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NEW PRACTITIONER IDEAS
We are all equal in a vague kind of way

AFTER THE quiet of the post-election period we are now up and running with a number of new announcements over the last few days. We have had the release of the common inspection framework that puts early years settings, barring childminders who work for agencies, on an almost even setting with primary schools in terms of how and when they get inspected. Of course, no framework will ever be perfect and there is considerable unease in the sector about the decision not to bring inspections in-house. Ofsted’s reasoning as far as I can tell is that they will bring the training of the external inspectors in-house, but then let the inspections be undertaken by the external providers and that this should allay anyone and everyone’s fears. Maybe it does, but if this is such a great solution, why is this not the same solution for other areas of education that have seen inspections brought fully in-house?

It seems that Ofsted has been listening to the rising number of complaints about its, well, its own inspection processes. But has it delivered a viable solution? It is difficult to tell. Complaints committees that include sector and independent voices sound like a real step forward, but who forms the committees, who drives them and what they end up with will all decide whether they are simply paying lip-service to addressing a problem or are as radical a solution as the sector has called for. These committees must fully represent the sector as a whole, not simply be weighted to the maintained sector; and will childminders have a voice? Time will tell. Maintained nursery schools and academies previously rated good or outstanding will be granted a short inspection during the next cycle to confirm whether they are still at that level. This seems like good sense, but what about PVI settings and childminders? Surely to have a ‘common’ inspection framework, its aspects (or perks) should be commonly applied to every setting that is governed by it? Perhaps it should be renamed the Common Inspection Framework.

It certainly does little to assuage the fears that the government is on a path of PVI elimination. If that sounds scary (it does; it is) then all the rhetoric coming from the education department seems to suggest that it has one focus – move all children to primary school nursery classes, make every primary an academy, give every academy (eventually) to a chain, then wash their hands of education altogether. The education secretary has already said that ‘coasting’ school will tell. Maintained nursery schools and academies previously rated good or outstanding will be granted a short inspection during the next cycle to confirm whether they are still at that level. This seems like good sense, but what about PVI settings and childminders? Surely to have a ‘common’ inspection framework, its aspects (or perks) should be commonly applied to every setting that is governed by it? Perhaps it should be renamed the Common Inspection Framework.

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Funds for staff development

The government recently launched a call for evidence regarding funding levels in the early years, but whatever the outcome it is clear that the cost of childcare provision must include staff development.

The announcement that the government is to review the cost of providing childcare was welcome news. The call for evidence in June is the beginning of the process which, it is to be hoped, will include full and meaningful consultation with the sector that will be listened to and acted on.

The level of free entitlement funding is crucial to the success and sustainability not only of the scheme, but also the sector.

The current situation, where providers are underfunded and have no alternative but to charge higher fees for hours over the free entitlement cannot continue – not least because such cross-subsidy makes a mockery of the ‘free’ entitlement.

There are, however, many questions to be answered throughout the process, not least how the anticipated increase will be funded. Will it be new money or recycled from savings elsewhere? Will local school forums have any influence over local funding levels?

Will there be winners and losers, and what will be the relationship of early years funding to any national funding formula developed for education, which, although promised during the last parliament, did not come to fruition?

How the cost of childcare is calculated and a formula developed and applied is crucial and must take account of the variety of providers, circumstance and factors.

A similar exercise was undertaken by local authorities when tasked by government to develop and apply an Early Years Single Funding Formula to ensure fair funding for all providers in their area. This resulted in some very complex and confusing funding formulas that added to the administrative burden of providers.

Those seeking to enter the early years workforce are, as with most other professions, funding their own initial training, often to degree level. Their own investment is not, however, repaid or rewarded once employed because minimum wage is the norm.

Underfunding of the free entitlement is a significant contributory factor to the low salary levels in the sector. A further consequence of insufficient funding is the reduction in training budgets, reducing further the opportunity for continuing professional development (CPD).

Careers prospects for early years and childcare professionals can be heavily reliant on the resources and circumstance of the individual – what they can or cannot afford to do. The combination of low wages, poor career prospects and dwindling training/CPD budgets does not currently make childcare an attractive professional career option.

Similar circumstances are emerging for the teaching profession, the consequence being the looming spectre of a recruitment and retention crisis. The impact, should the same fate befall the early years profession, would have a devastating impact on the government’s plan to double free childcare for working families.

Research shows the qualification level of staff in pre-school to be the greatest factor in the quality of early years provision. It is the quality of provision provided by highly qualified and experienced staff that influences the long-term overall educational achievement of children.

Initial staff qualification level is part of the journey and continuing professional development is necessary to develop and sustain the workforce of professionals within early years. The true cost of early education and childcare must, therefore, take account of a number of factors, including CPD.

The government has promised to increase free childcare. To do this, the sector not only needs to be funded correctly, it also needs time to build capacity, without which it may struggle to provide the additional places and hours it is expected to deliver.

Learning from the pilot programmes will take time to disseminate and be applied nationwide but it will also be able to make a valuable contribution to the review of funding.

The cost of childcare must include the cost of ongoing CPD for all early years and childcare professionals. Without it, the risk of a recruitment and retention crisis at a time of increasing and more lucrative employment in other sectors is greater and will present significant problems for the government’s planned programme of expansion.

Useful resources

- Voice is currently undertaking a short online survey of nursery workers, including qualifications, pay and conditions: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/nurseriesurvey
- To view the Voice statement on education in the Queen’s Speech, please visit: http://www.voice.theunion.org.uk/index.cfm?cid=1492&page=1
Our message must be clear

Campaigning against government policy is not as easy as it might sound because those in power are very good at ignoring you, however, hard evidence is something that gets noticed and brings rewards.

I REMEMBER EXACTLY where I was when I heard the news that we had won the ratios campaign back in June 2013. Sitting in a cab at 9 am on my way from a morning meeting, I received a call from then-deputy prime minister Nick Clegg, who said to me: ‘Neil, I’ve been so impressed with the Alliance’s campaign against ratios that I thought you’d like to be the first to know – we’re not going to proceed with the plans.’

It was the culmination of months of works – petitions, research, meetings, Freedom of Information Act requests, 24/7 social media campaigning, and more. And it had worked. We had taken on the government – and won.

In the two years since Rewind on Ratios, we at the Alliance have regularly been urged to launch new petitions about a variety of issues – the thinking often being, if it worked for ratios, it can work for this’. The problem is, it is not quite that simple.

One of the most important lessons we, as an organisation, learned from Rewind on Ratios was that successful campaigns are comprised of two key elements – public pressure, and a solid evidence base. The issue is that, often, people only focus on the former, arguing that we need to start a petition, organise a demonstration, produce campaign merchandise, and so forth.

Now, these are all important and useful activities which help to ensure that public awareness about the campaign in question remains high, and puts pressure on politicians and policymakers to actively engage with campaigners. But in our experience, public pressure alone is unlikely to lead to any real or lasting policy change.

This is where the strong evidence base comes is vital. In order for a campaign or lobbying effort to be successful, there has to be a demonstrable evidence base that underpins its aims. In the case of Rewind on Ratios, when explaining his decision to block the plans, then-deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg, said: ‘It is imperative to be led by the evidence.’

It is not enough to know that a policy is flawed, it is not enough to say that it is flawed, and it is not enough to get 5,000 other people to agree that it is flawed. You have to prove that it is flawed.

This is why we took the evidence-based approach with our work to tackle sector underfunding. Over recent months, we have commissioned two independent reports, which showed that the current free entitlement scheme is substantially underfunded, as is the government’s plan to move to 30 hours a week for three and four-year-olds. This is nothing the sector has not been saying for years. But all of a sudden we have hard data to support our concerns.

And what a difference it made. Eight months ago, the government told us it was ‘nonsense to suggest that childcare is underfunded’. Now they have set up a taskforce to look into the issue of underfunding and to initiate a long-called-for review into funding rates.

A year ago, most media reports on childcare focused exclusively on rising costs for parents. Last month, dozens of national newspapers and broadcast news programmes, and hundreds of local and regional papers and radio stations, reported extensively on the early years funding crisis, highlighting our warning that the sector faces meltdown if the issue is not addressed. Try as the government might, it is very difficult to dismiss hard evidence.

And so we have continued with this approach throughout Early Years Agenda, our post-election manifesto for government. Focused on the policy areas of funding, schoolification and Ofsted, the Agenda is an evidence-based call for change, calling for, among other things: A statutory requirement to be placed on local authorities to collect annual data from local providers on the cost of delivering free entitlement places; baseline assessment to be scrapped and the EYFS Profile’s statutory status to be reinstated; and early years inspections to be brought in-house.

This manifesto, and the extensive research and evidence that underpins it, will guide our campaigning work as we continue to meet and engage with government ministers and other key policy-makers, and look to ensure that the views and concerns of the sector on various areas of early years policy are taken into account at the highest level.

The government, and the general public, are finally listening to us. It is up to us to make sure our message is clear.

Useful resources
- For a free copy of the Alliance’s Early Years Agenda manifesto, please visit: www.pre-school.org.uk/EYAgenda-manifesto
- To find out more about the Rewind on Ratios campaign, please visit: https://www.pre-school.org.uk/get-involved/1276/rewind-on-ratios-latest-news
Opinion

Reform must come before offer

Many thousands of families are ready and waiting to take up full 30 free hours offer, so it is vital that the government and sector get reform right from the outset to ensure quality places are available.

ARMIES OF parents are waiting for the government’s 30 hours per week free childcare offer. Our recent NDNA Free Childcare Survey 2015, carried out on the UK’s biggest parenting site, Netmums, found that four-in-five families plan to take up extended free hours for three and four-year-olds in full. The majority are already planning how they could work more hours without a heavy financial burden of childcare in the family financial mix.

But to make the ambitious plans a reality for all those eager families, the nursery sector needs the government’s full support to get reform right from the outset. Our survey was the first time parents have been asked for their thoughts on the government’s pledge to double free childcare for three and four-year-olds in England, with pilots in 2016 and full roll-out in 2017.

Such large-scale and fast-moving expansion is a huge challenge for the sector to meet. NDNA has long campaigned for better levels of funding for the free hours, which most nurseries currently have no choice but to treat as loss leaders. With the hours increasing up to 30, there will be fewer additional hours for parents to be able to buy and, therefore, less chance of nurseries being able to make up the shortfall.

It is vital that the sector gets the uplift that is so desperately needed as a government funding review and promised increase prepares to get under way before parliament’s summer break. That is why NDNA is getting behind the Department for Education’s (DfE) Call for Evidence, which was launched mid-June as part of the funding review.

We have already presented the DfE with vital evidence from the sector including the last six years of NDNA’s annual surveys. Our latest research shows that 85 percent of nurseries in England are making losses on the current 15 hours per week free childcare, an average of £809 per year for each funded child.

We are now asking the whole sector to contribute to this call for evidence by its end date of 10 August to make it a success. NDNA will be at the heart of the funding review, representing the sector and ensuring our members can have their say with the DfE.

But it is not just about the funding of places. We also need to make sure the sector has the high-quality staff to make those places available.

It is not just about the funding of places. We need to make sure the sector has the high-quality staff to make those places available.

Coupled with retention trouble – with staff turnover increasing to 14 percent compared with 12 percent in 2013 (Department for Education figure), which spells widespread and wide-ranging problems with recruitment.

We are seeing situations in which lower-grade staff who picked childcare as their career of choice are leaving because they can earn more at employers like supermarkets that offer more family-friendly hours and less pressure. Early Years Teachers are sometimes moving to school nursery settings for better pay and shorter hours. Nurseries would love to pay their staff more but funding shortfalls constrain what they can afford. A third of respondents said there were not enough applicants qualified to Level 3 applying for vacant positions and that low pay was given as a reason for the lack of suitable candidates.

The drop in apprentices entering childcare is as much as 60 percent in some areas, mainly due to employers being unable to find them with the required level of qualifications as well as the right enthusiasm for working with children. This key area of recruitment needs full government attention. We are calling for the government to work with the sector to overcome workforce problems with a long-term strategy.

Childcare providers are paying more for staff training due to reduced support from local authorities. Despite this, there is an upward trend in employer investment with councils. 64 percent of providers now contribute to training in early years practice with around half paying the full cost. 71 percent of employers contribute to mandatory training with 63 percent footing the whole bill. However, 63 percent said they could not afford to pay for anything that was not mandatory.

Half of qualified Level 2 and 3 practitioners do not have GCSE maths and English at grade C or above, as is required of new candidates. Our recommendations include relaxing stringent GCSE requirements for childcare training, greater investment to workforce development and better career progression pathways to attract candidates to the sector.

Useful resources

Visit the NDNA website to see the full results of both the Workforce Survey 2015 and the Childcare Survey 2015: http://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Reports_and_surveys/ Surveys_and_reports.aspx
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Latest developments

Sector urged to respond to funding ‘call for evidence’

The government has launched a consultation on the cost of childcare funding, ahead of its plan to extend free childcare from 15 to 30 hours a week, which is due to be piloted from September 2016. The call for evidence will close on August 10, 2015.

According to the Department for Education website, the Call for evidence: review of the cost of providing childcare will ‘improve our understanding of how much it costs early years providers to provide childcare and ‘inform the outcome of the review into the cost of providing childcare’. This follows protests from the sector that the current offer is underfunded.

The government intends that the extended free hours will ‘help hard-working families by reducing the cost of childcare and making it easier for parents who want to work, or work more hours, knowing that their children are well cared for’.

In calling for the sector’s views on fair funding, the government has admitted that current rates paid to providers are insufficient: ‘To help deliver this extension, we have committed to increase the average rate paid to providers to the entitlement. It is essential that the rate we pay is fair for providers, value for money to the taxpayer, and consistent with the government’s fiscal plans.’

Information gathered from the call for evidence will be used in the review that is due to be reported in the autumn.

The department has stated it will welcome all contributions, but is particularly interested in:
• Existing studies and research about the cost of childcare, for example assessments carried out by local authorities on the cost of childcare locally.
• Evidence from early years providers about the factors that make up the cost of providing childcare, and how much of the total cost they represent. The department may contact you in future as part of the review, either to discuss. The call for evidence can be found here: https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/
• The childcare sector has responded positively to the announcement, but with notes of caution. Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, said: ‘We warmly welcome the call for evidence on early years funding, which will give providers a much-needed opportunity to share their views and experiences with government. ‘Having previously dismissed its findings, we also hope that the Department for Education will also take this as an opportunity to take into account the independent report into the free entitlement offer commissioned by the Alliance last year, which found that the existing schemes are underfunded by around 20 percent on average.
• ‘Looking ahead, we believe that it’s vital that this review is used to ensure that the early years sector is adequately funded in the long-term.
• A one-off funding increase may make for positive headlines, but will do very little to address the serious problems around business sustainability currently facing providers. As such, we look forward to contributing to the review.
• ‘The devil is in the detail. It is vital that this review is full, thorough and genuinely takes the views and experiences of early years providers into account. Given that the childcare extension plans have been costed at just £350 million a year – a figure that our research suggests is around a quarter of what is actually needed – we are concerned that the government is still significantly underestimating the scale of the existing funding shortfall.
• ‘Simply raising funding rates by an arbitrary amount won’t be enough – it is absolutely crucial that the government ensures that the hourly rate of funding actually covers the cost of delivering funded places. Anything less risks destabilising a childcare system that is already struggling to stay afloat.’

Liz Bayram, chief executive of the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, said: ‘It is excellent news that the government has recognised calls from the sector to review the level of funding for delivering the early education entitlement.

‘PACEY met with the childcare minister this week to share our members’ concerns not only about the level of funding, but about other barriers our members can face in delivering the free entitlement. These include inflexible payment processes in some local authorities, the impact of delays in payment and the variation in rates between different authorities.’

NDNA chief executive, Purnima Tanuku OBE, said: ‘We have been lobbying hard for a funding review to go hand-in-hand with an expansion of free hours. We welcome the commitment from the government to increase the hourly rate… It is essential that the rate paid for free hours is fair to providers. Nurseries need to balance their books for the government’s expansion ambitions to be achieved. The review must result in a meaningful increase in funding for childcare providers.’

Common inspection framework launched

Ofsted has launched its much-anticipated Common Inspection Framework that for the first time brings the early years sector more in line with other levels of education. The changes will include notice of inspection, common terminology and judgements.

Early years judgements will now take the form of ‘overall effectiveness’; ‘effectiveness of leadership and management’; ‘quality of teaching, learning and assessment’; ‘personal development’; ‘behaviour and welfare’; and ‘outcomes for children’.

All schools, which includes maintained nursery schools, but excludes PVI settings, that were judged as good or outstanding in the previous inspection will be subject to a short, one-day inspection every three years. This system works on the assumption that the setting is still good, and aims to clarify whether this is still the case. No new grade will be issued, but if necessary a full inspection will be triggered.

PVI settings will not be subject to the shorter inspections and will receive only a half day notice of impending inspection.

Each Ofsted region will also host a scrutiny committee ‘made up of HMI and leading headteachers, early years and college leaders not involved in carrying out inspections for Ofsted. They will assess and rule on the internal reviews of complaints about inspection’. This move is seen as a response to increasing concern over the inspectorate’s complaints process.

Early years inspections will continue to be outsourced to external providers.
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Consistency lets down framework

Dear Editor,

PACEY welcomes the new Common Inspection Framework as an opportunity to improve consistency across the inspection system. As our recent survey, Building Blocks, shows, there are significant concerns about consistency of inspections.

