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**Teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of 'Mantle of the Expert' as a teaching strategy in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

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**Abstract**

This is a paper focusing on the effectiveness of Mantle of the Expert within the Early Years Foundation Stage. It will be looking into the teachers' perceptions of Mantle of the Expert, what teaching strategies are used to implement Mantle of the Expert and whether it addresses all seven areas of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. An interpretivist approach was implemented and semi-structured interviews and observations were used to collect the data from a single educational setting. Participants were obtained through purposive and convenience sampling, as they were required to be Early Years Foundation Stage teachers practicing Mantle of the Expert, although data was only obtained from the teachers who were available on the day of the research.

The findings show that teachers positively perceive Mantle of the Expert, where children develop academically and personally. However, Mantle of the Expert is not without its limitations, as it can be challenging to understand its concepts and to plan for.

Overall, it would be advised that more schools should undertake a Mantle of the Expert teaching approach. However, with limited research available it may be deemed as risky due its different ways of meeting the curriculum.

**Introduction**

*Focus of the Paper*

Due to the pressures teachers are facing in order to ensure children are academically ready, current research shows creative teaching is reducing considerably and is being replaced with lessons of a standard format (Hutchings, 2015, p.5). However, this may not aid with academic improvement as Desailly (2012, p.4) argues creative teaching is the most effective form of education that develops children holistically. There are many forms of creative teaching strategies but this paper will be focusing on one in particular, Mantle of the Expert (MoE), and will be reviewing its effectiveness within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

MoE is rarely used in educational settings and as a result previous research is limited, especially with regards to the EYFS. This topic is important to study in order to start closing this gap in research and address unanswered questions regarding MoE. With the information provided in this paper, teachers may be able to make an informed decision as to whether MoE should be incorporated in their classroom or school.

**Paper Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to gain an insight into teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of MoE, in accordance with academic and personal development with children from the EYFS. In order to achieve this, three objectives were generated to aid and support these findings and they are as follows:

**Citation**

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- Explore the perceptions of teachers in regards to whether MoE is an effective teaching method for the EYFS and if so why?
- Examine the approaches teachers use to promote the aims of MoE.
- Investigate whether the seven areas of learning are addressed during the MoE sessions.

### Literature Review

MoE was invented in the 1970s, so is considered a relatively new teaching strategy (Taylor, 2016, p.14). Furthermore, MoE is reasonably rare, with only 73 schools worldwide registered as part of the MoE community (MoE, 2016). In addition, the MoE teaching strategy was bordering non-existent when the first content-laden National Curriculum, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Frameworks and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) teaching schemes were implemented in schools (Baldwin, 2008, p.5). Consequently, research in this area is limited but due to MoE incorporating cross-curricular and enquiry-based teaching strategies, this literature review will also refer to references in these areas where appropriate. The emphasis will be on how children learn, what MoE is, teachers' perspectives of MoE, teaching approaches used within classrooms utilising MoE and whether MoE addresses all seven areas in the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017).

Xu (2011, p.414; Boneva and Mihova, 2012, p.10) explains children have a preferable learning style to perceive new knowledge and Fayombo (2015, p.47) emphasises the importance of teaching in consideration of learning styles for effective learning. An auditory learner learns most effectively by hearing instructional information whereas a visual learner successfully comprehends from visual formats (Boneva and Mihova, 2012, pp.10-11). These two learning styles could effectively be supported through didactic instruction, also known as 'instructivism', as Laurillard (2010, p.21) suggests this teaching approach involves learning through listening, watching and reading. Swanson (2001, cited in Johnson, 2009, p.5) claims instructivism succeeds where other teaching approaches fail, especially with students who have learning and behavioural difficulties. Piaget refutes Swanson's claim as, rather than children cognitively developing through their learning style, his stages of cognitive development suggest all children chronologically pass through developmental stages of thinking skills (Mooney, 2013, pp.80-81). This also applies to the final learning style, a kinaesthetic learner, who learns most effectively through hands-on experiences (Boneva and Mihova, 2012, p.11). Nevertheless, Dewey and Piaget support kinaesthetic learning, as they believe children only learn when their curiosity is not fully satisfied (Mooney, 2013, p.80). In addition, Mooney (2013, p.80) emphasises adopting a Piagetian theory in the classroom requires changing the stereotypical perception of teachers from someone who shares information into someone who nurtures enquiry.

Teach for America (2011, p.11), an American teaching corporation for teachers working in under-resourced schools, infer students do not learn in one effective way and teachers who do believe in learning styles spend unnecessary amounts of time planning to cater for them. Furthermore, there is inconsistent research in connecting learning styles to learning and is more likely to refer to information processing styles (Cambridge International Examinations, 2015, p.2). On the other hand, Fayombo (2015, p.47) suggests teaching in accordance with the learning styles, makes teachers more flexible, creative and responsible, all of which are needed for effective teaching.

In addition to learning styles, Enikő (2013, p.49) suggests different areas of learning content can be learnt through various teaching methods, with varying efficiency. Constructivism is a teaching approach that is student-focused, interactive and revolves around the interests of the students (Johnson, 2009, p.3). It was devised by Piaget, who claimed children constructed their own knowledge by giving meaning to objects in their environment, rather than through adult instruction (Mooney, 2013, p.79; Cooper, 2014, p.43; Aubrey and Riley, 2016, p.24). Vygotsky

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(1978, pp.86-87; Cambridge International Examinations, 2015, p.2) endorses this idea through his pioneering work of the zone of proximal development, which suggests educational activities should situate between what the students can independently achieve and what they could achieve with scaffolding from a teacher.

