

The Voice Of Experience

—Dr Maggie Atkinson

Leading Others

- 3** people
listening - past,
present & future
- 6** reach for change
- 8** leading life
dialogues
- 11** collective leadership
challenge
- 13** children first and
always
- 15** cultural antennae
- 17** practice
a new leadership
paradigm
- 20** policy
time for two year
olds
- 22** stop press
- 24** productivity



When I reflect on my experience as a leader, and on the people who have taught me as well as being my managers and leaders, common themes arise. They apply, more often than we might think, to the children we develop and support, just as they do to adults trying to make sense of the systems they shape and lead.

An overarching theme for me has been the sheer good fortune coming my way. I have spent a lot of my life in the right place

PEOPLE

“It does not diminish any adult to ensure that children know how to exercise their citizenship, even from a very young age

at the right time to learn about others' leadership abilities and experiment with and develop my own. That I have also worked hard at it, applied for the right jobs and strived to do them well, made mistakes and am still learning, are all equally true. The saying that it seems the harder you work the luckier you get, is pretty accurate.

As a child I was encouraged, at home and beyond, to take and learn from taking responsibility: to help out in the house; to learn - often through challenges as well as triumphs - skills of both personal independence and inner resilience. At school, from the very start until I left at eighteen, I was challenged to be a classroom monitor, a sports player and leader, form captain and eventually head girl, school council member, mentor to and role model for younger children. Such truly child-centred and child-developmental ways of working - making up the hidden curriculum that goes beyond the taught one - are not new. They are present wherever adults in power and authority recognise children as active members of

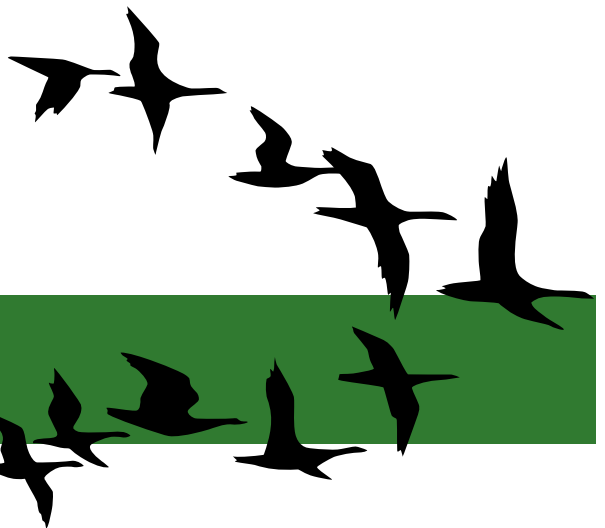
the community, with a citizen's right to a voice that is heard, with action that follows. It does not diminish any adult to ensure that children know how to exercise their citizenship, even from a very young age. The challenge now is that so many settings feel hard pressed to find the time to let children learn both to speak out and lead, given that to do so they need copious and continued support, training and guidance.

As a young teacher I joined a nearly-new comprehensive school, two thirds of whose teachers were in the first five years of their careers. Inevitably, within a short time additional responsibilities came my way. Two years into my career I had additional responsibility points, after four I was second in Department, and after eight took on a Department of my own in a second school. There I worked with some terrific professionals, and eager learners. But I also learned some of the tougher lessons of leadership: coping with scepticism, doubt, resistance to as well as acceptance of change, and the sometimes necessary, always exposing tactic of

stepping away from those you lead and like if a tough decision must be pushed through, whether or not they are all convinced.

I filled a range of roles in local government over the twenty years after I left my second school. Those roles were always about the exercise of influence, based on strong evidence, enabling me to give unbiased advice. Decision making leadership in such settings is largely not in the hands of the staff. Elected politicians, whose careers and personal reputations stand and fall by what happens in the ballot box based on what they both promise and achieve, are the leaders. Officers advise them - constructively, in usually a sense of strong partnership driven by ideals and a mutual wish to serve the people. But sometimes that advice must be given strongly and directly against what politicians may wish either to hear, or do. As a Director in my last Council for over 6 years, of course I had the power to direct what went on in my services, and where things were going wrong, in schools and other settings even when they worked at arm's length. If my style had been based solely on telling and insisting, rather than partnering and collaboration

“my leadership is about leading debates



with a strong bottom line of doing so when all else was said and done, I would neither have got far, nor been true to myself.

The leadership roles I have filled have never been in a command and control environment where what the boss says goes no matter what. I am pleased this is so. There have been times when being able to press on with no fear of being challenged might have saved time. But the “leaders command and followers must obey” model is not part of my repertoire. You might ask: is it part of yours? And if so what do you use it for and do the obedient followers get a say?

In my role as Children’s Commissioner my leadership is about leading debates. Reflect on your own as you now read about my work.

This is a high profile public office. Its reputation for probity, honesty, integrity, impartiality and clarity matter enormously. I must be prepared to stand alone as well as seeking to work with others. I must be endlessly patient, direct, objective and clear. What I say must always be firmly evidence based. I do what I do by influencing a wide range of people’s thinking, from politicians (local and national and across all areas of policy) to children themselves, and everybody in between. I must set a clear

“ Listen, absorb, watch and reflect on the nation’s attitudes to and treatment of children, and say what must be said about children’s rights

direction of travel for what my office does, that is discussed, developed and co-owned with my excellent staff team. Above all, I listen, absorb, watch and reflect on the nation’s attitudes to and treatment of children, and say what must be said about children’s rights. Sometimes that makes me popular, sometimes the opposite. It must be said, either way.

I will close with some questions for you.

Who listens to the opinions, as well as the general chat, of the children in your centres? What is their influence on your decisions: on what they experience, how sessions run, and the roles of adults with whom they can share their thinking? How do they know that what they say about these issues actually matters? If they don’t have a say, or you think they are too young to have one and there is little or no consultation with them, I dare to ask you: why are you doing what you do?

The opinions on leadership expressed in this piece are my own, not a representation of the thinking of my organisation, or its sponsor, the Department of Education.