We are keen therefore to ensure that this new framework offers a real chance to renew trust in the fairness and impartiality of the inspection process among early years providers.

In principle, plans to establish a new complaints scrutiny committee that will include early years representatives is to be applauded. Our sector survey showed confidence in Ofsted’s complaints procedure is currently low among providers.

Ofsted has clearly listened to widespread sector concerns on this issue, and we will be keen to work with the inspectorate to ensure this additional scrutiny has the efficacy it needs to boost providers trust in the complaints process.

PACEY has worked hard with Ofsted to ensure the new Common Inspection Framework recognises the unique early years environment in which our members operate, and we are encouraged to note that a number of our recommendations have been incorporated into the final guidance.

We are particularly pleased to see that our recommendation for a focus on children’s wellbeing and happiness has been preserved as a key inspection criteria. However, we need to balance this with the reality that the new framework focuses on mainly educational outcomes. It will be dependent on inspectors recognising how a play-based approach, as championed by PACEY, can boost outcomes.

It is, therefore, disappointing that early years inspections will not be brought in-house to embed this new ethos of consistency across the whole education system.

Liz Bayram, chief executive, Pacey

Offer is bad news for parents with disabled children

The proposal to double the number of hours of free childcare is great in principle, but could leave mums with disabled children out in the cold of employment choices again.

Charities Contact a Family, Every Disabled Child Matters and the Family and Childcare Trust have warned that the childcare offer for three and four-year-olds does not address the lack of availability of childcare for disabled children.

Their research shows that many families with disabled children can’t access the current offer of 15 free hours a week, as they struggle to find providers with the specialist skills to look after their child. We want fair play for families of disabled children when it comes to getting back to work and enjoying careers.

Our concern is that the offer as it stands will continue to disadvantage mums with disabled children hoping to return to work or increase their hours.

Almost three quarters of mums with disabled children have had to cut back or give up work due to lack of good quality and affordable childcare.

These families are already struggling to access the present entitlement of 15 hours free for their three and four-year-old children. Our concern is that this proposal as it stands will continue to disadvantage them.

We urge the government to ensure local authorities have sufficient funds available to make the childcare offer work for disabled children in the same way it does for other children and families.

This will ensure fairer access to work choices for mums with disabled children and give disabled pre-schoolers the same early education opportunities as other youngsters.

A Parliamentary Inquiry supported by the charities last year found that disabled children were failed by childcare at every step.

Amanda Batten, chief executive
Contact a Family

Government slashes charity funds

Dear Editor,

Children’s Charities have seen their income from government fall by over £150 million in 12 months, according to data published by Children's Partnership and NCVO. An annual survey of charity accounts reveals that the shortfall in income is hitting charities working with children and young people hard – government funding accounts for a greater proportion of income for these charities than it does for the voluntary sector as a whole.

The data shows that local government is a much more significant funder of children and young people’s charities than charities as a whole, suggesting these organisations have been successful in becoming competitive providers of services.

Anna Feuchtwang, chief executive, National Children’s Bureau: ‘This data shows how austerity measures are beginning to bite as local and central government purse strings are tightened. This will significantly affect children’s charities that have shown that with their good community knowledge they can provide cost-effective and high-quality services at a local level.’

Neil Cleeveley, chief executive, NAVCA: ‘This backs up what our members have been telling us for some time. The very groups best placed to help children, young people and their families deal with the impact of austerity are having to deal with rising demand with fewer resources.’

National Children’s Bureau

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Unlock great potential

Sue Husband, director of the National Apprenticeship Service, discusses how nurseries and childcare providers can build a pool of high quality recruits through involvement in the traineeship programme.

Traineeships were launched by the government in 2013 to unlock the potential of young people and to prepare them for their future careers, by helping them become ‘work ready’. They were developed in response to business needs, with research showing over half of employers think school leavers lack the right work experience, while 74 percent of employers say experience is critical or significant when recruiting.

Although we are just two years into the programme, traineeships are already proving successful. More than 10,000 young people started a traineeship in the first year, with a further 5,000 starting one in the first three months of the second.

Moreover, an evaluation published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills earlier this year revealed that 50 percent of trainees progressed to an apprenticeship or other employment, and a further 17 percent went on to further learning.

The report also pointed towards high levels of satisfaction with traineeships among both employers and trainees. Indeed, 94 percent of employers said they consider traineeships an effective way of increasing young people’s chances of finding paid jobs and apprenticeships. Additionally, four in five trainees (80 percent) say the support they received during their work preparation training helped to improve their job search.

For young people, traineeships are important because they offer the chance to build a CV and to get vital experience with an employer. Taking up a traineeship can enable them to learn about a business and the industry it operates in, while gaining valuable skills that will help them to move on in life, work and learning.

By offering traineeships, nurseries and pre-schools can play an important role in helping young people get the skills they need to progress, while building a pool of high-quality future recruits for what is a rapidly growing sector. Hundreds of companies, large and small and across multiple sectors are already supporting the programme, including the likes of Virgin Media, Jaguar Land Rover, Barclays and the BBC.

Employer expectation

Lasting a maximum of six months, traineeships are designed to give young people aged 16-24 the essential work preparation training, maths and English skills, and work experience they need to get an apprenticeship or another job. They are aimed at those who have little work experience but who are motivated to work.

We ask employers to commit to:

• Providing a high quality work experience placement for the trainee. A work placement that needs to last for at least 100 hours and must be long enough to enable the young person to develop new skills and behaviours.

• Providing a substantial and real workplace experience that offers meaningful insight into the world of work and that will ensure the trainee develops the skills businesses are looking for.

• And then, once the young person has finished their traineeship, we encourage employers to ideally give the trainee an interview with written feedback.

Mutual benefits

From large organisations to small businesses, all employers offering traineeships are playing a key part in helping young people get the skills they need to progress. Getting involved in the programme can be a great way to deliver on CSR objectives, as well as to bring new and fresh ideas into your nursery.

Traineeships also offer a great professional development opportunity for existing employees. By working with the trainees, employees will get a chance to develop expertise in skill development, mentoring and coaching of young people.

The training can also be tailored to meet your organisational needs. Employers are encouraged to take an active role in tailoring the programme (with the training provider) with additional content so that...
National Apprenticeship Service can put you in touch with a local training organisation approved by the Skills Funding Agency. Visit greatbusiness.gov.uk/traineeships or call 08000 150 600 to find out how you can take on your first trainee and help to develop talented young people with the practical skills needed for the workplace.

CASE STUDY
West Wight Nursery

The employer perspective

West Wight Nursery is a community nursery on the Isle of Wight. It provides care for over 70 children aged from three months to 12-years-old with a crèche through to an after school club for children aged from four to 12-years-old. It started offering traineeships in 2013 and by taking part in the programme, has found a skilled and enthusiastic apprentice and full-time employee.

West Wight Nursery had been offering training to childcare students in the local area for many years before being contacted about traineeships by training organisation Smart Training. ‘We’ve always been geared towards supporting people to train and improve skills, so I was keen to try and help someone along the path to a good future,’ explains Kim Tyrell, nursery manager.
While we cannot predict the future – we can certainly do our best to help the next generation prepare for it. Traineeships are already laying the foundations

Smart Training introduced Kim to trainee Mollie Hulme and, together, they agreed upon a four-month work placement for Mollie at the nursery to complement the other skills she was learning. Mollie spent one month with each age group and was mentored while she set up and took part in activities to help the children’s development – learning about health and safety and teamwork along the way.

Mollie took to the traineeship very well, as Kim explains: ‘Mollie was a particularly good trainee – she was very interested in the job and what it involved, always very reliable and willing to gain experience, and she had a lovely friendly nature with staff and children.’

Because of her success, when Mollie finished her traineeship in February 2014, Kim did not hesitate to offer her an advanced apprenticeship in Children and Young People’s Workforce with the nursery. ‘Offering a work placement gives us an additional staff member, which means a lot more interaction for the children,’ says Kim. ‘Our permanent staff members are also experienced mentors, and they really enjoy having the opportunity to pass on their knowledge.

‘The local community also benefits because when people find employment, there’s always a knock-on effect, from raising self-esteem, to earning money and spending it in the local area. If I can offer someone an opportunity to try this career and make sure it’s right for them, and guide them towards an apprenticeship, I’m very keen to do that.’

The trainee’s perspective
Mollie Hulme, now 18, is from Freshwater in the Isle of Wight. Her dream was to pursue a career in childcare and a traineeship at West Wight Nursery helped her do just that.

Mollie knew she wanted to work with children but had no relevant experience. After hearing about traineeships from a friend, she approached learning provider Smart Training, who began teaching her employability skills, including interview techniques, and arranged a work placement with West Wight Nursery.

‘During my placement I sat with the children, talked with them to help develop their language and supported their play,’ explains Mollie. ‘Then at the training centre I worked towards my Job Search and Interview Skills qualifications.

Mollie received a lot of support on her traineeship and found it to be exactly what she wanted. ‘The nursery is somewhere I really enjoy being,’ she says. ‘It’s very friendly and has a small team so I could have that one-to-one support if I needed it.’

Mollie finished her traineeship in February 2014 and has since completed an Advanced Apprenticeship in Children and Young People’s Workforce. She is now a full-time employee at the nursery. ‘My traineeship has been very important, especially the support from the training provider and experience I got from the work placement,’ says Mollie. ‘It’s given me the confidence to feel like I can really do this job, and I’d definitely recommend traineeships to other people my age.’

Kim, manager of West Wight Nursery, says: ‘When the opportunity arose, Mollie seemed an ideal applicant for an apprenticeship, which has given her the chance to qualify and progress in her career. I believe she will go on to be a great practitioner.’

What makes a good work experience placement?
• Choice and relevance – placement matched to the trainee’s areas of interest and aspiration, with young people undertaking high quality work experience rather than observation or mundane tasks.
• Organisational readiness – commitment from senior managers or owner/manager and a low ratio of trainees to experienced staff.
• Good preparation – thorough pre-placement preparation by the provider, employer and prospective trainee and, if relevant, an understanding of the trainee’s personal circumstances that might affect their workplace behaviour.
• Written agreement – made between the trainee, employer and provider setting our mutual expectations and commitments.
• A planned placement – a structured induction, clear objectives and integrated off-the-job training, with an identified mentor or buddy.
• Feedback and review – regular constructive feedback from managers and formal reviews at key stages with the manager, provider and trainee.
The Number Zero

Teremok, or the little house in the forest

This traditional folktale from Russia, about animals sharing and being friends, makes the number zero meaningful and fun to children.

Zero plays the same part in the dance of numbers that silence does. It is an enchanting surprise.

EYFS Areas of learning

Separate a group of three or four objects in different ways meaningful to children. They make connections between numbers and objects. Stories and rhymes put maths into context and demonstrate concepts in ways meaningful to children. They make maths more relevant, fun and accessible to children, sparking their imagination while developing their mathematical thinking.

Developing Early Maths through Story is the new guide to help practitioners feel more confident about teaching early mathematics.

Ideal for use with 3-5 years old, the book will encourage children to exercise mathematical concepts, both outdoors and indoors.

It contains 14 chapters, each with 17 sections including:

- A brief outline of a traditional story
- Opportunities for adult-directed learning
- Further activity suggestions for younger children and babies
- Scope for outdoor activities and for using natural materials
- Suggestions for using ICT.

This is also a perfect resource for parents and carers who want to explore or extend the learning of maths at home with their children in a very accessible and enjoyable way.

Developing Early Maths through Story

By Marion Leeper


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About the author

Marion Leeper is an early years teacher and storyteller who has used story and small world play to teach maths throughout a twenty-year teaching career. She is a regular writer for Early Years Educator magazine and many of her features focus on story and mathematical thinking.

Make the magic of storytelling become a creative springboard for maths activities!

Stories and rhymes put maths into context and demonstrate concepts in ways meaningful to children. They make maths more relevant, fun and accessible to children, sparking their imagination while developing their mathematical thinking.

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I became an inspector

What do you feel when you hear the words ‘Ofsted are here’? Do you feel you are on the same ‘side’?

Having worked for 30 years in the sector, Julia Gouldsboro decided to give something back to sector.

A teacher for 30 years, whenever Ofsted came to inspect, it sent shudders down my spine; anxiety crept in and even after working throughout the day and night to make sure lessons and schemes were up-to-date our school may have only received a ‘good’.

Sometimes, Ofsted would identify room for improvement and morale would fall to an all-time low. It is often frustrating and overwhelming as a teacher to be faced with Ofsted. I have often heard my colleagues pronounce that they wanted Ofsted to be valid and reliable, rather than to be a popular.

I was offered training on peer observation at my school by a retired inspector. Her words had a great influence on me. When I asked her why she had become an Ofsted inspector, I thought she would have replied, ‘because I want to be the big bad wolf’.

However, her reply was the main reason I decided to consider a career in inspecting early years settings. She wanted to make sure children were being cared for, were developing and were given the opportunity to grow and develop in a positive environment. She relayed how her visits to outstanding settings enabled her to recognise how these provisions help to give children the best possible start in life.

As teachers, this is also what I believe every teacher wants for the children in their care. Nobody said it was easy and someone has to make sure that it is happening.

I wanted to see excellent practice and make sure settings were striving for that excellence. My teaching experiences had been across all age ranges but for me it is in the early years setting that this care and learning is so vital and I wanted to be part of an organisation that makes sure young children are cared for and get the best start in life.

I also believe that care and learning should be excellent whatever the environment, whether it is with a childminder, in a daycare setting or in preschool.

It also should make no difference where those children are cared for, just that they have the right to be cared for equally. I grew up in the inner city in the 1970s. I remember having some very inspirational teachers that had faith in me. They did not write me off because I was the daughter of an immigrant family living in a one bed flat. This further enhanced my passion to strive for equal care for children.

We were offered a course on peer observation training. Peer observation involves watching another teacher and learning from each other. It was effective because it offered practical constructive criticism and made my teaching better – it focused on what the observer sees and the impact of that learning on children. It also enabled me to view some excellent practice, and also poor practice, and made me realise that this could have a positive or negative impact on children in our care.

I did not want to further my ongoing career in childcare management and having seen an advert for an early years inspector job with training I felt that this is what I aspired to do. Over 30 years I have taught nearly 1,000 children and I can see my work acting as a positive experience for children I have encountered. From this, I was driven to enter into a career that would allow me to make sure that children are cared for, learn and develop, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Tribal Inspections were offering training and after reading the words on the website of a freelance inspector my mind was made up…

‘My job as an Early Years Inspector is extremely rewarding as I am able to make positive changes to practice to ensure that every child matters and each child receives the best possible care. No day is ever the same, which means that each day poses new challenges. I have met some fantastic, dedicated practitioners, spoken to hundreds of children and observed practice at its best, and worst.

‘Ultimately, the greatest reward is the difference we can make for children in childcare through ensuring that they are safe, cared for warmly and consistently in a stimulating and nurturing environment.’ [Sue Mann, freelance early years inspector]

Training

With my CV and references accepted, training began in the south of England on an intense weekend away. I was so nervous and yet met the most lovely, fun
You are supported throughout the training and learning process and shadowed on your early inspections.

and hardworking people on that course. The training was excellent. It introduces you to all the roles you as an inspector will have, whether you are freelance or employed.

You learn how to conduct inspections, how to carry out registrations and how to make a judgement on the evidence you see, and also if it adheres to the evaluation schedule that you have, which succinctly points out what needs to be happening and practiced effectively in settings. It makes sure that you have the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to inspect and regulate effectively. These include the ability to:

- Gather, analyse and interpret relevant evidence.
- Make judgements that are objective, fair and based securely on evidence.
- Communicate clearly, convincingly and succinctly, both orally and in writing.
- Display high levels of professional conduct.

The course was also practical in that we role-played situations; we made judgements and the main thing I learnt was that you have to be very sure about the judgement you make on a setting and very knowledgeable about the statutory requirements. Training is continuous and I have had up-to-date training on the foundation stage, safeguarding, report writing and will always be expected to keep up-to-date in my training.

The next part in your training is report writing, for which you are given feedback is given. You are given the opportunity to work shadow. I learnt so much on my visits with competent Ofsted inspectors who were fair, valid and confident in their judgements.

During my training I was taught the many ways that you gather evidence and to triangulate evidence by looking at documents, observing and discussing with the practitioners. Some of the ways considered effective to gather evidence were tracking specific children or doing joint observations with the manager.

As long ago as Margaret McMillan, the need to observe practitioners and to give feedback was considered to have a positive impact on the teaching of children.

You are supported throughout the whole process and you shadow competent, experienced inspectors that give you a real insight into the enormity of the evidence you need to collect and the limited time you have to do it. You need to write these reports and are given feedback. I found this really helpful because it helped me to realise which areas I needed to focus on and why it is important to follow the right format. It also enabled me to see how to use my time effectively.

Later, you are shadowed on your own inspection. This was so nerve-racking, but I was fortunate to be supported by such a fantastic, experienced inspector. At the end of the day she told me that I would not be at this stage if I were not ready and that I should be confident in my observations and judgements. Her words inspired me and gave me confidence.
The report that you complete is again supported by fantastic guidance and support from a Quality Development ‘Buddy’, and I thank the inspectors who rigorously quality assured those first few reports. It is such a complex job and has been a very steep learning curve but one thing for sure is that there is a great support network in place.

