

More Than the Sum of its Parts

—Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford

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I believe we need to engage in a sector-wide debate about ways to influence all those involved in the development and well-being of children, young people and their families. Whilst others may attempt distraction with parallel comment and criticism about how the sector operates, we need to concentrate on emerging early years sector leadership practice that may bring about quality improvements system wide, influencing and enhancing life-chances for more children.

I have been working with the National College for Teaching and Leadership to produce an extended, creative think-piece, in parallel to papers prepared by Professor David Hargreaves for schools. My paper provides researched explanation, description and case studies of system leadership in practice to provoke and develop our thinking on this emerging model of sector-led improvement during a time of rapid change.



My questions for debate address:

What are relevant research findings on systems leadership, drawn from early years and beyond?

What are the emergent systems leadership practices in early years and especially in Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCCs)?

What are the unique challenges in developing systems leadership across early years and especially among SSCCs?

What are the potential next steps for the development of a robust early years self-improving system?

What do I mean by systems leadership?

The Oxford Dictionary defines a system as *a set of things working together as part of a mechanism or an interconnecting network; a complex whole* (2005). Historically, our understanding of systems originated from the natural world. Think of the human body, for example, which comprises multiple systems. The body's individual respiratory, digestive, nervous and blood circulatory systems have a specific role but all work in a coordinated manner for the effective functioning of the body. *Systems Theory* was developed in the 1920s through scientific research to understand the natural world (Haines, 1998). Similar principles have been applied over time to thinking about the technological and social world and more recently leadership and management thinking.

Dennis Meadows (American scientist and Emeritus Professor of Systems Management, and former director of the Institute for Policy and Social Science Research-University of New Hampshire) defines a system as:

“A set of elements or parts coherently organised and interconnected in a pattern or structure that produces a characteristic set of behaviours, often classified as its ‘function’ or ‘purpose’

(Meadows, 2009:188)

He helpfully outlines 4 key principles relating to systems thinking:

a system is more than the sum of its parts

many of the interconnections in systems operate through the flow of information

the least obvious part of the system, its function and purpose, is often the most crucial determinant of the system's behaviour, and

system structure is the source of system behaviour. System behaviour reveals itself as a series of events over time.

(Meadows, 2009:188)

What's our place in educational systems?

Systems leaders can be said to be those who see the system as a whole and who act in ways that reflect this

awareness of the big picture. They work to engage their peers across multiple layers and levels. System leaders see the development of individuals holistically, and act to bring together systems and structures in the immediate as well as the wider environment for this to happen. This is a real challenge for some of the larger SSCCs which are complex organisations working within a range of integrated partnerships across numerous agencies and with children and families on a range of health, education, social, employment and skills issues. It can also present challenges to the smaller centres, where leaders may feel disenfranchised from the macro workings of the school / larger centre



networks operating in their locality. But all centres hold important pieces of the socio-cultural jigsaw to enable community systems to respond more effectively to children's and families' needs. Centre leaders hold an important role within local systems and need to ensure their influential place within them (see Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet 2014, in press).

How do we start, what do we do?

System leaders recognise the behaviours that encourage change and seek to encourage them. Kegan and Lahey (2001) suggest that leaders may begin to initiate lasting change through changing the way they communicate. They suggest using the language of:

commitment instead of complaint
personal responsibility instead of blame
on-going regard instead of praise
public agreement instead of rules and policies

Systems leaders also understand the impact of human emotion and that the rationale behind human behaviour needs to be understood. Effective systems leaders keep a sacred heart, maintaining curiosity, love and the compassion necessary for modelling a can-do attitude, even at the most difficult moments, offering leadership with strong and visible moral purpose.

“Leading with an open heart means you could be at your lowest point, abandoned by your people and entirely powerless, yet remain receptive to the full range of human emotions without going numb, striking back, or engaging in some other defense. . . . A sacred heart allows you to feel, hear and diagnose . . . or comprehend the reasons behind their anger . . . Without keeping your heart open, it becomes difficult, perhaps impossible to fashion the right response and to succeed or come out whole.

(Heifetz and Linsky, 2002:227-228)

Clear communication and interaction are important components of effective systems, but systems leaders ensure they are coordinated through all parts of the system via shared purpose and intent. They do not under-estimate the impact of actions in one part of the system upon the effectiveness in another. Shared purpose acts as a unifying force for systems operation.

When boundaries shift between organisations as new alliances and federations are established within systems, leaders will need to address knowledge management and governance models in order that system-wide protocols exist that enable communication, interaction and shared vision and purpose.

What does it look like and how will we progress?

Arguably the strongest evidence on what system leadership looks like comes from the English schools system. Professor David Hargreaves wrote four think-pieces for the National College between 2010-12 which can be accessed via their [website](#). While Hargreaves' work is helpful in providing a record of system leadership in schools during this period, his *maturity model* is offering a blueprint for how system leadership may become a sustainable part of every leader's role, within a school, centre or early years setting (discussed by Lesley Hollinshed in [CCLR Vol2:3,14-15](#)).