Dr Maggie Atkinson
Children’s Commissioner for England

Listening - Past, Present & Future
Vicki Lant

Leaders need followers, but followers need to know that the trust they give will be received and treated with respect. A fundamental quality in a good leader is the capacity to listen - actively - and work with what is heard to generate a new truth for the organisation. Truths can be welcome or unwelcome, but being generated from collective contributions from followers gives them substance with which most can engage to move forward.

PEOPLE

It is therefore unsurprising that this edition's articles focusing on leading others have common strands about listening and responding. It may be about listening to the environmental noise and extracting the important voices to be heard (Dr Maggie Atkins p1 and Paul Watling p13), or listening to community users of services and prioritising their need (Ang Hilton p6), or communicating their views to others to act (Peter Gerrard p11), or modelling the give and take of effective dialogue (Faith Robbins p8). In all of this, we cannot ignore listening to our own inner voice of experience that reminds us of valuable things we may have buried in the clutter of yesterday that will help shine a light on the issues of today (Sue Webster p17) or tomorrow (James Hempsall p20).

Poised at the beginning of the year when the future seems particularly hard to cast, listening to experience and looking back may hold a better guide to

managing the future than relying on reading runes or crystal ball-gazing. The reviews of **Frank Field, MP** and **Grahame Allen, MP** in 2011, arm us with insights and evidence related to our core purpose.

Alfred DuPont Chandler Jr, professor of business history at Harvard Business School and Johns Hopkins University, used to say to his students, "How can you know where you're going, if you don't know where you've been?" (Seaman Jr., 2012). In a context where budget reductions are far too severe to do anything other than re-vision what is possible to benefit the lives of those most in need, it may be a salutary exercise to review the genesis of Sure Start, children's centres and their place in addressing important interventions in cycles of child and family poverty.

We often hear – and probably say – we are *where we are*, when confronted with layers of difficulty to which we are required to find forward-looking solutions. Do we stop to consider

why we are where we are? How can we understand factors that contributed to a lack of understanding about the work of children's centres, a lack of join-up in systems that would make them work efficiently, a lack of local system leadership that may have led ultimately to a lack of resources, in order that we don't repeat the cycle? Forgive me for having a simple vision about this work – the quality of the youngest lives impacts significantly on their well-being as they grow up and influences for good those that care for and live alongside them. It is an important investment to make clear across all levels of commissioning and commissioned in local authorities and amongst providers. We all share a responsibility to ensure this is heard as planning priorities are being set around us. With a Select Committee scheduled to consider children's centres in early spring, it is a pivotal moment to re-connect with the prime purposes and work in a connected way with partners to set a clear offer for families that reflects what they have told us really matters.

Given the financial restrictions

How can you know where you're going, if you don't know where you've been?

In the thick of the snow that caused 1 in 6 schools to be closed (BBC News; 21 January 2013), parents and toddlers were slipping and sliding their way to a centre I visited to join a busy play session that was clearly valued and offered a platform for a variety of one to one connections as well as the community of care and fun experienced by everyone present.



“Can we find ways to engage in courageous conversations that may result in letting some things go, in order to preserve and grow those things that can really make a difference?”

facing planners and providers, the voice of children and families must guide us to prioritise and emphasise the centrality of relationships, strip out duplication, use more, differently or let go empty facilities that do not enable us to fulfil our service values and have more purposeful discussions between commissioned and commissioners so that precious resource always benefits families.

In the privileged role of a facilitator within NPQICL, I listen to the stories of those commissioning and commissioned to run children’s centres and it seems to me that the short-termism of funding-led decisions is undermining the energy of those on both sides of the contract. Understandably, faced with the risk of contractions



the focus is inward – my job, my service, my team – or downward – don’t look up, keep on keeping on. Experience of the sector suggests it has enormous capacity for resilience when faced with a rapid succession of pivotal moments; at this one, can we find ways to communicate our listening

and be heard – what we’ve done, what we do, what we could do, how we might change and develop? Can we find ways to engage in courageous conversations that may result in letting some things go, in order to preserve and grow those things that can really make a difference?

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PEOPLE

In times of shrinking funding children's centre leaders are increasingly called upon to make best use of the resources to be found in their wider community in order to meet families' needs; but what does that mean in practice? How can a leader ensure that s/he understands the needs of their reach area and the resources potentially available to them?

I have always believed the principles and approaches underpinning community development (my own professional heritage) to be helpful in supporting leaders to develop services with and for families. I clearly remember my surprise on discovering how well the Sure Start Phase One Centre model resonated with the way I had been working throughout the 1980s and 90s with community-development and family-learning projects in both Leicester and Bristol. The Community Development Exchange defines the core values of community development as:

social justice
equality and anti-discrimination
collective action
community empowerment and
working and learning together

(CDX, undated, online)

support self-direction in individuals
encourage families to have more control over their lives
focus on raising self-esteem and promoting life-long learning
ensure equality of opportunity
encourage constructive discontent (not putting up with things the way they are)
empower people to change things
focus on developing self-fulfilment

(Whalley, 2006:12)



Reach For Change

Ang Hilton

These fit well with Margy Whalley's (2006) description of the approaches that children's centre staff should take when working with families in their reach, emphasising the need for workers to:

Whalley's emphasis on the empowerment of families within communities echoes the definition proffered by the National Occupational Standards for Community Development (2009), where it is seen as:

'A long-term value-based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion. The process enables people to organise and work together to, identify their own needs and aspirations, take action to exert influence on the decisions which affect their lives, improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live, and societies of which they are a part'

So how can children's centre leaders ensure that the 'wider community' has a voice both in the way services are developed



and in the decision-making process regarding prioritisation of local need? Based on my work over the past 8 years with a number of children's centres in the South West, I would suggest that an essential starting point is to develop a community profile in order to build a realistic picture of the needs of the communities within the reach area. According to Christakopolou et al (2001:321 – 351, adapted) a comprehensive community profile should ask the following questions:

1 What is the area like as:

- A place to live?
- A social community?
- An economic community?
- A political community?
- A personal space?
- Part of the locality?