Sometimes during my teaching career I often felt alone or isolated. Teachers are under such pressure and can often snap or criticise colleagues because of the enormous pressures they have to contend with. The support available as an inspector during training is constructive and positive and help is offered every step of the way.

I have learned the importance of being organised and remaining positive at all times, even when providers challenge my judgements. My key to remaining confident and secure is to make good use of the evaluation schedule and the evidence I have gathered to substantiate and explain how I reached my judgement.

Because I have been a teacher in many London boroughs I have to be very aware of the conflict of interest policy, as outlined by Tribal – conflict of interest is defined as:

(a) Has been employed or engaged by the Provider Services.
(b) A parent or carer of a person who uses the Provider services.
(c) The spouse, civil partner, sibling, child, grandchild, widow or widower or other relation of an employee of the Provider.
(d) A member of a board or governing body of the Provider.
(e) A relation of an individual holding office on a board of a governing body of the Provider.
(f) Has used the services of the Provider (for example as part-time attendance at a FE college or adult education provision).

(G) Has any involvement in an organisation in competition with the Provider.
(h) Has provided related services, including school improvement, to the Provider.
(I) any potential link to education in the provider/ local authority/area that could be perceived by a third party as a conflict of interest.

This is important because as an Ofsted inspector you are there to be fair.

On my first inspection I had the same feeling I had 30 years ago when I started teaching. I had butterflies, I felt anxious and I felt that there was a great deal of paperwork to check and activities to observe. It was very much like being a teacher.

There is an amazing support network and you are not on your own. You feel ready to make a judgement from gathering all the evidence needed and I realised the inspector is not there to point out bad teaching but simply how that teacher or setting has impacted on the children in their care by having efficient systems in place.

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance commented on the training of early years inspectors: ‘The devil is in the detail,’ he said. ‘Inspectors carrying out inspections under the new common framework must understand that early years is a unique stage of education.

’Inspection criteria, such as quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for children have very different meanings in an early years context, and this will need to be reflected in the inspection judgements. It will be vital, therefore, that these inspections are carried out by qualified, knowledgeable inspectors who possess a good understanding of early education.’

From the start of my training, I believe that this has been the case. I do not feel like the big bad wolf because there is such a wealth of good and outstanding practice in the UK. It is good to celebrate and advertise this.

Finally, there is also a need to work together. When I had the opportunity to observe colleagues and when they observed me it gave me an insight into my practice and how I could improve for the benefit of the children.

I am 30 years a teacher so I could be described as a dinosaur and I sometimes observed a spring chicken, a practitioner of three or four years. I honestly learnt so much because, often, the new teacher would have learnt new approaches that were successfully implemented.

Ofsted and settings are both aiming for the same thing – the best for children – which means they can and should work together. The Ofsted big conversation has started successfully to do this – www.thebigofstedconversation.co.uk/about-the-big-ofsted-conversation/

We should be working together.
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LAST YEAR, a number of schools joined a pilot project to improve outcomes for young children. The project was developed by a London local authority to help more children to achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – achieving at least the expected level within the following areas of learning: Communication and language; Physical development; and Personal, social and emotional development; Literacy; and Mathematics. A programme of support was offered to the schools, along with some key expectations. Each of the schools invited to join the project was situated in an area of disadvantage.

Schools were asked to identify the reasons why some children were at risk of not achieving the expected levels within the early learning goals. They were then asked to put in place plans that would ‘narrow the gap’ between those who attain success at the end of reception, and those who do not. Funding was set aside for each school to access. One of the basic tenets of the project was that schools were best placed to identify their own needs and then to successfully put in place the strategies to improve teaching.

The training and support that was offered to the schools was delivered, initially, to the foundation stage coordinators – these coordinators manage the early years in schools. They are also usually class teachers who teach in either nursery or reception. There was an expectation that they would then train their own staff teams.

Funding was set aside to enable the 15 schools that joined the project to purchase resources and access training. The training programme, offered throughout the project, was developed with the coordinators, and was bespoke to the needs of the schools.

The foundation stage coordinators in the project were split into three groups. Each group contained teachers from schools that were geographically close to one another because schools were encouraged to visit other schools in the project, and to work with one another across the year of the project.

The schools, in their groups, were asked to moderate their nursery baselines together in the autumn term in nursery – moderation could be either internal or external; internal moderation enables a school to consider and agree judgments on children's outcomes against age-related expectations found in documents, such as Early Years Outcomes, while external moderation involves schools coming together to agree judgments. This moderation is generally agreed to be robust.

The following term they were asked to moderate their reception judgments as children moved towards the early learning goals. Developing a robust baseline of children's skills on entry to nursery and/or reception was seen as important to successfully measuring progress afterwards.

A programme of high quality training for the schools, delivered by early years experts, was offered. This was fundamentally about developing young children’s communication skills. It included training from a speech and language therapist, focusing on early identification and support. Further discrete training aimed at developing young children’s talk, their play, their early reading, and their thinking skills was also delivered.

Towards the middle of the project, when the schools were talking about the barriers they still faced, they asked for additional training for their own nursery nurses and teaching assistants. The foundation stage coordinators wanted their colleagues to share their experience, by working in the same groups.

Training on ‘planned purposeful play’ was delivered, with the expectation that these practitioners would then train their teams – ‘planned purposeful play’ is the method by which effective teaching and learning is delivered.

Every half term, a consultant visited each of the schools. Foundation stage coordinators were trained to observe what was happening in the classrooms as a result of their actions. Successes were evaluated and, where barriers were still observed, new actions agreed. Encouraging and enabling teachers to observe and evaluate their early years practice to further improve it, was at the heart of this project.

Each school was given funds to develop subject areas that were limiting the good level of
• Developing children’s underpinning talk and language skills by providing them with opportunities to engage in storytelling.
• Supporting parent partnership through a range of planned workshops to help parents to see the benefits of talking and playing together at home. This was supplemented by workshops on families reading together, and counting and calculating at home.

The project has improved outcomes for young children in a number of ways. Not only has ‘the gap’ narrowed in every school that took part in the project, but teaching and leadership has also improved. Here are some quotes from participants:

Nursery teacher, who became the foundation stage coordinator during the course of the project

‘I had ideas for the nursery before I started teaching there. It was a mess and children spent time waiting for adults to help them. I knew I wanted to develop the workshop provision, so that children could play meaningfully without constant adult support. I’ve been able to do that because of the funding.

‘I’ve been able to set up workshop areas that really allow the children to be independent in their learning. What has been more important to me, though, has been the support I’ve received from others in the project.'
When teachers are given funds to develop their practice across the early years, they know exactly what to do

‘Visiting other schools helped me to re-design the nursery. I also knew that my own school would support me, but I didn’t anticipate just how useful this support would be. ‘The deputy headteacher has helped me, not just to develop the learning environment, but also how to successfully manage my nursery team.’

Foundation stage coordinator, who is also a key stage 1 coordinator

‘We have large numbers of children entering the nursery without any English at all. By the time they get to reception, these children have made strides in their learning, but their English skills are still not fully secure. I wanted to use the funding to develop a storytelling culture, especially in reception. So, we put a storytelling chair outside, to encourage children to tell stories to each other and to enjoy books together. We bought puppets, small world resources, and storybooks that our children want to use.

‘It has certainly improved children’s speaking skills. It has been such a success that we are developing storytelling across key stage 1. It has focused our attention too on how we can teach early language and literacy skills through story.’

Foundation stage coordinator, who is now on a ‘middle leaders’ course

‘I thought I knew, right at the start of the project, just how I would spend the funding. I wanted to help the children who enter the nursery with low language skills to have dedicated small group time. I had already chosen a very experienced nursery nurse to work with the children. We evaluated together what was happening. We spoke to all the nursery staff. We’d visited several other schools as part of the project, and looked at how their most disadvantaged children were being supported.

‘It made me think that working in small groups was not enough. We’ve changed the way in which the children get extra support. Now targeted small group work is balanced with support for these children in their self-chosen play. I think it has really improved our child-initiated learning.’

Conclusion

When schools work together, there are a number of advantages that benefit children, teachers, and school leaders. These include:

• Developing a bespoke training programme enables schools to choose their own content so that training is sharply focused on what is needed locally to improve practice.

• Visiting other schools, and working with other teachers, helps teachers to identify what is good in their own practice, and to identify what might be further improved. It is a really practical, ‘hands on’ improvement strategy regardless of whether the teacher is visiting or being visited!

• Leading a school-based project further develops leadership skills and career enhancement.

• Encouraging teachers to think about, and reflect on, what works best encourages everyone to become reflective practitioners. This gives teachers the skills they need to know what is not so successful and the confidence to change teaching strategies that are not working!

• When teachers are given funds to develop their practice across the early years, they know exactly what to do!

• Strengthening the ways that schools collect, moderate and analyse data will help teachers to successfully use assessment for learning. It also provides them with the evidence they need to show they are achieving the best outcomes for all the young children they teach!

Useful resources


• Early Years Outcomes. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-outcomes


Key points

• Last year, a number of schools joined a pilot project to improve outcomes for young children

• The project was developed by a London local authority to help more children to achieve a good level of development at the end of the foundation stage

• A programme of support was offered to the schools, along with some key expectations. Each of the schools invited to join the project was situated in an area of disadvantage.

• Schools were asked to identify the reasons why some children were at risk of not achieving the expected levels within the early learning goals. They were then asked to put in place plans that would ‘narrow the gap’ between those who attain success at the end of reception, and those who do not

• Funding was set aside for each school to access

• A basic tenet of the project was that schools were best placed to identify their own needs and then successfully put in place the strategies to improve teaching
GIRLS OUTPERFORM boys at all levels of education in the UK, with at least a 10 percent achievement gap (DfE, 2012). Boys are four times more likely to be excluded (DfE, 2012) and at least four times more likely to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (NICE, 2008). Aged five, girls are already significantly ahead of boys in a broad range of academic, social and behavioural measures (DfE, 2011).

However, while boys make up over half of the top 20 percent, they also make-up three-quarters of the bottom 20 percent (DfE, 2011). So, while some boys are doing very well, significant numbers are not.

While a broad range of competing environmental views of why boys are underachieving within secondary schools have been proposed, within the early years the reasons are often said to be biological.

Dobson (2001) blames feminism, while Foster, Kimmel and Skelton (2009) argue that we are seeing a continuation of the 1970s ‘moral panic’ about boys and young men. Lingard and Douglas (1999) suggest taking traditional boys’ interests and making them part of the curriculum – with, for example, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) – and school reading, and Holland (2003) advocating ‘superhero play’ in the early years.

Delamont (1999) argues that ‘feminisation’ leads to a favouring of girls over boys through daily routines and practices; types of discipline; social interactions; expectations, and even styles of assessment.

Shipman and Hicks (1998) focus on boys’ peer group culture, while Younger and Warrington (2005) focus on boys striving to become ‘a real man’, or ‘one of the boys’, and a sense of belonging. Interestingly, in sharp contrast, early years and primary education practices have generally understood gender differences as biological and not environmental.

There are commonly held views that girls reach maturity earlier than boys; that brain sizes are different – as are the bridging structure between the left and right sides of the brain; and that there are communication and fine motor skills, differences and bursts of testosterone for the boys (See Gurian, 2001; Macoby, 1998; Kilmartin 2006; Bidulph 1998; and Sax, 2007).

The problem with this biological approach is that it reduces all boys to kinaesthetic learners (needing activity; competition; an ICT focus and short-term targets), and narrowing boys’ underachievement to a ‘quick-fix’ of teaching and learning styles.

The bigger problem of these narrow understandings is that they have too often become dominant ‘truths’ about all boys within the fields of childcare and early education. They are taught on courses, reinforced daily in conversations between practitioners and parents, not just in the traditional ‘he is very active, a typical boy’, but also in more subtle forms, such as ‘don’t worry he will grow out of it’. Looking at three of these ‘truths’, there is good reason to test them against the evidence.

**Truth 1: Gender is soft**

Bidulph (1998), Gurian (2001) and Sax (2007) all suggest there are biological differences between boys and girls brains, which result in ‘blue’ and ‘pink’ behaviour. These perspectives have been trumped by findings in neuroscience (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Nature/nurture, the primary tension into the 2000s, has been replaced by ‘experience furnishes the brain’; gender is soft, rather than hard-wired; and that brains are adaptable and plastic (Eliot, 2010; and Kolb, 1995).

**Truth 2: The testosterone surge**

The second common ‘truth’ is that boys have a testosterone surge at four, or four-and-a-half, and that this accounts for the boisterousness of boys in the foundation stages and contributes to their struggle within the school environment.

Browne (2004) found a pre and post-birth testosterone surge for all children, but no surge in boys at four-years-old. Tracking this back, its origins appear to be in Bidulph’s book, Raising Boys (1998), and reproduced in a number of boy-focused parenting books (for example; Neil, 2007).

**Truth 3: The year 3 catch up**

The third ‘truth’ is that boys come into school behind girls and catch up in year 3. This belief has two parts, the first that girls are ready for the school environment, while boys still want to play and are not ready to sit down and engage with table learning at four-years-old.

The support offered for this is that Scandinavia (and other like-minded liberal countries) wait until children are seven-years-old before introducing them to formal learning.
Evidence suggests that a minority of boys come into school lacking verbal and fine motor skills, as well as the ability to sit still, with the majority of boys making the transition at four in a very similar way to girls. This also accounts, of course, for why the statistics tell us that some boys are doing very well, while others are not.

**Implications for practice**

These ‘truths’ dominate the way early years practitioners think about gender and so it is no surprise that gender-related issues in the foundation stage are not addressed, what would be the point? If it is biological, then it is ‘fixed’, and has to be worked around or waited for.

While there are some children (and certainly more boys than girls) who start school struggling with language; who are over-boisterous; have poor fine motor skills; difficulties in social skills and difficulties with routine and independence skills… too often these general statements are made about boys, when in fact they relate to ‘some boys’.

Neuroscience has provided a much better understanding of gendered behaviours as a soft, rather than a hard-wired, area and has highlighted the importance of early intervention while the brain is at its most plastic and adaptable. This in turn places an even stronger responsibility on ensuring that children have the skills to be ‘school ready’ and are able to settle into school and their education as quickly as possible.

The Early Years Foundation Stage has, in the past, relied too heavily on these behaviours changing as a result of biological development and maturation. Waiting, rather than intervening, increases the risk that too many ‘highly physical’ boys at four-years-old are even bigger ‘highly physical’ boys at 10-years-old, and a low verbal boy at four-years-old is at risk of being on the way to being an underachieving boy at eight-years-old.

Neuroscience tells us loud and clear that gender attitudes and behaviours are soft-wired, that we can intervene and change much of what we thought was hard-wired. This suggests that the early years sector has a critical role to play in addressing gender-based behaviours, rather than patiently waiting for biology to do the job!

**References**


Evidence suggests that a minority of boys come into school lacking verbal and fine motor skills, as well as the ability to sit still, with the majority of boys making the transition at four in a very similar way to girls. This also accounts, of course, for why the statistics tell us that some boys are doing very well, while others are not.

The problem with the commonly held view of a biological difference between the genders is that it reduces all boys to kinaesthetic learners.
Practical activities section

Plus: What uniforms tell us; Japan vs UK early years agendas; caring for pets and small animals; outdoors and open doors in forests.

What we learn from minibeasts

Modelling with potter’s clay
MINIBEASTS HOLD an endless fascination for young children. They feature in so many books, songs and rhymes, and provide a plethora of important learning opportunities. Their very diversity is central to holding the interests of children; think of a beautiful ladybird with its vivid colours and striking spots, a graceful butterfly with its symmetrical patterns, a spider spinning an intricate web, a slow snail leaving its slimy trail, safe in its shell house.

The possibilities for learning in all areas are endless; think of the mathematical opportunities in investigating the patterns and colours of minibeasts, as well, of course, as the counting of legs, spots, stripes…

So what is a minibeast? Let us start with some facts about these creepy crawlies. Minibeast is the collective name for many small animals; they are also called invertebrates, which means that they do not have a backbone — instead, some, like insects and spiders, have a hard shell (exoskeleton), and some have soft bodies, like worms or slugs.

There are more than 25,000 different kinds of invertebrates in Britain.

- A minibeast is a small animal.
- Minibeasts do not have a backbone (invertebrate).
- Minibeasts do not have a skeleton inside their body.
- Some minibeasts have a hard shell to live in.
- Minibeasts need shelter, water, food and air to survive.
- Some minibeasts are carnivores (eat meat) and some are herbivores (eat plants).
- There are many different types of minibeasts — for example, insects, arachnids, molluscs…
- Minibeasts can be found on land and in water.

It is important that children are taught to respect the natural world and to be gentle with all living creatures. Before going on any minibeast hunt, stress to the children that you know they will all be kind and respectful of the lives of even the tiniest creatures and that we are looking and learning, not hurting or destroying.

It is always best to learn things at first-hand, so get outside and get hunting for minibeasts!

Taking your children outside to get close to nature, every day and for as long as possible, will reap benefits; the children will explore using all of their senses and Speaking and listening and Understanding the world opportunities are numerous. The Personal, social and emotional development aspects are also imperative; the sheer joy of being outside and experiencing nature at first-hand are crucial for young children.

