September 2017

Children's Centre Leader

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

POLICY

Children's Centre Stories

As a modern-day barometer of social trends and issues, Google offers a useful insight into the state of the nation. Enter 'children's centres' into their search engine, and it reveals a total of 5.5 million results. There is a heart-warming selection of active websites for individual and groups of children's centres, and government information on finding your local provision. However, it is not long before a raft of local stories of the closure, or reshaping of centres, is presented. Stories describing the potential loss of 35 children's centres in Buckinghamshire, or relocation of centres in Herefordshire are current examples. The narrative, unfortunately, is a familiar one. We are left wondering when funders and commissioners will emerge from their sleep-walking into increased costs in the long-term, and understand the relevance of preventive and early intervention services as a cost-cutting measure for the future. With this in mind, in this edition, we hear from Leicestershire's approach to managing the challenges of continuing to deliver the core offer, whilst balancing the pressures of austerity funding, all at the same time as need for such services are increasing locally. We also learn about the everyday knowledge quality practitioners may need to support the delivery of early years learning, in addition to their theoretical knowledge. A key issue for anyone leading provision, who understands the importance of qualifications combined with the ability to deliver the professional role. With the recent national roll-out of the much anticipated 30-hours childcare, we hear from the lead researcher of the national DfE evaluations of its early implementation and early roll out across many local areas. The article provides us with the benefit of learning to date, offering clues to support its delivery across the whole of England from 1st September 2017. In our opinion piece, our Editor, considers the tensions between parents' and early years providers' role in supporting school readiness, and the expectations and roles of schools when children reach that important milestone.

Welcome

Welcome to the September 2017 issue of Children's Centre Leader. We hear about the 0-2 Pathway in Leicestershire on p2 and Dr Verity Campbell-Barr considers which types of knowledge are needed and valued in early care on p4. Dr Gillian Paull shares early findings on the 30 Hours of free childcare offer on p7 and I discuss school readiness on p10.

As always, let us know what you think by emailing: cclr@hempsalls.com

James Hempsall, Editor, Children's Centre Leader

Children's Centre 0-2 Pathway

Leicestershire children's centre team had to make the challenging decision about how they might be able to continue to deliver their core offer while balancing the ongoing pressures of austerity measures with increasing local need. **Rachel Sharman** shares their story.

As a children's centre leadership team covering the county of Leicestershire, we had to make the challenging decision about how we might be able to continue to deliver our core offer whilst balancing the ongoing pressures of austerity measures with increasing local need.

Using the evidence from the WAVE Trust, Leicestershire County Council is promoting a primary prevention approach to deliver socially and emotionally capable children. Preventing harm requires effective identification of those factors that result in harm and effective strategies for addressing these vulnerabilities. In Leicestershire, our model focuses on fostering emotional wellbeing and facilitating secure relationships with care givers that will support children's learning and emotional resilience and contribute to reductions in maltreatment.

Our model is underpinned by full delivery of the health visitor led Healthy Child Programme which delivers good universal services and identifies early, children and vulnerable families who are at risk of experiencing poorer outcomes. This is supplemented by notifications from midwifery who share information about prospective parents and their vulnerabilities.

What was borne from months of realigning our programme was our very successful 0-2 year pathway. A pathway which was designed as a focus on the '1001 Critical Days' for the most vulnerable families identified across Leicestershire.

"There is a growing acknowledgement that those first early years of a child's life are absolutely crucial. Getting it right as parents with professional help and public resource to support where needed has the potential to make a huge difference to how that child will grow into an adult contributing to society" www.1001criticaldays.co.uk.

Our pathway begins at the antenatal period and supports a family right up until their child's second birthday where they (on the whole) are eligible for their 2 year free entitlement to early education (FEEE) place.

Data tells us that 26 percent of babies in the UK have a parent affected by domestic violence, mental health or drug/alcohol problems. 36 percent of serious case reviews – into death or serious abuse- involve a child under one. High levels of stress in early childhood can be 'toxic' to the developing brain. What we also know is that identifying need early is critical to preventing the abuse and neglect of babies and improving their emotional wellbeing. Babies' development can be dramatically improved with early and effective support for parents. Pregnancy and the second year is also a critical stage in a child's development.

Our 2 year pathway is more intense from the antenatal period to the end of year one. The focus here very much is about our nurturing process. Each pathway offered depends on the due date so that we have the same cohort with similar aged babies supporting each other for a whole year. Same day, same time, same practitioner, same venue for a whole year.