2 What resources are available?

To make my research more relevant to the children's centre agenda I added participative activities relating to children's centre outcomes, and a further question directed at families' experience of living in their community:

3 What are the key challenges affecting families in your area?

- Which groups of families most need services?
- What are the specific challenges facing them?

In interviewing partners/practitioners who deliver frontline services to the most vulnerable families I used the above, plus:

4 Please share any other relevant information, for example:

- Data, statistics, research or reports regarding needs in the reach area?
- Contacts that would be useful in building a picture of the needs?

It would be easy to feel overwhelmed by the task of conducting a community profile, but a key point to remember is that you do not need to do it alone! The success of the 6 profiles I've developed with children's centres in the last 3 years has depended very much on the enthusiasm/skills of the team and partners (including pro-active parents and community activists). It's possible to build a very useful picture of what it feels like to live in your reach area if you draw on this existing knowledge and expertise.

↳ A long-term value-based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion

For clarity of purpose and in order to convince others of the value of the profile it is important to begin by considering the following questions:

PEOPLE

Why are you creating a community profile?

What are the benefits to your children's centre, partners and reach community? You need to be clear as to **why** you need this information - who will it be used by, and how? If your team and partners/parents understand why it will be useful, they will be more likely to follow your lead in supporting and contributing to its development. So how as a leader will you empower and inspire others to create a shared vision for the profile and its uses?

What do you already know?

Identify the information (quantitative and qualitative) already available to support you to identify the 'gaps' in what is needed. Draw on the expertise/knowledge/skills of your team, parents, partners and your Advisory Board to gather what information you can.

What resources do you have?

How long do you have to complete the profile, and who can help? What are the likely costs and who will pay? In my experience the success of the process depends very much on the level of buy-in from the children's centre team, partners, parents and Advisory Board. How will you ensure that your team is empowered, on-message, enthusiastic and embedding the collection of feedback in all their sessions? Effective

and inspirational/motivational leadership skills are fundamental to getting (and keeping) people on board. What existing opportunities (sessions, community events, partnership work) can you add value to and gain knowledge from?

How are you going to collect the qualitative data?

What creative strategies will you employ to engage with families (especially those who find services most difficult to access) to discover their views and needs? What outreach and participatory (fun!) methods can you use to reach them? Which partners may already have relationships of trust with them and how will you work with partners to get feedback on vulnerable families' needs?

“the principles and approaches underpinning community development helpful in supporting leaders to develop services with and for families”

The process of developing a profile affords you a unique opportunity to test out and develop your skills in leading others through empowerment. It offers you the chance not only to discover the needs of your reach area, but also to prioritise and mobilise the services that families really need.

Ang Hilton

Facilitator NPQICL Serco Partnership South West

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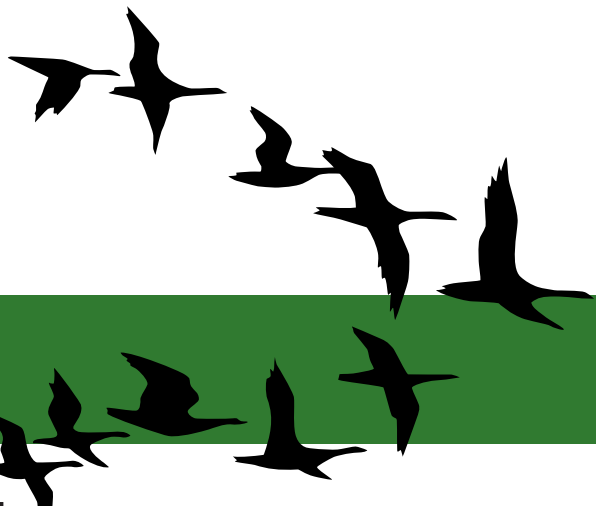
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Leading Lifelong Dialogues

Faith Robbins

Faith Robbins, is one of two Lead Practitioners for the Early Language Development Programme (ELDP) at Stonegrove Children's Centre which is managed by the Pre-school Learning Alliance on behalf of Barnet Council.

The Early Language Development Programme (ELDP) is led by the children's communication charity, I CAN, working with its partners in the Early Language Consortium, Action for Children, The Children's Society, Elklan CIC, The Pre-School Learning Alliance, with evaluation by The Office for Public Management



I heard about the Early Language Development Programme through information we were sent by the Pre-School Learning Alliance. Stonegrove Children's Centre was one of the first Centres to take part in the Early Language Development Programme in spring 2012.



and business support from Impetus Trust. The 2 ½ year programme supports the foundations of good communication development in young children. Currently, upwards of 50% of children start school in certain areas of social deprivation within the UK without the speaking, listening and communication skills they need to achieve. And as many as 10% of children in the UK – over 1 million – have long term speech, language and communication needs that require specialist help. The ELDP targets all pre-school children, but focuses on children under three, particularly those living in areas of need. Language skills are a critical factor in social disadvantage. Poor language skills mean that, by the age of 22 months, a more able child from a low-income home will be overtaken in their developmental levels by an initially less able child from a high-income home – and why by the age of five, the gap has widened still more.

To celebrate the progress that has been made through ELDP, Stonegrove Children's Centre was chosen to host a visit from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Children and Families), Edward Timpson MP in November 2012. Edward Timpson MP and Matthew Offord, MP for Hendon, joined our families attending the regular 'stay and play' session. It was a great opportunity to showcase the work we have been doing at the Centre.

an environment that offers opportunities for developing children's communication skills. This includes staff modelling supportive behaviour, such as using short sentences and giving a child time to talk. Because parents see these strategies in place, they will then have a better understanding of how communication skills develop.