In such a hectic, fast-paced world, slowing down and being in the present, enjoying the wonders of nature is an important lesson to teach and be taught. Mindfulness is the new buzzword; we should teach our children to live in the moment and to savour the awe-inspiring world around us.

Activities to consider

There are so many wonderful activities linked to the theme of minibeasts. Of course, you do not have to cover them all; just have a go at a few and see if they capture the interests of the children in your cohort.

Some activities may evolve into something that you did not expect and others may take far longer or shorter time than you originally anticipated. Try to be flexible and go with the interests and needs of the children.

Make a bug hotel

Create a minibeast hotel by piling up logs/stones in your garden or school grounds. Many minibeasts seek cool, damp places to stay, and your hotel should soon be full. Carefully remove a log or two to observe your guests.

Circle time to teach caring for creatures and their habitats

Remember to explicitly teach children about how to care for creatures and their homes. Talk to children about the importance of respecting all living creatures and treat them the way we would like to be treated. Reiterate that hurting creatures is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Teaching and observing lifecycles

Children will never forget the wonder of seeing the lifecycle of frogs or butterflies at first-hand. Try and get some tadpoles from a local pond and watch them turn into tiny froglets; remember to return the froglets to their original pond to avoid cross-contamination.

Try websites, such as www.insectlore.co.uk to buy live caterpillars and watch the fascinating process as they turn into butterflies. You can buy everything you need from them; just be sure that you release the butterflies very soon after they hatch.

Small world

Have fun creating minibeast small worlds in your tuff trays. Use compost, wood chippings, stones, gravel, plants, twig or logs, plants, plastic minibeasts and magnifying glasses. Let the children explore the minibeast world and listen out for their conversations and observations on what they see.

Making bug houses for your minibeasts

Challenge the children to select a plastic minibeast and make a house for it using reclaimed materials, such as cardboard boxes and add moss, grass, earth, compost, bark chippings, twigs and stones to make a comfortable home for your creature!

Role-play bug dens

Let the children design their own bug den using cardboard boxes, fabric, plants, and so on.
Interesting beastly facts

**Minibeast songs and rhymes**

What rhymes and songs can you think of that are linked to minibeasts? Consider some of the following:
- *Incy Wincy Spider.*
- *There's a worm at the bottom of my garden* (and his name is Wiggly-Woo).
- *There's a tiny caterpillar on a leaf* (to the tune of *She'll be coming round the mountain*).
- *Little Miss Muffet.*

**Spider web hunt**

Not all spiders spin webs, but those that do create incredibly intricate patterns. Have a look in your setting, both inside and outside for any spider webs. They look particularly beautiful on a frosty or damp morning – sometimes you might see a fly caught in one or a spider still creating its web. Could the children try and draw/paint their own representation of a spider web?

**Snail poems**

Look at pictures of snails (or look at real snails) and brainstorm all the words that the children can think of that link with snails (slow, shell, slimy) and make a class poem.

**Minibeast patterns and colours**

Laminate photos of minibeasts with interesting colours and striking patterns and discuss them with the children. Encourage the children to paint their favourite minibeast and add the details, such as stripes, spots, legs, and so on. Can the children mix their own paints to make the colour that most closely matches their chosen minibeast?

**Giant snail collage based on Matisse’s The Snail**

Show the children Matisse’s iconic *The Snail* (1953), made with giant painted pieces of paper. Could you make a class giant snail in the style of Matisse, using colourful pieces of paper?

**Symmetry – butterflies**

Butterflies are fantastic for teaching about symmetry. Cut out a half butterfly shape from a folded piece of large paper. Unfold to reveal the whole butterfly. Use ready mix...
paint in bright colours to make a pattern on one side only of the butterfly shape. When you have finished, fold the butterfly back in half again and gently rub the paper to help imprint the pattern. Unfold again to reveal the symmetrical pattern.

Planting a butterfly garden
Try and attract these beautiful minibeasts to your setting’s garden by planting some plants that butterflies like best! These include Buddleia, Verbena, Lavender, Perennial Wallflower and Marjoram.

Be minibeast detectives
Get your magnifying glasses and binoculars out and go on a minibeast hunt in your setting. Have a look under logs and stones and get as close as you dare! Can you take clipboards and draw any of the creatures you come across?

Classic texts
The Very Hungry Caterpillar and The Bad Tempered Ladybird (both by Eric Carle) - use these classic texts as starting points for further activities, such as sequencing, counting the different foods in the Hungry Caterpillar or as a discussion point for circle time if using The Bad Tempered Ladybird.

Music and dance
Dance to The Ugly Bug Ball and to The Flight of the Bumble Bee (Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov);

list to the music and talk about how it makes you feel. In a large space, encourage the children to dance to the music.

Make your own minibeasts
Make minibeasts from playdough, plasticine, or clay – use plastic models or laminated photographs of minibeasts to help the children add detail to their own models.

Move like different minibeasts
Can you wiggle like a worm? Flap your wings like a butterfly? Spin a web like a spider? Move slowly like a snail?

Minibeast surveys
Counting legs, spots, and so on – keep track of your minibeast finds by tallying how many of each minibeast you have seen.

Conclusion
Children are generally far more open to trying new things than adults. They have fewer pre-conceived ideas and are often not so limited by fear, embarrassment or fear of failure. Children are, therefore far less squeamish about investigating creepy-crawlies than many adults are.

Support and develop this ‘can-do’ attitude by trying to hide your own distaste for some minibeasts and getting stuck into the exploration and discovery journey that the children are on.

Remember, we are trying to develop the children’s ability to persevere and to be resilient. Model these qualities yourself. Scaffold the children’s learning by being the best example you can be. Scared of spiders? Not you! Feel funny about picking up worms? No chance! Take a leaf out of the children’s book and dig in the mud, and look under those logs and stones. You never know what you may find!

Once you have found some of these creatures, what can you find out next about them? Always be open to learning in new and different ways. Observe the way your children learn best and weave those learning styles in to your provision. Most of all, as in any learning, strive to have fun!

Extension
Minibeast books – fiction and non-fiction: There is a wonderful range of both fiction and non-fiction books available to support your topic on minibeasts. Please see the poster that comes free with this issue for a selection of texts that would complement your learning and that would encourage children to read and find out more.
OF SIMILAR latitude, size and climate, Japan and England have widely differing cultures and education systems. Nevertheless, both have high aspirations for the attainment of school children in order to maintain major economic and political roles in the world market.

This article will explore the ways in which Japanese early years provision differs from the English model, the influence of culture and pedagogy, and the lessons that early years policy makers in England might learn.

In Japan, early years provision takes two contrasting forms: Kindergartens (‘yochien’) are primarily concerned with education; daycare centres (‘hoikuen’) are primarily concerned with health and welfare (Hegdea, 2014).

Despite neither of the settings covering formal academic material, both effectively prepare Japanese children for the ‘rite of passage’ (Okano et al, 1999) into elementary school. This is made possible by the use of ‘soft’ Learning Objectives that focus on the context for effective learning, rather than the content of the learning. Whitburn (2003) identifies the following key Japanese early years Learning Objectives:

• Being attuned to the needs of others.
• Knowing how to listen to others.
• Knowing how to respond to questions.
• Knowing how to participate in group activities, especially those concerned with schooling: Rituals, such as lunch, cleaning and games.

Even in kindergartens affiliated with high attaining elementary schools there is a resistance to teaching curriculum subject knowledge. Thus, by the end of pre-school, the children are ‘primed’ with skills for learning without any academic content being taught.

At home, Japanese parents aim to foster interdependence in their children by developing very strong bonds with other family members. For example, children will sleep in their parents’ beds until they are five or six-years-old. Japanese parents believe that this approach fosters a sense of security and that their children will, therefore, be happier society members (Whitburn, 2003).

Despite this strong familial attachment, Japanese children make successful transitions from home to pre-school and later to school. Many Japanese parents knit bags for their children to keep their shoes in when in kindergarten and most children walk to the settings in large groups, leaving their parents at home. Thus, the importance of self-organisation is instilled at an early age and the kindergarten classes are very much seen as an extension of the family group, separate from home, but with same set of values.

Japanese culture has been characterized as a ‘collectivistic high-context culture, where people are expected to adjust themselves to social situations and engage in an indirect communication style to maintain group harmony’ (Imada, 2013). Okano and Tsuchiya call this a ‘structural functionists’ view of society (1999) and refer to a consensus theory in which all members of a group (or society) work towards the efficient running of the whole.

These repeated and reinforced conditions have had a deep psychological effect and are another factor in the successful transitions between early years settings and formal school. However, with high expectations for engagement in cooperative play and very little opportunity for solitary play some commentators have warned that this can lead to dependency on social structures for children later in life, and a lack of opportunity to develop creative and entrepreneurial flair (Hegdea, 2014).

Japanese children start elementary school the equivalent of one year later than English children. Despite this, they quickly exceed the attainment of their English counterparts.

One factor is the Japanese concept of ‘shudan seikatsu’ (‘group life’) or ‘group loyalty’ (Okano et al, 1999) In the setting, Japanese children take full responsibility for completing the daily chores (Hegdea, 2014). This includes food preparation, cleaning and administrative tasks, such as handing out resources.

Discipline is also primarily the children’s responsibility with anyone talking during the register quietened by their peers rather than the key worker. Furthermore, once work is completed, Japanese children will help their neighbours rather than seek...
individual extension work. This creates ‘the unique combination of individual responsibility and a feeling of group identity’ (Whitburn, 2003).

This is in contrast to England, where practitioners are expected to be the setting authority and learning facilitator and indicates a differing approach to the pedagogy of play.

Diagram 1 (below) shows one way of viewing the pedagogy of play in England. There is an equal emphasis on child-initiated play and mutually-directed play (teacher facilitating learning) – teacher-directed play takes a minor role. In Japan, the emphasis is on teacher-directed play and child-initiated play that is ‘freer’ (Whitburn, 2003) than in England – mutually-directed play takes a minor role (Synodi, 2014; Hegdea, 2014) [see diagram 2 opposite].

In terms of pedagogical approach, in England there is a strong tradition of social constructivism – the creation of group meaning by working alongside children to scaffold the learning (Edwards et al., 1998). While the success of the group is paramount in Japan, this is not achieved with close adult help. In many Japanese kindergartens, the command of ‘Gambette kudasai!’ (‘Please persevere!’) can be heard, the adult encouraging effort but not offering direct support unless strictly necessary.

When children are set teacher-directed activities, children are not scaffolded but are expected to show resilience by problem solving independently. When they initiate their own activities they are also expected to develop this independent of adult intervention. It as an individual obligation to complete the task and this struggle demonstrates a level of mastery.

The Japanese approach could be viewed as the opposite of Social Constructivism, because there is emphasis on children completing tasks individually for the group benefit rather than the group co-constructing of meaning. Children in early years settings in Japan are cogs in a machine. In the UK, the children are part of the process of designing their own machine.

In Japan, the group succeeds through the endeavours of the individuals – a form of self-regulated group behaviourism where the group rewards their own good participants. In the UK, the group succeeds as a result of the combined sum of the knowledge and skills of the members.

Japanese culture places the highest emphasis on group harmony. This approach links with some emerging western thought, such as Willingham’s Social Brain Hypothesis. He argues that the brain is designed to form and maintain patterns of predictable social relationships (Hattie et al., 2014). At a deep level, our actions are dictated by the need for group harmony rather than the appeasement of a figurehead.

While Japanese early years settings take this focus on compliance to extreme lengths it is unlikely that such an approach would suit settings in the UK. In contrast to Japan, we have children from hugely diverse social and cultural backgrounds and our individualistic and inclusive approach reflects this.

Diagram 1: The pedagogy of play could in England could be viewed like this:
Discussion

Making comparisons between our own practises and processes and that of another country can suggest new ways of working or confirm existing convictions. In this article I wished to consider the factors that the background of the children in your setting might have on their learning. Western culture has been characterised as ‘a low context culture, where the communication style is direct and explicit’ (Imada, 2013).

In contrast, Japanese culture is very context sensitive: Communication and actions are the result of wider fields of context, larger gestals. Imada believes that this, rather than the culture of strict self-discipline, is the decisive factor in the differing performance of school-age children in the two countries. Clearly, we cannot, and would not wish to, change the cultural backgrounds of children but the value systems we choose to promote within our settings is within our remit.

I would like to suggest that one possible approach to a value set might be an extension of the Japanese model of early years education'; in Developmental Science 16 (2) pp 198-208 Kroll L, Meier R (eds) (2015) Educational Change in International Early Years Contexts. Routledge: Abingdon


References


Imada T; Carlson S, Itakura S (2013) ‘East - West cultural difference in context sensitivity in early childhood’; in

Diagram 2: The pedagogy of play in Japan could be viewed like this:

Key points

- Be aware of the context of the learning as well as the content: Consider all aspects of the Enabling Environment, such as the other children, the resources and the cultural perspective the child brings
- Try to encourage both independence and a group identity by providing open-ended challenges that cannot be completed alone and by including the children in the daily classroom chores on a rota
- While there is a tendency to ‘jump in’ and support a child who is struggling, developing resilience is an important part of the learning process so where appropriate encourage, rather than play, ‘answer machine’
- Do not be tempted to place the acquisition of subject knowledge above the skills of learning to learn
- For four and five-year-olds try setting a ‘soft’ learning objective, such as children self-organising their possessions in the morning

Impact

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**References**

Furry animals welcome

Most children will have some experience of owning and caring for a small animal, whether it is at their own home, or at a family member’s house. This makes pets an ideal focus for learning opportunities.

PETs AND small animals are great for helping to engage young children. Many of the children at your setting will have their own pets or will have family members, for example, grandparents, who will have pets that the children identify as their own.

Children will also have observed small animals (both domestic and wild) in the local environment and perhaps also in the outdoor spaces at your setting.

Thinking about small animals will allow children to explore a wide variety of learning possibilities using something that they have personal experience of.

Before you start
Be mindful of any allergies or fears of animals that the children in your setting might have. Agree with the children that no animals will be removed from their habitats during any of your investigations.

Remind the children that hands must be washed after coming inside from investigating anything that animals might have touched, eaten or urinated on and before they go on to a new activity.

Activities to try
Pets at home
Find out what pets the children have and create a simple bar graph (you could ask the children to draw a picture of their pet and then add it to the correct bar on the graph). Use this graph to explore which ones are the most and least popular in your setting and help the children to count each block of pets.

Sand tray tracks
Before you leave at the end of the day or for a weekend, either smooth out the sand in your outdoor sandpit or place baking trays with thin layers of flour into the grounds to collect the footprints of the creatures that visit your setting when you are not there.

Use books or the internet to identify the animals that have visited – this will help you and the children to plan the extra food and habitats that you could provide to encourage more creatures to your setting.

Help the children to make print blocks of the footprints that they have observed around your setting so that they can put them into trays of paint and create trails. You could do these on border paper to decorate the display boards you create to complement this topic. Create a second bar graph to show the domestic and wild animals that visit the outdoor environment around your setting.

Observing and collating
Take the children out in small groups and let them observe any animals they see, but also look for evidence of animals (footprints, droppings, the fact that they have eaten food left out for them, and so on). Encourage the children to make marks to count the different animals they observe.

Encourage the children to bring in photographs or drawings of their pets and to make drawings and photographs of the small animals (wild and domestic), they observe at your setting so that you can create a display of the animals you are talking about.

Emotional connection
Talk about how pets and small animals make us feel! Encourage the children to think about how stroking and hugging pets, playing with them and helping to look after them makes them feel (be prepared for them to talk about happy feelings, but you may also raise memories about pets that have died or been lost – it would be worth checking with parents or carers before you undertake this activity just so that you are prepared).

Eating and feeding
Explore what different pets and small animals eat and how often they should be fed. Are there any things that particular animals should not eat? Help children to access information books and the internet to find answers to these questions.

Habitat
Talk about where different small animals live. Use pets the children are familiar with as a starting point and then extend your explorations to cover small wild animals.

Once you have discovered where animals live, go on a walk around your outdoor environment and see if you can find any evidence of small wild animals in your immediate habitat. Think about the pros and cons of having and/or encouraging small animals in your outdoor setting – there might be animal droppings, they might nibble through some of your outdoor equipment; but they might also encourage other creatures to your setting or enable you to study other topics (like birds or nocturnal animals).

If you decide you want to encourage more small animals to your outdoor environment...
use books and the internet to discover what you can do in terms of planting, putting out food, providing the perfect habitats or bird/bat boxes, providing opportunities for animals to play at your setting, and so on.

Help the children to create as much of this as possible by making food, or by designing and making habitats and toys, and then help them to place it in the appropriate places in your outdoor space. Once the new things have been installed they will need to be re-filled or checked for damage. The interventions will also need to be observed to see if they are actually being used by their intended audience, or whether other, unplanned creatures are using them.

Vets surgery
Turn your role-play area into a vets surgery, with plenty of toy animals – we created an ambulance using a wooden pram that we covered with cardboard the children had painted. Provide some old laptops and telephones, some treatment forms along with pens and pencils to encourage mark-making and pre-writing, and doctors sets to enable the children to treat the sick animals that are brought along.

The children will enjoy pretending to be vets or pet owners, discussing and recording the illnesses and treatments of the pets. If you have links to any vets surgeries see if you can invite a vet or an animal nurse into your setting to talk about their work (particularly the sort of pets and small animals that are dealt with locally).