In the first year we incorporate our Five Pegs:

- **Specialist antenatal** education and support during pregnancy and the first few weeks of parenthood with opportunities for an accreditation qualification with the National Open College Network.
- **Baby massage** to soothe the baby, aid sleep and

digestion, improving circulation, and easing teething pain. Massage encourages bonding where this has been identified as a vulnerability.

» **Tiny Talkers**, delivered by our Pathway Support Workers, is designed to help support parents to encourage babies begin to develop really good social and language skills.

» **Five to Thrive** - Central to the Five to Thrive approach is the set of five key activities which are the building blocks for a healthy brain - Respond, Cuddle, Relax, Play, Talk.

» **Great Expectations** covers what to expect from 9 months to 2 years in terms of development and behaviour. We work to prepare parents to care for a toddler on the move!

What sits around these pegs are other planned activities; the order of which depends very much on individual cohorts.

Staff additionally offer programmes in the second year supporting healthy lifestyles, promoting an awareness of the developing child to encourage smooth transition into pre-school and school. We offer group programmes focussing on the emotional health and wellbeing of adults. Our adult and family learning partners are key in supporting the aspirations of those adults seeking further learning or employment opportunities.

All practitioners are trained to deliver the Solihull Approach which is heavily focussed on emotional health and wellbeing and further enhanced by supporting parents/carers to understand children's behaviour and how to develop appropriate responses. The Solihull Approach model combines three theoretical concepts, containment (psychoanalytic theory), reciprocity (child development) and behaviour management (behaviourism).

To date, feedback and evaluation evidences that families are making positive changes which are sustainable. For a true insight into how our pathway has supported families to make a difference in their child's lives please watch our YouTube video.

Rachel Sharman has been working for Surestart Children's Centres since 2000. She has over 30 years' experience teaching and working in the early years/early intervention arena. Investment in the team is equally important to her as is investment in families. Reducing inequalities and raising aspirations drives her focus.

A Basket of Knowledges

Dr Verity Campbell-Barr considers the type of knowledge needed and valued in early years education. She argues that everyday knowledge should be as important as theoretical knowledge.

Debates on the qualification and training of those who work in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services have been plentiful in the last 25 years. Various government initiatives have sought to 'up-skill' those who work with young children. Beyond the deficit positioning of the workforce as somehow lacking in sufficient skill, there have been debates as to what should be the minimum qualification level of the ECEC workforce, which job titles best refer to members of the workforce and the discrepancies that are present between the different sectors (both in relation to qualification types and pay and conditions).

The concern with the qualifications of those who work in ECEC is undoubtedly fuelled by a growing evidence base that demonstrates associations between the quality of ECEC and the qualification level of those working in ECEC. The debates on the need for quality ECEC are well rehearsed, whereby quality ECEC offers early intervention to support children's holistic development and provides the foundations to their lifelong learning.

Quality has become a much debated concept, not least in regards to the consequences that it has for members of the workforce. Assessments of quality risk reducing the workforce to a qualification level, rather than considering what it is that constitutes a quality member of the ECEC workforce.

Arguably, up-skilling has become about a process of creating the 'right' kind of worker who will produce the 'right' outcomes – a model of technocratic professionalism that serves the needs of policy makers, but is restrictive (and reductive) in its understanding of what a quality workforce might look like. The debates on quality ECEC and their associated consequences for the workforce are important, such as who it is that informs understandings of a skilled workforce and how is largely determined by what are the 'desirable' outcomes for ECEC services. Whilst I recognise that understandings of the workforce are shaped by constructs of ECEC services and their role within society, I am interested in how a person comes to 'know' how to work in ECEC.

Considering how people come to know how to work with children is more than a question of a qualification level or how to refer to people who work with children, and moves beyond a deconstruction of who and what informs understandings of ECEC and their consequences for the workforce. Focussing on how people 'know' how to work with young children (and their families) is about recognising that ECEC is a knowledgeable profession, requiring rich and varied forms of knowledge.

KNOWLEDGES

It is important to stress that I see knowing as complex and multifaceted. Therefore, I believe that knowing how to work with young children requires a combination of knowledges, whereby there are different forms of knowledge, with different structures and processes of

legitimisation and distribution that inform how a person works in ECEC. Knowledges extend from the more theoretical to the everyday with a need to identify the full range of knowledges to appreciate the complexities of working in ECEC.