Key principles for developing this practice appear from examples to be:

understanding that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts
understanding the need for communication / knowledge management throughout the system to set clear direction and purpose
understanding the essential need to give time to building and sustaining, relationships, respect and trust
placing a focus on joint practice development and developing action research around what works
ensuring clear governance that secures accountability to improve quality and impact
using the best peer leadership to influence culture-changing behaviours through modelling of professional support, challenge and intervention

Moving the sector forwards

In addition to addressing the systemic evolution I have described above, we have the challenges that Ofsted poses to the sector to address with respect to:

variability in provision

under-qualification of the workforce

lower take-up of free entitlement offer of childcare in least advantaged areas

raising quality in weaker providers between inspections

Confident, self-improving leaders moving away from models of single establishment leadership towards a collaborative approach may direct collective attention toward shared improvement priorities that may more effectively reach and benefit those most vulnerable.

Give time to building and sustaining, relationships, respect and trust

With government promoting greater local autonomy, I hope you will agree that it feels like the right time to be leading a debate about

the features of a self-supporting improvement system

sector-led workforce development, and quality assurance

to ensure equity of access and opportunity for all children and families.

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Things Come Apart

—Vicki Lant

Since the publication of *More Great Childcare* in late January, early years issues have been in the news and grabbing the headlines, although not for the most positive of reasons. The last few months have brought claims and counterclaims about what works and what apparently works better elsewhere, quantities of unsubstantiated evidence and political posturing. It has mobilised the sector to challenge what is questionable and offer substantiated evidence about what really works, which may have helped to bring pause and further reflection to the debate recently. Academics from the UK and New Zealand have been informing All

Party Parliamentary Committees sharing exemplars from credible research and Peter Moss, professor emeritus at the Institute of Education, University of London, speaking during a **lecture** given by Professor Anne Smith on New Zealand's childcare policies supported by charity Barnardo's, encouraged the government to consider these as a better model for childcare reforms in the UK. The practice of many early years educators in the UK has been influenced positively by the socio-cultural models of learning and development of Te Whāriki from New Zealand, yet government has proposed exemplars from

many European countries. Peter Moss suggested that France was "not a country that anybody in the international field would hold up as being exemplary. It seems to me an example of lack of information for the government to make France, which is not at all advanced in early education, as some sort of exemplar, when countries like New Zealand or in the Nordic world have clearly got it right for some decades."

“countries like New Zealand or in the Nordic world have clearly got it right for some decades”

In her lecture, Anne Smith, professor in childhood studies and children's rights from New Zealand's Otago University shared similar challenges, associated with fiscal constraint, to potentially unravel the enviable systems of integrated childhood services that exist in New Zealand, including a more than 75% level of qualified teacher involvement in all early years settings. Professor Smith has been part of the vanguard of early years practitioners and academics in New Zealand who have actively influenced political change through their practice even when the odds seemed against them. As we reflected in our previous issue, we could sit on our melting iceberg or we could take control of the changing climate and act.

This edition brings many examples from the best of practice to offer ways ahead. Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford, who has also advised the All Party Parliamentary Committees, counsels us strongly to understand and make our own, system-leadership within the sector. Engaging together as providers with other children's service leaders in our localities begins to give us the unified voice and platform that is needed for others to appreciate and value how early years practitioners change lives for the better. But she warns, that unlike artist Todd McLellan, taking things apart into bite-sized pieces



Our moral compass?

TODD MCLELLAN

“practitioners and academics in New Zealand who have actively influenced political change through their practice”

PEOPLE

deprives us of the big picture, which we need to retain in order to appreciate the value of and place our own contribution.

Elizabeth Truss MP has thrown down a gauntlet to challenge the sector about purpose and evidence. The new Ofsted framework for the inspection of children's centres, published as we were going to press in the last edition, challenges the sector similarly. Nick Swarbrick and Sue Webster consider the centrality of observation aligned with theory in informing reflective practice to generate authentic evidence. Whilst Professor Nick Frost celebrates the advances in practice and improved outcomes for children and families achieved through multiagency working.

The Wave Trust's report **Conception to age 2 - the age of opportunity** provides us with significant and compelling evidence about the

Understand and make our own, system-leadership within the sector.

impact of qualitative interventions in the early years, which not only inform observations and recording,

but planning and influencing others be they parents, partner practitioners or fellow educators in the child's longer term journey. It offers

insights into brain development in the early years and the vital roles of all adults having a caring role for the youngest children. Dawn Cannon and Kay Mathieson explain the importance of this research for our work with the youngest children and their families. Sue Egersdorff encourages us to play to our strengths and address our shortcomings in order to present politicians with the critical value of our work now to families and communities in the future.

So, how many politicians does it take to change a policy? All of them - so influence yours! June O'Sullivan of

the London Early Years Foundation has been promoting International Children's Day in June as an occasion to demonstrate to all the life-changing value that early years providers offer communities, through celebratory events for children and their families. She has offered her **resource pack** online, to encourage us all to invite local politicians and MPs to understand what happens in the early years and how essential to strong communities are the twin elements of consistent funding and policy, centred around children, accredited evidence and research about what really works. It is an opportunity to put all this fragmented thinking back together and perhaps, for others to understand how we work and in turn offer greater respect.

