is difficult, you get such a lot of opposition. The 'Little Talkers' they are doing in North
River, we were very interested in that but they just didn’t see the benefit. I think they need to be a bit more open to what the community are bringing forward. We can work with local people and see what benefits local people. I think they need to be a bit more open to home grown stuff. We look a lot to what is working in North River. To me it is great but they are not getting the recognition because it is community based. Community based is not recognised or valued.

(Neighbourhood Manager East River)

Interestingly, the solidarity and programme-sharing here is across neighbourhoods that would previously have been deeply politically divided. East River itself is a working class interface community, which has experienced deep political divisions, previously the manager had mentioned that they had ‘a Protestant extended schools cluster and a Catholic extended schools cluster’ and North River is a working class Nationalist Republican community which also has intra group tensions. The tension documented however is not political by these definitions and actually cuts through traditional political demarcations centring around where community based approaches. ‘Home grown’ ideas sit within a field, such as health or increasingly education without the evidence base that supports this. Interestingly, this was not expressed as a rejection of the requirement for evidence as such, but the sense that the existing knowledge capital, the ‘baseline’ is not there, not just in communities but within the policy arena itself:

That is a tension I know is there with extended schools funding, it’s all home grown. They say ‘there is no evidence and we are putting money into this’. If you are going forward with a programme that you have implemented to the health board then they are going to say, where is the evaluation? It is something we are struggling with, where do you get all the baseline information? That’s something we raised with DSD is that you are looking for us to monitor and evaluate but we don’t have the baseline.

(Neighbourhood Manager East River)
6.11 Conclusion

The patterning of how the discourse of ‘evidence’ plays out at political, academic, policy and community levels demonstrates the usefulness of Bourdieu’s descriptors as summarised in the opening quotation. The different approaches to evidence, Bourdieu’s ‘range of possible ways of doing science’ whether large scale longitudinal studies and experimental trials, the selective ways in which these are interpreted by policy makers, the valorising of expertise and professional wisdom or social capital in communities all contribute to a complex discourse.

The way that the agents engaged in the different fields have a practical perception of the various realisations of science does, as Bourdieu suggests, function as a problematic. Policy makers and commissioners place a high value on the knowledge capital of evidence-based programmes and this translates into economic capital and resourcing for these. Community based practice and ‘home grown’ initiatives struggle within the policy field for recognition, yet ‘home grown’ carries significant social capital within and across communities. Professional wisdom, experience and expertise also carry significant capital in communities and with parents, particularly when this is flexible and attuned to their needs. The process of participating in programmes augments social capital for parents, particularly for those who participate in multiple programmes. This may be problematic however in relation to more marginalised parents who may become even more marginalised by these processes. These parents are unlikely to be ‘programme ready’ and need significant investment in building trust and relationships prior to programme participation.

The habitus and disposition of agents – whether policy makers, academics, health commissioners, community workers or parents – and their positioning with regard to economic capital in different ways and in different contexts renders them more or less powerful within the different fields. The complexity of the picture which is really only accessible through a Bourdieusian analysis is that power and positioning depends on the field and that agents can operate differently, in multiple fields at once. What is important or valorised depends from field to field. What is valorised in one field, academic research for example, may hold little power in a
neighbourhood, yet if the commissioning power in relation to that neighbourhood lies in a policy department which places high value on empirical evidence, then research is important. The discourse within communities is actively and reflexively engaged in the evidence debate and has the potential to inform both research and practice. The resources in relation to documenting and demonstrating evidence could more actively engage with communities. The most significant challenge in all of this however is that while 'silver bullet' claims from evidence based programmes persist and 'home grown' initiatives promise community contextualised solutions, social inequalities for young children in the case study area remain persistently intractable. What the implications are for all of this on social inequalities, on the processes of reproduction and transformation is the subject of the concluding chapter of this study.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e. every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to the power relations." (1977, p. 4)

7.1 Introduction
There are a lot of voices reflected in this study, in fact one of the problems I encountered as a fairly novice but enthusiastic researcher was trying to transcribe, organise and attempt to build theory from the vast amount of data I gathered in the course of field work that lasted almost a year. Of course, as the quotation from Bourdieu cautions, I must also be reflexive and own up to the fact that my analysis, theory building, meaning making also has symbolic power, especially here in relation to having 'the last say'. I will begin then, perhaps unconventionally, with a voice that I didn't fully capture within the data, even though she and people like her are central to this discussion. The deficit is on my part as even though she is vocal on my voice recorder, I do not any longer speak her language nor can I successfully render into words what it was that she was saying. Rosie's voice on the recorder is at times so loud that I struggle to hear some of what her mother Diane is saying. She is six months old and is breastfeeding while I am interviewing her mother who is talking warmly about her experience of the great breastfeeding support from Sure Start which was 'fantastic, with me and him being working, we don't usually get anything'. Rosie feeds, unlatches from the breast and turns her head around to make eye contact with me. Her pupils dilate, she goos, burbles and shrieks then nuzzles and burrows her way back in. She does this throughout our conversation which of course has to adjust to her rhythm and tonal level. Her call for interaction is impossible to resist and I respond with 'go on, tell me your wee story...' even though I struggle rather ineptly to retell it now. Diane accommodates all this with apparent ease, accustomed to the management of talk, even with a stranger and the on/off action of a feeding baby. Having breastfed my own children, both Diane
and Rosie’s embodiment in this scene is familiar, reflective of an aspect of my own habitus. Rosie’s curiosity to interact with someone new alternates with the urge to feed and she moves between the two as if commenting and participating in the discussion. I comment on Rosie’s interaction, which is both funny and compelling and Diane says:

Yes I know she is a curious wee thing and already a wee communicator (drops voice) I think it is the breast feeding you know, in my personal experience. I know everybody has their own choice in what to do but I can see the difference. All those lovely prams and nice cots but if you don’t give them the best in their wee bodies and their wee brains. I know it’s not for everybody but it was the only choice for me. (Diane, North River)

This interaction captures so many of the issues that it has taken me some eighty thousand words to try and describe. Rosie at six months old is primed for interaction, everything in her being is attuned to getting what she needs, foremost from her mother and from that base she can turn outwards towards the world. If I were an attachment theorist, she would be a wonderful example, and if I were speaking at a conference on brain development and communication, Rosie would convince any audience, even without recourse to an MRI scan of her brain. For now, I will situate the interaction in a different field of enquiry, according to the theoretical orientation of this study and describe what I think Rosie and Diane might add to the closing stages of this conversation. Diane and Rosie’s ease and comfort with breastfeeding and communication is embodied in both mother and child. Bourdieu (1984) points to the ways that people’s body dispositions are acquired in very early childhood so already this aspect of habitus is imprinting on the child as well as on her mother as habitus also develops through time. Is this attributable to the success of ‘Breastfeed your baby’ as a key Early Intervention message? Is supporting breastfeeding a matter of encouraging a healthy habit? ‘Habitus’ concentrates on the principles underlying or generating habits, which then are incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions, the embodiment of social structures. Diane drops her voice when she attributes Rosie’s
powers of communication to breastfeeding. She later says that ‘breast feeders have to be careful what we say so as not to upset the bottle feeders’. Diane acknowledges, ‘I know everybody has their own choice’ and ‘it’s not for everybody’, but ‘it was the only choice for me’. While acknowledging choice, remembering Mehuish’s ‘What parents do is more important than who parents are’ (2006, p.10), she also acknowledges that for her the choice was automatic, ‘the only choice for me’, reflecting her logic of practice. She distinguishes between the ‘lovely cots and prams’, though superficial indicators of capital, to point towards what she positions as the most valuable capital, ‘the best for their wee brains and their wee bodies’. So the highest form of capital is free, yet breastfeeding is less likely to be the habitus of the most disadvantaged. Expanding from the scenario outwards we know that the ‘evidence’ demonstrates that breastfeeding is negatively correlated with social disadvantage and according to Gale and Martyn (1996):

The mechanisms that link type of feeding in early life with later intelligence may have more to do with the child’s social environment that with the nutritional qualities of the milk (p. 1072).

This brief interaction gives an insight into how the discourses of neuroscience and evidence interact with habitus and capital within the broader social field. The influence of the broader social context is imprinted not just on mother and child but on the midwife, family worker, commissioner, policy maker as well as on myself as researcher and on you the reader. Each person will read and interpret this according to their own habitus, their own position in the field, the capital they have access to, their influences and constraints, and, as Rosie reminds us, each person has the potential for powerful agency and voice but the power of how that voice is actualised depends on how it is supported or impeded by all those spheres of influence that surround us.

