

# Early years newsletter

An essential quarterly source of policy, research and practice news, views and ideas for everyone working with young children and their families in Scotland

Issue 2

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## Welcome

### You can do it if you really want to

Most people working with children and their families want to make things better, that's the reason they're in the job.

But too often, inspiration and ambition get lost amid everyday working life. Problems of bureaucracy, processes that are difficult to change and demands made by others 'who don't understand' provide powerful obstacles.

Matching action to lofty aspiration is the most difficult part of policy and practice. None of this is unique to the children's sector. The same scenario can be applied to government.

When there is so much to complicate matters, it's important to keep things simple and try to hold in mind children's experiences.

Turn awkward purchasing systems, or the process of inspection to the advantage of children. Recognise the influence Westminster has over funding early childhood education and care in Scotland, and then

develop Scottish policy to compensate.

And if direct changes can't be made, minimise their impact on preventing the focus being on what really matters. A creative route around the obstacles is required.

Read Chris Miles and think back to your own childhood.

As the Christie report proclaimed, we know what needs to be done, so now is the time for "urgent and sustained reform".

We can do it if we focus on what really matters, and hope that this newsletter provides some ideas on what to focus on and what to avoid.

Please let us know your views, news and experiences so that we can share them through future editions of this newsletter.

Contact Sarah Burton  
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## Early learning and learning environments

### Case study

#### Think before you buy

*Chris Miles was a nursery head for many years, working for Fife Council where she became early years officer and pioneered nature kindergartens. She was awarded an MBE in the most recent honours for services to education and young people.*

"A few years ago I visited my first grandchild on the evening of her first day at nursery. Knowing the answer to the question, "what did you do at nursery today?" would usually be, "nothing", I asked her to tell me two things she had done. Having recounted that she had painted a picture and played in the sand, she proffered the view that there was an awful lot of stuff there. In response to my badly feigned mild curiosity (I was terribly keen to hear about it), she said that "nobody would BELIEVE how much stuff there is," adding, hands on hips in mild outrage, "and, if you ask ME, I'd say there's far too much stuff!"

This was music to my ears. In recent years I have been increasingly troubled that there are too many adults who believe that a good experience for children is something that can be bought, and the more 'stuff' you buy, the richer the experience. I determinedly maintain the view that the key to rich developmental experiences for children is adults who observe and reflect constantly in a continuing effort to see where children are coming from.

Some of the most useful reflection comes from going back in time and talking to the child still inside us, that represents who we were, and influenced who we have become.

So, on my training sessions, when I ask people to remember their childhood and play, 'stuff' isn't usually mentioned. What is valued are places, playmates, and being resilient and resourceful.

After all, imagination is not about what you've got, it's about what you've *not* got.

So people tell me childhood memories filled with symbols and representation; they recount whole scenarios and conversations that took place in their imaginations, they remember their creativity, problem solving, and resourcefulness, and relive the amazing capacity they had as children to invite one another into their wild imaginings, story making and character creating.

This 'stuff' is not for sale. But the stuff that is for sale is being bought from ever diminishing resources and, more importantly, has the power to prevent the real stuff of childhood from happening.

We are the trained educators; equipment catalogues are put together by trained salespeople who want our money. Before we spend it, we need to have worked out what we need to buy, what form it will take, and what its purpose will be, otherwise we are indulging ourselves on a pointless spending spree.

Think: when this 'stuff' has been bought, provided and set up, what will the children know that they did not know before? What will they understand that they didn't before? What skill will they have that they did not have before? What might they work through with this? What will have been gained? What could we gain for children without spending any money at all?

I suggest there are a few wee people we need to observe more closely, and certainly a few wee people inside ourselves whose early years we need to remember."

*Chris Miles tutors the **half day course: transforming early years spaces on a shoestring**, Edinburgh, 17 November*  
[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra\\_tsh\\_ow.php?ref=1548](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra_tsh_ow.php?ref=1548)

*She is an expert on nature kindergartens and outdoor learning in the early years, having pioneered Fife Nature Kindergartens, which feature on Education Scotland's outdoor learning online resources. Almost 80% of local authority pre-school establishments have regular weekly nature kindergarten sessions in local woodlands throughout Fife.*

*UK children trapped in a materialistic culture – new Ipsos Mori/Unicef report*  
[www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/News/Research-shows-UK-children-caught-in-materialistic-trap/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/News/Research-shows-UK-children-caught-in-materialistic-trap/)



## Policy matters

### Legislation and early years

The government's legislative programme has been published. First up is the **Rights of Children and Young People Bill** to be brought forward in 2012. The Bill aims to establish in law the responsibilities of Scottish Ministers to have 'due regard' to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when exercising any of their functions. This Bill will provide the basis for the draft titled **Children's Services Bill** to be introduced in a later session of Parliament, which will have a more specific focus on the delivery of services to children and young people.