Vicki Lant

Director Cambridge Development and Learning Ltd

Better Together

Professor Nick Frost



We are working in challenging times. The rapid pace of policy change, established by New Labour, has continued under the Coalition government. The speed of this change has been made more difficult by the impact of austerity: we all have fewer resources, third sector organisations are under pressure and, meanwhile, Children

Centre users are more likely to be out of work and may well be facing the consequences of welfare reform. Child care professionals may have expected some of this to be made easier by the Coalition commitment to localism and less bureaucracy: but I have yet to meet anyone who has experienced any unravelling of red tape. Ofsted seems to be as



“My experience of multi-disciplinary working is overwhelmingly positive

rigorous as ever - setting the bar even higher, as resources diminish and social problems get worse.

So far so depressing! However there are reasons to be optimistic. I think, in retrospect, we can be grateful to the previous government for one change above all others: we are now fundamentally working together. One of my earliest memories as a social worker for children in local authority care was, paradoxically, needing to beg local authority schools to admit a child for whom the authority was the corporate parent. Hopefully these days are behind us: today we are more joined up, networked, co-located and integrated. Whilst of course there are still rivalries and conflicts between services, my experience of multi-disciplinary working is overwhelmingly positive. I have recently had the pleasure of working with social workers, youth workers, police and others who are co-located, where they have regular morning information sharing meetings and where there has been a measurable improvement in challenging the terrible impact of child sexual exploitation.

Children's centres are fundamentally multi-disciplinary. I recall a Somali refugee mother telling me that she used to cry alone, but now at the children's centre, she now had “many shoulders to cry on”, a moving expression of the impact that our work can have in very difficult circumstances. So how can we hold on to our advances in multi-disciplinary working?

First, we need to work hard to maintain the benefits of multi-disciplinary working. Multi-disciplinary working is difficult and complex: it requires thinking, time out and planning. The suggestion of an away-day may create pressures for the staff team, but we need space to discuss everything from office layout, through information sharing to the coffee fund! Without space to discuss issues they can grow and fester and ultimately cause real and tangible conflicts within the team. We need to value and plan our away days and team meetings – they have to be of greater value than the time diverted from addressing front-line needs.

Second, we need some certainties in our world of change. Often members of multidisciplinary teams are seconded, or part-time, or on short-term contracts (or all three!). When there is less time to collaborate directly, ways of working can become isolated and entrenched; we need security from funders and senior managers, so that we can plan and implement work together with some long-term certainty.

Third, we need more and more co-location – a descriptor for sharing work premises that may be often used in a glib way without properly identifying what this means for those involved. Being located together seems a fairly requirement – but the spin-offs can

be considerable. We can share information, get to know other professionals and their roles, and actually work together in a regular and productive way. Professionals are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of co-location.

Fourth, and perhaps most important of all, we need to demonstrate the benefits of both family support and multidisciplinary working. The US project *Perry High Scope*, which combined day care and home visiting, is a rich source positive findings. The oft-quoted, but rigorously measured, figure identified that for every \$1 spent on Perry High Scope, \$12.90 in public expenditure was saved over a 40 year follow up (Bellfield et al,

2006). Until recently comparable British findings were hard to come across. Now, however, we have the LARC (Local Authority Research Consortium) findings on the impact of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The research team provide an estimate that the ‘potential future outcome costs’ of the cases they analysed were between £400 and £420,000, the costs of undertaking the ‘CAF and the intervention’ varied between £1,500 and £27,000. It is therefore argued that is argued that ‘potential savings’ range from £6,800 and £415,000. This evidence suggests that this form of early intervention is cost effective (Easton et al, 2012).

There is then a positive case to be made for multidisciplinary working: but it needs working at and arguing for if we are to come through the age of *austerity* with of services robust, intact and integrated.

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Learning to Behave: How Hard Can it Be?

Kay Mathieson

A range of influences

The rapid brain development that occurs in the womb and during the first two years of a child's life is subject to a range of influences. Chemical, environmental, genetic and economic factors all play their part in fashioning each unique brain. As the child tries to make sense of how their world works, neural connections are established as learning develops. A major factor is the early relationships which the child experiences. These first attachment relationships create a pattern which influences future understanding of interactions and social connections. Learning about ourselves and others and how to consistently sustain positive relationships is an on going process that can still challenge us in adulthood. Clearly then, our expectations in the early years foundation stage (EYFS), need to be realistic and in tune with each child's unique circumstances.

A range of skills

Ideally, in their early years children will experience and learn that they are cared for, valued and that their world works in a relatively predictable way. Skills that are essential for later successful independent relationships include, perspective taking, emotion understanding, communication and problem solving. As with any other area of EYFS each child will have their own learning pathway. Adults who are able to demonstrate 'mind-mindedness,' described, by Elizabeth Meins et al,¹ as thinking about each child as an individual with a mind, not just a being whose needs have to be met, will be most likely to appropriately support children's social behavioural learning. High quality sensitive interactions that demonstrate appropriate use of the skills the children are learning will significantly support their progress.