Conclusion
In this feature we have explored some activities to encourage the children in your setting to think about the small domestic and wild animals they see, come into contact with and have relationships with in the course of their everyday lives, at home and in your setting.

We have explored what animals they keep and seen how animals make us feel, what animals need to live and thrive, and how we could make changes and enhancements to our setting’s outdoor environment to further encourage visitations by small animals.

Being aware of and caring for other animals and our immediate environment and the positive impact these things can have on our lives are important skills for our children to learn as they grow into responsible and caring members of their local communities and the wider world.

Extensions

- Exercise: What exercise and play do small animals and pets require? Once again, help the children to access information books and the internet to find the answers to these questions. Give the children opportunities to create exercise machines for particular animals using drawings or junk modelling.
In the first of a series of three articles that serve to follow up from June’s introduction to adventures and emotions in forests, Deb Wilenski explores the power of the imagination to enter doors into new worlds.

In the last four years, through CCI’s Footprints projects, I have worked in six different early childhood settings – which has meant finding my way, in the first instance, into six different buildings – simple enough maybe? But each building has doors, and each door seems to work differently. Some are locked, while some have buttons, and some only open with secret codes. I tend to push when it says pull, I re-combine codes and often fail to see the giant green button that will magically allow me in.

The book of doors

Getting in

In CCI’s project with reception children, in Hinchingbrooke Country Park (see Adventure and emotion; June 2015), we thought about doors a great deal. Over the course of 10 weeks, the whole class developed a language of fantastical journeying in the woods that communicated their sense of entering new worlds. There were doors between trees, doors that opened in hedges, many thresholds to pass over and lands to enter on the other side.

One thing that struck me as I began to document the project in our Fantastical Guide was that none of the children’s doors was closed or locked. They could pass through easily even if it disappeared behind them. The children’s doors were all about freedom and adventure, not security or protection.

The freedom of the forest

The forest has long been a place of freedom. In traditional folk and fairyttales it is testing and dangerous, but ultimately allows protagonists to escape from constraining stories others would write for them; think of Hansel and Gretel, Sleeping Beauty, Brother and Sister.

Wild places offer new worlds to real children too, very different from the classrooms in which they spend much of their time. The woods cannot be organised by adults, there are no man-made materials, there are dark places, places to hide, and there is quietness and calm. Children can find new authority in the woods, make discoveries and forge new friendships, they can write different ‘stories’ of themselves and their fascinations.

This feeling of ‘coming alive in wild places’ was expressed beautifully by the reception children from Shirley Primary School in Cambridge when we worked with them in Bramblefields Nature Reserve back in 2012. Sitting in our morning circle in the middle of the woods, we were talking about plans for the day. Kiemute intended to go climbing – the week before he had finally managed to get up a difficult tree:

- Kiemute: ‘I was born on the climbing tree.’
- Nabil: ‘I was born in space and Mars.’
- Hayden: ‘I was born in the sky on a cloud.’
- Tyler: ‘I was born in a cat’s cave.’

Doors into invention

Our project in Bramblefields was one of three commissioned in 2012 by Cambridgeshire County Council Early Years Service. They were particularly interested in investigating how working in the wild, and connecting the classroom to this experience, could help language, literacy and social development, especially in boys.

In each project, two CCI artists worked alongside the children and their educators, Jane Taylor, Julie Chambers and Anita Kozicz. Walking down to Bramblefields for the first time, John said: ‘We’re going into the real woods,’ as if life was about to begin in earnest. Inside the woods, energetic and purposeful explorations began. Many of the children were intrigued by a bent tree that had no branches, except at its crown. The tree invited them to climb, but was a puzzle too, with no real hand-holds or places to put your feet.

Oliwia invented a way of getting up the tree by holding the branch above and pulling herself along. She climbed high, while other children watched in amazement. I asked if she had climbed trees like this before. Oliwia replied that it was the first time she had ever been up a tree at all, exclaiming: ‘I didn’t before and I have now!’

Doors into authorship

Many of the children spoke more than one language, and some were shy of speaking class children and their educators, Jane Taylor, Julie Chambers and Anita Kozicz.

For 10 weeks, CCI artist Filipa Pereira Stubbs joined up with myself, the reception
English in the classroom. Oliwia was often very quiet. Being the first to climb the difficult tree, and being observed to manage it, seemed to wake in Oliwia a desire to speak out loud and her confidence in the woods transferred to school, where she began to speak much more often.

Julie noticed this strong relationship between physical exploration, physical prowess, and changes in other children. One group of boys in the woods developed several games of pursuit and escape as well as skilful climbing in trees. Julie told us how for a whole afternoon they had worked together to make a large-scale model of a character in their game, coordinating their intentions and designs, developing ideas collaboratively. They had never worked like this before.

Szymonek’s book of doors

Close to the end of our last afternoon together, Szymonek came to show me something. It was a slim book he had made from folded paper. On the front cover was a tall tree, like the ones he had been climbing in the woods. On every page inside was a door.

I remembered Szymonek and his great friend Viktor, finding secret places in the woods and acting as doorkeeper. I remembered Szymonek way up high in the trees, comfortable and at home, making new friends, surveying his world. I also remembered Szymonek and Viktor, when in the fifth week of a project in which story-making was prolific, they dictated their first story – of tigers and daring fights. Their expressions were of pure delight and pride when we read it back to the whole group at the end of the afternoon. And the doors began to make perfect sense.

Going further in

We began the project with three core values. Filipa offered a sense of wonder and fascination, Julie added calmness, and Jane wanted children to take the lead.

To put these values into practice meant opening doors on our own practice, looking through and perhaps wanting to change what we saw. Julie described standing back more and more to give children space. Jane re-defined in her own mind what a story could be and where and how it could be written. The children became prolific authors as a consequence.

Adults can also claim the freedoms of the forest. What better place to understand where we are? What better place to remember where we want to go next? Going out of the classroom door, entering the new world of the woods, returning to the classroom, takes us deeper into our work and the values that drive it. As George MacDonald says in his novel of far stranger worlds [Lilith, 1895]: ‘The more doors you go out of, the further you get in.’

Useful resources

• Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination is an arts organisation working across Cambridgeshire to develop and support creative projects. Our Footprints work often brings together children of nursery or reception age, their educators, and families in local wild spaces.
• Short articles here and in the next two issues of eye will introduce readers to different elements in three of these projects.
• To read more about CCI’s work and values, and to find resources to buy or read online please visit our website at: http://www.cambridgecandi.org.uk/

Extensions

• Julie and her colleagues have continued to take the children regularly to the woods since our project, extending the work to both reception classes and year one. Drama has become central to how the morning’s work is revisited back in the classroom – a short film can be seen at www.cambridgecandi.org.uk/projects/footprints/bramblefields
Clothes as identifiers

Many of the children in your setting will enjoy dressing up and there are usually a few uniform bits to be found in the dressing up box, but exactly do they know about the different type of clothes we wear?

Any children like dressing up and there are usually a few uniform bits to be found in the dressing up box. The children may have a good idea what a uniform is, but it is worth asking.

A uniform is a set of clothes worn to signify members of a particular organisation. One of the most commonly seen uniforms is that of school children. Some pre-schools wear them but most schools offering compulsory education have a uniform.

Colours are typically blue, red, and green. Blue tends to be a common colour because it is a cheap die colour to manufacture.

By secondary school, black joins the list of typical colours. Can the children name the colours used by schools in their area?

A discussion about what the children like and dislike about school uniforms is always very enlightening. This can be followed up by having them say what they would like as a new uniform and by giving them a chance to design it. Designs can then be discussed in a show and tell type session.

Now the concept of uniforms has been introduced it is time to widen the subject by introducing other uniforms. Can the children name any uniforms they see adults wearing? The most common answer is likely to be a policeman, closely followed by nurse.

We could include soldier, sailor, airman, doctor, ambulance staff, fireman, traffic warden, crossing patrol, bus driver, shop assistant, and we could even include a sports team because they wear a uniform known as team colours (or kit) on the pitch.

Pictures of uniforms can be found in magazines and newspapers. A collection of such publications is useful because the children can look through to find examples to cut out for a collage, either constructed as a group or individually. A group one would be nice because it would result in conversations to do with design and the choice of pictures to use. The resulting display can then be used for illustrations and inspiration for other work about the subject.

It is now time to look closer at uniforms.

Some uniform parts are iconic, the custodian helmet worn by police, white coats of doctors, bearskins and red jackets of guardsmen. But things are changing. Police may just as easily be seen in caps with their fluorescent jackets and body armour waistcoats.

The old style blue nurses uniforms and white coated doctors have given way to scrubs in many hospitals. These are loose fitting tops and trousers reminiscent of those found in operating theatres and are usually coloured blue, white or green. The old style uniforms are still what come to mind due to their use in television shows and book illustrations.

For the very young, it is best to keep nearer to home to look for uniform examples. So, alongside these icons we can add locals, such as school crossing patrols, school dinner staff, shop assistants and clergy. All of these wear uniforms of one sort or another to identify their role within the community.

The crossing patrol warden dressed in a long fluorescent coat and a black hat with a lollipop sign is seen at many crossing points near schools. Dinner staff dressed in pink or white overalls and hair nets or hats are very common sights in school and colleges.

Shop assistants in tabards of green, blue or red on which the store’s name is embroidered are to be found in many local shops. Those found in chain stores wear the stores recognisable uniform making use of corporate colours and logos. Clergy are included here because, for example, a vicar’s...
Practical

dog collar is part of the uniform. A visit from any of these people would be interesting for the children where they can hear about their role in society, why they wear their uniforms and what accessories they carry specifically for their jobs.

Perhaps there are a few parents who would not mind talking about the uniforms they wear for work.

The material used in many uniforms is man-made these days but looking to uniforms of the past we can find wool and cotton being used instead of man-made fibres seen today.

The children are probably unaware of where these materials come from. Are they aware of wool coming from sheep, cotton from plants and man-made fibres from a mixture of chemicals?

Show the class a few samples of different textiles. After showing them, see if the children can sort fabric pieces into different groups – for instance; cotton, wool, nylon. Take care not to have the same colours for all of the cotton fabrics for instance as the test is on type of fabric rather than colour. You can ask which fabrics would be the warmest or coolest (temperature wise) to wear. Which do the children think would be the strongest and would last the longest.

The north west of England was at one time famous for its cotton mills, while areas such as the Cotswolds were known for wool production. It may be possible to find a local fabric industry and a worker to tell the children about the processes of cloth production. It may be possible to visit buildings that were, or are, still used for textile production in order to give the project a local angle.

Thinking again of accessories, there are various items carried by people in uniform in order to carry out their jobs efficiently. Perhaps there are examples in your dressing up equipment or you may be able to find pictures of objects.

See how many items can be matched with the correct uniform by placing the object with a picture of the uniform. Can the children say which goes where and identify the object and uniform it belongs to.

Many uniforms have some kind of identification – usually a logo of some sort. A logo is a design instantly recognisable as representing an organisation. Have a look at different logos used. There are many, from Police insignia to school uniform badges to local shop logos.

Are there any features on the logos that point out exactly what is done by the wearer? Can the children think of better logos than the ones they have seen? It is time to design some new logos before a show and tell session.

Be imaginative when it comes to the design – think beyond the use paper and pencils; think of collage, possibly making use of 3D effects, depending on what materials are used; or use computers as a design aid – there are plenty of good drawing packages.

The main thing is to help develop the children's imagination because they tend to have less imaginative development than in the past. Can they tell you why they have used the colours and shapes they have picked?

Young minds can really illuminate our worlds as educators. Learning should be two-way with teachers being inspired by pupils as much as the other way around. This subject gives us a chance to both give inspiration and be inspired by imaginative results.

This project can open up all sorts of interesting side lines if we listen and react to the children. The best learning takes place while we are all having fun.

**Extension**

- Cut our logos and uniforms from magazines, or print them from the internet. Once you have a selection you can play any number of games, such as matching pairs, snap, happy families or match the logo to the uniform. In fact, any game you would normally play with cards
A good medium for developing understanding of form and 3D art work.

Handling skills develop through regular exposure and experience with clay.

It can be used to create useful items, artistic sculptures and playthings.

Dries out and hardens or can be fired in a kiln for more permanent structures.

History of clay
Archaeologists have found evidence of people working with clay going back to some of the earliest human civilisations. In fact, ceramic art is one of the oldest art forms in human history. The potter's wheel probably dates back to the Mesopotamians of around 4,000 BC!

Adults often used the clay to shape into cooking, eating or storage utensils while the children made toys and playthings. Some adults produced sculptures in the shape of people, gods, decorations or magical objects, while children made clay dolls and animals to play with.

Famous sculptors
There are many famous artists who have used clay as a medium to create sculptures, such as Michelangelo, Bernini, Picasso, and more recently, Bernard Howell Leach, Shoji Hamada and Bennett Bean. Look at images of their work online.

Starter ideas
Free play
It is vital when working with clay, more than any other malleable material, that children are given time and opportunities to be involved in free play. Give each child a fist-sized piece of clay. Let them explore the feel of it, to experiment with how they can manipulate and handle it. Some children will be more hesitant, so lead by example and they will imitate. At this stage, the only vital instruction is not to eat the clay!

If a child is unhappy about getting messy, show them how easily the clay wipes off with a damp cloth or sponge. If the clay dries out while being handled, moisten it and knead until soft. When the children begin to make things from the clay, take care to make encouraging noises, express wonder and amazement while observing their creative play and use open questions, such as: ‘Tell me more about your models?’

Using tools
Place the clay on a sheet of canvas or hessian. Begin by encouraging children to squeeze, pinch, tear, pummel, prod, thump, roll, poke and hit the clay before introducing any tools. Add natural materials, such as shells or sticks, so children can create patterns and textures.

There are commercial sets of wooden or metal clay tools that can be used for etching, cutting and gouging the clay. Alternatively, you can use rolling pins, forks, knives, lolly sticks or combs. Let children use small damp sponges to smooth the clay and very small amounts of water can be used to soften the clay.

Clay tips
Coils and balls
Two basic shapes – coils and balls – can be used to create a wide variety of models are. Show children how to roll a piece of clay, round and round between their hands to make balls of different sizes. Who can make the most perfect, spherical ball shape? Alternatively, create coils by rolling a sausage of clay on a flat table until it lengthens into a snake or worm shape. Who can make the longest snake? The coils can be then used for all sorts of activities.

Literacy skills
Making letters out of clay coils is a great way to help children to recognise letters and symbols, especially if a child has dyslexia. Try making flat clay slabs for children to draw or write letters on. Can they write their name (and then smooth it away like magic)? Children will also enjoy finger painting or writing in clay ‘slip’, which is a mixture of clay and water. Place some on a shallow tray and let children experiment drawing patterns and writing letter.
Joining clay together
After experimenting with clay, let children practise joining pieces of clay together. First thing to remember is ‘the wetter the better’. Both pieces of clay should be the same dampness so they can blend together.

Another tip is to score the two pieces that need to be joined with clay tools or a fork and use slip (clay and water) to bind them together. It is important to use one or all of these methods, otherwise the clay pieces all fall together as it dries out.

Top clay activities

Pinch pots
Give each child a fist-sized piece of clay. Ask them to roll it into a ball, round and round, between their hands. Show them how to push their thumb into the ball and then pinch all around the edges to make a pinch pot or cup. Show the children some films of potters throwing pots and using a potter’s wheel on YouTube so they can see where they are eventually aiming!

Easter egg pots
The pinch pots can be slightly enlarged to create egg cups. Use marble or carved wooden or hard-boiled eggs to show the children the required size for the bowl in the pot.

Clay coil pots
Roll out the clay to a thickness of five millimetres and cut out a circle shape for the base of the pot. Use a clay tool to score marks all around the edge of the circle. Make some long coils of clay by rolling it out on the table until long and thin. Wind the coil round and place on top of the scored marks on the circle base. Repeat with another coil and gradually build up the sides of the pot.

The coils can be left visible or smoothed over with clay slip (clay and water). Do not forget to scratch each child’s initials on the base of their work.

Clay coasters
Make small circular tiles using the same procedure as before. Decorate with patterns using clay tools. Do not add too much texture or any relief because the mats need to be flat. Leave to dry and then paint and decorate. Stick a smaller circle of felt on the underside of the mat.

Natural tiles
Use some of the techniques above to create more natural tiles. Let the children create their own choice of basic shape — circle, oval, rectangle, asymmetric, and cut it out of the rolled out clay. Decorate using fingers, tools or natural objects pressed into the clay,
such as shells, pinecones and nuts. Can they make repeated patterns all over the surface of the clay?

Coil snails
Go to Google images and show the children some clay coil snails. Let them create a long coil and then curl it into a spiral snail shell. Use slip to seal the spiral so that it stays coiled. Paint the dried snails and display.

Animal sculptures
Look at images of animal sculptures online. Show the children the work of Nick Mackman, an artist who specialises in animal sculptures. Let the children choose an animal to sculpt. Talk about what is happening in the animal’s life at the moment they want to capture. Is it sleeping, eating, scratching, sniffing…?

Model heads
Give each child a fist-sized lump of clay. Ask them to roll it into a smooth ball. Show them how to flatten one surface so that the lump can stand up steady. Then invite children to mould the ball into the shape of a head. Remind them to include all the features as they use tools to carve the clay – nose, two eyes, two ears, mouth, textured hair…

Picasso plates
Look at images of Picasso ceramic plates. Explain that children are going to create their own decorated plates. Let them practise ideas for their design on paper plates. Can they draw a self-portrait or face, in profile or head on? Help children to roll and cut out a large plate shape from clay. Use clay tools to draw their design onto the clay.