Taylor (2016, pp.22-23) describes the three features defining MoE. The first being, 'The students operate within a fiction as an expert team with power and responsibilities' (Taylor, 2016, p.22). This feature represents the children's mantle of expertise and develops through commitment to the role within the expert team. Another feature includes, 'The expert team works for a client, who sets standards and requires information' (Taylor, 2016, p.22); the students work for a fictional client that gives the students purpose, meaning and direction. The students have to work together to solve problems, create products and perform designated tasks to meet the demands of the client. Furthermore, these tasks are designed by the teacher to meet the requirements of the curriculum and needs of the children. The final feature is, 'The client commissions the team to perform tasks and activities towards an end product or project' (Taylor, 2016, p.23). This results in children performing a range of tasks and activities, which provides opportunities for students to study the curriculum and develop skills and understanding.

Harrison (2007, pp.15-16) concluded from her research that MoE increases pupil engagement and independent learning through real-life opportunities and recorded an increase in the children's willingness to engage with the thoughts and ideas of others. In agreement, Ofsted (2012, p.2) aver the characteristics of independent and motivated learners are important for improving teaching quality and pupil progression in a range of subjects. Nevertheless, Harrison (2007, p.16) states for these results to materialise teachers must manage children's ideas to meet the learning objectives of the sessions, as well as carefully planning time scales and cross-curricular links. Johnson, Liu and Goble (2015, pp.207-208) reinforce this statement in their study introducing MoE to trainee teachers, where the participants' lesson plans neglected some principles of MoE due to their lack of knowledge in how to use MoE time efficiently and across a range of subjects. However, the same research (Johnson, Liu and Goble, 2015, p.208) revealed, after additional training, MoE was valued by the participants for its ability to incorporate multiple perspectives whilst still achieving the learning objective and perceived MoE as an effective teaching strategy in teaching children difficult topics through its creative and enjoyable method.

Arnold (2010, pp.17-20), an early years support teacher, also emphasises the positive characteristics of MoE, as the wide range of learning opportunities allowed all the children in her research to achieve, despite their academic ability or learning style. This complements the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department of Education, 2017) as Gerver (2010, p.60) suggests this curriculum provides these broad learning opportunities that are also achieved in MoE (Arnold, 2010, p.20). Gerver (2010, pp.60-61) expands on this topic, emphasising broad learning opportunities encompass skills, such as hypothesising, investigating and self-managing, all of which children require throughout their education. However, Arnold's (2010) report is biased due to its reference to the positive effects of MoE and is contradicted by non-bias research from Sayers (2012) where teachers found MoE too difficult to maintain, as support is needed from headteachers in order to work in a challenging and cross-curricular way (Sayers, 2012, p.236). This support may not be required, as although cross-curricular planning within the EYFS is crucial, each curriculum area for the EYFS can be taught individually (Johnson, 2014, p.64). Furthermore, a participant from Sayers' study (2012, p.236) also expressed that when adopting a MoE approach, headteachers need to not be too concerned with improving standards. Nevertheless, this can be difficult when Ofsted (2014, p.10) have raised their expectations in their most recent strategic plan, to encourage service providers to focus on delivering the best possible outcomes for children.

On the other hand, many researchers suggest MoE improves standards, such as Zeeman and Lotriet (2013, pp.86-90) who stated in many cases academic skills, including investigation, questioning and critical thinking, were achieved. In addition, Hall (2014, p.152) saw a particular improvement in two students who lacked focus in previous lessons. However, in the final MoE session the same two students showed excellent improvisational skills and had effectively completed a written task (Hall, 2014, p.152). Arnold (2010, p.19) reinforces this research, stating children, that had previously been reluctant to write, shared an increase in willingness to express their thoughts and feelings during MoE sessions through written activities. These results may have occurred as teaching literacy creatively promotes focused and engaged children, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding (Horner and Ryf, 2007, pp.1-3). Nevertheless, MoE sessions are not always perceived as effective. Hall (2014, p.152) also experienced a child who found expert framing challenging as she did not understand the nineteenth century enough to represent a role within that era. Furthermore, early years children interviewed during research conducted by Theobald (2015, pp.354-355) expressed learning takes place when they listen to the teacher so perhaps children should have more formal learning before MoE sessions to cement key knowledge beforehand. Contrastingly, Bolton (2003, p.138; Huxtable, 2009, p.44) explains that MoE can be an effective teaching strategy but it requires teachers to have a change of conception with regards to the relationship they have with the children and be willing to put in a high degree of effort into planning and preparation.

Abbot (2007, p.3), a former student of Heathcote, explains for MoE to be an effective teaching strategy, teachers need to incorporate three teaching modalities: drama for learning, inquiry learning and expert framing. Furthermore, research shows adopting all three of these approaches promote quality learning (Ragnarsdóttir and Björk, 2012, pp.8-12; Youth Learn, 2016, p.2).

Drama holds a strong position within children's education (Medwell *et al.*, 2014, p.178). In the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017, p.12), children represent their ideas, thoughts and feelings through role-play, which is associated with drama (Medwell *et al.*, 2014, p.179). This is supported by meeting some of the Early Learning Goals for the area of Communication and Language (Medell *et al.*, 2014, p.179), such as 'children listen attentively in a range of situations' and 'children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs' (Department for Education, 2017, p.10). Medwell *et al.* (2014, p.178) also explain that drama is very versatile, not only is it a mode of study but activities such as hot seating and flashbacks can be used for cross-curricular learning, for example Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design within the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017, p.12) or History (Department for Education, 2014, p.245) and Literacy (Department for Education, 2014, p.14) within the National Curriculum. A study conducted by Ragnarsdóttir and Björk (2012, pp.8-12) found that drama could positively affect children's ability to learn, especially children with learning disabilities, by broadening their perspectives. However, these results could differ in different schools depending on the level of teacher encouragement, as the teachers interviewed expressed the need to motivate some children to notice academic improvement (Ragnarsdóttir and Björk, 2012, p.10).