“Learning about ourselves and how to sustain positive relationships is an on going process that can still challenge us in adulthood”

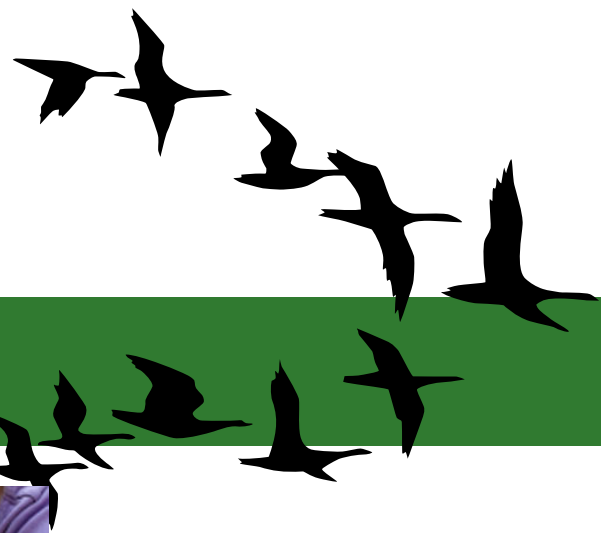
Securing our approach

Regardless of difficulties in a child's early relationships, experiencing warm sensitive engagement with adults who value them will make a positive difference to their social understanding. The major challenge in our settings is to recognise and maintain a coherent approach to behavioural and social learning. Creating an environment where everyday interactions demonstrate what we would like children to learn, even through conflict situations, is essential. Opportunities for individual learning such as, pretend play, role play, joining/leaving a group, making choices, resolving conflict, inviting others to



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play, refusing others' request to play, recognising own and others' emotional states offer children the 'best possible chance' to progress their learning.

By viewing 'behaviour' as an area of learning like any other, we can challenge our assumptions and tune in more closely to the child's perspective of 'how the world works.' This helps us to build our understanding of how children learn. We can also consider the systems and routines in our setting. For example, do our arrival and departure routines support children in their learning about transitions and their associated emotions? It is quite reasonable to feel upset when our special people are no longer present and some days will be easier depending on how everyone feels. Another example is considering the progression of learning about conflict resolution, sharing or making choices from baby rooms to preschool/reception class. Coherence in response and using these as learning opportunities rather than adults communicating control will support gradual real life application of social competencies. These skills also need to be demonstrated in adult interactions to make the messages effective.

Tune in more closely to the child's perspective of 'how the world works'

There is no quick fix to supporting behavioural learning or social development. But securing our overall approach and helping all adults to clarify and develop their own understanding will contribute to high quality interactions and coherent messages for children. Engaging parents in the process is essential to success.

As practitioners, we are on a constant learning journey about all the children with whom we work. Parents have an intense learning experience about their own child, usually without the benefit of general learning about child development. Our professional role is to bridge this gap through balanced and consistent communication about children's progress.

By creating an environment in which all relationships demonstrate recognition of the complexity of social competence we can give children 'best possible chance' to develop their understanding of themselves and others.

Kay Mathieson
director linden learning
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Children's Centres - Shaping Up and Moving Forward

Sue Egersdorff

The publication of *More Great Childcare* along with its associated consultations has certainly made us think about the services we provide for young children and their families, their quality and the workforce we need to maintain and improve that quality over time. Although there is little direct mention of children's centres in current policy documentation their important contribution continues to be recognised, almost universally, by local decision makers and commissioners as the economic and social situations facing many parents, families and communities become increasingly pressured. It was encouraging to hear Susan Gregory, Director for Early Childhood at Ofsted talk of the critical contribution children's centres make when she spoke recently at the National College for Teaching and Leadership's Conference, *Leadership for Learning*.

The potential for children's centres to make a real difference to the everyday lives of our youngest children remains huge but perhaps it is time for refreshed thinking and deep conversations about pedagogy, teaching, learning, improvement and funding. The fact that some of these conversations may be challenging is also something we should welcome. After all, what our children experience, and the values under-pinning the children's centre environment is serious business and demands serious debate.

The childcare reform proposals are centred around a strong vision that all children whatever their background or wherever they live should benefit from high quality early education and care and that their parents should equally be able to access affordable childcare that meets their working patterns and commitments. Such a vision is laudable but must be considered alongside growing concerns about the impact of escalating child poverty, poor early language development and the very real challenges of providing high quality childcare in areas of least advantage. Our professional conversations must find support for those who are working ferociously

on the ground to address such social and cultural inequalities.