This chapter will draw together the main findings of the study in relation to the outworkings of the key discourses in early childhood intervention of neuroscience and evidence. The field analysis will be drawn from the specific case study context
of Ballymore, a city in Northern Ireland where Early Intervention is a catalyst programme within an overall Regeneration Plan. Using a Bourdieusian framework of habitus, capital and field, I have constructed an analysis of how these discourses operate in practice from in depth interviews with various stakeholders as well as through observational studies of programmes and practice. Importantly, as discourse is not a locally occurring phenomenon, this case study of Ballymore is located within a wider field of relations and struggles for capital characterised by the operationalisation of the discourses of early childhood intervention in research, policy and practice within the regional context of Northern Ireland as well as in other contexts which are significant influencers.

This concluding chapter will begin by revisiting the purpose of this thesis, the issues identified from the existing literature and theory which informed the aims and objectives of this study. I will then discuss the limitations and practical challenges of the study. From here I will move to discuss the main findings of the study, elaborating on how the iterative process of interfacing the data with the Bourdieusian framework helped illuminate as well as challenge some of the key ideas. From this I will situate the findings initially in relation to the implications for practice and subsequently for further research and theory building. In particular I will articulate the contribution of the thesis to the discussion of the relationship between reproduction and transformation and how this is crucial to both theory and practice.

7.2 Revisiting the purpose of the thesis in the context of the existing literature and theory

The original review of the literature provided the context for the study in the light of dominant discourses in neuroscience and evidence which have shaped the field of Early Childhood Intervention. It is perhaps useful to revisit some of the key issues from earlier chapters at this point in order to set the study findings in context. Tracing the emergence of the dominant discourses demonstrated the growth and significant profile of neuroscientific research in relation to early childhood as well as a dominant research focus on the effectiveness of early
childhood interventions, particularly longitudinal and experimental trials. Of particular interest from a discourse perspective were the ways in which research in both these fields has been translated in public policy as well as the way that science and research has been popularised and disseminated. As discussed in earlier chapters, one of the first studies to consider the importance of Early Childhood Intervention in context was 'From Neurons to Neighbourhoods' (Shonkhoff & Phillips, 2000) which brought together work from a range of disciplines in the field. This was followed by 'Science does not speak for itself' (Shonkoff and Bales, 2008) which raised the issue of the translation of science for policy makers focusing for example on 'simplifying metaphors' while refraining from considering the discourse in the political or social context. This thesis has taken these debates right into the heart of the practice context following the outworkings of the journey of the discourse of neuroscience from 'neurons to neighbourhoods' and raises important questions as to what happens in this process of translation and dissemination.

The other related discourse which is the focus of this thesis, is in relation to evidence. Again, longitudinal studies which shaped the field in relation to evidence are the frequently cited triad of the High Scope Perry Preschool (Berrueta-Clement 1984; Schweinhart 1993), Abecedarian (Ramey & Campbell 1991) and the Chicago Parent Programme (Reynolds 2002). As demonstrated in the policy documents examined in this study, the interpretation of cost benefit/analysis from these studies has been widely (mis)referenced by politicians and policy makers. As discussed previously, Heckman in 2010 re-examined the cost/benefit analysis of the High Scope Perry Pre School study in the light of criticism which questioned the strength of its impact claims (Hanushek and Lindseth 2009) emerging with a more cautious re-analysis of the benefits:

In general, the estimated annual rates of return are above the historical return to equity of about 5.8 percent but below previous estimates reported in the literature... Benefits on health and the well-being of future generations are not estimated due to data limitations (p. 128).
This brings the discussion to an important point which is that when discussing benefit, whether statistically evidenced or not, care must be taken in the conflation of the notion of 'beneficial' and 'equalising' effects (Vandenbroeck, 2015). All three studies compared children from a low SES group with other children in a similarly low SES group. They did not compare disadvantaged children against their more advantaged peers, therefore even if we accept beneficial effect, this cannot be misconstrued as constituting an equalising one. This is important in weighing up the capacity of interventions to be 'transformative', as surely to make this claim they must not merely be beneficial but be equalising. The importance of this distinction between 'beneficial' and 'equalising' is highlighted by Vandenbroeck in his discussion of quality and equity in early childhood education and care:

Despite the large consensus on the beneficial educational effects of high quality ECEC, there is much less evidence on its equalizing effects, as most longitudinal studies have compared children from poor families who use ECEC to children from equally poor families not making use of ECEC (or making use of lower quality ECEC). (Vandenbroeck p172)

The related question of cultural context and cost/benefit pertinent to this study was also raised in a 2007 review of the 'landmark' studies by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the University of London. As previously discussed, while the review team endorsed the original evidence that centre-based early childhood interventions do have a positive effect (remembering that positive does not mean equalising) on educational and cognitive outcomes, the difficulties of generalising from these and the problem of extrapolating a cost/benefit analysis was highlighted. Their conclusion was that results should be revised to read 'for the specific population in these studies' (Penn and Lloyd 2007).

The question of generalizability across cultural context has been the subject of a number of subsequent studies (Barrera & Castro, 2006; Kumpfer et al, 2008). Although some trials of parenting and early childhood interventions have reported
successful ‘transportation’ of interventions across countries and cultures (Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006, Reid, Webster Stratton, & Beauchaine, 2001) others have found less positive results (Gottfredson et al., 2006; Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy 2002). Gardner (2015) acknowledges, in the introduction to her recent systematic review on the subject that ‘while there has been rapid global dissemination of parenting interventions, little is known about their effectiveness when transported to countries different from where they originated’ (p. 1). Some of the existing research has suggested that interventions will be effective in new cultural contexts only if there is an ‘extensive multistage adaptation process’ (Barrera & Castro, 2006; Kumpfer et al., 2008).

The surprising, or what the author terms ‘intriguing’, conclusion of Gardner’s (2015) systematic review was that while interventions transported to ‘western’ countries showed comparable effects to trials in origin countries, effects ‘were actually stronger when interventions were transported to culturally dissimilar, non-Western countries’ (p. 11). The findings appear to be at odds with the view that interventions will be most effective when transported to countries that are more similar culturally, and in terms of service provision, to those in which they were first developed. Gardener poses the question, in light of these findings as to why the included interventions tended to be more effective in non-Western countries, many of which offer less well-developed family services. One possible explanation, Gardner suggests, is that:

parents in more traditional cultures might be more responsive and respectful to perceived experts and therefore engage more willingly, and learn more, from the intervention (p. 11)

This type of analysis, with its failure to problematise sociologically the notion of ‘traditional’ cultures being more ‘responsive and respectful’ to external, western ‘perceived experts’ on parenting in my view says much about the necessity of critical engagement with empirically based research. In notable contrast, in this study, parents as well as facilitators, community workers and managers were
frequently resistant and/or critically reflexive in relation to programmes from external ‘perceived experts’. In cases where these were used, programmes were subject to adaptation and cultural contextualisation. Is this a reflection of parents, facilitators and managers being less responsive and respectful? More likely it suggests a different type of social capital at work and different positioning in the field with regard to the status of external knowledge capital. It is also likely to be reflective of the wider struggle of field and capital in the community in which the case study was located where there is a tradition of challenge and resistance to externally imposed values and attitudes.

Vandenbroeck, Roets & Roose (2012) have added an interesting dimension to this critique which could be applied to Gardner’s findings, pointing out that highly publicized recent studies of ‘evidence based’ programmes have also been drawn from contexts marked by high child poverty, substantial inequality and ill-performing welfare states. They emphasize that in these countries, ‘care as usual’ (i.e. the circumstances of the control group within an RCT) may mean that there is a lack of care, or that the care provided is of poor quality. Therefore, in a similar vein to Penn and Lloyd’s review they conclude, ‘the obtained results of these studies cannot be generalized as ‘what works’ beyond the borders of these countries’ (p541). What is perhaps more important, in reference to this study to observe from systematic reviews, such as Penn and Lloyd (2007) or Gardner (2015) which draw very different conclusions about generalizability and cultural context is again to reiterate the importance of critical reflexivity on empirical findings.

Other studies, which have been key influencers and cited frequently in policy documents include the EPPE (2004) /EPPNI (2006) longitudinal evaluations of children’s pre-school experiences. These studies were significant particularly in relation to the quality of early childhood settings as well as in the importance of the home environment and the summary statement from the research team ‘What parents do is more important than who parents are’ is often quoted in policy and practice contexts (Melhuish et al 2006, p. 56). Like the cost/benefit equation this statement provided the impetus for some of the critical thinking in this study. The
separation of 'what parents do' their behaviours, from their socio-economic background, 'who parents are' is a concept that needs critically examined in the social and political context of where the discourse is used. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' provided a useful route into this analysis.