Similar results are created with enquiry learning, Youth Learn (2016, p.2) suggests this strategy is suitable for all age groups and children, including those who do not respond well to lessons, where memorisation will flourish in an enquiry learning setting, as it could awaken their confidence, interest and self-esteem. However, Wang *et al.* (2010, p.386) indicates that children of the early years age do not have the attention span to successfully complete an enquiry-based activity. Nevertheless, Dewey and Piaget supported the enquiry-based learning strategy (Mooney, 2013, p.80), as they believed children's learning is driven by their inquisitiveness, suggesting learning only occurs when curiosity is not completely satisfied. On the other hand,

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research findings from Ergazaki and Zogza (2013, p.94) demonstrate that teachers encounter difficulties in transferring from the adult-led lessons into enquiry-based learning where children construct their own knowledge. The same research (Ergazaki and Zogza, 2013, p.94) also suggests that teachers are reluctant to encourage children to ask questions as this may promote children to undertake empirical investigations, which may be demanding for children within the early years.

Additionally, research conducted by Becker (2014, pp.18-19) found that expert framing, children taking on the role of adult experts (Aikten, 2013, p.36), generated an eagerness to learn and children completed tasks with a greater degree of self-efficacy. Edmiston (2003, p.1), a former MoE teacher, explains that this is a result of student positioning, where MoE teachers use their authority to position children in an appropriate role for their expertise. Furthermore, in another report Edmiston (2003, pp.226-227) suggests the teacher should also take on a role within the Mantle topic and either position themselves with a high authority role, where the teacher provides information, guides activities and changes the focus, or with a low ability role, where children are provided more of an opportunity to make suggestions. Contrastingly, research conducted by Harrison (2007, p.14) discovered expert framing for the purpose of enterprise disappointed the children, as when they discovered the enterprise initiative was not genuine, they felt the hard work was meaningless. Therefore, Harrison (2007, p.14) concluded that expert framing is not a fully beneficial teaching approach for children.

Heathcote, the developer of MoE, and Herbert (1985, p.173) state MoE facilitates teaching and learning at all levels of the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014) and incorporates all of the areas. Later literature, devised by Heathcote and Bolton (1999, p.123), suggests in order for MoE to cover the whole curriculum it needs to be implemented over a relatively long period of time, such as a school term. However, the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014) has been updated since this literature was written and may not apply to the new content. Nevertheless, more recent research from Arnold (2010, p.20; Booth, 2012, p.5) concludes that the MoE's diverse learning activities easily encompass all curriculum areas. Arnold (2010, p.19) especially found links between MoE and Literacy and saw a significant improvement in the children's motivation and inspiration to write due to the purpose MoE provides their work. Contrastingly, Taylor (2016, p.126) states that MoE is not designed to teach the whole of the curriculum and that he has difficulties in linking mathematics, music and physical education from the Primary National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014). Bromley and Labrow (2007, p.6) express that most curriculum areas can be taught through MoE but have the same viewpoint with regards to Mathematics and decided to teach this subject as a discreet topic due to it being more appropriate to be taught independently. Taylor (2016, p.129) believes this is due to these subjects requiring sequential teaching, repetition of key concepts and practice over time, something that MoE does not provide.

MoE has been adopted in many schools due to its creative approach in teaching the curriculum (Baldwin, 2008, p.5). An aspect of MoE that promotes a creative curriculum is its cross-curricular learning, which is a teaching strategy that is now being encouraged to make learning more efficient and engaging (Baldwin, 2008, p.5). Becker's research (2014, p.2) supports this statement as his motivation for incorporating MoE within his school was to meet Teaching Standard 4 (Becker, 2014, p.2), where teachers would 'contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s)' (Department for Education, 2013, p.2). As a result, Becker (2014, p.21) found that MoE provided ample opportunity for cross-curricular learning that effectively enhanced learning and engagement, particularly in Literacy, Design and Technology and Art. However, addressing all the curriculum areas through cross-curricular learning leads to time constraints, which in turn results in missed opportunities for developing learning (Becker,

2014, p.21). Becker (2014, p.21) advises schools who are taking on MoE to limit the number of cross-curricular objectives in a lesson, which will prevent them from diminishing and to consider how time constraints may affect the school's curriculum aims. It must be noted that the research mentioned in this paragraph is based on the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014) subjects and not the areas in the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017), resulting in the findings being less applicable to this research. Nevertheless, this is addressed in research conducted by Ofsted (2010, p.9), where creative approaches were being incorporated in twenty-two schools. All but one of these schools integrated a cross-curricular approach, particularly in their early years provision and found a positive impact on pupil's attainment and personal development.

With regards to teachers' perceptions of MoE, many teachers believe it increases pupil engagement, independent learning (Harrison, 2007, pp.15-16) and standards (Zeeman and Lotriet, 2013, pp.88-90). As a result, MoE is a creative and enjoyable teaching strategy (Johnson, Liu and Goble, 2015, p.208), which still provides a wide range of learning opportunities (Arnold, 2010, pp.17.20). On the other hand, teachers feel they have to manage children's ideas to meet learning objectives, carefully plan timescales and cross-curricular links (Harrison, 2007, pp.16; Sayers, 2012, p.236) and need additional training to understand the functioning of MoE (Johnson, Liu and Goble, 2015, p.208).