On the upside this means there is time to further influence government, to ensure that the Children's Services Bill is bold and ambitious and is likely to impact positively on children's lives. On the downside, it might mean local authorities further delay action on investing in early years services in anticipation of the requirements of legislation.

### Early years briefings and reports

Children in Scotland has produced several briefings on Early Childhood Education and Care and the urgent need to invest and transform provision for families and young children:

- Briefing: **What the Government's Programme for Scotland means for children, young people and their families** (September 2011)
- Early Years Briefing Paper 7: **How they did it: Slovenia and Norway's Early Childhood Education and Care policy** (September 2011)
- Early Years Briefing Paper 6: **Legislating to improve outcomes for young children in Scotland** (September 2011)

- Early Years Briefing Paper 5: **Scotland's Additional Support for Learning Act as a resource for young children (and their parents) and for early years providers** (August 2011)
- Early Years Briefing: **Scotland's new government and its Promises for young children and their families** (July 2011)
- Special report 2: **Early Childhood Education and Care: Developing a fully integrated early years system** (September 2011)
- Special report 1: **The Costs of Childcare** (February 2011)

Members can access all these briefings in the policy briefings section of the Children in Scotland members' webpages.

If you are uncertain about your membership or having any difficulty accessing these briefings or reports please email [jbainbridge@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:jbainbridge@childreninscotland.org.uk) or [asmith@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:asmith@childreninscotland.org.uk)

There has been an important opportunity for voices to be heard at a series of government consultation events. Minister Angela Constance has been attending all events in September and October. If you are attending, this is the chance to encourage the Government to be bold. If not, then there is still plenty of time to influence decisions. Send your comments to the government at [childrenserviceslegislation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:childrenserviceslegislation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or [earlyyearsframework@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyearsframework@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)



### Learning outside – reflecting, documenting and explaining to inspectors

Earlier in the summer there was discussion in England about changes to health and safety guidelines for schools aimed at making it simpler for teachers to take children off site. The health and safety executive head was robust in laying the blame at 'misguided jobsworths' who limit children's activities through spurious health and safety concerns. Such practice wrongly has its focus on easing adult professional lives and minimising adult anxiety, rather than considering children's best interests. However, putting children first does not always make things simple.

At a recent training session arranged by Children in Scotland and led by Chris Miles, a number of delegates expressed frustration that their efforts to provide outdoor experiences for children that freed their imagination and their inventiveness were not understood or appreciated by inspectors who sought more traditional structured learning, but in an outdoor environment. Neither side would have felt they were not putting children's interests first and both were probably frustrated by each other's failure to appreciate the other's viewpoint.

For many working in the early years, whose days of making mud pies and collecting sticks and stones are a happy but distant memory, understanding how children's experience of the outdoors enriches their lives and learning is not automatic, but takes time. It is not just inspectors who might need a bit of reassurance; staff and parents might be unnerved by a lack of formal learning materials.

Experienced practitioners suggest that the way around these obstacles is through more formal documentation of the day-to-day observation and reflection that would be part of providing and developing such outdoor spaces. A more formal documentation process helps staff to really think through children's experiences and consider and understand their own enabling roles. As well as helping them provide even better learning environments, staff gain confidence about their decisions, which can aid the process of communication between staff and inspectors. What is important is that this process of documentation and reflection supports the original aim of providing enriching learning environments, is purposeful and manageable, and does not take over as a task of its own.

For example, Juliet Robertson (Creative Star Learning) comments: "A similar query arose last week in a nursery where I'm working because all the children had to play with outside were some ropes, a big rope, tyres and natural materials. Our solution is to undertake a weekly observation in the indoor and outdoor spaces where a member of staff will note the language, interaction and play observed. This observation will be discussed at the weekly meeting with noted action points on how, for example, all practitioners can extend and challenge the children's learning through careful facilitation. Each member of staff will take a turn at doing this, with a different focus each week; for example, numeracy, literacy, fostering creativity, cooperative learning. The aim is to compile evidence and actions that demonstrate that everyone is aware and working to develop their practice, and at the same

time ensure children's needs are met through play-based experiences rather than structured activities. In my experience it is when these discussions arise that practitioners develop confidence and are better able to articulate what they are doing and why."