Strong leadership remains critical to the mix, again endorsed by Ofsted as a fundamental component of quality provision. Put simply – leadership matters if we are to find sustainable responses to the difficult and entrenched issues we face. The best leaders consistently use their authority well to influence, secure accountability and establish the conditions for others to problem solve through:

“critical contribution children's centres make

Common language around improvement

- vital for practitioners to prioritise and understand what is expected of them

Common purpose

– clearly articulated direction of travel with baselines against which to measure progress

Common ground

– a willingness to work and collaborate across partnerships locally to make best use of new freedoms and autonomy and ultimately maximise learning opportunities for all

So what might be particularly taxing the minds of the best leaders as they strive to ensure a bright future for the children accessing their children's centre services in operating terrains facing constant change and tension. The following are reflections from recent conversations with children's centre leaders, local authorities, commissioned providers and researchers in response to two fundamental questions:

“What will add value to our core business?”

“How can we guarantee that evidence and knowledge of effective practice actually impacts on outcomes?”





There was a shared consensus that further exploration is required to consider how:

children's centres leaders can form **high quality partnerships focused on improvement** both across the early years sector but increasingly with schools

data sets from within and beyond a centre can be brought together in order to **establish a strong and broad evidence base** and use it effectively to have a positive and measurable impact on learning, teaching and care

workforce planning is given more prominence to ensure leadership "density" and a relentless focus on building the capacity and capability of the workforce at every level

children's centres **engage with the new diversity in local educational provision**, for example, academies and teaching schools

children's centres use their knowledge and expertise to support the integrated working required to **ensure the success of the two year old free education offer**, particularly their wealth of experience around babyhood (0-2 years)

leaders can come together locally to guide the learning process and champion professional dialogue to **secure a shared understanding of what outstanding performance is** and use the strongest leaders to support others

new and innovative approaches to service design can be developed to **improve opportunities to identify and close achievement gaps equitably**

enhanced attention can be given to **early language development, home learning environments and early attachment experiences**

Children's centres have so much to offer to all these issues but this may be in ways not considered before and with new and different delivery partners. Keeping professional debate alive and vibrant is one of the best ways to keep moving forwards, nudge those who may need to change and challenge those whose thinking may have become stuck. Every minute will count!

Sue leaves the National College in June 2013 in order to support the early years sector in an independent capacity in part through regular contributions to Leader Reader

Purpose and Young Children: A Personal Perspective

Nick Swarbrick

Storms come and go in Early Years, often, it seems to me, when changes are imposed. Some changes come whether resisted or not, and some are introduced in an awkward and authoritative way and are resisted because of that. In promoting **More Great Childcare**, the Government response to the Nutbrown Review, Liz Truss has made some comments which, if accurately reported, suggest that she and I sit at opposite ends of a spectrum of views of how children learn best. "Free-flow play is not compulsory," she stated in the Mail, "it's structured play which teaches children to be polite and considerate through activities which the teacher is clearly leading."

It was an interesting read and was rewritten in the light of the storm that followed; her words provoked such anger that for a while it was hard to hear an unruffled voice in response.

In **the more reasoned speech** from which the Mail interview springs, Liz Truss makes a real plea for high quality education and care, and in particular for a graduate-led workforce whose tasks include raising quality for everyone. It is the Minister's words on what she has observed in nurseries that have angered many. Coming on top of the proposal to allow nurseries to take more children per adult, her comment that "I have seen too many chaotic settings, where children are running around. There's no sense of purpose" suggests that she wants children sitting down undertaking tasks with teachers, something she claims is best practice in France.

A number of serious voices, from Big Names in Early Childhood such as Naomi Eisenstadt and Kathy Sylva to people doing the work with young children on a daily basis, are now joining together to make their points to the minister. Julian Grenier, in his informative and enlightening Early Years blog **"Inside the**

Secret Garden" states clearly: "there is no serious evidence to support most of the government proposals."

I worry that this ministerial pronouncement is liable to deny a lot of good work that thoughtful people do with their own children and as paid professionals or volunteers. Few parents (or grandparents) want a bear pit at home, any more than a nursery worker wants a block play corner wrecked or Lord of The Flies in the garden – but that's not what actually happens; by building on children's interests that grow from adult stimuli (a book, a song, some colour in the water tray) children are encouraged to develop a sense of purpose. This encouragement comes from positive relationships, exhibited through high-quality interactions. The evidence is already in the public domain; from the first reports of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) and its sister project Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years



(REPEY), it is clear that children aren't simply running around with no sense of purpose. A careful, rather than cursory, look at what is happening in a good-quality setting is that there are always some children moving from one activity to another. They move from sand to water, from home corner to computer so that one child will stay at an activity for twenty minutes, another for maybe less. Children are not running around without a sense of purpose any more than commuters are at Waterloo. The role of the practitioner is clear: to support the learning, to observe the development, to plan for the next steps.

Therefore, a final plea: as part of a self-evaluation task, or as a project for Early Childhood Studies students from a local College or University, think about your evidence. Observations are a real driver in Early Years, and our understanding of children's needs is based on the twin foundations of theory and observation, but in this

instance, make opportunities for observations that are clear about how long children stay in particular areas, and with what support; whether patterns of play are dully repetitious rather than children exploring and rehearsing until they feel secure in a skill; whether there is a gender or cultural or age bias you want to address. It may throw up some uncomfortable things: that child's activities in the water play could have a mathematical element we have not explored; these children's interest in outdoor play could be enriched with this story or that song. Find ways to build up a picture of how children learn in your setting and what the staff do to support that learning. Observations aren't just for children's profiles. In this I agree with Liz Truss wholeheartedly:

“I also want to see practitioners well-versed in the evidence.”