Dinosaur world
Create a landscape for dinosaurs to live on using lumps, piles and paths of clay in a tuff spot. Press plastic dinosaur feet into the clay to create footprints for the children to match to the models. Push cardboard trees and bushes into the clay. Leave clay to air dry. Add dry sand, rocks, stones, shells, and so on, to complete the layout. Let children play with small world dinosaurs in this imaginary play world.

Mini-buildings
Let children make small brick shapes from clay. Leave to dry and then encourage children to build walls and small structures from small world play. Who can build a wall for Humpty Dumpy to sit on and fall off? Or a house for the three bears? Who can construct the tallest tower for Rapunzel to let her hair down? Who can build the finest castle?

Seasonal clay activities

Spring clay nests
Look at images of bird’s nests. Go outside and collect some natural materials to make a bird’s nest. Use sticks, twigs, moss, dried grass, feathers, and so on. In spring, keep your eyes open for real nests to point out to the children. Remind them that it is important not to touch or disturb nests because it will upset the owners! Back inside, let children make a shallow bowl of clay, using the same technique as for the pinch pot (see above). Stick the materials into the clay to fashion a multi-media model of a nest.

Autumn leaf prints
In the autumn, let children go outside and pick up fallen leaves. There are many different art activities related to leaves, such as wax crayon rubbings, press printing, and more. Try making clay leaves. Roll the clay to a thickness of about five millimetres. Press a leaf down into the clay so that the ribs and veins make an impression. Carefully around the shape of the leaf with a plastic knife and then peel the leaf off. Leave to dry and then paint with autumn colours.

Winter lamps and candlesticks
Start with a fist-sized lump of clay. Roll into a ball and then flatten the base by banging on the tabletop. Make sure it is steady because it is important that a candle stick does not fall over! Press the base of a candle into the top of the clay to make a hole the right size for the candle. Decorate using clay tools or press dried pasta or sequins and beads into the clay. Leave to dry and then paint or leave ‘au naturelle’. This activity can be adapted to create diva lamps at Diwali. Use a tea light instead of a candle to create a bigger hole. Use red, silver and gold, or luminous, paints to decorate.

Summer sunflowers
Look at images of sunflowers. Grow some sunflower plants outside or on the windowills of the classroom. Collect some sunflower seeds. Roll the clay out to a thickness of about five millimetres and cut out large flower shapes using a cutter or stencil. Fill the centre of the flower with sunflower seeds pressed into the clay. Leave the shape to dry and paint the petals bright yellow.

Extensions
- Clay bugs: Provide a selection of plastic small world bugs for children to examine. Show them how to press a bug of their choice into some clay to make impressions. Can they see all the parts of the bug in the clay? Help them to use correct terminology, such as body, thorax, legs, antennae, and so on. Let them experiment in creating bug sculptures out of clay. Add collage materials, such as matchsticks and pipe cleaners for legs and antennae. How accurate can they make their clay bugs? Leave to dry and paint with bright bug colours!
- Clay tiles: Show the children some square tiles for bathroom or kitchen walls. Explain that they are going to make their own square tiles. Roll out the clay to a thickness of five millimetres. Cut into squares of approximately six to eight centimetres. Invite children to decorate the tiles with clay tools. They can use patterns or pictures. Add texture or relief using mini-coils and balls. Join small pieces to the tile using scoring and slip (see above). Leave to dry and then paint with bright colours.
Neuroscience tells us loud and clear that gender attitudes and behaviours are soft-wired and can be changed.

**Key points**

- Certain ‘truths’ dominate the way early years practitioners think about gender and so it is no surprise that gender-related issues in the foundation stage are not addressed.
- While there are some children (and certainly more boys than girls) who start school struggling with language; are over-boisterous; have poor fine motor skills; difficulties in social skills and difficulties with routine and independence skills… too often these general statements are made about boys, when in fact they relate to ‘some boys’.

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Focusing on the details

Observation is such a vital part of the early learning process that it might seem that we know all there is to know about the subject; one small project assessed a different method, the use of mini-camcorders.

We conducted a small in-house project in a nursery to evaluate the use of micro-camcorders to record observations that could be shared between practitioners and parents. The choice of activities to record was informed by Froebel's principles on play. Therefore, to gain a sense of the infants' holistic development and their interactions during both structured and unstructured play, sessions were chose to record observations during music time and periods of outdoor play.

How the observations were collated

'Snap shot' clips of babies were filmed at the end of each month the films were collated into a child's electronic folder, copied onto a disc and placed in the child's paper portfolio. All parents were informed prior to the project and asked whether they would like to participate. The potential observations were organised prior to the recordings taking place. Challenging behaviour was also discussed between the practitioners and the children were supported where necessary.

Care was taken to minimise the viewing of other babies during a scene although at times this was unavoidable. Care was also taken to ensure that the parents were informed of the content that would be filmed and that the process involved some purposeful editing in creating and sharing the film for positive reasons, rather than for any other purpose, was also acknowledged and discussed.

The theoretical rationale for using micro-camcorders

Using the micro-camcorder as a tool to develop observations to share with parents was theoretically informed by the German educator Friedrich Froebel's (1782-1852) principles of play. He advocated that the first learning experiences of infants are crucially important to the later development of individuals.

Some of Froebel's key principles can be summarised as:

- Recognition of the uniqueness of each child's capacity and potential.
- An holistic view of each child's development.
- Recognition of the importance of play as a central integrating element in a child's development and learning.
- Recognition of the child as part of a family and a community.

Camcorders as tools

So, what is the current 'view' regarding the use of camcorders as tools for carrying out observations?

The use of cameras has increasingly become an everyday feature in nursery settings and selected images have become part of documentary evidence in exploring learning opportunities and capturing play scenes.

Similarly, the use of camcorders has also been widely used as part of the research process with young children. In this project, the focus was on just how beneficial the use of a micro-camcorder could be when used for capturing play activities but also for sharing the filmed observations with parents as part of a monthly development review.

Emphasis was placed on planning and on ensuring that parents were informed prior to filming, but also on where the content would be stored. Recognition that the process involved some purposeful editing in creating and sharing the film for positive reasons, rather than for any other purpose, was also acknowledged and discussed.

A music session

During the music session, the micro-camcorder was placed discreetly to one side of a table so that the view was of the whole group, including the practitioners. The group was in focus initially and then the camcorder was lifted to observe a particular infant take part in the activity.

Reflections from the film

Reflections were made from the film that proved particularly helpful in planning for each child's uniqueness within the Early Years Foundation Stage (2012) curriculum, especially when supporting potential and capacity.

This session was challenging because, as a group activity (singing) it was inevitable that other voices and other children would be involved in the observation. This was accepted, although focus remained on one infant each time. As a reflective tool, the practitioner felt the session was led more...
Provision

Reflexive Practice

Drawing on Peters’ (1994) DATA process was helpful in outlining the changes that occurred using a micro-camcorder (Dryden et al, 2005)

• D – Describe the task that needs to be looked and possibly changed: In this instance, it was re-visiting how the practitioners observed and what they felt was important in how they record. Focusing on parts of the day helped to frame and make links to existing practice and observations when informing future planning.

• A – Analyse the description looking at the assumptions of the time and then the responses to them: This was helpful in thinking about existing practice and how practitioners edited observations without meaning to, as well as purposefully, in aiding individual capacity for uniqueness.

• T – Theorise a range of ways to respond to the task: Reflecting and theorising on what was than anticipated and that the choices of songs were generally themed.

The child’s body language was noted more from the film than when observations were recorded via pen and paper. It was also noted that disruptions and background noises impacted on the session and consideration of ways that this could be reduced in future sessions was reflected on.

The giving and returning of instruments was also observed to be rather quick and that providing more time, as Froebel suggests, would create capacity for uniqueness and individual choice.

Comments from parents

The sharing of filmed observations with parents was successful although it was noted that children in the music session often behaved differently to what the parents had expected. Some parents found their child’s behaviour to be more positive and interactive and positive in a peer situation in a marked contrast to what they had observed at home. The parents were also eager to extend the songs and share them at home.

Reflections from filming outdoor play

Of the many observations filmed, one in particular highlighted the value of filming rather than observing through other means. This incident involved an infant trying to unlock a low gate to get to where some older children were playing on the other side.

The infant was able to walk and was intrigued by what was occurring on the other side of the gate, rather than with her own peers on push along toys. She spent some time stretching and reaching for the lock, and twisting and turning the metal lever with her hands. She would turn to her peers every so often and encourage them to help; she used language and negotiation skills throughout. She did not get frustrated, but instead was fascinated by the mechanics of the gate and how the bolt could be turned, but not opened.

The gate had wooden slats and was quite low and the older children would come and chat every so often. This highlighted the significance of the environment as a play opportunity, as opposed to the pre-planned resources presented to the infants.

It was not until the film was reflected on afterwards by both the parents and practitioner that the development was noticed and that it was obviously occurring around the physical and inquisitive nature of the infant, including her ability to sustain attention on her chosen activities and to have fun with the existing environment around her.

The engagement of the practitioner and parent when viewing the film also created a specific time and place for experiences and qualities relating to the infant to be shared, further enhancing the parent partnership bond.

The use of micro-camcorders provides an unobtrusive way of observing children's play

Photo by Tracey Clarke
observed provided a deeper understanding, in particular, making links with Froebel and his theory on education and play principles.

• A – Act using one of the above: This was achieved by sharing the film with parents and developing observational skills in a unique way.

Issues
Were there any issues with using a micro-camcorder as a tool for carryout observations? Overall, the success of the project can be summed up in the self-reflections practitioners made about their role in playing with infants, planning for play and their individual interests.

Key points
• Organise and plan a framework to outline the time to carry out the recordings
• Spend time considering the most appropriate tool to use for recording, and exploring the physical value of a micro-camcorder in terms of it being an unobtrusive piece of equipment that does not inhibit infants at play
• Plan for the accessibility of computers and ensure that you set policies for the use of digital equipment, including storage and safeguarding of children
• Have a meeting to plan for ethical issues, such as editing and sharing of film, parental consent and children’s consent
• Be realistic about retaining a balance of different types of ways to observe, rather than relying solely on filming, and plan for appropriate time to reflect
• Create a dialogue with parents to enhance partnerships
• Consider the theoretical position in developing how infants are viewed and where this could be developed further

One area that was not anticipated was the significantly increased dialogue that occurred between parents and practitioners about how they perceived their children in nursery that stemmed from viewing the ‘snap shot’ scenes.

Reflections were continually made regarding the different approaches to using the mini-camcorder in terms of being a practitioner or being a researcher, as well as regarding whether to simply select or whether to edit snap shots to be included in a child’s final portfolio. There was a challenge for practitioners, therefore, in how subjective the process became and as to how much time it took to edit films.

The process of downloading the film into individual electronic files with an additional saving onto a CD as part of the child’s portfolio for parents to view was also time consuming. However, the process was deemed worthwhile and helpful when the observations could be used for a dual purpose, such as developing practice in staff meetings.

Useful resources
• http://www.froebeltrust.org.uk
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About the authors

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Provision

Shout it out or keep it in

This is the first of three articles that will explore introversion and extroversion, personality aspects that are often misunderstood but that can help us to improve the daily provision we offer children.

Jenni Clarke
is an independent early years advisor and author

BEING INTROVERTED or extraverted is one aspect of our complex human personality that, if we understand them correctly, can support nurturing in early years settings. Understanding our colleagues and the children in our care will improve the quality of the daily experience for all.

This article will explain the terms and dispel some common misconceptions, as well as suggesting staff inset ideas and support for concerned parents. The next article will look at the optimal environment, resources and activities to support an introverted child’s learning, while the final article will look at the optimal environment, resources and activities to support an extroverted child’s learning.

What makes us introverted or extroverted?

Talking about being an introvert or an extrovert has become a social trend, but there are many misconceptions, such as that an introvert will ‘become more social when she makes friends at school’, or an extrovert will ‘calm down as he gets older’. All research agrees that we are born introverted or extroverted, it is not something we ‘choose’ to be or something we can change.

However, it is important to know that these differences are viewed on a continuum with ambiverts (those who are comfortable in any situation) being in the middle. Our life experiences also shape our preferences and, as adults, we may often take on some traits from the opposite side of the continuum to cope with situations we find ourselves in. It would be rare for someone to be purely introverted or exclusively extroverted.

Introversion and extroversion is caused by two chemicals found in the brain – dopamine and acetylcholine. Dopamine is triggered when we act quickly, socialise or take risks, it gives us a burst of happiness. Introverts are sensitive to dopamine and too much can leave them feeling over-stimulated, tired and depressed.

Extroverts need more stimulation to produce dopamine, the more they interact with others or participate in active, novel experiences the more they feel the effects of the chemical.

Acetylcholine is released when we read, concentrate or think deeply and it rewards us in a more subtle way, leaving us relaxed, content and alert. Introverts feel good when this chemical is released, extroverts hardly register its mild effects.

Misconceptions

Many of the misconceptions come from those with the opposite personality trait – what one person understands as normal behaviour another sees as different. Educational environments are inherently social, so it easy to see why more extroverted behaviours can be the expected norm, and some introverted behaviours can be attributed to social problems and depression, rather than a personality trait. Being more aware of this continuum and understanding another’s point of view and preference can support better adult working relationships, as well as informing planning for learning.

Misconceptions about introverts

They are shy – shy people are nervous or even afraid of other people; this is often a learned trait from social experiences. Both introverts and extroverts can be shy, although an introvert may appear shy because they think before they speak, whereas extroverts speak as they think. There is a difference in how information is processed in the brain.

An extrovert uses a short pathway, focusing on the areas of the brain where the senses are processed, but for introverts the pathway is longer, passing through areas of the brain that deal with meaning, errors, self-awareness, planning, speech and long-term memory. Introverts are not brilliant at small talk, which may look like shyness but is purely because their brains are wired for deep conversations on subjects that they are passionate about.

They are unemotional – this is a separate aspect of personality and both introverts and extroverts may internalise their feelings rather than show them to others.

They are rude or impolite – introverts may not respond quickly to a question and sometimes are not aware that the question needs a response or that it has been directed at them, they are also more likely to give honest, direct answers that may appear to be blunt.

They do not make good team workers – they are better suited to small groups where they have time to process information and where their opinions will be heard, but they function in larger groups too, generally listening more and commenting later.
They are anti-social – it is true that introverts are content to be alone, but they enjoy and need the company of others, just in smaller doses. An open plan office, for example, is a difficult environment for an introvert, unless they have a private space within it.

They are boring and weird – introverts may not enjoy large noisy parties, but they generally have many creative interests and passions. They do not make personal decisions based on what is popular or trendy, they can often challenge the norm with their novel ideas. Not weird, just different.

They are not good leaders – actually their ability to listen and their analytical mind makes them quiet but confident leaders.

**Misconceptions about extroverts**

They want to be the centre of attention – they are confident and thrive on social interactions and situations, but they do not need to be the centre of attention.

They are always happy – social interaction makes extroverts happy, but how they cope with their emotions is another aspect of personality. Extroverts have the whole range of emotions, as do introverts.

They are self-centred and annoying – extroverts show their affection by being social and enthusiastic. When they are alone or quiet for a period of time they crave interaction, so when they see someone is alone and quiet they interact with comments or practical jokes out of kindness.

They are not good in a small team – extroverts react quickly to situations and problems, rather than taking time to look at different methods of solving a problem, they do work well in large groups, but may provoke thinking through their questions in a small group.

They never want to be alone – they do enjoy and need their own space, but in small doses.

They are not creative – they are as creative as introverts, but in a different way – they are more likely to use social interaction and talk to stimulate ideas and projects.

They are bad listeners – extroverts are good at listening, in large social groups it is important to be aware of different people’s opinions. They are also good at encouraging people to talk more by using open-ended questions.

Some of the above may make it easier for you to understand why fellow workers, and yourself, behave in the way they do. Knowing that some staff are naturally better suited to organising and participating in particular activities than others will create a better working environment for all. Knowing your own and the other members of staff’s strengths means that planning can be devised to maximise these, which will benefit the children in your care.
**Provision**

**Traits**

A trait is a distinguishing characteristic or quality, especially of one's personal nature. The following two lists sum up the general traits for introverted and extroverted adults. It is not a definitive list but gives you a quick guide to understanding part of your own and others' personality.

Remember, that as adults we have learnt to adapt to different social situations and some people you believe to be extroverted may well be introverted and vice versa. You can use these lists as a starting point toward understanding.

**Introvert traits**

- Self-sufficient and content with their own company.
- Super-focused, great concentration, especially in a quiet environment.
- Interested in many things, they often have numerous hobbies and passions.
- Thought provoking when you get them talking.
- Solve problems by thinking through all the options.
- Happy with simple, quiet activities, such as a good book or film.
- Driven by internal needs, not external pressure.
- Observers in group situations.

**Extrovert traits**

- Love big social events.
- Enjoy talking to anyone, interested in others.
- Solve problems by talking through them.
- Happiest when with others.
- Enjoy new and daring activities.
- Easy to get to know, have many friends.
- Assertive in group situations.