The new Education Scotland brings together inspection systems and curriculum guidance with the aim of better alignment between the two. Online examples and links to the practice of nature kindergartens, forest schools, and outdoor play are now housed by the same body managing the inspection of such settings (see below).

## Take it further

### Outdoor learning online resources

Education Scotland has been adding to its online outdoor learning resources. There are **short films from Grounds for Learning** explaining and promoting "natural curriculum in the early years"; "nature's playground"; and "fire as a context for learning".

A series of **Woods for Learning case studies** are online too with examples from nursery and primary schools. Cowgate Under 5's Centre's case study describes how it has used their Forest School as an approach to developing leadership.  
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/w/woodsforlearning/index.asp?id=educationaltheme%5C|presentation>

A free event: "**School Grounds – designing for nature, health, learning and play**" delivered by Scottish Natural Heritage, Grounds for Learning and the Scottish Government is on Monday 14 November 2011 at Thornlie Primary School. Contact [sgp@snh.gov.uk](mailto:sgp@snh.gov.uk) or visit <http://www.snh.gov.uk/news-and-events/events/event-details/?id=749>

### Making space publication

A new publication from Children in Scotland is packed with images of inspiring spaces for children, indoors and out, from across the world. Alongside articles by architects, academics, and campaigners the publication showcases the winning, and many shortlisted, entries to the Making Space 2010 international award which focused on excellence and innovation in architecture and design for children and young people and attracted entries from 26 countries.

Order your free copy online  
[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/pub\\_tshow.php?ref=PUB0370](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/pub_tshow.php?ref=PUB0370)

### Funding for spaces and places

A new Big Lottery Fund 'community spaces Scotland' has been launched for community projects run for, and by, voluntary and community organisations to help local people take the lead in improving the spaces and places that matter to them. Schools, community councils and social enterprises can also apply. The average grant size is likely to be around £100,000, but applications for grants between £10,000 and £250,000 can be submitted. Find out more here:  
[http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog\\_community\\_spaces\\_scotland](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_community_spaces_scotland)



## Play England publication - outdoor play and learning -

This evaluation of the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) programme trialled in 60 schools in England found the scheme dramatically shifted schools' attitudes to play, much to the benefit of pupils who returned to the classroom 'ready to learn'. Changes introduced included:

- Providing training and mentoring for teaching staff and lunchtime supervisors
- Giving children a licence to play in all weathers
- Redesigning outdoor spaces to enhance their 'playability'
- Introducing a range of play materials that children could use imaginatively
- Embedding play into other areas of school practice.

The free report includes insights into how reluctant and uncertain school staff, including teachers and assistants, transformed their attitudes and their school provision. It includes a useful bibliography on young children and play environments. <http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/340836/supporting-school-improvement-through-play.pdf>

## Suzanne Zeedyk and the Connected Baby

The connected baby is a film conversation by Suzanne Zeedyk and Jonathan Robertson on babies capacity and readiness to communicate and respond to others: "their very brain pathways are shaped by the kinds of responses that they receive from other people." There will be a screening in autumn 2011 in Edinburgh and Paisley and limited free DVDs available. More information, articles and opinion are on Suzanne Zeedyk's website: [www.suzannezeedyk.com](http://www.suzannezeedyk.com)

Suzanne Zeedyk was a speaker at Children in Scotland's conference **The Future of Foster Care in Scotland** on 13 September. Children in Scotland members can access a report of the conference in the members' section of the website. [www.childreninScotland.org.uk/members](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/members)



## Supporting parents

### Case study

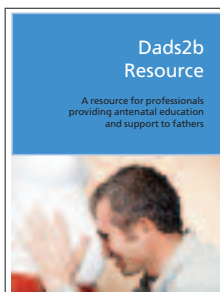
#### Peer support for a mellow dad

In prison for most of his adult life, father to two children in care, former perpetrator of drug and alcohol-fuelled anger and violence, Jim (not his real name) is now a mellow dad who has been able to establish close bonds with his third child.

While taking part on a 12-week mellow dads parenting course, Jim's story was one of trying to repair damage to relationships with his children and gaining control over his own addictions and emotions. The course ended but the peer support it began continued with a dads' football team set up as way of everyone keeping in touch. During this time Jim mentioned that he was going to have a third child with a new partner, who already had a child. **Dads worker** Andy began working with Jim one-to-one, helping him gain ante-natal knowledge and learn about care for babies. A trip to the labour unit and a meeting with a midwife helped allay antenatal anxieties.

After the birth Andy helped him with a baby massage course at his home, which ended with Jim keen to join a dads' play group, led by Andy, to spend time with other dads and their babies and children in a play-based environment.