Footnote:

Not only hard to hear unruffled voices, but there is clearly more to come. At the time of writing this footnote, **David Cameron** seems to be distancing himself from the ratios argument at least and **Julian Grenier** has weighed in to the battle again, too.

Increasing the Reflective Functioning Capacity of Early Years Practitioners

Dawn Cannon



With a background in health visiting, I am always interested as new research emerges about our role in supporting infant mental health (IMH). This new knowledge should prompt us to think more deeply about our work with infants and young children. It is recognised that early experiences and the relationship with early years practitioners shape babies' and young children's socio-emotional, behavioural and cognitive development (Barlow and Scott 2010). What happens during the formative first three years of life can affect future outcomes across the life-course. Recommendations within *Foundations for Quality* (Nutbrown 2012: 29) refer to the need for "full and relevant criteria to ensure qualifications promote the right content and pedagogical processes" but what should this mean regarding IMH?

The World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) considers IMH to be a "multidisciplinary field of inquiry, practice and policy" (Zeanah, 2009) and cites the following definition (created by the

Zero to Three steering committee on IMH) which is expressed as a characteristic of the child:

“The young child has capacities to experience, regulate and express emotions, form close and secure relationships, and explore the environment and learn. All of these capacities will be best accomplished within the context of the caregiving environment that includes family, community and cultural expectations for young children. Developing these capacities is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development

(Zero to Three, 2001)

This definition highlights the child's need to experience, express and regulate their emotions within the relationships established inside the caregiving environment. The significance of maternal *mind-mindedness* in home contexts is well documented, but what about *mind-mindedness* in a childcare context?

Meins (1997) considers *mind-mindedness* to be when adults think of babies and young children as intentional beings with their own personality, traits and sensitivities,

References:

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as opposed to being defined by their physical behaviour and characteristics. Mind-mindedness is also known as reflective functioning and mentalisation. Fonagy et al (1991) consider that reflective functioning is likely to be an essential component of high-quality care giving and reflective functioning has been defined “as the capacity to envision and think about mental states, in oneself and in others, in the service of building realistic models of why they behave, think, and feel as they do” (Fonagy and Target, 1997: 679).

There is an extensive research base into maternal reflective functioning accumulated over the past two decades which identifies specific links to: **developmental outcomes** (Bowlby 1988; Brennan et al. 2000; Da Costa et al. 2000; Greenberg and Speltz 1988; Kendall-Tackett 2001; Sroufe 1988; Stern 1977); **developing a sense of self** (Kaye 1982; Stern 1985); **attachment security** (Koren-Karie et al., 2002; Laranjo et al., 2008; Lundy, 2003; Meins et al., 2001; Meins et al 1998); **development of self-regulation** (Bernier et al 2010); and **development of theory of mind** (Meins et al., 1998, 2002, 2003; Taumoepeau and Ruffman, 2006, 2008). With the rapid growth of children cared for in child-care centres (United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) 2008) attention now needs to be given to the reflective functioning capacity of early years practitioners.

The research into the dynamics of reflective functioning in childcare contexts is sparse. Virmani and Ontai’s (2010) intervention study considered how to promote reflective functioning in practitioners

by comparing reflective supervision and traditional content-based professional development workshops. Their findings support the view that reflective supervision and training promotes reflectivity amongst practitioners. Degotardi and Sweller’s (2012) study considered practitioners sensitivity and stimulation levels and found positive outcomes related to two indices of practitioners’ reflective functioning. They concluded that future research is required to address how reflective functioning can be “supported in both teacher education and professional development programs” (p 262).

Consideration regarding the “full and relevant” (Nutbrown 2012) IMH criteria currently on offer reveals inconsistency across a range of early years qualifications. Gilkerson’s (2004) view is that most early years training focuses on age-related developmental stages and routine caregiving within the childcare environment. Some early years qualifications may include IMH content related to:

“The neurophysiological and biochemical structuring of the brain, The basic characteristics of attachment: safe haven, secure base, proximity maintenance, and separation distress, attachment classification: secure, anxious/ambivalent, avoidant and disorganised attachment.

However, there appears to be minimal input related to the research evidence linking reflective functioning and developmental outcomes, developing a sense of self, reflective functioning and secure attachments, development of self-regulation and development of theory of mind.

IMH is still considered a relatively new multidisciplinary field of inquiry and

many professions do not comprehend fully all the implications for policy and clinical practice. Nevertheless, the clinical significance of early years practitioners developing their reflective functioning capacity to promote an interpretive stance (as opposed to a descriptive stance) is evident. It is essential that early years practitioners be empowered to extend their IMH expertise and capacity to enable them to interpret the behaviours of children, perceive their mental life and respond to the needs of the children in their care.

So what are the implications for our work in children’s centres? Is it time to convene a working group in your locality or to send a member of the team on training?