Remember that extroversion or introversion is a continuum and some people might be very extroverted while others are less so. Extroversion seems to be more common than introversion. This does not mean, however, that one personality type is 'better' than another. Each type has its own pluses and minuses, many people are more extroverted in some situations and more introverted in others.

**Staff meeting ideas**

The following are starting points for discussion or for staff inset activities, if anyone is particularly interested they could go online and complete the Myers Briggs personality test, which looks at many different traits. What do the words introvert and extrovert mean to you? Write down the key words and phrases the staff use and compare with the misconception list.

Divide into two groups – introverts and extroverts, discuss their choices and what the implications are for the way in which they work. Give each group the list of misconceptions and discuss. Look at the different ways in which the brain deals with pleasure chemicals and how the brain processes information and, again, discuss the implications.

Cut up the list of misconceptions without the explanations and ask the staff, in small groups or pairs, to put them into introvert and extrovert categories, and then to discuss. Look at some written observations, or video, of children playing and discuss their behaviour in terms of introvert/extrovert and discuss the implications for planning.

Ask the staff members what their favourite place is in the setting and/or their favourite activity to play with the children, discuss in terms of introvert/extrovert. What are the implications for planning? Ask the staff to be honest and say which children they prefer to play with, then discuss why this may be the case. Look at the traits lists and discuss which ones you display at home and at work. Are you displaying different traits in the different situations?

**Information for parents**

Listen carefully to parental comments and worries that are connected with introvert or extrovert issues. It is hard for an introverted parent to understand the needs of an extroverted child, and vice versa.

Provide them with some information on the environment and ideas for activities they can do at home (this will explored further in the next two articles). Reassure parents that being social and having plenty of friends is not necessary for a happy and fulfilling life. Neither is it always necessary to have copious amount of quiet, alone time.

Note: If an outgoing social child becomes quiet and withdrawn this is probably nothing to do with their personality, so it is best to advise professional support.

There are numerous websites with advice for parents, here are three examples:

- [www.sheknows.com/parenting/articles/972879/print+extroverting-your-child](http://www.sheknows.com/parenting/articles/972879/print+extroverting-your-child)
- [www.quietrev.com/](http://www.quietrev.com/)

**Avoiding labels**

Having shown the differences between introverts and extroverts it is important to stress that the purpose of these articles is not about labels, it is about understanding preferences and processes. It would not be helpful to begin to categorise young children into introverts and extroverts. It is helpful to be aware of the differences and to ensure that you are providing the environment and activities to suit all the children in your care. This will be discussed in detail in the next two articles.
Early education in Kenya

Kenya has frequently been in the news due to the ongoing tensions with the Islamic militant group, Al Shabab. The latest horrific attacks at Garissa University, which has a large Faculty of Education, resulted in many fatalities, many of whom would have been the country’s future teachers. Despite this, the Kenyans remain positive, with the need to educate their children high on the agenda.

At 87.4 percent, Kenya has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. This is an amazing accomplishment considering the country has a population of 41 million people and 42 percent of them are under the age of 15.

Government schools organisation and structure

Government schools currently follow the 8:4:4 system, which provides children with eight years of primary school, starting in ‘standard one’, aged six-years-old, followed by four years of secondary school and then four years of university.

In 2003, it was announced that primary education would be free under the Free Primary Education Policy. This policy abolished school fees and other levies, thereby creating an opportunity for 1.5 million previously out-of-school children to access education. This has consequently put a huge strain on schools. It is common to see 50 to 70 children per class jam-packed, shoulder-to-shoulder on old rickety, wooden benches.

To support the schools, parents are expected to provide their children’s books and uniforms as well as paying for extra curricula activities.

All teachers are qualified and deliver the government’s prescriptive curriculum, in English, using traditional teaching methods.

Recently, however, the government has placed a significant emphasis on trying to develop an effective modern education system. Their vision is to catapult their schools into the 21st century by fulfilling the political pledge of providing 1.3 million standard one children with laptops in 22,000 government primary schools.

In reality, this has created many challenges, not only with the training of teachers but primarily in providing basic power connection to each school!

Two years of early years, or pre-primary education as it is termed, is now compulsory for children aged three to six-years-old; but only around 50 percent of children attend. This is largely due to many schools not having the funding to build the necessary extra classrooms. Schools lucky enough to have pre-primary classrooms frequently lack teachers, as well as basic teaching resources, running water and mains power. In spite of all this, an early years curriculum of sorts is taking place.

The government advocates learning through physical, spiritual, social and mental growth. But in reality, teachers mainly focus on teaching the children the English language, letters, numbers, shapes and colours. For many of the children, this is taught by rote, but things are beginning to change and some teachers are attempting to make their lessons more practical.

In a couple of pre-primary classrooms I visited recently, children were sitting in groups and involved in hands-on activities. The teacher had written letters and numbers on the back of old cereal packets, cut them up and had the children sorting those letters and numbers and then making sums, words and sentences.

In another school, children were sorting real objects by colour and even had a role-play shop set up in their classroom. All the classrooms visited showed impeccably behaved children, who were inquisitive and eager to learn.

Private settings

There is a huge range of private early years settings in the country that suit every parent’s budget, from the smallest to the largest. Standards vary enormously from basic to outstanding. There is also a wide choice of international curricula available, such as Montessori, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Dutch, Japanese and the Rudolf Steiner approach.

For the last couple of years I have been voluntarily supporting the Upper Hill Nursery School, Naro Mora, situated on the foothills of Mount Kenya; it was set up by a qualified teacher, Jane. Her aim is to provide an education for the local children of the area without them having to walk an hour and a half to the nearest school. She rents a poorly built wooden building with a mud floor, and makes use of furniture made of recycled building off-cuts.

Jane charges a minimal fee of Kshs 300 (£2) per month and started with just a handful of children, two of them being her own. In line with the
government system, the children range from three to six-years-old. At the last count, the nursery school now has 67 children on role.

**Learning and development**

Jane has a daily routine and the children spend time both inside and outside. Inside the classroom, Jane and the children sing songs in Kiswahili and English, many of them action songs. She uses a chalkboard, some handmade posters, paper and a few pencils to support learning.

Over the years I have provided Jane with additional sheets of card, pegs, a washing line, glue, marker pens and scissors, plus other basic stationery items, and taught her how to make resources to actively involve the children in their learning.

The washing line has been a hit with the children! They order number cards, find the missing number, count forwards and backwards and a whole host of other activities. We have made cards with pictures and a set of letters so that the children can match the initial sounds.

The children have collected bottle tops so they can count, add, subtract, sort and build towers. We have created pattern cards so the children can match and continue patterns with their multi-coloured bottle tops. The children’s favourite resources are the number fans. Jane was amazed at how many different questions and activities could be done with them.

With the additional stationery resources, Jane is now able to support the children’s creativity by making collage pictures using natural resources they collect, such as beans, seeds, leaves and twigs.

Outside playtimes are a daily occurrence where children run after old wheels with a stick and play with their homemade pull along cars, made from recycled materials and bottle top wheels. They also play clapping games and run around playing tag and catch.

**Health and wellbeing**

Jane ensures every child has good hygiene and that they wash their hands and face before and after snacks. To ensure the availability of water, the children take it in turns to bring a jerry can of water to school, which is shared with the other children. She encourages the children and parents to have a healthy snack and discourages chocolate and sweets.

**Parents and partners**

Sand and cement was bought with additional funds that had been raised and the local community gave up their time for free to help in the mixing and laying of a concrete boundary to prevent the water running through the classroom during the rainy season. Later, the parents put in an outside toilet for the children.
The nursery still has a long way to go, but three years on from inception, Jane now has 35 children and has taken on a second teacher. It is a long cry from what our early years settings in first world countries provide but it is making a huge difference to the 35 children that otherwise would be at home, or walking over three hours a day to and from school.

**Unique child**

In contrast, I have also been supporting a private school group, Braeburn Schools, with their early years settings. Each of the nine settings is different – each catering for the different needs of the children and their families, but their vision is the same: ‘Every student to be a successful learner, a confident individual and a respectful citizen.’

The teachers are a mixture of Kenyans and expatriates, and the schools expect the highest standards. Being outside of the UK has enabled the schools to deliver a bespoke curriculum, which not only follows the Early Years Foundation Stage but also reflects the unique geographical environment of each school.

We had great fun in a training session a few years ago changing words of well-known songs and adding actions to make them unique to their school environment. Themes chosen are required to be exciting, and different, and they must reflect children’s interests and their local area.

**Learning environment**

Braeburn puts a great emphasis on the natural world and children using natural materials. Children are frequently seen outside experimenting in mud kitchens, pouring water down bamboo shoots, balancing on old car tyres, clambering over wooden climbing frames and are encouraged to take risks. Sand trays are full of soil, real leaves and flowers. Boxes of off-cuts of local fabric encourage children to think creatively – they are used in 101 different ways.

For those children who want quiet time or simply to have a chat with friends, the opportunity to sit around their campfire on wooden logs, or in caves and huts quietly reading, is provided.

The natural world continues inside as children in the home corner use real fruit and vegetables and sprinkle on real spices to give their concoctions a spicy aroma and a tasty flavour!

**Leadership and management**

More recently, I was involved in training the senior management team to enable them to have a deeper understanding of early years and the best way to appraise their early years teams. We had them revisiting their childhood roots as they delved into icy water, shaving foam, and a gloopy mess, and hunted for insects in the garden with magnifying glasses.

This certainly put a different angle on the early years and the amount of learning that takes place when children are provided with natural, stimulating, exciting resources.

**Conclusion**

Early years education is a learning journey, not just for children but for the adults involved too. By providing practical learning opportunities, children are enabled to be inquisitive, imaginative and creative. You do not always need the newest and best resources produced – what you find in the natural local environment is not only a cheaper option but often the most inspiring!

**Last word**

I have seen some of the most amazing, dynamic, stimulating and engaging lessons, literally delivered under a mango tree!

**Key points**

- Kenya has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. The government has placed a significant emphasis on trying to develop an effective modern education system. Its vision is to catapult schools into the 21st century
- In reality, this has created many challenges, not only with the training of teachers but primarily in providing basic power connection to each school
- Two years of early years, or pre-primary education as it is termed, is now compulsory for children aged three to six-years-old; but only around 50 percent of children attend
Active movement – a behavioural programme for health

by Linda Baston-Pitt

‘Healthy diet and regular physical activity are crucial for a healthy childhood and emerging evidence suggests that sedentary behaviour in the early years is associated with overweight and obesity’
Ensuring the positive wellbeing of the children in any early years organisation should be viewed as a necessity, not a luxury. However, wellbeing is a difficult concept to understand and can mean different things to different people.

Felicity Huppert gives one of the best descriptions, ‘well-being is a positive and sustainable condition that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish. Well-being… requires an integrated approach, one that embraces mind, body, society, and the environment. Understanding how individuals and communities can be helped to thrive and flourish could be of great benefit to our citizens, our educators and our leaders.’

In 2007, the World Health Organisation highlighted the power of an early influence on health and social wellbeing, commenting, ‘investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment a country can make, with returns over the life course many times the amount of the original investment’. The proposition being that the early learning of positive behaviours and attitudes that contribute to wellbeing have significant value in later life, benefitting both the individual and society as a whole.

However, the growing concern among parents, organisations and the media, about the health and wellbeing of our children continues to rise. Much of the concern comes from the rise of obesity in children, and the associated lack of physical activity in their everyday lives (Gallagher, 2014; Holm J et al, 2011; Statham and Chase, 2010).

There is little doubt that a healthy diet and regular physical activity are crucial for a healthy childhood and emerging evidence suggests that sedentary behaviour in the early years is associated with overweight and obesity (NHS, 2010), as well as lower cognitive development (Hawkins and Law, 2006). According to an all-party parliamentary group on health patterns for healthy families, ‘obesity is a family affair and it starts early… over 90% of excess weight gained by girls and over 70% gained by boys is acquired before school age’. [APPG, 2014]

With parents, politicians and the media united in their commitment to encourage physical activity and to redress obesity, it is not surprising that wellbeing remains high on the agenda, post-election. Children’s wellbeing is clearly integral to nursery provision. The benefits of health and happiness are beyond question and we all seek to promote an early years environment that influences positive behaviours in both childhood and adulthood.

What were the main aims and objectives?

The aim of the project between Active Movement™ and the Old School House Nursery (OSHDN) was to both identify and reduce sedentary behaviours within the nursery using this unique behavioural change intervention, evaluated by the Mosaic Approach to collect evidence and support children’s participation in the process.

In defining the programme, four main objectives were set:

- To work in partnership with an early years setting to establish non-sedentary behaviour for children.
- To test a process of setting activity and communication tailored to the mobility and understanding of each year group (via a campaign using two characters, Stan and Sid).
- To involve children under five-years-old, parents and practitioners, to improve long-term wellbeing.
- Extending and adapting the Mosaic Approach in order to educate adults and children as to the benefits of non-sedentary behaviour, and how its integration within daily practices can bring to both adults and children a lifetime of wellbeing.

This pilot project was carried out over eight weeks, in November and December 2014. The Active Movement™ programme has been successfully used in a number of office-based businesses and aims to embed movement into every day routines to benefit individual long-term health and wellbeing.

The project with the OSHDN is the first time the Active Movement™ programme has been adapted for use in an early years setting, with a similar project running simultaneously at a primary school. The programme is co-designed by Dr Mike Loosemore, a leading authority in Exercise Medicine, and is centred on long-term behavioural change. ‘Active Movement™ has been designed to integrate simple actions and non-sedentary behaviour into everyday lives… the focus on small steps to achieve major gains makes the programme achievable by, and therefore accessible to, everyone.’ [Loosemore and Savage, 2014]

The benefits of health and happiness are beyond question and we all seek to promote an early years environment that influences positive behaviours.
The Old School House Nursery is a national award-winning day nursery near Cambridge, which has achieved ‘outstanding’ in all areas from Ofsted. The setting offers full daycare to children from six-weeks-old to pre-school age, and holiday care for four to 11-year-olds. The project was run with the full backing of the management team, staff and parents, and children were supported using the well-established Mosaic Approach.

The setting staff followed an eight-week Active Movement™ programme, that involved children in the setting being introduced to posters and messages on Active Movement™ alongside two characters, Sid and Stan. The characters were depicted on posters displayed round the setting and on stickers, featuring a phonetic link between Sid sitting down and Stan standing up, for added memorability and understanding.

The findings in this article are taken from evidence collected from the children and from the staff who were looking after them.

**HOW WERE THE FINDINGS COLLATED?**

The raw data collected from the setting included the eight-week schedule for the programme, 13 child observations, and weekly reflections from the setting staff on how Active Movement™ is affecting both themselves and the children in their care.

Observations and comments from the children relating to the characters of Sid and Stan were taken during a tour of the nursery and a magic carpet activity (part of the Mosaic Approach). The use of a variety of sources to gather information can help to provide triangulated evidence for a small research project such as this.

The OSHDN has used the Mosaic Approach to ensure data is sourced in a variety of ways, including observations, discussions, photographs and children’s work. Robert-Holmes (2005) suggests the Mosaic Approach uses multiple methods to empower children through participation.

The process starts with the gathering of evidence, including drawings and maps by the children, photographs the children have taken and observations and discussions conducted with the child, their parents and key workers at the setting.

The Mosaic is made up of many components with the child at the centre of it. Observation is just one piece of the mosaic; field notes, narrative observations used to inform discussions, diary studies, observation of pre-verbal children’s body language, expressions and noises are all used in...
Stage two involves collating all the information, interpreting it and reflecting on the evidence that has been gathered. This information then enables the researcher to gain insight into the child’s activities and interests, and act accordingly. The Mosaic Approach appears to be inclusive and is not dependent on the child’s developmental stage or verbal communication skills, which was particularly valuable in this project because the children involved were so young.

School room environment
Initially, staff identified a list of activities and areas in the school room environment, and divided these into sitting, standing, or areas to do both in. The areas identified for sitting included snack/meal times, playing on the computer, reading books and sitting on vehicles, such as trikes and cars.

The standing areas included washing hands, the puppet show and light box area, putting on coats, dancing, playing in the forest garden, and games, such as football.

Most regular activities were recognised as being suitable for both standing and sitting, for example, home/role-play, writing and numeracy areas, puzzles, construction and small world toys, art and messy play, musical instruments and singing, the sand pit, mud kitchen and den building, and planning/recall and news times.

Child observations
Of the 13 observations taken during the programme seven were of male children and six of female children, all were aged between 13 and 45 months at the time of the observations. These took place at different times of the setting day, during the third week of the eight-week programme.

All observations were conducted either inside the child’s usual room or in their garden area. The observations were carried out by senior staff in the setting, and were between 30-65 minutes long. Each observation focused on one child playing within their peer group, some of the observations were of the same child.

Stan and Sid tour around nursery
A small group of children had a tour round the nursery with an adult, looking for posters of Sid and Stan. The children decided the route they took, and the adult wrote down their comments when they found the posters. The messages from the character posters about the health and wellbeing benefits of standing and moving appeared to be followed and understood by the children doing the tour (a mix of boys and girls aged from three to four-years-old).

Comments demonstrating this included, ‘standing makes our bodies work’, ‘we like Stan, he is tall and has long strong arms’, ‘we will be good like Stan and healthy because we stand’, ‘we sit for lunch but we play and run’, ‘if you don’t move you ache’, and ‘mummies and daddies like to stand and walk’.