This one-to-one support for one man, has the potential to transform the lives of a new baby, a stepsibling, and two half-siblings. Supporting parents is not just about new mums. Dads, including non-resident dads who often become step parents, have a huge influence on children's lives and support for their



parenting has the potential to make a difference at any stage in their children's lives.

A new **Dads2be Resource**, based on expert antenatal knowledge and the experience of providing antenatal courses for dads in West Lothian, is available free online:  
[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource\\_A-2.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource_A-2.pdf). If you'd prefer a CD Rom contact Sara Collier on 0131 222 2412 or email [scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk)

### Policy matters

#### Welfare reform

Several member organisations of Children in Scotland have been working together to amend the current Welfare Reform Bill at Westminster to ensure no sanctions are made against parents who are unable to secure affordable, accessible, good quality childcare, and to enshrine the principle that the childcare required to allow parents to be employed must also be in the best interests of the child. Although the amendment was not adopted by the House of Commons, Action for Children Scotland, Barnardo's Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland, Children 1<sup>st</sup> and Children in Scotland are pursuing action in favour of it by the House of Lords.

The Bill had its second reading in the Lords on 13 September, where there was much criticism of the potential impact on families, and child poverty. The high costs of childcare that make it difficult for families to increase their income through work were repeatedly raised, alongside the potential implications of the decision to cap welfare benefits. Unfortunately, at this stage, no peer raised concerns about the quality of care on offer and it being in the best interests of the child. But there is still time. The Bill will now go to a further committee and report stage before having a 3<sup>rd</sup> reading in the Lords.

The Bill also proposes changes to child maintenance, with a green paper setting out plans for a UK wide statutory scheme. Responding to this, Children in Scotland raised a number of concerns; the paper did not, for example, recognise that family support services are a devolved issue.  
[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/CiS\\_DWP\\_CMRresponseFinal7April11.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/CiS_DWP_CMRresponseFinal7April11.pdf)

Contact Marion Macleod  
[mmacleod@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:mmacleod@childreninscotland.org.uk)

If you have evidence and information let us know, or why not contact individual Lords directly? Read the transcript of the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading debate so you can see the views of the Lords. A date has yet to be set for the committee meeting, but Children in Scotland's weekly policy update email will keep you up to speed. (contact [scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk))

#### Fathers and football

Children in Scotland provided written and oral evidence to the Justice Committee examining the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill, raising the need for prevention to be a higher priority with investment in early childhood and support for young fathers in particular. Research finds that fatherhood is often a trigger for young men to begin to reflect on their lives and make positive changes. Ensuring there is sufficient support available to help and encourage young dads to re-evaluate their lives would be part of an important contribution to preventing the prejudice and violent behaviour this Bill is attempting to change. This was just one of the points made in Children in Scotland's evidence to the Justice committee. Read the full response online:  
<http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/OffensivebehaviourBillresponseAugust2011.pdf> and  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/Business/ORSearch/ReportView.aspx?r=6385&mode=pdf>

## Childcare costs and benefits

Save the Children and the Daycare Trust conducted a survey of parents to establish whether and how costs and the availability and quality of childcare were preventing parents from taking up paid work. Cost was found to be a major barrier preventing parents on the lowest incomes from accessing childcare. Those in work and in severe poverty are considering giving up jobs because of the reduced level of support provided by the working tax credit for childcare.  
[www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland)

Children in Scotland's **The Costs of Childcare** published in February 2011 is available free online.  
[www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/CIS\\_Costsofchildcarereport\\_FEB2011.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/CIS_Costsofchildcarereport_FEB2011.pdf)

A report on findings from the **Working for Families** programme outlines clearly the barriers to helping parents move into work or training. Complex and inflexible childcare, tax credit and funding arrangements are top the list of barriers. The report includes a list of case studies illustrating the problems faced. Download it free here:  
<http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/workingforfamilieschallengesforthefuture.aspx>

These issues will be discussed at the one-day seminar, **Rich in possibility: ending child poverty in Scotland, 17 November 2011**, Edinburgh,  
[www.childreninscotland.org.uk/poverty](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/poverty)

## New poverty data report

**Exploring poverty gaps among children in the UK** is a new paper from Westminster's department for work and pensions looking at existing poverty data in different ways to look at the extent of child poverty for those who are below the relative poverty threshold. One conclusion is that parents' attachment to the labour market appears to be the key factor which protects children against low income, a finding which should be considered in the context of recent surveys