ELDP has been very beneficial to our children's centre: It has given us a format to follow and due to the complex language needs of our families, it has helped us to support them with different stages of their children's development. We have been working to ensure we provide

Part of the ELDP training requires the lead practitioners (myself and another) to cascade this training to other practitioners in our local area. We have cascaded the programme to most of the settings in Barnet and all the staff at our children's centre are involved.



PEOPLE

It is really important to involve other practitioners to ensure that everyone working with children under 5 years understands the importance of early communication and language development and that we all have a common goal.

We know that our programme of ELDP is working through the positive feedback we are receiving from practitioners and parents. We were sent the e-mails below from a mother who we have been working with. She would read to her child but never understood the link or importance to early communication and language development and would never have had the confidence to read in a different way unless we had worked with her.

Hi Faith, your hard work paid off. I was reading a book with A in a coffee shop & lady told me that she was enjoying listening to us reading & that we had fantastic interaction. She went on to tell me she was a family therapist & didn't come across it in her work. So thank you for all your support.

We have found other practitioners' reactions to our training have been very positive. Sharing knowledge and skills is vital for continuing professional development and for those other lead practitioners remember - run with the programme as it really is worthwhile.



Through the ELDP, 485 'hubs' of early language expertise will be created in areas serving some of the least advantaged children and families. Lead practitioners from children's centres and other settings will be supported to cascade a comprehensive package of training, resources and support to other local practitioners, working with health visitors and speech and language therapists.

The training for lead practitioners is only available until March 2013, so if you are interested in this, please email eldp@ican.org.uk. Also email to find out whether there is a trained pair of practitioners near you, so that your setting can also benefit from ELDP.

¹ Vocabulary at age 5 is a very strong predictor of the qualifications achieved at school leaving age and beyond (Feinstein and Duckworth, 2006)

Faith Robbins

Outreach worker Preschool Learning Alliance
Stonegrove Centre, Barnet



Collective Leadership Challenge

Peter Gerrard

Ignorance risks wobble

The last decade has seen children's centres despite their relative infancy becoming part of mainstream thinking at the highest levels of government decision making. In 2010 a general election caused an evolutionary wobble in the confidence about the future of Children's Centres which a year in office helped to partially stabilise as ministers demonstrated commitment to the sector. Of the many dangers facing children's centres, abandonment of universalism, out of date critiques on waste, a new government getting up to speed or worse market force dogma, the most real threat was, and remains, the economic downturn. This has led to severe, mind-numbing cuts by some Local Authorities despite increasing children's centre recognition and success.

Whilst not marginalising the trauma of cuts, many feared worse and, though not through the woods by a very long way, many Local Authorities understand the importance of children's centres and are supporting them on the pathway to permanence.

Early intervention is essential

Never has it been more important for leaders to ensure the nature, value and importance of children's centres be heard, understood and acknowledged as unassailable in the fight against child poverty, disadvantage and derisory life chances. Progress in understanding Children's Centres

is being made and research commissioned by successive governments - Prof Kathy Sylva (2004); Prof Edward Melhuish (2004), (2012); Sir Michael Marmot (2008); Frank Field MP (2010); Graham Allen MP (2011); Dame Clare Tickell (2011) and Prof Eileen Munro (2011)

- demonstrates, unequivocally, that the early intervention work that Children's Centres undertake, facilitate or lead with partners, is fundamentally addressing the mammoth challenges created by the child poverty trap.

Most recently Susan Gregory HMI, OFSTED National Director of Education and Early Years, in her December 2012 televised annual OFSTED lecture, also made numerous positive references to the importance and value of children's centres.

Behind the scenes

The Children's Centre Leaders Reference Group (CCLRG), facilitated by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) was established in 2010. It comprises experienced Children's Centre Leaders from all over the country reflecting a wide and rich range of professional heritages, Children's Centre models, leadership structures, community circumstances and sector providers.

The purpose of the group is multifaceted providing the Department for Education and

National College with a sounding board regarding front line practice, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the field, and also informing upon likely impact and implications of emerging policy or issues. The group further shares good practice and advocates and champions the work of Children's Centres meeting with MPs, Government Ministers, Ofsted, Department of Health and a myriad of influential strategic organisations such as 4Children and the National Lottery.

The CCLRG in liaison with the NCSL, has worked tirelessly to raise the profile, recognition and influence of children's centres with more than moderate progress. Success is attributable to all manner of stakeholders, influencers, policy-makers and researchers but unequivocally rests substantially with children's centre leaders and their teams in the field whose life changing interventions provide forceful evidence of high value, high quality impact and the necessity of longevity.

Children's centre Leadership is local, widely dispersed in style, structure and purpose and often constrained by LA finances and aspirations to unprecedented degree. Achieving a collective vision and being heard, with

↳ Susan Gregory HMI made numerous positive references to the importance and value of children's centres

↳ the group champions the work of Children's Centres MPs, Government Ministers, Ofsted, Department of Health and a myriad of influential strategic organisations

PRACTICE

momentum and coherent identity and influence at strategic level is both a challenge and a necessity and the CCLRG aims to give voice to the concerns, advice and perspectives of those at the cutting edge of services albeit in national not local arenas.