Considering knowledge often leads to a focus on theoretical forms of knowledge. The favouring of theoretical knowledge can be attributed to two core characteristics. Firstly, theoretical knowledge has often been through a process of testing, either as a result of some form of scientific testing and/or due to a history of the information being shared and therefore tested via its social relevance. Within the testing model, more scientific approaches have a history of being identified as more rigorous and robust – if I can see it then it must be true. The favouring of observable forms of knowledge are evident throughout ECEC from that which is identified as 'quality' to the assessment processes that enable a person to gain a qualification.

The observable nature of scientific testing relates to the second characteristic of theoretical knowledge, whereby it can be distributed. In the simplest form, theory is written about in books and can therefore be shared, generating social relevance.

Whilst ECEC is something of a theoretical hybrid, drawing on a range of different disciplines (e.g. psychology and sociology in their various forms, health, economics, neuro-science etc.), the dominance of developmental theories reflects the privileging of the testing principle.

In some ways, I think ECEC has tied itself in knots with developmental theories. In seeking to demonstrate the effectiveness of ECEC, developmental theories have been utilised to provide evidence that ECEC works. For example, child-centred practice as a philosophical construct has a history grounded in romantic concepts of children as autonomous individuals. However, the desire to demonstrate the effectiveness of a pedagogical approach where the child is the leader of their learning incorporates aspects of developmentalism, creating a paradox between a potentially liberatory pedagogy and one governed by expectations of children's development. Thus, the robustness of theory can be potentially constraining, but the need for evidence is hard to resist when it drives both recognition and legitimacy.

The pull of theory is not solely about providing evidence of the effectiveness of ECEC services. The ability to distribute ideas will also contribute to the popularity of some theories over others. In some respects, the distribution of theory is facilitated by the use of English as lingua franca. Returning to developmental theories, there is much to be said for the argument that it is an Anglo-America/Anglo-European child that dominates theories on child development. (Just pause and try to consider which theorists you know from the Indian continent.) However, it is not just the use of language that facilitates the sharing of theory. Other theories lend themselves to distribution as they appeal to those who work in ECEC. The Reggio Emilia Approach has an international reputation, but this will have been facilitated by both Italy's history of sharing pedagogical theories (e.g. Montessori) and that the core ideas of the Approach are likely to appeal to liberal-minded educationists.

TACIT KNOWLEDGE

My questioning of theory is not about trying to undermine it, as theory forms an important aspect of what it is that people need to know for working in ECEC. In fact, part of the distribution of theory is that it enables me to ask questions of it. However, knowing how to work with children is more than just theory – I can know about child development, but I cannot 'do' child development. There is therefore a process of application that is important in knowing how to work with children. Yet one form of knowledge is not going to be sufficient. In applying child development knowledge (for example) I will need other forms of knowledge, including (importantly) knowledge of the child. Knowledge of the child represents more

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everyday forms of knowledge, but also illustrates how those working in ECEC will draw on a range of knowledges to inform their practice.

In combining different forms of knowledge to inform one's practice, I also think that there are personal forms of knowledge. Sometimes the personal knowledge is referred to as an attitude or disposition, but ultimately it is those characteristics that can really help a person to know how to work in ECEC. It is hard to articulate this form of knowledge as it is far less visible than other forms of knowledge. Often there is a tendency to refer to this knowledge as a person's innate ability – a natural, inborn ability to work with young children. However, I think that an innate construct of this knowledge masks just how challenging it is to work with children. Knowing how to be patient and empathetic or playful and fun are careful and considered forms of knowledge. Such knowledge has to be combined with what is known about a child, including what is known about their development, and getting the balance between these different forms of knowledge right is challenging.

The combination of all of these different knowledges leads me to consider another aspect of knowing that is really important for working in ECEC – knowing how to evaluate knowledge. In part, this is about knowing how to reflect on practice, but is also about recognising that knowing how to work with children does not just come from theory, it also comes from experience and so we learn from combining different forms of knowledge - what works and what doesn't.

In my mind, I like to visualise the idea of a large knowledge basket that everyone who works in ECEC has within their minds. Every day we rummage through the knowledge basket to know how to work with the children in our care, their families and our colleagues. This knowledge basket can be, at times, quite messy, but it illustrates just how rich, varied and complex it is to know how to work in ECEC.