The policy context for Early Childhood Intervention has been shaped by a number of key influencers, in particular the persistence of the Allen (2011) Report that claims an evidence base in the research and has distilled this to create a powerful combined discourse of neuroscience and evidenced-based programming focused on parenting. The proposition put forward that a myriad of social problems including criminality, risk taking behaviours, poor mental health, violence, abuse and neglect have their roots in poor parenting. Neuroscientific research it is claimed 'demonstrated' the impact of this on the wiring of the brain that the first three years of life. RCT tested Early Intervention programmes to improve parenting skills were then proposed as the solution to a range of social problems:

A key finding is that babies are born with 25 per cent of their brains developed, and there is then a rapid period of development so that by the age of 3 their brains are 80 per cent developed. In that period, neglect, the wrong type of parenting and other adverse experiences can have a profound effect on how children are emotionally 'wired' (Allen 2011, p xiii).

The key concern is that the interpretation of the discourse 'claimed' from science and research in the translation into policy has been subject to simplification and misinterpretation. This concern was originally raised from some of the high profile figures within the scientific community itself, for example, Michael Rutter:

There has been a misleading extrapolation of the findings on experience-expectant development to the entirely different notion that higher quality psychosocial experiences in the first 2 or 3 years of life will have a much greater effect than similar experiences later, because the early experiences bring about a lasting change in brain structure. As several commentators
have pointed out, the claims (which come from people outside the field of neuroscience research) are misleading and fallacious for several reasons (Rutter, 2002, p.20)

The discourse in terms of what constitutes the evidence base for early childhood intervention has also been misinterpreted to fit, with the most notable example being Allen’s (2011) ‘menu’ of nineteen evidence based programmes. This policy discourse not only privileges one type of evidence but also is underpinned by the assumption that short term programmes focused on improving parenting skills are the solution to complex social problems.

More recently, there has been an emerging critique from research supported by the Faraday Institute’s ‘Uses and Abuses of Biology’ funding programme, which is highly critical of the reductionist and limiting construction of the child produced by these policy analyses. These also point to the lack of a broader social analysis in the central idea that parenting is the main or only factor in child outcomes. (Macvarish and Lowe 2014, Lowe and Macvarish, 2015). This represents a brief summary of some of the key debates and research in the field in which this exploratory study is located and to which this thesis will make an original contribution.

7.3 Limitations and practical challenges of the study
The quest to develop a coherent methodology for this study is discussed in Chapter 3 and I will not repeat it here. The theoretical orientation, methodology and methods however do point towards some of the limitations of the study as well as the practical challenges involved in research work of this kind. The theoretical debates in relation to the purposes of different types of enquiry which are discussed in Chapter 2 and the dominance of empirical research in the field makes it all the more important to clarify and defend the orientation of this thesis. In this thesis, Critical Realist in orientation, using Grounded Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis within a Bourdieusian framework I have examined how the dominant discourses in Early Childhood Intervention operate within a specific cultural and community context. The focus was on how discourses can validate agency and
practice in some instances and suppress it in others. This was considered within the broader social field of policy as well as in the more local context of communities and families. The study is therefore a contextualised case study from which there is no claim made to generalise. The observations I have made at policy and practice level are, as I have acknowledged, from my own position in the field. Another researcher, coming from a different paradigm might observe things differently. An empirical study for example, of the correlation between Early Childhood Intervention programme participation and attainment in Ballymore might study the same context and come up with findings at variance with what is described here. An in-depth ethnographic study of parents and children in one programme might again observe things differently. This study, however, can ultimately only be judged in relation to its orientation and original purpose which was to observe and critically examine the operationalisation of discourse through from policy to practice level. Therefore, from these findings, generalisations are not made about programmes elsewhere, nor are empirical or causal claims made.

In considering practical limitations, the decision to look at the issue from macro to micro level in a whole city context presented significant practical challenges. I gathered an enormous amount of data both in electronic form in recorded and transcribed interviews, in field notes and observational data and in programme manuals and information which all had to be analysed and all could potentially have found a home in the final version of this thesis. As it is in common with many researchers I had much more data than has found its way into the final analysis, data exploring issues such as food and nutrition, language and communication that has only surfaced in minor ways in the final cut. I also had much more detailed information on programmes, however as the objective of this study was not to compare or evaluate, the focus was fixed on a different level on the broader processes at work within multiple programmes. This has perhaps not fully done justice to the expert and sensitive facilitation of the five programmes I witnessed in practice. On a positive note, perhaps these data will find their home in subsequent studies. Another limitation of the study is that in spite of carrying out multiple observations, I feel that this final version over privileges verbal accounts from
interviews over other forms of data. My key concern in gathering data, especially in the homes of parents and children but also in group settings was that my presence as a researcher would not discourage any parent or child from taking part in a programme. I felt that the use of a video camera in participants’ homes or when they were talking about personal issues in a group setting would be off-putting. I did some filming in the ‘Wonder babies’ programme but one of the issues here was that the voices of the wonder babies themselves mostly drowned out the adult comments. Gathering video data while facilitating the opportunity for synchronised observation of body, gesture and voice also presents challenges in that adults and children behave differently once a camera is introduced. As it was, my notebooks are full of children’s mark making where even the youngest babies and toddlers were interested in getting hold of the pen. Perhaps if I could decipher their mark making their observations of me might be more interesting than mine were of them.

7.4 Revisiting the Research Questions
Before the summative concluding discussion and considering the volume of information which at this point been presented to the reader, it is perhaps timely to revisit the research questions that were proposed at the commencement of the study. These were:

- What approaches and perspectives on Early Childhood Intervention are identifiable from implementation in the community?
- What are the characteristics of these approaches and what kind of evidence are they based on?
- How might the dominant discourses contribute to supporting some approaches and inhibiting others?
- How do the dominant discourses from research and public policy impact on the implementation of Early Childhood Interventions?
- In what ways do these discourses contribute to the reproduction or transformation of social inequality?
7.5 Revisiting the Aims and Objectives

Subsequent to these questions being raised, the following aims and objectives were developed for the research:

Overall Aim

This thesis aims to increase our understanding of the notion of Early Childhood Intervention as a discourse; how it is generated and reproduced and how it makes possible certain processes and practices and limits others.

With this in mind the research set out the following core objectives:

- To analyse the existing research on the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention to identify key processes and characteristics.
- To examine the public policy discourse on Early Intervention using Critical Discourse Analysis.
- To identify the Early Childhood Intervention approaches being implemented in the case study context focusing on key processes and characteristics.
- To identify ways of communicating and connecting this knowledge back to practice in the field.
- To add to the theoretical understanding of the implementation of Early Childhood Intervention approaches in communities.

7.6 Main findings of the study

In discussing the main findings of the study I will initially summarise the key issues which have emerged ecologically from policy through to practice levels in relation to how the discourses of neuroscience and evidence are translated in the wider social and political context of the case study and in the case study itself. These will then be analysed, drawing from the Bourdieusian framework, in relation to the key concepts of habitus, capital and field. By drawing together the data in relation to the discourses on neuroscience and evidence this way, I aim to bring additional insights in relation to this study of the discourse of Early Childhood Intervention particularly by employing the Bourdieusian concepts of ‘reproduction’ and
‘transformation’ to the overall analysis. The purpose of these findings is not empirical or evaluative, but an attempt to relevantly produce insight into the way discourse reproduces or resists social and political inequality or domination. Instead of providing answers or generating evidence as empirical research attempts to do, this type of critical analysis raises important ethical and political questions about society, particularly in relation to how young children and parents are positioned and viewed. It raises issues about how developments in scientific knowledge and new insights from research are not politically neutral and are powerfully mediated through the lens of public policy so that what emerges can be substantively different from the ideas which were its genesis. In this way it is acknowledged that the thesis is critically engaged with rather than detached from the discourses analysed.