MoE is a teaching strategy itself but to be effective three other teaching strategies are required: drama, inquiry and expert framing (Abbot, 2007, p.3; Ragnarsdóttir and Björk, 2012, pp.8-12; Youth Learn, 2016, p.2). Drama is incorporated through role-play within the early years (Medwell *et al.*, 2014, p.179) and is especially effective with children who have learning disabilities (Ragnarsdóttir and Björk, 2012, pp.8-12) but some teachers find children need motivation to use this approach (Ragnarsdóttir and Björk, 2012, p.10). Enquiry is suitable for all age groups and builds confidence, interest and self-esteem (Youth Learn, 2016, p.2). However, some teachers find it difficult to transfer from adult-led teaching into child-led learning where children construct their own knowledge (Ergazaki and Zogza, 2013, p.94). Lastly, expert framing generates an eagerness to learn and promotes efficient working (Edmiston, 2003, p.225) but it can cause disappointment among the children when they discover the enterprise initiative is not genuine (Harrison, 2007, p.14).

In closing, when discussing whether MoE addresses all seven areas of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017), research shows that MoE can be used to address the whole curriculum (Heathcote and Herbert, 1985, p.173; Heathcote and Bolton, 1999, p.173; Arnold, 2010, p.20; Booth, 2012, p.5) and cross-curricular learning is one method in which this is achieved (Baldwin, 2008, p.5). Nevertheless, some teachers found it challenging to make links between some subjects, such as Mathematics (Bromley and Labrow, 2007, p.6; Taylor, 2016, p.126) and found cross-curricular learning time consuming (Becker, 2014, p.21).

### **Methodology**

This research study adopted the philosophical paradigm of interpretivism (Sarantakos, 2013, pp.40-41; Thomas, 2013, pp.108-111). Thomas (2013, pp.108-110) refers to an interpretivist as someone who is interested in social science, where an understanding of peoples' thoughts is gained and how those thoughts were originally formed. Furthermore, an interpretivist does not desire to create generalisations about the world and instead focuses on gaining a detailed insight into the topic, whilst still acknowledging there may be multiple explanations for the data gained (Mukherji and Albon, 2015, p.25). Therefore, a qualitative research design was adopted for this research project in order to gain possible multiple truths from the data collected (Yin, 2016, p.16).

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The research undertaken is classified as a case study as it was conducted in one setting, in this case a first school, located in England. Denscombe (2014, p.54) defines a case study as focusing on one setting of a particular phenomenon with an aim to provide an in-depth account of the participants' responses and actions (Jarvis *et al.*, 2012, p.63; Roberts-Holmes, 2014, p.84). Two teachers were selected through a combination of sampling strategies. Purposive sampling was utilised initially to select the school, as it was essential for the data to be collected from a setting practising MoE (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.156). Participants were selected through a combination of purposive sampling, as the teachers were required to be from the foundation stage, and convenience sampling, to accommodate those who were available on the day of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, pp.155-158).

Purposive sampling was ideal for this research project as it allowed access to people with an in-depth knowledge of MoE within the foundation stage (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.157). However, this type of sample is criticised for its inability to represent the wider population due to it being deliberately selective and biased (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.157). Convenience sampling shares this inability to generalise due to the sample not being able to represent anything but itself (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.156). On the other hand, this type of sampling is more practical for the setting in which the research was carried out, as the sample size was determined by those who were available and accessible at the time (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, pp.155-156).

Two interviews were conducted to explore the teachers' perceptions as to whether MoE is an effective teaching method within the early years. Both interviews took place in the school's multifunctioning room, which was relatively quiet and free from distractions. The participants were class teachers from each year group in the foundation stage; pre-school and reception and were individually interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed the interview questions to focus on specific areas that needed addressing but also gave scope for following up points made by the participants (Thomas, 2013, p.198). This research project also utilised semi-structured interviews. This is a flexible research method that can be used to obtain qualitative data using visual and aural information (Menter *et al.*, 2011, p.163; Sarantakos, 2013, p.229). Two observations were completed of the nursery teacher (Participant 1) conducting MoE sessions. The aims of the observations were to identify what curriculum areas were being addressed, what teaching strategies were being used and how the teacher promoted pupil engagement and progression. The observations were undertaken from the outside of the activities, as Greetham (2009, p.229) explains being obtrusive can alter the usual situation to an extent where results could be invalidated. In addition, when participants are aware that they are being observed, they may alter their behaviour, also known as the Hawthorne effect (Kumar, 2014, p.174). This may result in observing a situation that is not the regular behaviour (Kumar, 2014, p.174).

Guba and Lincoln (1994, cited in Kumar, 2014, p.219; Trochim and Donnelly, 2007, p.149) infer that the trustworthiness of research is determined by four components. **Credibility** is establishing support of the research results by the participants who provided the data (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007, p.149). The results chapter will show this by providing quotations from the participants themselves. **Transferability** refers to the ability the research results have in generalising or transferring to other settings (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007, p.149). This is challenging to achieve due to the interpretivist ontological position of this research, especially with regards to the generalisations. Instead, this research aims for a detailed insight into MoE where multiple-truths may be found (Mukherji and Albon, 2015, p.25). **Dependability** is regarding whether the same results would be obtained if the research was repeated and **confirmability** is the degree to which others could confirm the results (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007, p.149). Kumar (2014, p.219) suggests that these latter two components of trustworthiness are also challenging due to the flexibility



and freedom qualitative research provides. However, Kumar (2014, p.219) infers that it is possible for qualitative research to be repeated if there is a detailed record of the process for others to replicate. In accordance with this statement, the process of this research has been written in the methodology chapter to make the results as dependable and confirmable as possible. Nevertheless, differences with staff, pupils and schools may show differences in results no matter how closely the research is replicated.