(outlined above) into the cost of childcare, which result in parents' exclusion from the labour market. Read the report here:  
<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/WP103.pdf>

## Parents and young children's learning

One of the latest Growing up in Scotland reports, **Parental service use and informal networks in the early years** reports that some parents find it hard to access any formal services for their children and it is often those parents and children who might derive most benefit from support that are put off. Mothers surveyed by the Growing up in Scotland research project reported a range of reasons for not accessing formal early childhood services, but cost and lack of availability was an issue for some. For many the reasons are complex and cultural. While the report finds that many mothers (the research did not address fathers' views) found, for example, group antenatal sessions a source of scrutiny and stress rather than support, it concludes that "targeting appropriate interventions" is one solution. While the findings of this report are a vital insight into new parents' attitudes to formal services, the conclusion seems to run counter to these findings. Targeting has the potential to bring even closer scrutiny and assessment and can often simply miss the mark. Offering a range of universal but personalised services suitable for a range of cultures and personalities, emphasising relationships of trust and continuity are more likely to make an impact than further identification of need and resistance to traditional services.

What do you think? Read the research findings online here:  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/05/25092504/0>

Three other **Growing up in Scotland reports** were published in May this year:

*Changes in child cognitive ability in the pre-school years*  
*Parenting and children's health*

*Change in early childhood and the impact of significant events*

Read them online here  
<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/gus/publicity.html>

## Impact of parental support for children's learning – two new reports

Two longitudinal studies report the vital role of parental support for children's learning early in life and throughout school. The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, also known as 'Children of the Nineties' has been used to look at the early communication environment in a child's first two years of life, and the role this plays in preparing children for school. **The role of language in children's early educational outcome** findings fit with what is known generally about the importance of early learning and language, but one finding offers a challenge to policy approaches that seek to target extra support based on socio-economic criteria. The study found the "communication environment is a more dominant predictor of early language than social background. In the early stages of language development, it is the particular aspects of a child's communication environment that are associated with language acquisition rather than the broader socio-economic context of the family."

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RB134>

The EPPE project report "**Performing against the odds: developmental trajectories of children in the EPPSE 3-16 study**" found that parental support for children's learning early in life and throughout their formal learning enabled children to transcend socio and economic disadvantage and achieve at school. These parents made use of both positive and negative experiences of their own, valued education highly and supported their children, often while experiencing severe poverty, demonstrating high levels of resilience to their circumstances. The report suggests that these

determined parents attitudes compensate for lack of the cultural and social capital more easily available to other families. While support for parenting is important, more impact could be made by finding other ways to provide this capital for children with less resilient and determined parents, through school settings.

Read the full report here:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR128.pdf>

## Take it further

### Supporting fathers

The new **Dads2be Resource** was launched as part of NHS Scotland's new parenting education strategy and has been made available throughout Scotland for use by dads workers, midwives, health visitors, and anyone working with soon-to-be new parents. It was produced in partnership by Children in Scotland, NHS Lothian, NCT, West Lothian Sure Start and Fathers Network Scotland. If you'd like to know more, contact [Kallen@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:Kallen@childreninscotland.org.uk)

Download the resource here:

[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource\\_A-2.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource_A-2.pdf)

Read the August 2011 **newsletter of 'Making Gender Equality Real – for children, fathers and families**

– Download it here -

<http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/MakingGenderEqualityRealProjectUpdateAug2011.pdf>

Katrina Allen from Children in Scotland, who works on Making Gender Equality Real – for Children, Fathers and Families, will be at the event **Fatherhood Today on 15 November in Edinburgh** organised by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships. [www.crfr.ac.uk/events/fathersevent.html](http://www.crfr.ac.uk/events/fathersevent.html)

### Training – working with parents

Stan Godek leads training on **Working with Parents** on behalf of Children in Scotland. A one-day course for all those working with children who'd like to improve their relationship with parents is on 29 September, in Edinburgh. Details here:

[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra\\_tshow.php?ref=1525](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra_tshow.php?ref=1525)

### Parents wanted for child health information research

Where do parents find out what they need to know concerning health care for their young children? How are their information support needs met, or not met? Who do parents turn to, or consult, when they need information about their children's health?

Children in Scotland is conducting a short piece of qualitative research for NHS Health Scotland to help answer these questions.

Health Scotland is especially concerned with parents who have been *under-represented* in, or inadequately served by, early years information services and support. So, we are concentrating on an illustrative sample of three groups of parents: fathers (biological or *de facto*), parents with literacy/numeracy issues and young parents (under 24).