Public policy is not the only lens however through which ideas are mediated and the ways in which neuroscience and evidence are interpreted and translated at community and programme level while reflecting dominant discourses also reflects resistance to and critical questioning of dominant models. This type of critical analysis in relation to early childhood intervention is underdeveloped, though more recent research in the field would suggest that it is a growing area of interest (Macvarish and Lowe 2014, Lowe and Macvarish, 2015). The original contribution of this case study is that it identifies the broader areas of discourse and examines in detail how these are outworked in a specific community context as well as using a Bourdieusian framework to expand the analysis theoretically. The connection of critical theory and research to practice I will later argue is in itself an engagement in the tension between reproduction and transformation not least in that it exposes the (mis)use and (mis)appropriation of both research and science.

7.6.1 Discourse on Neuroscience

Bourdieu (2004) observed the encroachment of political and economic forces on science as suggesting that ‘science is in danger, and for that reason it is becoming dangerous’ (p. 6). The interpretation and translation of what is termed ‘neuroscientific’ discourse in early childhood intervention in public policy more
often draws earlier work in behavioural science and amounts to an
oversimplification of neuroscientific research. This is most explicitly seen in
extrapolations in relation to rapid synaptogenesis or the existence of ‘sensitive’
periods misconstrued as ‘critical’ as evidence of the need for intervention with
children aged 0-3 in disadvantaged communities. The potential insights from
neuroscience in relation to infant development are significant and have added to
our knowledge of young children’s social emotional development, physical
development, communication and language. However, the opportunities
neuroscientific research presents for deepening our understanding of young
children has instead been translated in policy to a narrowed focus on the
neurological impact of adversity, conflating this with social disadvantage in a deficit
based approach.

This deficit discourse in which brain-based claims are combined with a deterministic
view of the descent of poor children with disorganised attachment into mental ill
health, violence and criminality was evident in the analysis of the policy discourse in
Northern Ireland, particularly within key Health and Justice policies examined such
as ‘Infant Mental Health’ (2015) and ‘Reducing Offending’ (2012). This position
contrasts with a lack of emphasis on neuroscience in other policy areas, including
education policy, where for example, the early years strategy ‘Learning to Learn’
(2013) makes only one reference to brain development. Similarly, in Bright Start,
the Childcare Strategy (2012) the emphasis on attachment, neuroscience, brain
development is completely absent. Within the Childcare Strategy, the economic
discourse of ‘getting parents into work’ is dominant and the attachment or
neurological impact on children has been subsumed.

The recognition that the discourse based on neuroscience in relation to the
importance of the first three years has had policy impact and garnered significant
resources for prevention was also recognized and is particularly evident in cross
departmental policy areas such as ‘Delivering Social Change’ (2012) and the ‘Early
Intervention Transformation Programme’ (2015). However, the impact of these
policy initiatives in relation to shared working across departments or more
significantly in relation to impact on poverty and inequalities is yet to be demonstrated. Child policy making in Northern Ireland is a fragmented space with a multiplicity of policies, strategies and departmental responsibilities. There is frequent revision of policy without the establishment of clear mechanisms for monitoring actions or progress. The numerous Child Poverty strategies without clear targets or the Children's Strategy are notable examples of this. Shared working between departments is challenged by traditional political allegiances, most specifically seen in relation to the lack of shared working between the Departments of Education and of Health. This lack of shared working was documented in the study from political level through to community level where initially Early Intervention in Education and in Health in Ballymore were proposed to operate as separate programmes. Equally, within the Early Intervention Transformation Programme separate government departments are developing separate strands of the strategy. Fragmentation and competing interests rather than a concerted approach to addressing child poverty illustrate how structures make a powerful contribution to reproduction of the status quo while maintaining the promise of transformation in the discourse.

At local level there was a significant division in the Early Intervention partnership which could be seen as the difference in adherents of the different interpretations of neuroscientific discourse in relation to intervention birth to three, the 'window of opportunity' and in relation to intervention at any point of a child or young person's life, emphasizing brain plasticity and thus opportunity through life. There were also instances of the symbolic violence of the deficit model being internalized within communities, most notably in the reference to 'the community with the bad brain' as a shorthand descriptor for communities with high rates of deprivation and social problems. This is likely to be perpetuated by the prevailing influence of the deficit approach in advocacy, through public seminars and events. However, within communities, an assets-based approach to using the neuroscientific discourse was much more prevalent in practice. Neuroscientific information was simplified and translated to explain young children's behaviour or encourage parents to question and examine why children might act in the ways that they do in both home based
and group based programmes. While positive and encouraging, there were sometimes incidences of brain-based attributions reflecting the current prevalence of the discourse when child development theory would provide a more substantial explanation. Equally, there was some concern that more advantaged parents appeared more enthusiastic in their adoption of the discourse whereas more disadvantaged parents were less likely to be engaged. In the South River area in particular there was strong engagement with the discourse from an assets-based perspective. Approaches targeted at more marginalized parents such as 'Happy Hooligans' and 'Random Acts of Love' in their use of colloquial language and on the streets community engagement appeared to subvert the deterministic discourse of dysfunctional families and adversity. Community messaging around neuroscience in South River was also evident in public output such as 'Five Simple Guidelines to help your child's brain development'. While these approaches have an important function in relation to information and empowerment, it may also be important to note that while on the whole the discourse is presented from an assets-based perspective, the basis of the discourse is unchanged. Responsibility for healthy baby brain development is in the hands of the parent and the ability to create good routines, provide a secure home environment and access support in the community is all within reach of the parent. While the influence of the selective interpretation of neuroscience and the influence of deficit models is reflected to some extent at community level, attempts to simplify and interpret neuroscience from an asset-based perspective are more dominant. There is also a notable degree of critical engagement and reflexivity in relation to the neuroscience discourse, particularly at community and practice level.

7.6.2 Discourse on evidence

In relation to the discourse on evidence, the dominant discourse drawn upon in public policy reflects the dominance in the wider Early Intervention field of experimental trials, particularly randomised controlled and quasi-experimental designs. This is most explicitly seen in the persistent influence of the Allen Report (2011) which, similarly to the ways in which neuroscientific discourse has been reduced and simplified, distils the research on evidence into 19 'evidence based'
programmes, dismissing other approaches as not worthy of the 'title and kudos' (xi) of Early Intervention. This approach, based on a 'menu' of recognised programmes has influenced policy in Northern Ireland, again, particularly in the area of Health and Justice. While the dominant discourse in Health policy in relation to evidence in Early Intervention still draws heavily from Allen (2011), in the commissioning and decommissioning of programmes, there is also an emerging concern as to how this may limit or restrict opportunities in not accounting for 'evidence informed' or 'promising practice'.

The main 'evidence base' of Learning to Learn (2012), the key Early Years Education strategy focuses on the quality of the pre-school environment and draws on the EPPNI (2006) longitudinal study of the effects of pre-school education. The key EPPE study finding, that 'what parents do is more important than who parents are' (Melhuish 2004 p.10) is the impetus behind the Departmental Strategy, 'Education Works'. It also is reflected in 'Getting Ready to Learn' the education component of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme which comprises a number of small scale initiatives to be rolled out at individual pre-school or nursery level focused on parents reading to or engaging in play with their children.

The combined impact of this restricted interpretation of evidence is a focus, in Health policy particularly, on short-term programmatic solutions (on average 6-12 weeks’ duration) from a menu of RCT tested programmes focused on improving parenting skills. In Education policy, while there is not the same focus on programmes, the emphasis remains on 'what parents do'. In this way the dominant discourses on evidence at policy level may differ to some extent in their genesis but combine to attribute social problems to poor parenting and particularly within Health policy to prescribe short term, empirically tested parenting programmes as the solution. The evidence of intractable social inequalities in communities and the lack of evidence of impact on inequalities of universal Early Intervention such as Sure Start would suggest that bringing about social change in communities’ entails more significant change than supporting parenting. It should also be noted that claims of benefit from interventions from evidence are often misinterpreted as
having the potential to be equalising. The lack of impact of Sure Start on educational inequalities (2015) then rather than being politically ascribed to a failure of the 'intervention' would of course also point to a deeper source in the root causes of social and educational inequalities the principal of which is poverty.

The discourse on evidence in early intervention at community level however was coming from a much more critical basis. From managers and practitioners at local level there was little endorsement of externally RCT tested programmes. Concerns about cultural appropriateness, lack of client centeredness as well as the most marginalised being programme ready were raised in most contexts and were equally reflected in Sure Start and Neighbourhood perspectives. There was a very limited endorsement of externally developed programmes, most notably the Family Links 'Nurturing' programme, which is family, rather than 0-3 focused, and has not made it on to the 'Allen list'. This programme in particular stood out as positively received in a wide range of contexts in the case study and was described as 'transformative' by one manager. The other interesting example locally in relation to evidence was the 'Starting Strong' home visiting programme, which was undergoing an RCT at the time of the research. In this case, testing a locally developed programme reflected different positioning in relation to the degree of support for and critical engagement with the processes of establishing an evidence base. There was critical thinking in relation to programme, context and research methodology and both management and staff continued to be reflexive about the research process.