Analysing qualitative data results in the understanding or interpretation of perceptions, processes and interactions and is usually achieved through identifying themes (Menter *et al.*, 2011, p.144). This research project has adopted the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach for its overriding ability to explore people's experiences and perceptions, supporting an interpretivist research design, and its suitability for small-scale research projects (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.181). The analysing process included six steps. **Preparing the data** involved writing up transcripts of the recorded interviews and written detail was added to the observation forms. During this process, names were anonymised for confidentiality. This step was performed promptly, as Greetham (2009, p.226) suggests delaying could lose valuable insights that make research unique. **Key information was highlighted** to pinpoint relevant information. The highlighted information was then referred to in **descriptive comments**, to show key words and statements made by the participant. **A critical perspective was applied** to interpret the meaning of the answers provided. The critical comments are then read through and **given an emergent theme**, which are then **grouped and ordered** by their relevance to one another and sub-themes are generated (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.181). In contrast, Braun and Clarke (2013, p.183) state that this analytical method can be too descriptive but Brocki and Weardon (2006, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.183) emphasise that this can be prevented with the use of critical interpretation. This will be considered in the discussion chapter.

Denscombe (2014, p.306) states that researchers need to complete research projects in an ethical manner. In spite of this, BERA (2014) have published ethical guidelines on educational research that also consider the Data Protection Act (The Stationery Office, 1998) in their privacy guidelines. All research participants have the right to confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2014, pp.7-8; Kumar, 2014, p.286) and were protected in this research project by storing all research data on a password-protected memory stick and anonymising all names. Participants have the right to withdraw and do not require providing a reason when they do so (BERA, 2014).

**Protection** is one of four ethical considerations Walliman and Buckler (2008, pp.30-32) explain. Protection and the other three ethical considerations were explained on the consent form, which participants were required to read and sign if they gave **permission** to take part in the research (BERA, 2014, p.5). In the consent form participants were made aware of the research **proposal** and the **potential** of the research benefits and risks.

Participants taking part in research should not suffer harm as a result of it (Denscombe, 2014, p.5). Therefore, before conducting my research I gained an ethical consent certificate, which gave permission to ethically conduct the research.

## Results

In the interview transcripts and observation forms three main themes emerged, each with three sub-themes: curriculum (curriculum coverage; effectiveness; and adaptability); Continual Professional Development (CPD) (development opportunities; pedagogical knowledge; and job satisfaction); and engagement (active learning; real-life context; and motivation). Table 1 clarifies these themes.

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**Table 1.** Main and sub-themes from teachers interview transcripts and observations forms.

|                     |                           |                   |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Main Themes         |                           |                   |
| Curriculum          | CPD                       | Engagement        |
| Sub-themes          |                           |                   |
| Curriculum Coverage | Development Opportunities | Active Learning   |
| Effectiveness       | Pedagogical Knowledge     | Real-life Context |
| Adaptability        | Job Satisfaction          | Motivation        |

When interviewing the participants, both agreed that MoE addresses all seven areas of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017). Participant 1 said, 'it's almost easier in the early years because a lot the statements are quite vague...so yes I would say it does, it does meet them'. This response was also reflected in Participant 2's interview and observations showed cross-curricular learning in MoE sessions. Throughout the interviewing process, particular curriculum areas were referred to more than others. 'Understanding the World' is an area mentioned by both participants, with Participant 1 suggesting that MoE learning objectives usually meet this area. In addition, interviews showed MoE addresses many curriculum areas, with Participant 1 suggesting, 'the ones that come from it naturally are very much...really all those prime areas'. However, Participant 1 referred to how sometimes MoE does not naturally cover all of the curriculum areas and is about 'being creative to get it in', something that Participant 2 finds 'quite tricky'.

With regards to how effective MoE is, child development was regularly commented on throughout both interviews. Life skills, confidence and enthusiasm are some developed skills that are mentioned and Participant 2 explains that is in done by 'starting with what they know and then developing it and branching out'. This is replicated in the observations, where Participant 1 discovers the children's pre-existing knowledge through questioning and then develops on the answers provided. Teachers perceive that the creativity MoE creates, greatly improves writing and has shown a marked improvement with enthusiasm demonstrated by boys and SEN. Participant 2 was clear on their thoughts, stating: 'I think it's really effective'.

The participants perceived MoE to be quite adaptable, with Participant 1 inferring, 'You can plan a Mantle whichever way you want to and focus on different things'. This is evident from the observations as two sessions based on the same lesson plan resulted in different activities due the direction the teacher was leading the children. Having the flexibility to focus on different things, allowed Participant 1 to use coordinates with their Reception class and inferred those who were able could use coordinates at the end of the lesson. However, this participant does not feel MoE is best suited for less able children as sometimes they 'wonder how much those children understand'. Participant 1 overcomes this by getting the 'free-flow activities linked so when they go off and explore...they are interacting at a different level', making MoE accessible for all abilities.