The **Association for Infant Mental Health UK** (AIMH) is an interdisciplinary association that promotes education, research and the study of mental health and emotional and social development. It brings together professionals from many fields that work with infants, young children and families. Together we may be able to develop and promote this important understanding more widely within our practice.

Many Things Can Wait

Sue Webster

Many things can wait; children cannot.
Today, their bones are being formed,
their blood is being made,
their senses are being developed.
To them we cannot say 'tomorrow.'
Their name is 'today.' —

Gabriela Mistral

Gabriella Mistral's famous poem reminds us of the importance and urgency when supporting a child's development. I returned to it recently, it has been buried somewhere in my consciousness, but is always evident in my values and makes me resistant to change that does not have children's needs as being the central tenet for progress. It is clear when we review our own personal development journeys that our experiences of learning, both formally and informally have the capacity to make us grow in confidence and skills or sadly to deplete our potential to feel confident and believe in our ability to lead and inspire others.

As adults when we reflect on our life experiences we become aware of events and people who have generated or depleted our potential to be leaders. Gallwey's (1974) simple equation is never far from my thinking:

$$\text{Potential} = \text{Performance} +/\text{- Interference}$$

This presents a powerful responsibility for all those who lead policy, strategy and practice, so how can we ensure that the practice in our nurseries is fit for purpose and will grow the future leaders of our country? While there is limited research about young children's leadership capacity and development, there is emerging evidence that suggests children display a range of leadership skills in their play at nursery (Mawson, 2011). Often practitioners working with children fail to recognise or value the signs and behaviours as being emerging leadership qualities. Regrettably the research suggests that some practitioners consider these emerging leadership skills as challenging and unhelpful (Lee et al, 2005 and Owen, 2007).

Perhaps this negative view of children leading us comes from our history, as an industrial nation.

Children only came to the fore when politics or commerce demanded it. Human capital theory rides high currently, yet our consciousness about children in this context is demeaning, from the cuteness of television advertising to the unit cost element of the present arguments about childcare ratios. The Reggio

children display a range of leadership skills in their play at nursery



approach in Italy emerged from the aftermath of a fascist political regime. This approach developed from the need for a national imperative to ensure that children would develop the life skills to support them to participate, critique and challenge decision-making; key leadership skills that Malaguzzi recognized as vital for national recovery.

key leadership skills that Malaguzzi recognized as vital for national recovery

As we continue to attempt to survive during these turbulent times, I have adapted a well-known saying 'cometh the hour, cometh the need to focus on the child as a leader from whom we can learn'. As the temperature of public debate rises about the operation of our sector, many leaders from our often undervalued and sometimes subservient profession are raising their heads above the parapets to lead and influence for children. But what can we learn about leadership from children? As professional development budgets are contracting perhaps an exploration of leadership in its purest form could be a useful team project?

What I am suggesting is a piece of practitioner research collected during one month and analysed collectively over the next three to six months. This could be a simple

process, where each member of the team collects one observation as an example of how a child leads others in nursery. Two good sources of information about observing leadership in young children in a nursery setting are Lee et al, 2005

and Lee and Reccia, 2008. Their research explored what children's leadership looks like and what strategies do children use to

lead others? You could use these papers as a starting point but to create a shared ownership within the team and generate comparable data, you should negotiate the criteria and parameters for each observation tool you develop. This activity will also generate many leadership learning opportunities too, to understand more about:

What is leadership? What does it look like?

The data collection and analysis process will provide many valuable prompts for deep discussion. If time is a factor, suggest that people work in pairs of small service groups in the first instance, you could use notice boards and post-it notes in the staff room for initial thematic analysis or encourage everyone to use journals to collect their thoughts. Grint's (2010) questions about what leadership is could be a useful framework for thematic analysis once you have some data to analyse:

Is leadership: —————

related to where children are **positioned** in the hierarchy of the peer group, age or length of time and familiarity in the nursery?

associated with **personal characteristics**, who they are, their traits, personality, curiosity, high self-esteem or intellectual or social or emotional capital?

what the children **achieve** through influence and negotiation?

a **process** for leading, a successful strategy using listening, clear communication or networking?

Whole team discussions could begin by focusing on practice that promoted leadership development and progress to explore together what has been learned about identifying and supporting emerging leadership in children. The findings from Lee and Recchia, (2008) suggest that the following questions may be useful prompts for group discussion:

What are the most appropriate environments and resources for leadership development?

What is the role of practitioners, are there strategies or different behaviours that are more or less successful?

One of the additional outcomes from undertaking a research project about leadership in your centre will be that the whole team will learn so much about leadership in general and consider their own leadership in practice together with jointly evaluating the overall joint leadership of the centre. Concluding questions at the end of the activities could be:

What do we know about leadership?

What kind of leadership works best for me / my team / the centre?

What does each of us as leaders contribute to the team leadership of the centre?

What are our next steps?

“What can leaders learn from children?”

Again looking at low-cost or no-cost ideas, future internal professional development could include mentoring and buddying, peer observations and group reflection within the team, across a cluster or local authority. Don't forget that you can share your learning too, writing up a short article for the Children's Centre Leader Reader or other publications that share and promote best practice. You could join the **British Early Childhood Education Research Association** and submit your research paper to be considered for one of their conferences.