Overall, parents and programme participants were not engaged with debates around the evidence base of programmes and 'what works' was not part of their rationale for participation. More important than external validation was the reputation of the programme in the community. Parents' focus was around 'what works for us' and this was attributed to the skills, flexibility and expertise of facilitators and the supportive peer group. Services such as childcare as well as proximity to home were also important for participation. There was some evidence of the impact of programme content in their feedback but their concern was less
with whether it was proven to work elsewhere than whether it worked for them. It was also notable that parents tended to participate in multiple programmes which is interesting in that the evidence base from trials tends to focus on the impact of a single programme. The participation, sometimes of a small group of parents in multiple programmes has implications beyond its impact on effectiveness studies. More importantly it raises the question about who is not participating in programmes which is one of the key challenges in the field.

7.7 Applying the Bourdieusian Framework to the analysis of these findings

In applying a Bourdieusian analysis to the findings from the case study, a central concern is to examine whether ultimately the discourses in Early Childhood Intervention as outworked in this context are reproducing or transforming inequalities. Transformation is one of the most powerful concepts that characterises the discourse, not just in Early Childhood Intervention but also in the broader social and political context. In the broader context of Northern Ireland politically, the discourse of transformation can be supported with reference to a Peace Process and Peace Agreement that many would have found unthinkable twenty years previously. Underneath this political transformation is another reality, that social and economic inequalities persist and that the life chances and opportunities of children are still constrained by poverty. The different social circumstances that shape both the experience of conflict and the transition to a peaceful society has in my view, been better captured as a discourse by a singer in a rock band than by any policy maker or researcher.

Gary Lightbody of the band ‘Snow Patrol’ was invited to provide the foreword to the Child Poverty Alliance’s recently published report, ‘Beneath the Surface’ (2014). Lightbody reflects on his own childhood where a middle class upbringing in the seaside town of Bangor of ‘golden hued yawning predictability’ protected him from a Northern Ireland, which to his eyes in the distance was ‘sporadically scorched with violence’ (Foreword, p. x). He speculates, with perhaps a subtle reference to the habitus of those who write and read such reports:
Heat, food, water, a roof over your head... If you are reading this as an adult, then chances are as a child you had all those things as standard (p. x)

Unlike Bangor, children and parents in working class communities in Ballymore experienced a high impact of conflict and now their children continue to experience persistent levels of child poverty, which are among the highest not only in Northern Ireland but also in the UK. This is the structural underpinning of what is often described as the 'intergenerational transmission of inequality'.

Commenting on the correlation of poverty and conflict, Lightbody observes:

that children in Northern Ireland should be the worst hit by this (poverty) seems doubly cruel. To have finally come out the other side of decades of conflict a new generation is trying to build a New Northern Ireland from the rubble of the old (2014, Foreword p xi).

The 'Beneath the Surface' report is not optimistic about transformation in the absence of structural change. Without increasing the resources or reducing the outgoings of poor families with children, it concludes that 'all of the evidence suggests that child poverty levels will reach shocking levels by 2020' (p. 119).

Discourses of reproduction and transformation are recurrent at different levels in the case study context. Underneath this powerful political discourse at macro level of political transformation post conflict, a number of the overarching policies use the term 'transformation'. This includes those in Early Childhood Intervention, the most notable and recent iteration of which is the 'Early Intervention Transformation Programme' which is currently under development at the time of writing. The expectations of public sector change following the Peace Agreement were enormous, with claims made that structural reform (e.g. reorganising health, education, and local government) would be 'transformative' and lead inexorably to better quality public services in Northern Ireland. Instead, reforms became part of
a wider political struggle some of which remains unresolved and which have tested the effective working of the Northern Ireland power-sharing Executive (Knox 2012).

At city level the context is ‘transformation through regeneration’, with Early Intervention as a key theme and catalyst programme whereby the aspiration is that the city will become ‘the best place to be born and grow up in’. This continues at neighbourhood level, where Neighbourhood Renewal aspired to ‘transform our area into a safe place which people will choose to live in’. This aspirational discourse is set against a backdrop in which the reproduction rather than transformation of social disadvantage is reflected in the empirical data.

So what can Bourdieu’s theory add to this in relation to reproduction and transformation? Does the use of Bourdieusian theory merely add to a deterministic picture? The criticism of being overly focused on reproduction in a deterministic way has been frequently levelled at Bourdieu (Goldthorpe, 2007). Similarly, to other socially critical theorists, Bourdieu has been criticized for his emphasis on reproduction at the expense of transformative action to create a different world. According to his critics, Bourdieu’s theory, by overstating the impact of structure, seems to leave no room for notions like resistance (Grenfell & James, 1998). It has been suggested that Bourdieu does not give nearly enough credit to agency and the revolutionary potential of agents and that his worldview therefore is far more reproductive than transformative. His vision of the world, it is argued, ‘ultimately remains one in which things happen to people, rather than a world in which they can intervene in their individual and collective destinies’ (Jenkins, 2002, p. 91). In fact, as Waquant, Bourdieu’s collaborator and interpreter clarifies, this deterministic view is a misreading of Bourdieu and ‘Struggle, not ‘reproduction’, is the master metaphor at the core of his thought’ (Wacquant 1998, p. 264).

While my reflection and analysis in relation to this case study has drawn heavily, some would say too heavily perhaps on Bourdieu, I would like to use the case study to demonstrate that while the picture uncovered (or constructed) in the research suggests the overall dominance of reproduction rather than transformation, this
does not imply that there was an absence of struggle, or that personal, familial and community change were not evident. In fact, elements of resistance, struggle and critical thinking were evident at all levels. The central concern is that the outworking of the discourses of neuroscience and evidence in Early Childhood Intervention as demonstrated in the case study analysis is more likely to reproduce than transform social inequalities as at every level. This is principally because the outworking of the dominant discourses places the responsibility for transformation with parents, who have limited resources or capital but on whose shoulders are placed the responsibility for delivering transformative social change. This is not to imply that transformation cannot happen or is not possible at individual and family level but that the way the wider social structures impact on individuals determine how easy or how difficult it is for this to happen. For this reason, the wider social structures must be analysed alongside the position of individual agents in order for a more complete picture to emerge.

If, as the discourse implies, achieving better outcomes is a matter of parents making the right ‘choices’ then the implication is that all parents are equally placed in non-material assets and resources. This is the cultural capital that informs ‘what parents do’ or their logic of practice. Parental habitus is structured by the different social forces that have produced it. As well as being structured however, it is also structuring in that it gives coherence to the various activities of an individual, the ‘what we do’ across the separate spheres of life. This is why Bourdieu defines habitus as ‘the product of structure, producer of practice, and reproducer of structure’, the ‘unchosen principle of all choices’ (2007, p228). A pertinent example of this from the case study is of the parent who has been in the care system presenting in ‘fight mode’ in their interactions with statutory agencies. From this habitus and marginal position in the field a parent is unlikely to garner equal resources of language and communication, essential cultural capital for their young child. Equally, the community worker debarred from using the words ‘speech’ and ‘language’ as descriptors for home-grown initiatives will struggle for cultural capital in a world of the professionals whose habitus will uphold their own criteria against those from intruding fields. This is why the discourse in relation to reproduction
and transformation must be viewed ecologically as the case study illuminates. It also demonstrates how the interrelated concepts of habitus, field and capital must be seen concurrently in elucidating struggle, reproduction and transformation:

This conceptual triad also allows us to elucidate cases of reproduction – when social and mental structures are in agreement and reinforce each other – as well as transformation – when discordances arise between habitus and field – leading to innovation, crisis and structural change (Wacquant, 2007 p. 270)

The field of Early Childhood Intervention, as I have stated throughout this study, can be viewed as being made up of different and competing fields in science, health, education, economics and politics. As it is currently a powerful mobilizing set of ideas it may constitute a ‘temporary social field’ producing cross-field effects (Rawolle, 2009). The struggle within different fields is for capital which may be economic but may also be scientific, cultural i.e. knowledge, research, social i.e. networks and connections. The struggle is principally played out in the field of power i.e. the political or policy field and the influence of political power can be clearly seen in the way the discourses of neuroscience and evidence are mediated. Currently, in the Northern Ireland context, a limited and reductive interpretation of these discourses appears to dominate at the policy level. There is however some resistance to this at policy and commissioning level. It is important to remember that managers and commissioners are also acting from their habitus but also have agency, the capacity for struggle within the system to reproduce or transform. Within the system agents have differing aims as Thompson (1991) observes:

some will seek to preserve the status quo, others to change it - and differing chances of winning or losing, depending on where they are located in the structured space of positions' (Thompson 1991, 14)