You may be working with parents in the groups described above and know some who might like to participate in focus groups, or individual interviews, during which they will be invited to share their experiences and ideas with our research team. We will also be conducting an online survey and using other means to reach eligible parents who prefer not to participate in focus groups or face-to-face interviews.

Parents may contact us directly themselves, or you may contact us on their behalf (if they so wish). Please contact Sara Collier [scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk) or on 0131 222 2412, if you would like further information or have an interest in working with us to arrange a focus group in your area.

## Working together

### Case study

#### Listening to young children

Working together isn't just about adults talking to each other, it's about working together with children. Professionals can only work together effectively if they really understand what they are trying to achieve, and without listening to young children carefully, adults might be missing the point and putting their energies in the wrong direction.

Listening to children should be part of daily practice in early years settings through observation, conversation, and reflection, but there are a range of particular methods for enabling children's views to be taken on board. Most important is adults' responses. Only by reflecting on what has been said and changing practice accordingly can children's communication be really meaningful.

City of Edinburgh Council's continuing professional development programme for early years staff puts a strong emphasis upon young children's rights and their involvement in planning.

Stenhouse Child and Family Centre has developed the use of Talking Mats with young children as well as with older children and their parents in preparation for children's hearings. Talking mats are a way of using images with children to facilitate discussion about their lives; what they are happy with, what they are unhappy with and what they are unsure about. The talking mat then empowers the child to talk to staff about painful events in his/her life and also ensures that the child's views and feelings are taken into consideration in important decision-making forums. Stenhouse also use this technique as a form of self-evaluation to gather children's views about their

experience in the Centre. Depute Manager, Leeanne Turner is an accredited trainer in Talking Mats and has offered training to all early years settings and partner providers in Edinburgh as part of the Council's Growing Confidence pre-birth to three training programme. [www.growingconfidence.org](http://www.growingconfidence.org)

Stenhouse Child and Family Centre will be hosting a study visit during day one of Children in Scotland's annual conference. Details: here: <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/minds>

**Also in Edinburgh ...** This year Liberton Nursery School has been awarded a rights respecting school Unicef award and the Cowgate Under 5s Centre has been awarded an Investing in Children accreditation. This latter award has two key criteria, explained by Investing in Children's Liam Cairns: "They have to demonstrate that there's a dialogue going on between the people who run the nursery and the children who use it, and as a consequence of that dialogue things are changed. What is very important is that the evidence comes from the children themselves." Read the accreditation report here: [http://www.iic-uk.org/modules/download\\_gallery/dlc.php?file=97](http://www.iic-uk.org/modules/download_gallery/dlc.php?file=97)

There are other tools for gaining children's views on particular issues, such as floorbooks, or making use of photos with the 'Mosaic Approach'. A useful list can be found on the creativestar blog: <http://creativestarlarning.blogspot.com/2011/08/cow-gate-community-garden-party.html> Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People is running a Right Wee Blether this autumn, asking those caring and working with young children aged between 2 and 5 to let him know their views on what matters most to them. Find out more: here: <http://www.sccyp.org.uk/infoforadults/a-right-wee-blether>

## Policy matters

### Competent people, incompetent systems?

'What works' is the heading for many policy documents, events and programmes, suggesting that the application of a particular winning formula will achieve predicted results. And sometimes it can. However, the recipe for relationships is not as predictable as those for cakes and so identifying the precise ingredients (such as list of required competencies) does not necessarily lead to the positive outcomes predicted.

**New research** commissioned by the European Commission into the concept of competencies in Early Childhood Education and Care across Europe finds that understanding of the whole system is more important than identifying its constituent parts. 'What works' is not a series of individuals' skills, knowledge and attitudes but how these develop within a system.

The research, *CORE study on competence requirements in early childhood education and care*, to be published in October, is reported on in the latest issue of **Children in Europe magazine** (details below). This extract from the article by researchers Michel Vandenbroeck and Mathias Urban outlines the key recommendation from their findings:

"The *competent system* develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context. A key feature of a *competent system* is its support for realising individuals' capabilities for developing responsible and responsive practices that meet the needs of children and families in rapidly changing societal contexts. Therefore, a shift of focus, from an individual to a systemic understanding of *competence* lies at the basis of recommendations that can be drawn from our findings. These recommendations include the paid time for planning, documentation and reflection, the

involvement in peer learning (e.g. with colleagues from neighbouring institutions), the combination of work with attendance at training institutions, and the participation in action research projects or practice-based research. These conditions apply to *all* practitioners, regardless of their level of formal qualification."