In conclusion I will leave the final words to Nayer, (2008) who poses the question: What can leaders learn from children? He reminds us that children are honest imaginative very curious and are not afraid to take calculated risks and comments:

“Unlike children, we adults draw comfort working within predictable boundaries. The sudden turn that used to delight us when we were kids raises our guard in later life.”

Sue Webster
early childhood studies, lecturer,
university of warwick



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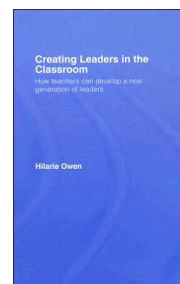
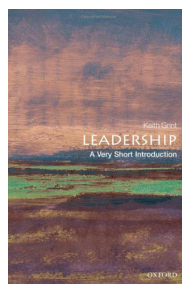
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children's Centre Leader Reader

recommended reads:



click on any of the titles to find out more



Department for Education

Recent documents to inform practice:

(April 2013): **Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) Strand 2: Baseline Survey of Families Using Children's Centres in the Most Disadvantaged Areas**

This report provides findings from a survey of families who are using Sure Start children's centres when their child was 9 to 18 months of age. It is part of a larger evaluation of children's centres in England



Save the Children®

**Save the Children May 2013
Surviving the first day: State of the world's mothers 2013**

This year's report focuses on infant health, and includes a new feature, the **Birth Day Risk Index**, which provides a similar ranking of countries based on infants' chances of surviving the first day, along with data on the survival chances for older infants and children. The report highlights just how critical the first day of life can be for women and their infants, Britain's world ranking was 23rd



Department of Health

Changes to immunization programme 2013/4

Letter to PCTs outlining changes for the immunization of babies and young children

Information: To Share Or Not To Share? The Information Governance Review has been published (26 April 2013)

Dame Fiona Caldicott and Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt launched the report at the Electronic Patient Records conference on 26 April. Jeremy Hunt welcomed the report and emphasised its importance in enabling better sharing of information to improve care.

The Department has also announced that Dame Fiona will chair an independent panel to oversee and scrutinise implementation of the review's recommendations and to provide advice on information governance issues. We should draw this to the attention of colleagues and commissioners in order to establish strategic information sharing agreements throughout our work in partnership.



Recommendations include:

9.4.2 **Leadership on information governance within organisations**

The boards or equivalent bodies in health and social care organisations should ensure that information governance staff understand the need to support the safe sharing of personal confidential data for direct care as well as the need to protect individual's confidentiality. Health and social care professionals and staff also have a responsibility to know the information governance policies of the organisations they are employed by, and should be prepared to challenge policies and guidance that inhibit the appropriate sharing of personal confidential data for safe and effective direct care.

The Review Panel concluded that information governance specialists should work together across organisational boundaries to enhance the community of practice to improve knowledge and best practice, solve practical challenges, develop trust in the information governance function and remove isolation. This report does not exclude the possibility of small organisations sharing Caldicott Guardians or information governance staff to develop expertise and ensure consistency.

(Chapter 9 Education and Training p90)

“Cross-government policy is increasingly focusing on early intervention to improve ‘public welfare’. These initiatives use data to identify ‘at risk’ individuals and groups in order to offer support e.g. to help troubled families or to combat domestic violence, trafficking and grooming.”

(Chapter 10 Children and families p92)



Helpful links to all new Ofsted documentation:

Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance (for local authorities, commissioners of local health services and Jobcentre Plus)

The framework for children's centre inspection from April 2013

Children's centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013

Sure Start children's centre summary self-evaluation form for a centre or group of centres

Children's centre self-evaluation for guidance from April 2013

Inspection of your children's centre

PRODUCTIVITY



Events led by the National College

Summer 2013 Children's Centre Leaders Network events

Registration for our summer Children's Centre Leader's Network (CCLN) events is **now open**. These events provide an excellent opportunity to network and learn from peers.

The focus will be on current key themes and policy direction that will require strong Early Years leadership across the sector. These include:

'Leadership Matters' Early Years Leadership and Learning – Policy Updates!

Sue Egersdorff, Director for Early Years NCTL

A quality Early Years Workforce

Dr. Eunice Lumsden, University of Northampton

Early Help - Health Visitor Implementation Plan – the Next Steps?

Pauline Watts, Professional Officer – Chief Nursing Officer's Professional Leadership Team, Department of Health

Registration and details are now available on the **National College website**. For further information please contact **CCLN.TEAM@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk**



National College Led Events - dates to put in your diary

25 June	Central IGEN House, High Street, Kegworth, Derbyshire, DE74 2DA	REGISTER
2 July South	Redcliffe Children's Centre (Anglican Methodist Hall), Prewett Street, Redcliffe, Bristol, BS1 6PB	REGISTER
4 July North	Everton Nursery School and Family Centre, Spencer Street, Liverpool, L6 2WF	REGISTER

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Next issue:
July 2013
Leading in a diverse
system

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