Importantly, however, the assumption should not be made that a Commissioner is necessarily less radical than a community worker, as Bourdieu clarifies, this type of
analysis does not simply imply that, 'all small capital holders are necessarily revolutionaries and all big capital holders are automatically conservatives' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 108-9)

The local context is influenced by the overall discourses at the political level, as ultimately this is the level where resources are mobilized. However, the field of Early Childhood Intervention has some different features at local level. The importance of social capital, relationships, networks and home grown knowledge as influencers was notable. Also, a strong and vocal community sector, which has emerged out of the context of conflict, with some capacity to directly influence government, gives this field considerable power. The transformation at political level has meant that in some working class communities, direct access to Government Ministers, some of whom come from these communities is possible. The position therefore of Neighbourhood managers in the field with access to significant social and political capital can be a strong one. This power in a still divided society such as Northern Ireland, is however contingent on political affiliation. In this respect, strong capital with one Department or Minister, such as Education for example, may not translate to capital with another Department such as Health or Social Development. There is therefore struggle in the field at neighbourhood level, where locally developed models with social capital claims compete with the knowledge capital of officially approved, externally developed programmes. This is particularly true if the relevant Department endorses the knowledge capital of evidence-based programmes as is notably the case with the Department of Health.

The confluence of all of this is that at political, policy and at community and neighbourhood level, Early Childhood Intervention is focused on parents. The formula for addressing social inequality is better parenting, administered through parenting programmes and focused on changing habits. The messages communicated, while apparently easy or simple, once contextualized are revealed as anything but simple. ‘Breastfeed your baby’ is an enormous challenge if breastfeeding rates are so low as to be invisible in the community or if partners and
family are opposed or unsupportive. 'Read a story to your child every day' is
difficult if you have poor literacy and low confidence, or if, like Hani and Amir,
English is not your first language and archaic traditional nursery rhymes are
perplexing to understand.

The facilitators and parents that I met in the course of the research for this study
were critically and reflexively engaged in different ways and in this sense were
struggling against deterministic discourses without necessarily having the power or
resources within the field to transform them. Parents every day in communities like
Ballymore are critically reflecting on their own childhoods and addressing the issues
this raises for their own children in programmes like 'Nurturing', 'Family Eat and
Enjoy' and 'Starting Strong'. They are changing habits because they want a
different future for their children. In a remark that was typical of a number of
parents, they are strongly motivated by their children's interests:

I am wild shy, I hate having to speak with new people, but I did it for him.
(Parent, Nurturing, North River)

As Reay's (2003) research on maternal involvement demonstrates however,
personal critical reflection is only one part of the journey as habitus continues to
work long after the objective conditions of its emergence have been divulged. In
reality therefore, the eight-week programme, while encouraging parents to reflect,
is unlikely to have transformative impact long term. Reay's (2003) research also
demonstrates that it is easier to reproduce than to transform the habitus therefore
parents who already have capital: social, cultural and economic can reproduce this
for their children. This is why it is more likely, though not certain, that growing up
in 'golden hued yawning predictability' in Bangor may be an easier position to
reproduce that reality from than growing up in the Oldlands estate in Ballymore.
For parents with limited access to economic and cultural capital the task of
transforming habitus is significant. The other dimension of programmes focused on
teaching behavioural change, is that the change may only take place superficially.
The previous chapter quoted a parent’s comment in relation to family rules:

I use the family rules with my wee boy. He knows them off by heart and he knows if he breaks them he will not get a sticker. (Parent, North River)

This in my view is an example of the symbolic violence of the outworking of this discourse where the parent, and consequently the child accepts the logic that changing their behaviour will change their position. Some parents have internalized the discourse in the belief that through participating in programmes, teaching their children rules, they will better navigate the system and this will impact on the inequalities and barriers they and their children experience. This may be the case, to an extent. As we know from Bourdieu however, the habitus operates unconsciously, providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives ‘without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 76).

Many parents are bravely trying to change intergenerational patterns, some parents are getting the benefits of services designed for the more marginalised, some are constantly in ‘fight mode’ with the system, many are grappling with issues that are too oppressive to engage at all. Equally, there are those involved in facilitating both Early Intervention and family support programmes who are struggling to deliver positive change with families and communities. Habitus change, at whatever level this is happening, is much more complex than changing habits. In order for this change to be transformative, it needs to be at both individual and social level. Despite a broad awareness of children’s rights and needs and a proliferation of policies, strategies and departments with responsibility, Northern Ireland still invests less in children than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Existing health, education, social care and other services do not always serve children well, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Government needs to face up to its responsibilities beyond advising parents to face up to theirs.
While at this point in time and within this context, Early Intervention has not transformed social inequalities, it has brought benefit for some parents and children in disadvantaged communities, arguably not for the most disadvantaged and not on the scale that the discourse promises. It could be argued that the mismatch between reality and aspiration, reproduction and transformation is actually set in the discourse itself. Bourdieu (2005) reminds us that economics, while expressed in facts and figures is a social construction which cannot explain what happens in reality. The expectation of transformative change has been constructed on overstated claims. The cost/benefit claim, for example, of the $1 investment generating a saving of $17, while sold as hard evidence did not exist anywhere other than in an economist's construction. It has, however, been embedded in the public imagination as part of a transformative discourse, capturing the possibility of what Early Intervention can offer.

Perhaps the future for Early Childhood Intervention is in a more realistic and grounded approach, which is more modest in its claims, continuing the essential work of supporting children, families and communities but recognising that this is long term and needs to be supported by structural change with clear strategies for addressing poverty and inequality at the level of governance. It should be remembered, again with reference to Bourdieu (1990), that wider structures are not fixed, but are also reproduced or transformed through the habitus of individuals, some at a powerful institutional level interacting in multiple fields, the classic agency/structure dialectical.

Habitus, field and capital, as clearly illustrated in the case study of Ballymore, also reflect the structures and context of the time. Northern Ireland has demonstrated that significant structural change is possible at a political level. However, this political transformation has not been underscored by social and economic transformation. In this sense, Bourdieu provides a theoretical rationale for the need to address habits, behaviours and culture but also to do so across the system, including within and across the political and economic fields that directly reproduce wider structures.
Currently, the discourses that are dominant in Early Childhood Intervention have placed total responsibility on parents for change and many parents are doing their very best to be up for that change. Many others are too marginalised, too alienated from statutory support structures, too subsumed by overwhelming practical daily struggles to be able to deliver change for their children. Their children are also society’s responsibility. That is why the state has responsibility as a duty bearer for young children, for upholding their rights. Not as disembodied brains, not as the objects of enquiry, not as economic investments for the future but as children with rights in the here and now for the brief time in life that is their childhood.

7.8 Implications for Practice

One of the objectives of this research was to identify ways of communicating and connecting this knowledge back to practice in the field. This is not only desirable but politically necessary in the pursuit of genuinely transformative change. Importantly, in the discussion of struggle, reproduction and transformation the position of the critical researcher is neither uninvolved nor is it neutral. Bourdieu argued for an engaged social science and upheld that theory was political. The aim of theory construction, of ‘revealing what is hidden’ is not just an academic exercise therefore but an exercise of symbolic power:

> to make social science into an effective countervailing symbolic power and the midwife of social forces dedicated to social justice and civic morality

(Wacquant in Stones (ed) p 263)

Research in Early Childhood Intervention, including critical studies such as this one must therefore recognise their position in the field. Research is positioned within the struggle for power and critical research must combat the capacity of dominant discourses to uphold and reproduce their own criteria of evaluation over and against those of intruding fields. Importantly, the critical link between theory and practice cannot be assumed but must be forged in order to be transformative. The researcher, while using theory to expose inequalities must also be careful to realise
that interpretive detachment can make its own contribution to reproduction and create a distance and dislocation between theory and practice:

the sociologist necessarily assumes a contemplative or scholastic stance that causes her to (mis)construe the social world as an interpretive puzzle to be resolved, rather than a mesh of practical tasks to be accomplished in real time and space – which is what it is for social agents (Wacquant p. 275)

Appropriating from the essence of Thesis 11, as well as from Bourdieu, sociologists of early childhood, like Marx’s philosophers, cannot stop at ‘revealing what is hidden’ in the discourse of early intervention, but must themselves challenge and change this in order to be transformative. It is not enough for research and theory to expose the outworkings of the dominant discourses, it must crucially make the link with practice in order to provide a concrete social analysis as to how inequalities can be better challenged and addressed.