The search for the right professional ingredients or competencies is underway in Scotland with the recent consultation on 'Common core of skills, knowledge and understanding and values for the children's workforce'. Overarching frameworks such as Getting it Right for Every Child attempt to contribute to systemic competencies. However, on the ground, in Early Childhood Education and Care the divides between those working with children under 3 and those over 3 through funding, training and employment conditions remain strong and entrenched, and so work against attempts to bolster individual competencies through higher qualifications and training.

The same issue of individual competencies and the importance of systems can be found in other areas of children's services. For example, midwives may be well trained and skilled at developing positive relationships with women that could impact on their wellbeing and the health of their pregnancy and the early days of new parenthood. However, systems can sometimes prevent these important relationships developing because women are unable to see the same midwife throughout their pregnancy, occasionally seeing a different staff member throughout

### **Children in Europe issue 21 – Empowering children, parents and the workforce? The competency debate**

The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue examines how the concept of competency is not just confined to thinking about professionals but informs ideas of parenting as a series of competencies that can be taught.

Members of Children in Scotland receive Children in Europe free as part of their membership package. Find out more here:  
[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/abo\\_m\\_bm.htm](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/abo_m_bm.htm)

The issues raised in the magazine will be under discussion at the **Children in Europe 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference in Stirling on 11 October**.

Speakers include Professor Claire Cameron, from Anglia Ruskin University on what research tells us about competencies. And the event will offer a valuable insight into New Zealand's approaches to working with families and support for early childhood.  
<http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/cieten>



### **Workforce competencies: The Effective Provision of Preschool/Secondary Education (EPPE/EPPSE) Project**

With discussion of workforce competencies often comes mention of the ongoing EPPE/EPPSE project. This research is, for example, cited on the Scottish Government's guidance on pre-school teacher deployment (2009). The project began in 1997 and has since followed close to 3000 children in England from preschool through age 14. The project has been extended to 2013 in order to follow the same children through age 16+, looking at their final years in compulsory schooling and where they go next. One of many EPPE findings is the importance of 'quality' pre-school experience as a predictor of children's more positive cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes later in life. The study linked 'quality' in part to staff qualifications.

EPPE found that the percentage of pre-school staff who are qualified teachers is predictive of positive child outcomes, and also that quality was higher in settings

with managers who had "qualified teacher status" (QTS). These teacher-qualified members of staff provided children with more direct teaching than their non-QTS peers, as well as "more experience of academic activities" and "higher cognitive challenges". Non-QTS staff were found to work as "significantly better pedagogues" when working with qualified teachers.

As EPPE is widely used as an evidence base for recommendations on early childhood policy, it is important to examine these findings with a critical eye, in particular examining how characteristics like 'quality' and 'outcomes' are measured in this study. EPPE is largely based on statistical analysis (though it supplements this with case studies that focus on pedagogical practices). Therefore EPPE requires concrete, measurable characteristics, and so uses a variety of standardised rating scales to collect data.

While not questioning the rigour of the EPPE study, we could question the assumptions that underpin it.

First, Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) are a highly contested area in the education field in England. In a recent review of Key Stage 2 testing, for example, Lord Bew and the review committee questioned the use of standardised testing to measure student's abilities in creative writing. Unlike spelling or grammar, creative writing does not lend itself to clearly defined right/wrong answers, and the review identified that there are "clearly significant issues with the current writing tests."

Second, neither early years foundation degrees in England nor childhood practice degrees in Scotland existed in 1997 when children in pre-schools were recruited for the study. The historic nature of the EPPE/EPPSE research parameters needs to be considered in light of changing qualifications, professional practice and entitlement to services.

Read more here:

**Guidance on pre-school teacher deployment:**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/teac/herdeployment>

**The EPPE 3-11 Project: Final Report from the Primary Phase: Pre-school, School and Family Influences on Children's Development During Key Stage 2 (Age 7-11).** The report can be downloaded from <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/eppe3-11/eppe3-11pubs.htm>

Lord Bew's report can be found at [www.education.gov.uk/ks2review](http://www.education.gov.uk/ks2review)

**Early Childhood Education and Care - a quick comparison of Slovenia, Norway and Scotland**

**Slovenia** established its first national programme for children from 1 to 6 in 1979. During the 1990s, Slovenia began to invest in the early years workforce, and develop a national curriculum. Slovenia now has a fully integrated early years system with a legal entitlement for all children to a subsidised full day place in a service following the end of paid maternity/paternity care at 12 months.