Dr. Verity Campbell-Barr is an Associate Professor in Early Childhood Studies at Plymouth University. Her research focusses on the quality of early childhood services, particularly the role of the workforce and the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for working in early childhood services. She is about to undertake a European project on concepts of child-centred practice.

A Bright Future for 30 Hours?

Dr Gillian Paull shares the findings from early rollouts of the 30 hours free childcare and looks at the benefits and pitfalls from both provider and parent points of view.

This month witnessed the national rollout of 30 hours free childcare, the extension of the free early education entitlement for three and four year olds with working parents. In spite of the popularity of providing support for working parents and the substantial amount of new government funding for childcare, the reception of the new policy has not been universally enthusiastic with considerable adverse publicity expressing concerns around the financial sustainability of delivery for providers and the ability of families to access places. However, the evidence from the early tests of the extended hours suggests a more positive prognosis.

THE EARLY TESTS

Two major early tests of 30 hours free childcare were undertaken in the form of "early implementation" in eight local authorities from September 2016 and in "early rollout" in a further four from April 2017. Evaluations of these early initiatives drew on large scale surveys with providers and parents and from in-depth research with the local authorities in all 12 areas, providing robust evidence on likely reactions and impacts in the national rollout.

THE GOOD NEWS

So let's begin with the good news and the reasons to be optimistic about the potential success of the policy.

First, the extended entitlement places were successfully delivered and there was no evidence of any lack of provision to meet demand. In 10 of the 12 areas, the numbers of children who received extended hours were close to the planned or estimated numbers of eligible children. A high proportion of providers were willing and able to offer the extended hours and providers of all types were involved in delivery. Importantly, most providers not currently delivering the extended hours were planning to do so in the future. There were indications that provision had expanded with many providers reporting that they had increased occupancy rates or had increased staff hours or the number of staff. Moreover, around two thirds reported that they could either definitely or possibly offer more places and the number of other entitlement and paid places had not been notably reduced.

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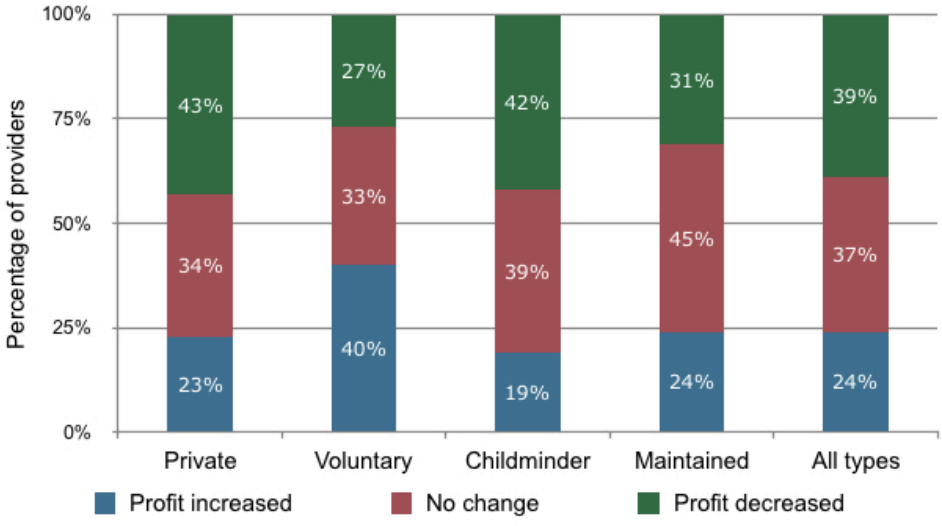
Figure 1: Impact on profit



Source: Early rollout evaluation survey of providers. Notes: .Sample sizes for private, voluntary, childminder, maintained and all provider types are 302, 97, 241, 58 and 712.

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Second, in contrast to some expectations, providers reported mixed financial impacts from delivering the extended hours. In the early rollout, 60 percent reported there had been no impact on the hourly delivery cost per child, while 8 percent reported a decrease in cost and 32 percent reported a rise. When asked about the impact on profits (which maintained providers may have interpreted as the surplus of funding over cost), 24 percent said that profits had increased while 39 percent reported that they had fallen. The balance of impact varied by provider type, with more voluntary providers reporting a rise in profits than reporting a fall (figure 1). There was also evidence that providers' confidence to develop financially viable models is increasing, particularly with support and advice from local authority early years staff.