Participant 1 explains support is always provided when needed and regular training occurs: 'There's a lot of training and we're all really lucky in the school, we get all of those opportunities'. The training has allowed everyone to be on the same page, which is beneficial because Participant 1 said, 'it has to be a team effort'. Luke Abbot, a former student of Dorothy Heathcote, has visited the school, observing lessons and giving advice when needed. The CPD is important because Participant 2 infers, 'I'm still learning, I think there's a lot to it with all the different conventions and the way you deliver it'.

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The participants training in MoE has provided them with suitable pedagogical knowledge, as discussed by Participant 2 when explaining the use of role play to allow the children to experience empathy. Participant 2 also refers to the requirement of child-led learning: 'you've got to stop yourself from speaking too much because you're used to just talking at the children'. This was seen in Observation 2, where Participant 1 allowed the children to fulfil their learning by expert framing bus drivers and cashiers. In addition, Participant 1 explains MoE promotes a creative approach to teaching: 'once you've done it this way it's very hard to do it a different way. It's very hard to stop being creative because this is what the Mantle forces you to do'. Scaffolding is also used, as explained by Participant 2: 'this is very much...guiding them and just saying things where needed and not taking over, holding back as much as you can but then picking on the important things and guiding the children that way'.

Participant 2's teaching background as always had a creative manner. However, this participant prefers MoE as it allows for more scope and makes every child's input valid in the discussion. However, Participant 1 explains that their more structured teaching in previous experience was easier to plan and deliver 'but for the children and for the teacher it was...nowhere near as interesting'. Participant 1 believes this interesting aspect to MoE, makes unnecessary curriculum aims intriguing and purposeful. Participant 1 considers they are lucky, as the headteacher is understanding of making mistakes as long as they are considered a learning experience but also infers if you are the type of teacher that does not like making mistakes, you may find this way of teaching challenging. Another difficulty may be the need for additional adults in the classroom: 'you've got thirty children on your own, it's very hard to do that without another adult because...the classroom management is a lot harder'. Despite this, Participant 1 also has a sense of satisfaction when inviting parents in for MoE workshops: 'I think it's really nice for their parents to come in with their children because the children could show off all the things that they knew'. Participant 1 believes MoE promotes active learning, as children 'don't necessarily do creative play in the way they might have done years ago' and that MoE provides the opportunity for children to do this. In addition, Participant 2 finds that children participate in MoE for longer. Participant 1 explains that MoE encourages teachers to think of their children's interests to keep them engaged and actively involved in their learning for longer. Both participants state that children are engaged with their learning due to the real-life context it provides, Participant 1 said, 'it encourages children to apply the skills that they're learning and the knowledge that they're learning because they're putting it into a situation where they're got to use them'. Participant 2 gives an example of children using a real-life context: 'we then stepped inside the house and we imagined what we would do in the kitchen...It's very basic but it makes things come to life'. However, Participant 2 suggests being careful when using real-life contexts as it is fictional and 'children who haven't got that understanding could be a bit confusing...and actually that's quite damaging because they can be really worried about it'. In spite of this, during the observations Participant 1 emphasised to the children that they were in 'Story World'.

Throughout the interviews, both participants refer to aspects of motivation. For Participant 2, children are 'all keen to join in' and children show their focus from the start of the session and this is justified by MoE having the element of surprise: 'they don't know what is going to happen next in the story, so it's all quite new and exciting'. Both participants infer that MoE gives children a purpose for learning, for example Participant 2 states, 'children will write better if they are writing for a purpose...it just makes it a bit more interesting and engaging for them'. Participant 1 suggests MoE 'makes learning more interesting for them so they're more likely to want to try and want to have a go and they're almost learning without having to know about learning' and if children are not engaged 'it's because you haven't pitched something right for the children's individual needs'.

### **Discussion**

As identified in the results chapter, nine sub-themes were collated from the interview transcripts. In order to address my research objectives, these nine sub-themes have been categorised with the research objective they link with and this chapter will focus on synthesising these themes with previous literature.

It was clearly identified that MoE does address all seven areas in the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017) and particular reference was made to the prime areas, Understanding the World, Literacy and Numeracy. This supports previous research inferring that MoE facilitates teaching and learning at all levels of the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014) and incorporates all subjects (Heathcote and Herbert, 1985, p.173; Arnold, 2010, p.20; Booth, 2012, p.5). Not only does this study support this research but it also enhances literature in this area as the findings of this study refer to the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017) and not exclusively the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014). Nevertheless, Heathcote and Bolton (1999, p.123) suggest in order for MoE to cover the whole curriculum, it needs to be implemented over a long period of time. As this was not a longitudinal study, long-term effects were not apparent but it could be argued that these observations may have shown this, as Kumar (2014, p.139) suggests longitudinal studies obtain factual information over a continuing basis, which enhances the findings accuracy.

MoE can present some difficulties in certain subject areas. Bromley, Labrow (2007, p.6) and Taylor (2016, p.126) all found Mathematics a difficult area to link in MoE work. However, this study did not support this view as instead Mathematics was identified as a strength when teaching MoE as the teacher could incorporate coordinates for the higher ability children. Nevertheless, this may only be appropriate for Mathematics going above and beyond the curriculum aims as Taylor (2012, p.129) infers that Mathematics requires sequential teaching, repetition of key concepts and practice over time, something that MoE does not provide. This may be why Bromley and Labrow (2007, p.6) state that Mathematics as an area that should be taught individually. Despite other literature, the research findings showed MoE sessions can cover all seven areas of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017) as long as teachers used their creativity to incorporate all of the areas over time. However, observation findings show that all but one of the seven areas of learning from the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017) were integrated into the sessions. Therefore, creativity may not be needed to incorporate all of the areas as they are naturally covered in MoE sessions. Instead, particular aims of the areas may be challenging to cover using MoE and will need creativity from the teachers' behalf to incorporate these instead.