As the research has been informed by an iterative process, at different stages I have shared findings as they have emerged with participants in the process and practitioners in the field. The opportunity to present a Master Class on the research at an Early Childhood Conference in Belfast in June 2015 was one such opportunity. As a key concern of this thesis is the critical examination of the discourse, it was important as an advocate in the field to share findings with others. To this end I will provide a synthesis of what I think might be some of the issues for practice arising from this research.

The first of these is that it is important that practitioners have the opportunity to critically reflect on the ways in which discourse is interpreted in policy and to what extent this is reflected in the research base in neuroscience and evidence. Advocates in the field should be aware that the process of simplification can distort or over generalise research findings. Early childhood practitioners must be supported to critically engage with discourse in neuroscience and evidence and to interface this knowledge with their observations from practice. This is where...
practice has the potential to be transformative, because it can engage at different layers of the social system. Of course, in order for this to happen, it is important that both the research community and government respects knowledge from contextualised practice in the field. The potential for partnerships between researchers and community could be more effectively utilised, particularly the pursuit of research that critically engages parents and communities rather than that which positions them as passive objects of analysis. In the same way that external research including that which claims ‘gold standard’ status must be critically examined by practitioners in relation to grounded knowledge, practice must also be subject to critical enquiry.

All practice and research in Early Childhood Intervention should have the challenge of addressing inequalities at its heart. By being content with marginal benefit, or comparing poor children only with similarly disadvantaged children, practice and research is more likely to reproduce than to transform. A focus on reducing and ultimately eliminating the gap between the economically advantaged and disadvantaged child is a more fundamental concern than the effectiveness of programmes or the number of people accessing services in a disadvantaged community. Neither individual programme effectiveness demonstrated in controlled conditions nor the fact that a programme is ‘home grown’ or popular necessarily means there is an impact on inequalities. Without clearly impacting on inequalities, no programme can be transformative. In relation to practice in Early Childhood Intervention in the community, the predominance of small groups of parents with existing social capital accessing multiple programmes should be addressed. While this may be viewed as a positive way of growing social capital and engagement in communities, it may also inhibit the participation of less advantaged parents and children, thus reproducing the very inequalities it is positioned to address. Finally, and most importantly, it is vital that practitioners reflect on their role as duty bearers in relation to upholding the rights of very young children. As young children cannot choose the ways in which they are represented and discussed it is important that practitioners challenge representations that depict
young children as disembodied brains or passive objects of research and insist that young children have the status and agency which is theirs by right.

7.9 Issues for further research and theory building from this study

This has been in many ways an ambitious study particularly for a single researcher. It has sought to explore the outworking in a case study area of the broader discourses in neuroscience and evidence that are dominant in the field. A Bourdieusian framework was used to illuminate the ways in which these discourses both support and inhibit practice with children and parents in the community. In this way the critical analysis presented has purposeful relationship to research and practice as well as the capacity to forge links between the two. This work can be positioned alongside others in the struggle for real transformation in the theory and practice of Early Childhood Intervention, revealing as it does a problematic at the heart of what purports to be transformative but is actually reproducing and reinforcing inequality. This is one of the important political aspects of theory in educational research as Stephen Ball articulates:

The point about theory is not that it is simply critical, theory in educational research should be to engage in struggle, to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices (Ball 1995, p. 267)

In order for theory to be authentically critically engaged, to have transformative power, it must engage with practice. The (mis)use of research in relation to both neuroscience and evidence requires critical questions to be raised at all levels: from parents, practitioners, commissioners and policy makers as well as from researchers. It is only by engaging the whole system ecologically in critical struggle that the potential for transformative change can be actualised.

Inevitably the thesis raises many more questions than it can answer. At macro level a representation has been constructed of some of the many interlocking fields and sets of relations that cumulatively shape the overall field of Early Childhood Intervention in a particular policy context. Forms of capital: scientific, cultural,
social and economic which are the basis for struggle and position in the different fields have been analysed. Further research examining the outworking of the discourses of Early Intervention in different contexts would be useful to examine whether similar or different forces are at work. Ecologically connected with this, at the micro level, the study has drawn on Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ in particular to critically examine the messaging in Early Intervention that ‘what parents do is more important than who parents are’ and the assumption that all are equally placed to make changes in ‘habits’. Recognising and challenging the structural nature of inequalities is at the core of the struggle between reproduction and transformation. The acknowledgement of unequal starting points and the connection of habitus to field to capital, micro to macro is crucial. But the concept of struggle itself, including challenge, resistance and resilience at all levels is also crucial to analysing the reproduction/ transformation dynamic. The habitus, rather than being viewed as a deterministic concept (Jenkins 1982) when linked with struggle in the wider field of relations and to social capital has potential application in further research to explore factors in resilience and change in children, parents and communities from a sociological perspective (Reay 2003, Connolly 2009).

It is acknowledged that an increased risk of poor outcomes for young children may be related to such factors as teenage parenthood, maternal post-natal depression, relationship breakdown or living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. The presence of these factors however cannot be used to scientifically predict outcomes for an individual child, in a particular family or for children in a particular neighbourhood, the ‘community with the bad brain’. Outcomes depend on a wide range of interrelated variables and include wider social, economic and political factors as well as individual agency. Research therefore may identify risk factors, such as those listed above, but to attempt to use these to predict outcomes in a deterministic way, is what Connolly (2006) describes an ‘ecological fallacy’. The communication to disadvantaged communities of this type of deterministic reading (mis)interpreted from research which was manifest in the case study underscores the need for critical engagement with research in Early Childhood Intervention. Practitioners, parents and communities must be central to that engagement as
transformation is not possible from a marginal or passive position. The current standoff between proponents and opponents of empirical research in relation to Early Childhood Intervention further inhibits critical engagement of either in this sort of discussion and runs the risk of communities being reduced to the status of contested territories for research. For this reason, it is my hope that studies of this kind from a Critical Realist position, that engage with theory, policy, commissioning, practitioner and parent perspectives might contribute to opening up new possibilities for this type of dialogue.

A final area for further research which was an emergent theme in this study is in relation to Early Childhood Intervention in areas in or emerging from conflict. There is emerging research in relation to the impact of conflict on children, which explores this from neurobiological perspective. Some of the more recent contributions to this debate are collected in the recently published collection, 'Pathways to Peace: The Transformative Power of Children and Families' (Leckman, Panter Brick and Salah 2014). This includes chapters such as 'Peptide Pathways to Peace' and 'Epigenetics: Significance of Gene-Environment Interface for Brain Development'. Unfortunately, epigenetics and peptide pathways are outside of my expertise as a social scientist. However, I believe that it is essential that social scientists and early childhood researchers critically engage across disciplines with these developments, as well as engaging with the communities that are being researched. This is vital in order to ensure that research with young children and families in conflict affected areas is developed in a manner that is critically reflexive, engages with and is respectful of the dignity of children, families and communities and importantly is translated in ways that are respectful of the rights of the young child.
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### Appendix 1 Mapping of Early Intervention Programmes

**EARLY INTERVENTION CITY- AREA MAPPING (with Nurturing Programme outlined as example)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Title Description of Intervention-Service/Programme/Approach</th>
<th>Theory of Change/Outcomes</th>
<th>Who Delivers? Personnel</th>
<th>Numbers targeted/ scope reach</th>
<th>Delivery method/ Duration/ funding</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluation internal/external /RCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North River</td>
<td>Nurturing Programme</td>
<td>By helping adults understand and manage feelings and behaviour they will become more positive and nurturing in their relationships with children and each other.</td>
<td>2 facilitators HV and FS worker</td>
<td>7-10 parents per programme</td>
<td>Manualised Programme Co-Facilitation over 7 weeks</td>
<td>Internal evaluation using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) Internal evaluations sent to Family Links UK contributing to wider UK evaluation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 Questions for Semi Structured Interviews Service Providers

Early Intervention – example of a definition provided

- Intervening early to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families or with a population most at risk of developing problems.
- This definition includes interventions early in life and interventions early in the development of a problem.
- Includes universal interventions offered to an entire population to prevent problems developing, and targeted interventions that are offered to particular children, young people and families. (C4EO 2010)

Questions:

Q1 What is your understanding of the idea of early intervention and how it impacts in this community?