Finally parents were keen to take up the extended hours and most used the full 15 additional hours. Around half (in early implementation) thought that the extended hours had increased their childcare use, with greater effects for lower income families. Many parents reported that the extended hours helped them to work: around one in ten mothers thought that they would not otherwise be working, while almost a quarter thought they would be working shorter hours without the policy. Parents also reported that the extended hours had given them greater flexibility in their work choices, improved their work-life balance and had a positive impact on family finances (58 percent reported they had slightly more money to spend and 26 percent said they had much more money to spend).

CONCERNS

But the early trials have also highlighted some potential problems.

In one area, the number of delivered places was lower than expected, potentially related to problems that parents experienced in applying for eligibility using the national childcare service which was tested only in this early trial area. This showed the importance of having reliable and efficient processes for parent and provider eligibility-checking. In another area, adverse local conditions led to a slow and ineffective implementation of the policy, highlighting the need for an efficient and sufficiently resourced local early years infrastructure to ensure effective delivery of the policy.

More fundamentally, the early trials suggested that different types of providers may face specific challenges to continued or expanded delivery of the extended hours. Some day nurseries said they may limit places to a financially viable number while others thought that expanding provision may be limited by staff retention and recruitment difficulties. Staff recruitment was also an issue for some playgroups, who also had concerns about finding more venue space or using existing space for longer, particularly those using shared spaces such as community centres. For some schools, declining pupil numbers were a strong motivator to deliver the extended hours but those that were "full" had less incentive to participate, particularly if the "childcare" programme was not seen as part of the core purpose of delivering early education.

A second fundamental issue is how flexible and free the extended hours will be for parents. Although most providers reported that they gave parents at least some choice in when they took the hours, there were several ways that some providers limited parental choice to help ensure financial viability. Some providers (17 percent) introduced or increased additional charges (for items like meals, snacks, music lessons or outings) and some parents reported making payments associated with the extended hours but were not always clear what they were for. More broadly, while some parents thought that the extended hours were a large financial help ("...not having to worry about paying for childcare has been great..."), others had expected larger savings on their childcare bills (with the actual outcome "a huge disappointment").

THE FUTURE'S LOOKING BRIGHT

As presented in recent media coverage, there are undoubtedly some potential issues around the financial viability of delivery for some providers and the need for smoothly functioning application and payment processes. In addition, some parents may find that there are unexpected payments associated with the extended hours or that the extended hours are not always available when they would like or need.

But the broader picture from the experience of most providers and most parents in the early trials is much brighter. Adequate numbers of places were delivered. Most providers were willing and able to deliver the extended hours and most did not find it financially detrimental to do so. Most parents using the hours thought that they had enabled them to use more childcare and that they had benefited financially. Substantial proportions of parents also reported that the new policy had allowed them to work more.

While a focus on potential problems is helpful to ensure these issues are addressed, it is also important to understand that, more broadly, the evidence indicates that the 30 hours free childcare is likely to be successfully delivered and may well achieve its intended objective to support working parents.

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Dr Gillian Paull is a Senior Associate at Frontier Economics where she undertakes research on the labour market, childcare and early education, and social policy. Recent projects include the evaluation of early implementation of the 30 hours free childcare and the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) and work on mothers' employment and family poverty. She recently served as a Specialist Advisor in the House of Lords and previously held research positions at the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the London School of Economics.

Should children be ready for school, or schools ready for children?

James Hempsall explores what it means to be school ready and considers what children's centres can do to help prepare families for the next stage in children's lives.

The start of the 2017 academic year was again celebrated by a raft of press articles about how young children are ill prepared for school. Various research reports were published, and social commentators, early years practitioners and teachers alike joined in the debate. It took me back to April 2014, when Ofsted published a very interesting report of their survey into school readiness. It was called 'Are you ready? Good practice in school readiness'. All managers of early years and childcare settings, as well as children's centres, and especially schools should continue to take heed of its key messages.

In early years we have been familiar with the term 'school readiness' for around five years or so. It is one of many aims of early learning for preschool children. And it is something we are measured against, and sometimes criticised for when other professionals believe children are unready.