The adaptability of MOE was seen as a strength in this study. The ability to plan sessions to focus on any topic and adapt sessions to suit the children's enquiry was cited as an advantage by both participants. From the findings it can be argued that teachers can plan MoE in whichever way to focus on different objectives and activities can be altered to suit the children's individual needs. This concurs with research conducted by Harrison (2007, p.16), who found MoE teachers can manage children's ideas to meet the learning objectives and can adapt timescales and cross-curricular links to meet the curriculum. This adaptability was also evident in the observations as the teacher adapted activities during the sessions to meet the children's interests and to promote further learning. Contrasting, other research has found that MoE sessions can be challenging for children, resulting in incomplete tasks because the teacher did not adapt it to suit the children's individual needs (Hall, 2014, p.152). This was not the case in this particular small-scale study, as the observations showed the participants have pedagogical awareness and would use questioning to clarify the children's understanding and adapt the activity if needed. Clearly, different teachers have experienced different events in the adaptability of MoE but this research

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has shown MoE can be adaptable in meeting the curriculum and children's needs and this was clearly stated by the participants.

The study's findings show MoE provides ample training opportunities for teachers in this school setting. This is also evident in research conducted by Johnson, Liu and Goble (2015, p.208) where trainee teachers were provided additional training after their lessons lacked the principles of MoE. As a result, the participants gained the knowledge required to teach MoE sessions and perceived MoE as an effective teaching strategy in teaching children difficult topics through its creative and enjoyable method. In addition, MoE provides opportunities for experts in the field to observe lessons. Abbot, a former student of Heathcote, has previously visited this setting and provided guidance in setting appropriate tasks. This training opportunity was a considerable benefit to the participant due to Abbot's (2007, p.3) broad knowledge in implementing MoE. This is evident in this research project as the teachers described and demonstrated a broad range of teaching strategies. These teaching strategies will now be discussed further.

It is predominately argued that MoE provides the opportunity for cross-curricular learning (Becker, 2014, p.21). This cross-curricular theme was seen in both the interviews and observations where participants utilise this teaching approach to address the seven areas of learning in their lessons. Furthermore, the observations indicated one MoE session can address multiple curriculum areas, for example Observation addressed: Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, Literacy, Understand the World and Expressive Arts and Design. This is important in addressing Teaching Standard 4 (Department for Education, 2013, p.2), as teachers can contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum. In addition, Baldwin (2008, p.5) states that the cross-curricular aspect of MoE is being encouraged to make learning more efficient and engaging.

In a study conducted by Sayers (2012, p.236), a participant highlighted the need for headteachers to not be too concerned with raising standards when adopting a MoE approach. This suggests that teachers need to be accustomed to MoE before academic standards increase and during this adapting process mistakes may occur. Results from this research support this as it was noted MoE teachers have to be willing to make mistakes and this is endorsed by their headteacher as long as the teachers learn from them. This was evident in one observation, where the participant could not engage the children in the activity but learnt from this and engaged the children in the following session. Consequently, the pedagogical approach of risk taking is used regularly, as seen in both observations, where the participant accommodated the children's ideas and built the lessons from them. However, risk taking may not only be acquired for this reason and may be due to the development opportunities mentioned previously, as Blase and Blase (2000, p.135) found that teachers who had development opportunities and support for innovation increased risk taking in lessons. In relation to Blase and Blase's (2000) study, findings show a copious amount of support is provided in this study's school. This advocates development opportunities as well as support to promote a risk taking pedagogical approach.

Enquiry based learning promotes confidence, interest and self-esteem, allowing for memorisation of lesson content (Youth Learn, 2016, p.2). This is incorporated into MoE sessions through exploration and child-led learning. The participants of this research embodied this approach through free-flow activities that are linked to the Mantle and guiding children through their learning where needed. This is an example of Piaget's constructivist theory to learning where teachers act as facilitators to aid students in obtaining knowledge (Youth Learn, 2016, p.1) and where knowledge is constructed by giving meaning to objects and not through adult-led work (Mooney, 2013, p.79; Cooper, 2014, p.43; Aubrey and Riley, 2016, p.24). The use of free-flow activities in MoE sessions is suitable for children with SEN, as they are working at a level more

suitable to them. This utilises Vygotsky's (1978, pp.86-87) theory on the zone of proximal development where by activities are situated between what children can individually achieve and what they could achieve through scaffolding from the teacher. Observation 2 shows inclusion of this practice where the teacher guided children through activities and asked questions to promote further enquiry. Therefore, MoE does promote enquiry-based learning but it must be noted that the challenging aspect of this approach may restrict its effectiveness. Findings show teachers utilising learning through enquiry was something they had to learn. In support, a study conducted by Ergazaki and Zogza (2013, p.94) also found that teachers struggled to transfer from adult-led to enquiry-based learning.

Children taking on the role of adult experts, otherwise known as expert framing, generates an eagerness to learn and efficiency in task completion (Becker, 2014, pp.18-19). In agreement, one participant defines MoE as an engaging, exciting and motivating approach to learning that provides children with real life situations. Although children being provided a real life context is motivating, this research also shows that it can be a negative aspect. The other participant explains that some Mantle stories can negatively impact children's emotional wellbeing, for example a Mantle based on a dinosaur egg can worry children due to dinosaurs usually being negatively portrayed in stories. Having a real-life context in lessons is also viewed negatively by Harrison (2007, p.14) as children were disappointed when they found out the Mantle story was not real. To avoid this, the participants explain the MoE rules to the children at the beginning of every session; one of them being to remember that they are in story world, meaning it is not real. Furthermore, interviews showed the need to remember curriculum aims in MoE sessions, as it is easy to get carried away with the drama and story aspect. Therefore, having a real-life context can be exciting for children but having MoE rules, like the participants in this study, may need to be considered to avoid disappointment from the children.