- Population: 2 million
- GDP: 89% of EU average
- Child wellbeing: 7th in Europe
- % of Households with children aged 0-6 in poverty: 10.9%

Over the 15 years since the 1995 Kindergarten Act, **Norway's** pre-school services have developed into a fully integrated Early Childhood Education and Care system with (from 2009) a legal entitlement to all children to a subsidised full day place in a service following the end of paid maternity/paternity care at 12 months.

- Population: 4.6 million
- GDP: 179% of EU average
- Child wellbeing: 4th in Europe

- % Households with children aged 0-6 in poverty: 6.7%

UK figures, which include Scotland show that 33% of children under 3 attend formal services with 5% attending for more than 30 hours. For children aged 3 to 5, the numbers are 89% for part-time and 24% for fulltime, respectively.

- Population: 5.2 million
- GDP: 114% for UK, Scotland is just under the UK figure
- Child wellbeing: 24th in Europe for UK, with Scotland considered similarly low and lower in aspects such as child poverty.
- % Households with children aged 0-6 in poverty: 22.6% (UK)

For more detailed information read the full briefing: Early Years Briefing Paper 7: **How they did it: Slovenia and Norway's Early Childhood Education and Care policy** (September 2011)

**So what would integrated early childhood education and care look like in Scotland?**

A European research programme led by Children in Scotland found that integrated systems of early childhood education and care were highly correlated with low child poverty and high child wellbeing. [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi)

A high quality, integrated approach to early childhood education and care brings together all those working with children from birth and does not divide them according to education or care backgrounds or roles.

So how can Scotland begin to emulate such a system? Children in Scotland has published a detailed report with recommendations for action to develop a fully integrated early years system. The first recommendation is that the Scottish Government should use the European Commission's Communication

on Early Childhood Education and Care as a policy framework for Scotland. (See briefing paper 3 – <http://childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/EYFbriefingpaper3v3.pdf>).

Read the full report *Early Childhood Education and Care: Developing a Fully Integrated Early Years System* by visiting the 'policy briefings' page of the Children in Scotland members' webpages [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/members](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/members) Or for more information email [sburton@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:sburton@childreninscotland.org.uk)

**The Christie report: let's get on with it**

The Christie Commission was tasked with developing recommendations for the future delivery of public services, so having asked for advice, hopefully the new Government will take heed. Along with Susan Deacon's recent early years report, *Joining the Dots* (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/343337/0114216.pdf>), and the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee's work on preventative spending, the Christie Commission call for greater emphasis on actions that will diminish the need for costly remedial public services and crisis interventions is welcome. And, while the public sector must take a leadership role in this direction, including a serious reallocation of existing resources, the voluntary sector should have a prominent role in both the planning and implementation of these desired actions to prevent harm, rather than responding only after the fact. There is not much more to be said other than we need to get on with it.

Read Children in Scotland's full response here <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/ChristieResponse.pdf> and read the Christie report here <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/publicservicescommission>

## McCormac Review – flexibility

Many of the review's findings reflect the recommendations made by Children in Scotland for teachers' working hours to be more flexible, particularly in relation to early childhood education (see CIS report on ECEC), and in recognition of the importance of the social dimension of education. Read the review report <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/reviewofteacheremployment>, and read CIS consultation response here [http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/Teacheremployment\\_April2010\\_CIS.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/Teacheremployment_April2010_CIS.pdf)

## Preventative spending

The Parliamentary Finance Committee sought evidence on preventative spending last year and published a report on the importance of investing in the early years. The new committee sought further guidance to aid scrutiny of the forthcoming spending review and the 2012-13 draft budget. <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s4/committees/finance/Callforevidence-Budget201213.htm>

Children in Scotland published a briefing on pre-conception health, one aspect of preventative spending, as well as two detailed responses to the initial preventative spending inquiry and responded to this further call for evidence. [http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/PreventativeResponse010911\\_000.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/PreventativeResponse010911_000.pdf)

## Take it further

### Business and society

Learning and skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the issue under discussion in a joint project bringing together the Goodison Group in Scotland (a think tank of individuals from business and education) and the Scottish Futures Forum. Details of their collaboration are online, along with an invitation to take part and an article published in *The Scotsman* by project chair Sir Andrew Cubie. Those invited to the first event included "professionals

involved in early years work" signalling the significance of this sector to the aims of this project, which is, "how Scotland can become a world-leading learning nation by 2025".

Visit:

<http://www.scotlandfutureforum.org/index.php?id=116>  
or email [info@ggis.org.uk](mailto:info@ggis.org.uk)

**This document is one in a series of Children in Scotland publications that highlight issues, research or areas of policy and practice that have a particular impact on children's early years and on the diverse workforce that provides services for this group.**

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