SCHOOL TRANSITION

We should all aim as children and their parents join us in their early years, to support them in their transition into school at the start of their journey into adulthood. We often share a child's first experiences of being separated from their parents, interacting with non-family member adults, taking turns, and making new friends. We can often be the first care givers for children, other than their parents, and in doing so we offer parents their first experiences of developing trust of childcare and childcare practitioners. A vital experience for parents wanting to work. We can introduce families to books, positive behaviour skills, and safe boundaries and risk-taking, and a whole range of new opportunities socially, educationally and economically.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING NEEDED

The term 'school readiness' emerged, as the report identified, from various reviews, guidance, and training modules such as the Graham Allen's Report (2011) on early intervention, and the Tickell Report (2011) that looked at reviewing the EYFS and used the term in deficit: 'school unreadiness'. Even during the following years, no clear and agreed definition has emerged. I would urge the development of a shared understanding and agreement as this would be a significant uniting force for further partnership between early years and schools. And now 30 hours childcare has become a live and national policy, partnerships and collaborations have never been more important.

KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

There are some real risks that without a shared value base, we will sleep-walk into some unwanted practice. If school readiness means we all support children to develop their key skills in communication, speaking, listening and questioning, social and emotional wellbeing, and physical development, then count me in. If it is about producing learning robots trained to comply with a rigid and inflexible education system, then I am less keen on the idea. Because as the Ofsted report said "children require

high quality provision and individualised support". All policy makers and all types of provision, including schools, should remember this and individualise their approaches, wherever possible.

My argument is school readiness should be a partnership, and not just the 'job' of the early years sector, it is one that is best achieved by parents, providers, partners and schools. I fear the pre-school sector is often judged or singled-out to blame if a child doesn't conform to the norm when arriving at school for the first time. And on that matter, schools need to have readiness for working with young children and their families. It's a two-way thing. It's all about quality transition that respects diversity, cultural differences and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

What parents and carers do on a daily basis to support their children's learning is not only important, it is essential. Even for our most frequent and long-term users of early learning, their most significant influence is their parents. And as a sector, we should feel proud of how we engage and include parents in our services. And the ways in which we support home learning. However, we should not be complacent, we can always do more. So often, I meet children who have low confidence, under developed skills in language and learning, low physical development and activities, and I see this replicated in their parents. Our role, in all children's services, including schools, is to support parents to achieve their full potential too. And we do. By providing our services, before school age, we offer parents opportunities to grow and develop, learn and work, build self-esteem and confidence, and improve communication skills.

SCHOOL-READY PARENTS

These all contribute to a school readiness for parents. School ready parents are much more confident to engage with school and able to feel included in their communities. They will also be best placed to support those vitally important periods of transition as well.

Partnerships with other settings acknowledge that children may attend two or more provisions. And specialist interventions such as speech and

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language therapy offer other inputs too. They help to inform assessments, recommendations and effective transitions for individual children. Initial assessments must effectively and efficiently identify a child's starting point. Accuracy and quality here buys us the time we need to develop and individualise development programmes for all children, and drive our work in partnership with other services and professionals that offer a specialist perspective.

There are opportunities for us to balance the use of child-led and adult-led sessions. If a child becomes used to participating and enjoying adult-led learning activities, they will be ready to engage with this when it is presented to them in school. Not forgetting that it is child-led activities that allow children to become independent learners, explorers and individuals, and this is of equal value to me, and something that needs to be reflected more in the school day. This is because learning in later school years, and certainly in FE and HE sectors is structured in this way.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Research shows how beneficial to language development it is for children if adults around them (early years workers and parents or carers) speak clearly to children and offer opportunities to speak, be imaginative, construct sentences and ask questions. Research has shown that least advantaged children are likely to hear much fewer spoken words in their early years than their peers (Hart & Risley, 1995).

So, let's work together to agree and shared definition, one that encompasses the multi-sided nature of school readiness, one that includes children, parents and their schools. And in the meantime, let's make sure we build in some of these principles into our everyday practice in early years. Under a shared principle of working together and not apportioning blame.

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James Hempsall, OBE, has worked in the sector for over 25 years. He is a former playworker, children's centre manager, further education lecturer, development worker and projects manager for a national childcare charity. His career has been spent supporting organisations to develop quality and sustainable childcare. James was the National Support Director of the Department for Education (DfE) Achieving Two Year Olds contract, supporting the roll-out of the free entitlement for least-advantaged two year olds. He is currently the National Programme Director for the DfE Childcare Works programme, supporting the implementation of 30 hours childcare as well as a volunteer counsellor/psychotherapist.

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