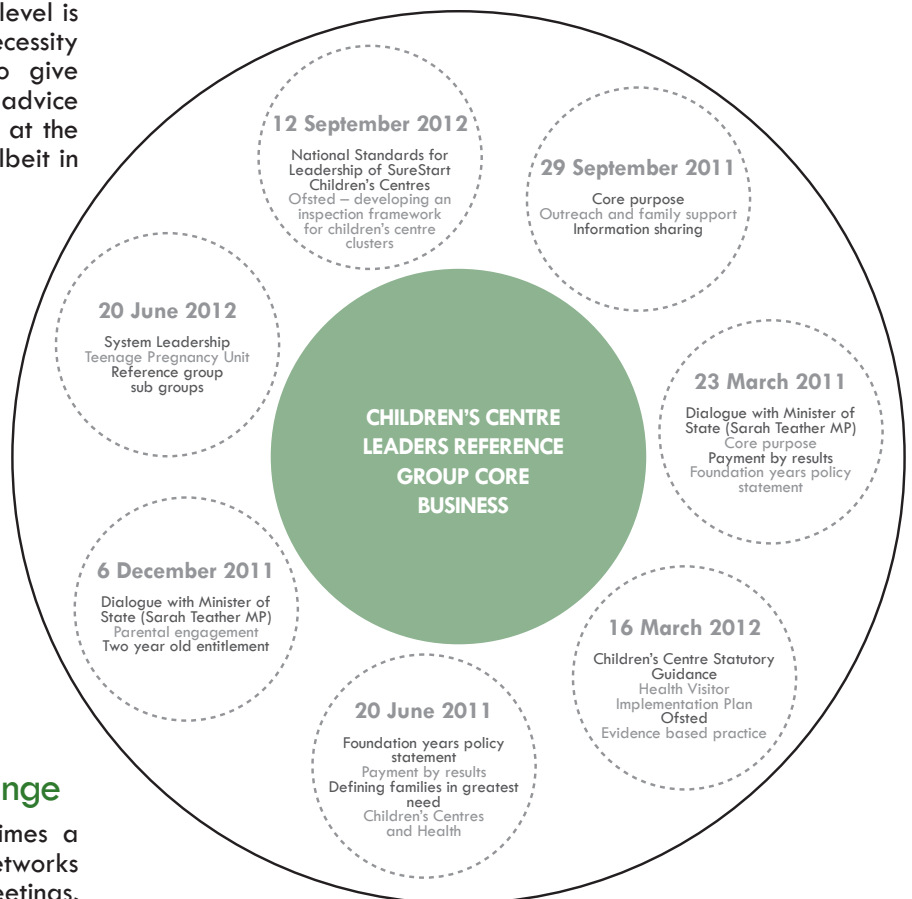
Influence upon change

The CCLRG meets four times a year plus sub group networks and extra ordinary meetings, together with some individuals attending events and meetings as group representatives often by invitation. Working to Chatham House rules discussions are frank, often challenging and always current. Decision makers may not always agree with perspectives shared but consultation is genuine and dialogue usually fruitful. A number of key national policies significantly influenced by the group include: the Core Purpose, Foundation Years Policy Statement, Statutory Guidance for Children's Centres and Developing an Ofsted Inspection Framework for Children's Centres.

Group Refresh

To keep the group representative, members are replaced every three years on a rolling cycle which is currently in the process of refreshment and if leaders are interested in finding out more about this opportunity to join the group please contact:

earlyyears.team@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk





Children First and Always

Paul Watling

I have been asked to explore the differences between the two roles that I have had in Children's Services Leadership, namely being a political Lead Member for Children's Services and being the Leader of a Children's Centre.

My background is in Community Development and I have worked both in local government and in the third sector. I have led in children's services for over 20 years, including leading a sure start programme which became a designated children's centre in

2005 and creating the drivers for local politicians.

So what can I say about the Political Leadership of Children's Services? An interesting point is that, apart from the Leader of the Council (The Prime Minister in local government terms) the only other statutory member in the local authority is the Lead Member for Children. It is law that this member represents children's voices within the administration. The statutory Guidance for Lead members says:

“The Lead Member for Children's Services (LM) is a local Councillor with delegated responsibility from the Council, through the Leader (or Mayor), for local children, young people and families. Each LM, as a member of the political executive, has a pivotal role in championing children and defining the political priorities for them within the broader political context of the Council.”

(Lead Member Statutory Guidance 2009)



So at a time of austerity, with central government making swingeing cuts in budgets (over 20% for the services that I lead) I believe the leadership role for Lead Members for children's services could not be more important.

Let me be clear, this is a much more strategic leadership role than anything I have experienced before and the range of services that I have responsibility for are greater than anything I have done before, but the remuneration for this is role is that of a part-time centre worker.

So what would drive someone to take this responsibility and the consequences of dealing with the

external environment that is currently hostile to local government and to politicians generally? This is where the common values, principles and purpose for children's services come in. I stood for election because I was angry at the way the services in the area I live in were being run, (no Director of Children's Services; budget cuts without thought to the outcomes for Children and Families etc). I was lucky enough to be elected and then selected by the leader to be lead member.

What I had to do when appointed was try to balance the political realities of being part of a team running a local authority in a time of financial crisis with my moral purpose for being involved. I can

say that this is no more of a dilemma than being the leader of a Sure Start Children's Centre; the dilemma is more easily solved if we always put children and families at the heart of our decision making.

At my weekly meetings with our newly appointed Director of Children's Services, I come with a clear agenda, with questions regarding how our strategic decisions will affect the children and families we work with. Like many of you at the moment we have to make hard decisions, we have to take a broad view of how we implement the cuts that are forced on us by central government and as I mentioned earlier, I and my colleagues, who all are passionate about Children's Services, will be judged in two years' time by the people who elected us.

I believe that, as long as I keep the "moral purpose", which I happen to believe is held cross-party in this country, for children's services and I put the children and families at the heart of the decisions I make, we will find our way through the tempest that we are currently navigating. I am fortunate that I work with a great team, whom I trust and I hope trusts me.

the dilemma is more easily solved if we always put children and families at the heart of our decision making

My father gave me a book as a Christmas present; it is called *Iron in the Blood* by Richard Morris, who my father worked with during his 25 year career on the railway. It is a good read and highlights some of the stresses of moving into a strategic leadership role.

As an epilogue Richard highlights the Ten Commandments which he followed as a leader/manager. This led me to think about mine which are:

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Trust the team you are developing.

Always have fun, use humour appropriately and smile a lot.

Openness and honesty is a positive principle.

Walk the job; meet with the whole team as regularly as possible.

Expect the best but prepare for the worst.

Don't spend time worrying about what you can't influence.

An absence of paranoia is essential (especially at times of crisis.)

Talking is better than e-mailing.

People like to be heard, even if they don't get the answer they want.