Compared to MoE, it was found that a more structured teaching approach is easier to plan and deliver but despite this, it is still believed that MoE is much more interesting for the children and the teachers. This partially supports Sayers' (2012, p.236) research, where teachers found MoE too challenging to maintain. However, this research also refers to the need for a supporting headteacher, something that the participants believe they have, which may explain why the participants still find MoE manageable, despite its difficulties. Despite this, research shows headteachers should not be too concerned with improving standards as academic achievement may not be gained through this approach (Sayers, 2012, p.236). The findings of this research disagree with this statement as it was found that teachers perceive MoE as an effective teaching strategy, both academically and personally, throughout the curriculum. The teachers show how proud they are of the children's development by inviting the children's parents to MoE sessions where achievement can be discussed and viewed.

With regards to the effectiveness of MoE, it is believed, since adopting this teaching strategy, the school is progressing academically and during both interviews the participants make regular comments on how the children develop in the prime areas. MoE promotes development in investigation, questioning and critical thinking (Zeeman and Lotriet (2013, pp.8-90), all of which are aims for the prime areas mentioned by the participants. This supports research conducted by Arnold (2010, pp.17-20) who believes MoE allows children to achieve, despite their academic ability or learning style. Therefore, the findings refute Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which suggests children develop through chronologically passing through developmental stages of thinking (Mooney, 2013, pp.80-81), as the literature concurs the theory of learning styles, where children most effectively obtain new knowledge through a preferable learning style (Boneva and Mihova, 2012, p.10; Xu, 2012, p.414). Consequently, this suggests MoE can cater for auditory, visual and kinaesthetic learners, making it a broad teaching strategy that can promote

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learning in many children. This was witnessed during the observations, where discussions were utilised for auditory learners, mind mapping, visual props and models were incorporated for visual learners and enquiry, drawing and making were used for kinaesthetic learners.

Ofsted (2012, p.2) aver that motivation is important for improving teaching quality and pupil progression. During both interviews, the participants refer to the motivating characteristic of MoE due to this teaching strategy being interesting, resulting in the children almost not realising they are learning. This supports Harrison's (2007, pp.15-16) research where the children's willingness to engage increased during MoE sessions, especially with regards to the thoughts and ideas of others. In support of this, the findings show MoE sessions have taught children to empathise with one another and understand there can be multiple opinions. In addition, MoE uses enquiry to elicit children's learning (Edmiston, 2008, p.1), this will promote motivation as children start to ask questions related to the topic and children only learn when their curiosity is not fully satisfied (Mooney, 2013, p.80).

In contrast, both participants also mention that some days, the motivation to completed MoE sessions is very limited and, as a result, will not last for very long. It was also evident in observations, where one session finished quicker than the other due to the lack of motivation shown by the children. This supports research conducted by Ragnarsdóttir and Björk (2012, p.10) where teachers had to encourage their children to see academic improvement. However, as explained in the interviews, most of the time the children's enthusiasm for learning shines through when participating in MoE.

### **Conclusion**

With regards to the research objectives, the data has shown adequate findings in answering the targeted questions. In terms of the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of MoE, it is mostly deemed that MoE is effective in improving children academically and personally. However, teachers feel it is difficult to understand this approach at first and there are times where it is challenging to plan and deliver. Many approaches are used to teach MoE, including: expert framing, cross-curricular learning, drama for learning, enquiry, group work, child-led learning and adult-led learning. Teachers used these approaches well in promoting the principles of MoE and improving children's knowledge. The seven areas of learning are addressed through MoE, particularly the prime areas, Understanding the Word and Literacy. Although observations did not show all the seven areas being utilised, other research shows the seven areas are addressed over time. When this approach was witnessed during my first teaching placement, my view was very positive as I thought it was such a creative and effective teaching strategy. However, since doing this research I have been made aware of this strategy's challenges. This research project has shown me that MoE is effective but in terms of my teaching practice, I would only want to adopt certain aspects of MoE, such as the expert framing and cross-curricular links. Using the whole approach would be too challenging during the start of my career but incorporating these two aspects will promote creativity and engagement within my classroom. Other aspects, like inquiry, would also be utilised but not necessarily at the same time.

This was a small-scale research project, meaning the accuracy of the findings may be not be as high compared to a large-scale research project (Buckler and Walliman, 2016, p.181). However, when considering the time and practicalities of the resources (Buckler and Walliman, 2016, p.181) a small-scale research project was more convenient and practical.

MoE needs to be researched further within the EYFS and researchers should consider using a larger sample size in different school settings to allow for generalisability. Quantitative research could be used to determine how children progress using MoE by performing a base-line

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assessment at the start of the academic year and another assessment at the end. This could be compared to schools with a similar background in order to determine whether MoE is more effective than a more structured way of learning.

Overall, in current practice MoE can be incorporated into school settings but it would need to take form throughout the whole school, as teamwork is an important aspect in maintaining this provision. Time should be taken to understand MoE and practise using it effectively. As a result, both teachers and children should enjoy using this approach and children are likely to flourish both academically and personally.

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