Q2 What in your view are the strengths and difficulties at the level of children and families? at community level? at a broader social level?

Q3 In what ways are these connected?

Q4 What difference, if any, do you think new ideas from neuroscience about children's brain development has made?

Q5 What kind of evidence do you think is important in early intervention?

Q6 In what ways do you think early intervention is making a positive change in the lives of children and families in this community?

Q7 In what ways are the lives of children staying the same or getting worse in this community?

Q8 Are there any other issues that you think are important?
Appendix 3 Consent Form Service Providers

Dear Service Provider

EARLY INTERVENTION CITY RESEARCH PROJECT

About the research

I would like to introduce myself and explain why I am writing to you. I am a PhD student at Queens University Belfast in the School of Education. I am also an early years practitioner with many years of experience through working with Early Years-The Organisation for Young Children and previously as ********* *********** current|y | am undertaking research which looks at Early Childhood Intervention programmes for children 0-6. As part of the research, I am doing a case study which looks at the idea of ********* as an Early Intervention City. This will involve observing how different programmes operate in practice as well as interviewing parents, early childhood practitioners and those who commission and manage services. The topic is very relevant given the emphasis on Early Childhood Intervention in government policy and locally in the ‘*********’ which identifies ‘Early Intervention City’ as a catalyst programme for the regeneration of the city. The objective of my research is to explore how this works in practice through listening to and observing young children, listening to parents, to early childhood practitioners, managers and policy makers. Through this I hope to identify ways of improving outcomes for young children.

What it involves

The case study will involve observed practice with staff, parents and young children in early years settings who are implementing early intervention programmes. It will also involve focus groups and semi-structured interviews with parents, staff, service providers as well as those involved in managing and commissioning Early Intervention services in the city. Through these processes I hope to gain an understanding of how Early Intervention operates in a citywide context.
As a service provider/service manager I am asking for your agreement and that of your organisation to take part in the study and for your consent to be interviewed and/or take part in a focus group. The participation in the study of service providers at neighbourhood, local and regional level, managers and commissioners as well as policy and decision makers is vital to obtaining a holistic picture of Early Intervention in the city context. I would emphasise that all information relating to the study will be kept confidentially and a system of coding of data will be used. No individual’s name or occupational title will be identified in any written reports of the study and evidence gathered, in visual and written forms will be kept in a secure place at the School of Education.

It is hoped that the research will help focus attention on the importance of early childhood intervention in addressing inequalities and making sure children get the best start in life. Findings from the research will be presented to parents, early years practitioners, service providers, managers and commissioners, policy makers and others with an interest in this area. Everybody who has participated in the research will be provided with a summary of the study’s findings and invited to an event to disseminate the research findings at the end of the project.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form by .................. I very much hope that you will support the research and help further our understanding of the role of the Early Childhood Intervention in addressing social and educational inequalities.

Yours sincerely

Clionagh Boyle,
PhD student School of Education
CONSENT FORM

I have read the attached information letter which explains the EARLY INTERVENTION CITY Research project.

I understand that all the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that my name and occupational title will not be included in any reports.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time.

I understand that this research will be published in form of a Doctoral dissertation.

(Please tick one of the following boxes to indicate whether or not you agree to taking part):

☐ I AGREE on behalf of my organisation to being interviewed as part of the Early Intervention City Case Study

☐ I AGREE on behalf of my organisation to taking part in a focus group as part of the Early Intervention City Case Study

☐ I DO NOT AGREE to taking part in the above research

Signature: _______________________ Date: ______________________

(Name)
FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS:

The fieldwork for the Early Intervention City study will take place between October 2013 and June 2014. Participation in the study is voluntary and there will be no negative consequences of participating/not participating.

You may withdraw your consent for participation in the study up until 1st December 2014. The data collected will be used for my PhD thesis and for future publications.

My contact details should you wish to discuss the study or if require any further information are:

Clionagh Boyle
PhD student
School of Education
69-71 University St
Queens University Belfast
Belfast
BT7 1HL
Tel: 02890975941 email cboyle39@qub.ac.uk

The research will be supervised by Professor Paul Connolly, Professor of Education, Head of School who can also be contacted at the above address or by email:

paul.connolly@qub.ac.uk
Appendix 4 Consent Form Parents

Dear Parent

EARLY INTERVENTION CITY RESEARCH PROJECT

About the research
I would like to introduce myself and explain why I am writing to you. I am researching Early Childhood Intervention programmes for young children. I am doing a case study which looks at the idea of ******** as an Early Intervention City. This will involve observing how different programmes for young children operate in practice. I will also be interviewing parents and staff to get their views on the programmes. The topic is very relevant to current government policy as well as locally in the ‘******’ for the regeneration of the city. I want to explore how all this works in practice through observing young children taking part in programmes and listening to the views of parents and staff.

About Me
I am a PhD student at Queens University Belfast in the School of Education. I am an early years practitioner with over twenty years experience of working with children and parents. I have worked as a Senior Early Years Specialist with Early Years and previously worked with ***** ********** and in different roles in the community voluntary sector.

What it involves
The Manager of the service your child attends supports this research and I am asking for your permission so that you and your child can take part. The objective is to observe young children taking part in the programmes just as they would usually do and there will be little or no disruption to their routine.

I am also asking for your permission to use photographs and video as this is one of the best ways of capturing very young children’s learning and development.
Please note that this material will not be broadcast or used for any purposes other than the research. Video recordings will be stored securely and will only be kept for the duration of the research (September 2013 - December 2015) and then erased.

I would also like to hear about your experiences as a parent using the services and will be organising for parents to come together in small focus groups or individually to hear your views.

The names of children, parents, staff, the name or location of the setting will not be identified in any written reports of the study. All of the data for the research will be kept in a secure place at the School of Education. It is hoped that the research will help focus attention on the importance of early childhood intervention in making sure children get the best start in life. Everybody who has taken part will be provided with a summary of the study’s findings at the end of the research project and invited to an event to hear about the study.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to your child’s setting by *****

I hope that you will support the research and help further our understanding of the importance of the early years of children’s lives.

Yours sincerely

Clionagh Boyle
PhD student School of Education
CONSENT FORM

I have read the attached information letter which explains the EARLY INTERVENTION CITY Research project.

I understand that the letter is asking for permission for the researcher to observe my child participating in the daily group activities in the early years setting they attend.

I understand that all the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that my child's name, my name and the name of the early years setting will not be included in any reports. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time. I understand that this research will be published in form of a Doctoral dissertation.

(Please tick the appropriate boxes to indicate whether or not you agree to taking part):

NAME OF CHILD (print)___________________________________

☐ I AGREE to the researcher observing my child taking part in the daily group activities and programmes within the early years setting.

☐ I AGREE to my child being videoed or photographed taking part in daily group activities within the setting for the sole purpose of the research.

☐ I DO NOT AGREE to my child taking part in the above research

NAME OF PARENT (print)____________________________________

☐ I AGREE to taking part in a small focus group of parents to give my views about the services
☐ I AGREE to taking part in an informal interview with the researcher to give
my views about the services

☐ I DO NOT AGREE to taking part in the above research

Signature: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________

(Name)
FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS:

The fieldwork for the Early Intervention City study will take place between October 2013 and June 2014. Participation in the study is voluntary and there will be no negative consequences of participating/not participating.

You may withdraw you consent for participation in the study up until 1st December 2014. The data collected will be used for my PhD thesis and for future publications.

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The research will be supervised by Professor Paul Connolly, Professor of Education, Head of School who can also be contacted at the above address or by email:
paul.connolly@qub.ac.uk
Memorandum

To Clionagh Boyle From Ulrike Niens, Chair, Ethics Committee Date 1 October 2013

Distribution Supervisor School of Education Office

File

Subject Ethics Approval for Research Proposal "A Critical Examination of the Discourse of Early Childhood Intervention" (originally submitted 26.3.2013)

The School of Education Ethics Committee has approved your proposed research. Note that this approval applies only to the procedures outlined in your submission.

Any departure from these must be discussed with your supervisor, and may require additional ethical approval.

Note for the supervisor: it is the responsibility of the supervisor to add any research projects involving human participants, material or data, to the University's Human Subjects Database for insurance purposes. (The Human Subjects Database is accessible through QOL under 'My Research').

The Committee wishes you every success with your research.

School of Education

Queen's University Belfast

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