Share your passion even with those that don't get it.

Cllr Paul Watling
lead member for children's services
Telford and Wrekin



Cultural Antennae

Alina Mohd Yunus

Until recently Alina managed an International Preschool for Dutch and Malaysian families in Singapore. In 2012 she graduated with a BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Care and Education from University of Warwick. She was part of an energetic group of practitioners who studied at the Crestar institute in Singapore.

Aspiring to global orientation in the early childhood sector and simultaneously being an effective leader do not come without care and effort. It involves accepting changes in the field of early childhood education and encouraging staff and engaging parents (who are our clients and paymasters) to understand the benefits of the twenty-first century research and ideas.

The contemporary practices adopted in this century have evolved based on current research studies towards a better educated nation. Learning styles are more interactive to inspire enquiring minds in learners through a creative curriculum. Learners - both young and adults in our centres - are encouraged to explore, experiment and discover stimulated through their curiosity. This experiential learning promotes language, self-regulation, confidence, independence, interactions and thinking out-of-the-box. This approach draws out the natural inquisitiveness of the child, to investigate further and in depth, until s/he is satisfied with the outcome. Adults are always there to facilitate and scaffold the child's experience into new learning. These practices underpinned effective

early years and primary practice throughout the twentieth century in the United Kingdom, Europe and Scandinavia. However, not all educators and parents have these positive learning experiences. In order that parents and educators comprehend our learning objectives, effective leadership strategies such as participative (democratic) and delegative (free reign) styles may be appropriate. These approaches help to identify and address the concerns of both groups. Theoretical and practical knowledge about contemporary practices can be presented to parents within activities, and to educators within in-service

training. Session responses and feedback enables leaders to address concerns and work through myths. Sometimes the concerns may relate to cultural differences in educational beliefs, approaches and strategies.

As leaders in the early childhood sector, especially in a country with great diversity, we need to observe great sensitivity to others. I recognise I must address different religious, cultural beliefs and ethnic practices with great thoughtfulness. We might unconsciously provoke reactions amongst parents, grandparents, children, staff or the community. We assume and generalise based on stereotypical views at our peril; it's much richer to learn and understand from the individual's and community's perspectives. Once we have gathered new learning, we can try to assimilate the cross-cultural



knowledge into our leadership. As leaders, we have to walk the talk. One example would be to interweave the ethnic and cultural festivities into our programme themes, by inviting families and the community to participate and take a lead in developing activities. Through this cohesive approach, we have found that cross-cultural awareness becomes the norm and eventually, trust and confidence are built between parents, staff and the centre. We believe that working in this way will forge a seamless partnership between families and the centre.

Centres have a great opportunity to promote cross-cultural environments. Learning and behaviour that promotes cross-cultural awareness can be adopted in the staff manual, centre guidance/website for families and its culture. The awareness promotes a conducive working environment. Staff, parents and the communities feel less intimidated and more secure with the respect and understanding modelled through the centre. As a leader, I know I must practice and advocate cross-cultural



Retrieved from the [New York New Jersey Public Health Training Center](#).

leadership at all times, in all aspects of management, administration, relationship-building and learning.

In adopting global orientation, an early childhood leader has also to include educational knowledge in early childhood at national and international perspectives. Progress in education in the twenty-first century needs its leaders to learn continuously alongside the children and families. To be a really effective leader, I know I must share my love of learning in culturally appropriate ways with all those I work and learn alongside in my centre.

Alina Mohd Yunus

— until recently Alina managed an international preschool for Dutch and Malaysian families in Singapore

PRACTICE



A New Leadership Paradigm?

Sue Webster

How many of you have made leadership resolutions for 2013? By the time you read this, the diet and gym commitment may be a distant memory, the post-Christmas depression has subsided and SEFs and development planning are on the horizon. How much of the work is shared within your team? Perhaps it is a good time to take a few hours auditing the attributes, knowledge and skills in your team and considering your centre's leadership model?

How and when do you delegate or are responsibilities distributed evenly in your team? Do you understand enough about the pool of attributes, skills, knowledge and possibilities available? During periods when we are building a team we often concentrate on exploring roles and personalities and use tools such

as **Belbin's** to aid our own and other understanding of the team. Descriptors like Shaper, Plant and the other seven **team roles** will be familiar. If not, try **this test** yourself and check whether you think your results an accurate reflection of your own team personality type. If it seems useful try the tool in a team development session. According to Belbin, (2012), leaders have used the tools to improve productive working and relationships, develop high performing teams, raise individual self-awareness and make each member more effective participant in a team. Revisiting within an established team could also highlight personal and professional growth, cement trust and create new or better understandings.

We all bring with us into our role as a leader; a history of leadership

experience, and those who have completed NPQICL may remember how useful it was to map out a leadership development story. It identified people and incidents that influenced our personal and professional ideas and helped to reveal the sources of our values and principles. This journey was our leadership apprenticeship. Some reflection may remind us that some of the qualities and practices of those people who inspired us would not be appropriate within a 21st Century leadership model.

We know that the classical approaches where leaders exercise power through command and control are not appropriate in children's centres or early years settings today. But we may still revert to this behaviour model when we feel threatened about our teams' effectiveness or when our own performance is challenged.

In our collective team experience it is possible that we may have lived through four eras of leadership practice; the table below offers a broad overview of the past 100 years.

ERA	PRACTICED THROUGH	DRIVERS
classical	Command and control Power and authority	Leader's traits
transactional	Tasks and rewards	Leader and follower reciprocity
visionary	Inspiration, charisma, authenticity and transformation	Leader/follower shared mission
organic	Relationships, participation, distributed, shared or collective responsibility	The overall system engagement to be sustainable, flexible and responsive to the challenges

PEOPLE

Our journeys are a valuable resource but sometimes we need to unlearn some behaviours and our attitudes about others. Other team members have lived and worked during a different era and fashions of leadership. As we come together and construct new models and partnerships we must keep this in mind.

Rory McDowall-Clark and Janet Murray, 2012, argue that the organic paradigm of leadership operates by 'leading from within'. This is a leadership model that is not about a specific 'leader' but focuses the leadership task as an entity. Energy is focused on developing 'human potential, increasing leadership capacity' (p. 121) and expanding the ability of professionals to work collaboratively through relationships and networking.

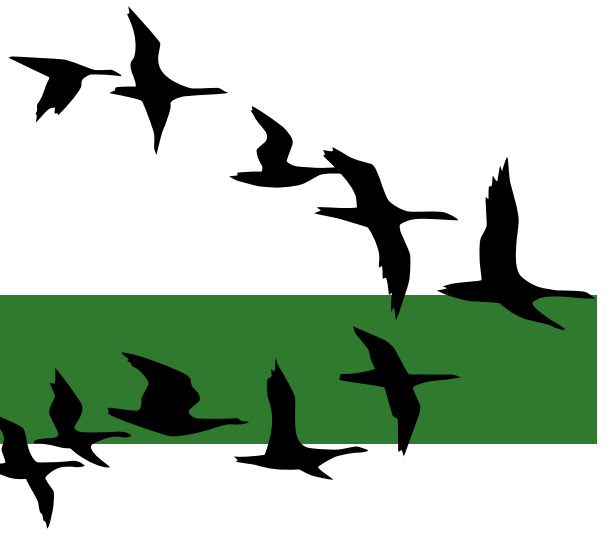
To understand 'leading from within' we must consider the concept from two dimensions. Firstly, each person within the team's 'inner leadership', the personal practices, motivations, values and beliefs, that may influence leadership behaviour. The second focus is the 'diffused leadership' where the team focuses on the collective



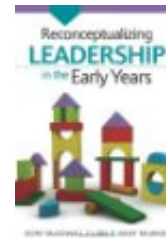
rather than individual engagement. It is refreshing that McDowall-Clark and Murray are not suggesting organic leadership as a method, rather they argue that perhaps for too long as professionals in early years, we have been drawn to implement leadership fashions rather than developing our own paradigm. A postmodern idea, perhaps, that could feel a little frightening. While it is vital that we operate safely and are accountable, we are a relatively new institution in society that should be leading paradigm development, rather than following others with more experience but arguably little more success.

There is some common agreement in recent business and educational

leadership writing (Goffee and Jones, 2010 and Wilkinson, et al. 2010) that contemporary leadership is not about conforming to a specific model or framework, what works for one leader, may not work in another situation where there are different variables. The most effective leadership development takes place within communities of practice where leaders are challenged to influence change in themselves and others, engage in dialogue that analyses shared values and practice dilemmas and use knowledge for the good of others rather than self. (McDowall-Clark and Murray, 2012). Participating in external communities of practice or developing one within your own children's centre model could become your strategy.



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Michael Maccoby and Tim Scudder, (2011) argue that when as leaders we are facing challenges and change, our anxiety to be effective, can destabilise the confidence in others if we begin to micro-manage them. Maccoby and Scudder account for this by comparing era too, suggesting conflict emerges when there is a 'clash of values and attitudes'. They compare two types of people in teams:

'bureaucratic social characters' people with fixed ideas who like systems and order usually brought up in a traditional fashion (non-working mother, breadwinner father and 2.4 children) - and,

'interactive social characters' team members with dual income parents brought up in a world increasingly dependent upon technology, that embrace change and look for rapid results and personal progression.

As postmodern leaders we have to work hard to revisit and adapt our practice to avoid conflict and continue to remember the mantra 'if you do what you always do, you get what you have always got'.

New year, new leader, new perspectives, make sure you devote some time to learn more about the people in your team, read a book about organic leadership, engage in debate with your peers. Also really try to attend at least one Children's Centre Leader's Network meeting or a National Conference about children's centres to continue to build your own social capital and develop your own paradigm.

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Time for Two Year Olds

James Hemsall

Following on from the success of offering free early education for three and four-year-olds, the Government is rolling out an entitlement of 15 hours for two-year-olds living in lower income families in England. In this new series, James Hemsall, National Support Director for the DfE's national support contract – Achieving Two Year Olds, keeps us up to date with developments and suggests ways in which children's centres can get involved. This month he focuses on children's centres as providers of places.

Achieving Two Year Olds is funded by the Department for Education. From now until 2015 we aim to support childcare providers and local authorities to make early education for lower-income two-year-olds a great success. The project is provided through a partnership between Hemsall's and Mott MacDonald, and we work with a range of different partners in the voluntary and community sectors too.

We are thrilled that build up has already started towards providing places for an estimated 130,000 children from September 2013 (about 20% of all children nationally), doubling to around 260,000 children from September 2014 (about 40% of all children nationally). For 2013-14, the government is providing local authorities with £525m to make this happen, and it plans to increase the funding to some £750m a year from 2014-15. It means there will be an increasing demand for two-year-old places from eligible families. These are families who meet the

criteria for free school meals; looked after children; and others at the local authority's discretion. Eligibility will be extended in 2014, following a response to recent consultation results – we expect this to be announced in the spring.

This new funding will enable many more two-year-olds to use childcare who currently do not do so, so there is potential for children's centres to sustain and grow such provision and to facilitate access to local provision for the families with whom they work. The hourly funding rate is set by each local authority in consultation with providers. Whilst this is open to local decision making, we are keen to see simple formulae and transparency in their development. The rate is expected to be higher than the level for three and four year olds and is a long-term offer in the same way. The national average rate, according to the Department for Education, is £5.09. Your local rate may be higher or lower than this.



achieving **2** year olds

hemsall's



WHAT COULD CHILDREN'S CENTRES DO?

Ask the key question.

Ask yourself, your team, your management or committee – could you provide places for two year olds?

Discuss with the local authority

their funding arrangements, quality criteria and any other requirements. What hourly rate are they paying? Do they have any extra eligibility criteria?

Look at other ideas. What have other children's centres done or what are they planning? What lessons have they learned from working with two-year-olds before? Look at case studies, attend local training or share learning at network meetings and visits. Are any of these ideas useful for you?

Small changes can make a big difference. We have all learned how moving from sessional to flexible models, and increasing from 12.5 to 15 hours have supported families and providers over recent years. What little changes could be made now? Could you take more children if you change the way you deliver your hours?

Talk with parents. Is there a local demand for childcare for two-year-olds? How many of your local families may be eligible in the 20% and 40% roll-outs?

Are there opportunities to **work in partnership** with other settings (group providers or childminders), schools or other children's centres? Getting in touch now could be a useful step to find out how you can support them, and they can support you.

Think about your centre.

Find out if changes to ways of working, or routines, could open up spare capacity. Consult with colleagues. What would meet their needs and the needs of families too? What skills and qualifications does your team need?

Look around your space.

Perhaps you have an area you could adapt for two year olds. Could a little re-organisation make a big difference? Is something a little more ambitious needed? Some government capital funding is available through your local authority – get in touch with them to discuss your ideas.

Now review your business model.

Do the sums add up? Can you make them add up if you make small adjustments? Can you offer places that are sustainable and high quality? Do you need to involve a second opinion to enable you to complete this review and offer other ideas?

Finalise your plans, get started and monitor your progress,

making changes along the way as you learn from the experience. Share your learning with others.

Keep in touch with our work by registering on the Foundation Years website:

www.foundationyears.org.uk

We talk with each local authority about what best will support them and their providers. As a result, we have funded a wide range of development work, consultancy and training. You could also register with the Achieving Two Year Olds group on the LGA knowledge hub for all the latest news and resources

www.knowledgehub.local.gov.uk



James Hemsall
director Hemsalls

STOP PRESS

POLICY

Elizabeth Truss MP published on 29 January 2013 her report [More great childcare](#).

It purports to:

raise the status and qualifications of the workforce
free high quality providers to offer more places
improve the regulatory regime, and
give parents more choice.

It will achieve this by:

creating Early Years Teachers from current Early Years Professionals and recruiting further early years teachers alongside the creation of a generic Level 3 qualification, Early Years Educator

raising adult:child ratios in early years settings
employing "high quality" staff ; legislating to enable childminders to join agencies to help them run their businesses

relying on Ofsted judgement as the sole arbiter of quality

suggesting schools should offer provision for the youngest children

Through:

deregulating on appropriate environments for young children

effectively reducing the number of adults caring for infants and very young children

removing Local Authority quality improvement schemes that support and challenge between Ofsted inspections

creating a market-driven approach to childcare where quality will cost and the least advantaged families will have choice limited by cost, and

allowing providers to create their own performance standards

This report was announced at the Policy Exchange, which the day before published [Quality Childcare](#).

It is a helpful summary of the journey of development of present early years provision. Key findings indicate that people living in the most deprived areas of the country are receiving poorer quality childcare. Quality Childcare shows that over three quarters (79%) of nurseries and childminders were judged 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted last year compared to only 64% of nurseries and childminders in the most deprived areas of the country. The figures are calculated on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood level.

Ofsted ratings from last year show that the most affluent areas of the country receive almost two times the level of top quality childcare provision compared to the most deprived areas. There are also three times as many outstanding providers when comparing the least and most deprived local authorities in England. Not surprisingly the vocabulary development of the poorest children is 16 months behind those from the highest income families.



YouGov polling of 1,637 people carried out for Policy Exchange also shows that people on lower incomes are less able to choose high quality childcare because of cost constraints. Nearly half of people earning less than £20,000 consider cost an important factor when choosing childcare, compared with 34 per cent of people earning between £40,000 and £60,000.

The report recommends:

- 1: All Local Authority evaluations should be made public and hosted on the Ofsted website**
 - 2: Government should identify funding required to professionalise the workforce to the necessary level**
 - 3: Childcare settings which do not improve on a Satisfactory rating between Ofsted inspections with existing LA support should have to join a Quality Assurance scheme run by an external provider**
 - 4: Encourage Teach First to extend to the early years, as a way of attracting bright graduates**
 - 5: Build on existing programmes to develop Teaching Centre networks nationwide to improve quality**
 - 6: Include the integrated two year old check in the National Pupil Database, and consult on what information should be supplied to reception class teachers by nurseries**
 - 7: Priority should be given to free school applications in deprived areas that offer pre-school provision**
-

Where is the join-up?

Following Tuesday's announcement and the publication of the 'More great childcare' report, the National College have launched an online discussion asking members for their reaction to the report.

This is a great opportunity for people to voice their opinions.

Please note people will need to be members to **join the discussion.**

PRODUCTIVITY



Events led by the National College

The College's Foundation Years online seminars are hosting a new series of seminars in which they are examining the theme 'quality matters', with two further seminars planned:

28 February - The importance of quality in the foundation years workforce (part two)

20 March - Quality for two year olds - narrowing the gap

You can register for these seminars via the [National College's website](#). Recordings of the previous seminars are available [online](#) if you missed them first time around.



National College led events - dates to put in your diary

7 February	North	De Vere Village Manchester Hyde Hotel	Register here
12 February	South	Holiday Inn London, Kingston South	Register here
13 February	Central	LCC, National College, Nottingham	Register here

This event will enable delegates to participate in a learning exchange, led by the East Midlands early years development demonstrator, on the importance of leadership in narrowing the gap. If you have any queries or would like any further information, please email cln.team@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk or call the College help desk on 0845 609 0009.

As publicised on the National College Leader Network pages – **The Communication Trust:**

This spring, CCLN events will focus on current key themes impacting on foundation years leadership. These include:

- Ofsted – considering responses to the children's centre inspection framework and the next steps
- the new Early Years Foundation Stage Profile – implications for the foundation years
- alternative delivery models for children's centres – cabinet office
- managing knowledge matters – Innovative ways of using data to improve outcomes

[Download an agenda for these events.](#)

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Leading change

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