It is clear from the children’s comments that they do not view Sid in a negative way. For example, at the snack table one child said, ‘we can only be like Sid at the snack table’, another said, ‘Sid and Stan can play together in the art area’. In the forest garden one child commented, ‘Sid can sit with us in the log circle’, another said, ‘we need to be like Stan and Sid in the number area’.

This is an important consideration in the early years, as young children have a developmental need for rest. There are also safety and developmental reasons for children to sit down for some activities.

Magic carpet activity
A member of staff took photographs of different areas of the nursery setting, alongside photographs of the children playing in these areas. These contained images of the children displaying both sedentary and non-sedentary behaviours during a variety of activities, which identified and supported the children’s recognition of, and engagement with, the characters of Sid and Stan.

The photographs were spread on the carpet and used as a point of discussion, after which the children placed stickers on each picture. The children were each asked to decide whether the area and/or activity shown should have a sticker of Stan, a sticker of Sid, or a sticker of both Stan and Sid.

The children were a mixed gender group of three-year-olds, all of whom joined in with the activity. Each child was able to identify the area and activity in the photograph, the other children in the picture, and identify and place the stickers of Sid and Stan.
Their comments demonstrated a recognition and engagement with Sid and Stan – for example, one child said: ‘He’d stand, he’s Sid, he could stand up and play… both… he could be Stan and Sid, we do both.’ At the end of the activity each child was asked what activity they would like to do next, and whether they would be a Sid or Stan while doing the activity. Each child was able to do this and comments from the children included, ‘Sid, sitting down in the role-play area’, ‘Stan, in the light box area cause I’m Stan’ and ‘Sid in the snack area’.

At the end of the activity three of the seven children were going to be a ‘Stan’ and four were going to be ‘Sid’, demonstrating that the children identified equally with both characters.

**Active learning reflections/observations**

Observations were carried out by staff members in the four rooms, throughout the programme, for each of the eight weeks (32 in total). The four rooms included the baby room upstairs (birth to one-year-olds), the baby room downstairs (one to two-year-olds), the nursery room (two to three-year-olds), and the school room (three to five-year-olds).

The staff reflections provided evidence of how the characters of Sid and Stan had been integrated, and evidence of the children’s recognition and engagement with the characters. For example, during the first week of the programme in the baby room one of the pre-verbal babies pointed to the characters and babbled, while another slightly older baby said the characters names when the adult pointed to them.

In the nursery room, one child kissed the poster of Sid and said, ‘I like him’, and when the adult said, ‘I like Stan’, the child said ‘I do too’ – while in the garden, an adult asked a child looking at the posters what they were doing and the child responded, ‘sitting on a chair and standing, and Stan is best’.

By week three, one adult in the school room reflected that: ‘The children continue to recognise Stan and Sid, regularly commenting and questioning about the characters spontaneously. The children particularly reacted well to the new poster in the room, especially ‘Sid stood up today’. The children were questioning where he had gone and celebrated that he had stood and was no longer sitting on the chair. Many children also showed the new poster to parents when being collected at the end of the day.’

These reflections demonstrated that the characters appear to have a positive influence on children of all ages, with staff in each room observing interaction between the children and the posters of Sid and Stan. For example, babies approached and stroked the posters, and offered them toys. They evidenced how staff adapted challenges and goals from the programme to suit the developmental needs of the children in their care – for example, one of the challenges was to walk round with an upset child. This worked well for the baby room, but staff in the nursery room adapted this to holding hands and walking to another area because they do not carry the older children.

Examples of how messages about the benefits of the Active Movement™ programme were influencing those around the staff and children were demonstrated when one practitioner reflected on how a parent told her that their child had reminded her and her husband that they could walk and talk.

There is also evidence in the reflections that the project is improving/increasing non-sedentary behaviour with some of the children. In week seven, some staff members commented that ‘one child in the group regularly chooses to stand at times he would normally sit, for example, at planning times when the rest of the group are seated. When chairs aren’t provided at table top activities-my group are generally more accepting that we are standing and don’t request chairs.’
Towards the end of the eight-week programme staff decided to incorporate the characters of Sid and Stan further into the planning for Christmas activities. Ideas included baking Stan gingerbread men, Stan’s birthday dance party (songs and games), Stan’s birthday role-play (picnic using role-play food, pretending to bake him a cake, and so on), and practising writing Christmas cards to Stan and Sid.

These demonstrated how easily the programmes, messages and aims could be adapted and incorporated into everyday planning and routines.

**Adult observations/quotes**

Comments from staff members demonstrated their engagement with their own Active Movement™ programme and how it had influenced their behaviour, both within the setting and in their non-work lives.

Comments from adults participating in the eight-week programme, included, ‘while at the concerts I was aware of the need to stand all the way through rather than sitting’, ‘I like the news articles and reports regularly presented by Active Movement™ as reassurance, it’s a gentle reminder all the time’, ‘when I went shopping at the weekend I was telling my friend about the benefits of standing and being a Stan – all the way round I referred to myself as Stan’, and ‘I hadn’t realised the impact of standing until I had seen all the facts’.

This positive engagement from staff with the messages of increasing health and wellbeing benefits from non-sedentary behaviour should also have a beneficial impact on the positive role-model they project to the children in their care.

**Discussion**

The project’s main aims and objectives were to work in partnership with an early years setting to establish non-sedentary behaviours in children; for the children to move from recognition of the characters (initially Stan and Sid) and what they represent, to advocacy in everyday actions; to involve children under five-years-old, and parents and adults working with them, to improve their wellbeing; to extend and adapt the Mosaic Approach in order to educate adults and children to the benefits of non-sedentary behaviour; and how its integration within daily practices can bring to both adults and children a lifetime of wellbeing.

These objectives seem to have been largely met, within the boundaries of a relatively small-scale research project.

Active Movement™ and the Old School House Nursery worked closely together, with key staff liaising regularly by email and phone, and scheduled face-to-face meetings taking place. The data in this report clearly demonstrates the children’s recognition of Sid and Stan, and their engagement with the characters.
in their everyday routines. Comments and reflections from staff and children show their understanding of the benefits of non-sedentary behaviours on their wellbeing, and the Mosaic Approach seems to have adapted well to accommodate and provide evidence for the programme.

Staff members have adjusted daily activities and routines to support key messages about the benefits of non-sedentary behaviour, using the characters to encourage and embed these. The children's tour of the nursery and magic carpet activity clearly demonstrated their empathy with the characters of Sid and Stan, with some of their comments showing that the children viewed them as peers who could be part of their setting and who could join their play. This engagement with the characters of Sid and Stan appeared to support the children's understanding of the health benefits of being non-sedentary, and enthusiasm to stand and move more.

The increased awareness of their own and children's wellbeing is clear from staff reflections and comments. The short and long-term benefits of this increased awareness for the setting, staff and children should not be underestimated.

Role-modelling is a vital part of a nursery practitioner's job and if staff feel positive about their own wellbeing they will communicate this to the children in their care and feel better equipped to carry out their role with energy and enthusiasm. Their involvement in the programme via their own bespoke Active Movement™ programme made their assimilation with the concept and its integration that much more intense.

An increased awareness of the child's wellbeing, their energy and activity levels and general emotional and physical wellbeing, could also help identify any concerns for the child earlier and lead to more targeted early support for families. Raising awareness and expectations of both the wellbeing of staff members and children, indicates benefits for health, self-esteem, peer and social engagement, and a sense of advocacy and achievement.

Some of the barriers the staff identified when attempting to carry out their weekly challenges are unique to early years settings, and these could easily be adapted to accommodate differing circumstances. For example, social needs and safety considerations may make it impossible for staff or children to be standing or moving during feeding/refreshment times (indeed Sid advocates this as ‘good’ sitting time).

The flexibility of the Active Movement™ programme enables staff members to compensate with alternative planning for children and staff to be active during the setting day, so offsetting these issues.

**Conclusion**

Though the evaluation was relatively limited, the effect on children and staff has been encouraging. Young children have become aware that activity is an important part of their lives and recognise its benefits. The cross-pollination of the characters from ‘activity’ to ‘health’ also throws up enormous possibilities, such as the areas of nutrition and personal safety.

In the meantime, the programme continues to evolve within the OSHDN and is stretching into primary and secondary schools with greater participation and increased educational content. Its huge potential for building the physical, social, emotional and mental capabilities for all children, both in the short-term and for a lifetime, is only possible because it has started from a place that few have considered before.

**References**

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**Key points**

- Ensuring the positive wellbeing of the children in any early years organisation should be viewed as a necessity, not a luxury.
- In 2007, the World Health Organisation highlighted the power of an early influence on health and social wellbeing, commenting ‘investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment a country can make, with returns over the life course many times the amount of the original investment”
- Emerging evidence suggests that sedentary behaviour in the early years is associated with overweight and obesity as well as lower cognitive development.
- The aim of the project was to both identify and reduce sedentary behaviours within the nursery.
- The project with the OSHDN is the first time the Active Movement™ programme has been adapted for use in an early years setting.
MAJOR ONE DAY CONFERENCE Friday 18 September 2015

MADE HOUSE, 150 Corporation Street, Birmingham, B4 6TB

8:30–9:15 Registration
9:15–9:20 Welcome & opening remarks
Matt Govett, Managing Director, MA Education & Publisher of EYE magazine
9:20–10:00 KEYNOTE: Can £300 make a difference to a disadvantaged child?
June O’Sullivan MBE, Chief Executive, London Early Years Foundation
10:00–10:40 The Early Years Pupil Premium: using evidence to narrow the gap
Matthew van Poortvliet, Grants Manager, & Peter Henderson, Research Officer, Education Endowment Foundation
10:40–10:55 Q&A
10:55–11:25 Coffee and refreshments
11:25 –12:00 High Impact use of the Early Years Pupil Premium
Professor Sonia Blandford, Founder & CEO, Achievement for All
12:00–1:00 WORKSHOPS
A: Making the Early Years Pupil Premium work
June O’Sullivan MBE, Chief Executive & John Trow-Smith, Head of Information & Systems, London Early Years Foundation
B: Effective approaches to using the Early Years Pupil Premium in Cambridgeshire, based on the pilot scheme
Graham Arnold, Sector Development Manager, & Jackie Pitman, Early Years Narrowing the Gap Advisor, Early Years Service, Cambridgeshire Local Authority, an EYPP national pilot authority
C: Unlocking the door to learning: using the Early Years Pupil Premium to improve early communication and language skills for disadvantaged children
Rae Aldous, Headteacher, Westwood Primary School, Suffolk
D: Early Years Pupil Premium: a practical approach. Who are the learners? What do they need? Identifying strategies and closing the gap
Roxanne Vines, Head of School, Mill Hill Primary School, & Tracy Morgan, Early Years & Maths Leader, Mill Hill Primary School, Hampshire
1:00 – 2:00 Lunch & exhibition viewing
2:00 – 2:40 The single inspection framework
Gill Jones, Early Years Deputy Director, Ofsted
2:40 – 3:20 Making the most of this opportunity
Sue Robb, Head of Early Years, 4Children
3:20 – 3:30 Q&A
3:30 – 3:40 Closing remarks

To book your place visit www.eyeconference.co.uk or telephone +44 (0)207 501 6344

EARLY BIRD EXTENDED UNTIL 31ST JULY - BOOK NOW!
The Nursery Year in Action by Anna Ephgrave

Review by Martine Horvath
This is quite simply a fantastic resource for anyone working in early years settings, whether that be a children’s centre or school nursery, packaway village hall pre-school, childminder or reception class because there are so many great ideas shared that are either generic to all settings or easily adapted.

With over 150 full colour photographs illustrating, in a very helpful, concrete and tangible way, what a nursery can look like throughout the year, practitioners will be inspired to ‘have a go’ and will be reassured by the very ‘doable’ learning experiences and activities for children.

There are examples and samples taken from learning journeys, planning and observations with plenty of supporting resources available to download from www.routledge.com/97813888526 as well as in the appendix.

The reasoning behind each and every decision clearly demonstrates the impact on children’s learning and sound pedagogical practice emphasised through a child-led approach, throughout.

This is my ‘must-have’ book of the year that could help to enrich practice and instil a love of learning in any early years setting, if used and shared effectively.

By way of pedigree, the author of this book is a consultant teacher ‘whose Early Years department has achieved “Outstanding” at four consecutive Ofsted inspections’.

Her book provides practical ideas to ‘work with confidence in a way that is rewarding, manageable and, above all, creates a happy, relaxed learning environment for children.’

Spatial Reasoning in the Early Years: Principles, Assertions, Speculation by Brent Davis and the Spatial Reasoning Study Group
(ISBN: 9781138792042). Paperback. £29.99 Published by Routledge. www.routledge.com/education; orders via 01235 400400; books.orders@tandf.co.uk

Review by Martine Horvath
Written by an impressive team of multi-disciplinary mathematicians and cognitive scientists, this is a cutting edge read peppered with endearing vignettes and anecdotes of children’s play and their response to various learning experiences.

Spatial reasoning has recently gained prominence because spatial skills are proving to be not just essential to mathematical understanding but also strong predictors of future success beyond the classroom in various fields, such as technology, science and engineering.

‘This book helps to define the concept of spatial reasoning and provides compelling evidence of the need for a clear focus within early education specifically.

I particularly like the way that the book contains an abundance of visual representation, drawings and diagrams, because without these, this would not be quite such a dynamic and accessible resource.’

Being a Key Person in an Early Years Setting from Pre-school Learning Alliance
(ISBN: 9781907478222). Paperback. £9.95 for members, £13.95 for non-members. Published by Pre-school Learning Alliance. Tel: 0300 330 0996; shop@pre-school.org.uk; shop.pre-school.org.uk

Review by Martine Horvath
This is a nifty little pocket-sized A5 booklet addressing the importance of a Key Person to a child in their early years and their family, and especially when settling into a new setting.

Featuring key aspects around emotional wellbeing, partnerships with parents, relationships and sustained shared thinking this will help practitioners to understand some of the important foundations the book is built around like attachment theory, transition theory, and relational pedagogy and sustained shared thinking.
Picture books

Is it really August? It must be because the sun is out and children are looking forward to their holidays (and many of the staff in your setting I would imagine!).

We have a lovely selection of books for you this month, ranging from various animal capers to abstract shapes concepts, and from classic songs to a very famous birthday girl.

*Fish is Fish* by Leo Lionni [£6.99 from Andersen Press; ISBN: 9780192744470]. This is a beautifully illustrated story about friendship that tugs at the heart strings ever so tenderly and reminds the reader about what a wonderful world it is that we live in, when there is friendship and love to help us through even if we cannot always have what we want.

The illustrations will make you want to sharpen your pencil crayons and start colouring; they are enchanting.

*The Unexpected Crocodile* by Kim Kane and Sara Acton [£6.99 from Allen & Unwin; ISBN: 9781760111731]. Suitable for children aged four to seven-year-old this is a quirky, humorous and quite different story that will definitely make readers smile, even if only in shock and horror!

When Peggy’s family hosts a barbecue for their neighbours, the Dawsons, Peggy is just not too sure at all about those unpleasant Dawson boys.

Her disquiet turns to delight when an unexpected crocodile turns up for tea and you will never guess what he does... well I’m not a ‘spoiler’, so I will let you find out for yourself.

*Take a Triangle* by Britta Teckentrup [£9.99 from Words & Pictures; ISBN: 9781910277089]. As you read through this book, you will begin to appreciate the sublime nature of how it builds knowledge of shape in the environment and all around through its simple, predictable and repetitive text and cleverly correlating illustrations.

It is ideal for emergent readers or children ready to learn their shapes. The hardback also has a certain evocative, old fashioned, tactile quality to it, enticing you to stroke and smell the book — or perhaps that’s just me! This book forms part of a series that includes triangles, lines, circles and squares.

*A Tower of Giraffes* by Anna Wright [£11.99 from Words & Pictures; ISBN: 97819101277102]. This book is highly educational and enjoyable on several levels. Whether it is an ostentation of peacocks, a gaggle of geese, a colony of koalas, a scurry of squirrels or a drove of pigs, each and every page of this book is exquisitely illustrated in a style I have never seen before.

At first, it looks rather odd that penguins seem to have decorative wallpaper bellies and both mischief of mice and prickle of hedgehogs seem to have highly patterned and floral fabric for their bodies, not to mention the knitted pullover fleeces for the flock of sheep!

But then your eye gets used to it, enjoys it and begins to see all sorts of possibilities in the décor of your own home and potential for alternatively attractive animal bodies.

It is quite simply inspired and you have to see it to believe it.

*The Cloudpotter* by Tom McLaughlin [£10.99 from Bloomsbury; ISBN: 9781408854969]. Haven’t we all laid back and enjoyed making shapes in the clouds at some time or other? This is a really beautifully realised book that animates this experience through an endearing tale of friendship between a young child and a dog.

Moving from loneliness into genuine friendship and companionship as they enjoy spending time together doing the same thing, children will be cloudspotting and using their own imaginations to create pictures, stories, adventures, and so on, after reading this.

It is ideal for all ages because the pictures alone invite you to talk about them and name the different shapes the clouds make, even if you are not able to access the text yet.

That’s What Makes a Hippopotamus Smile! by Sean Taylor and Lauren Cardon [£6.99 from Frances Lincoln Children’s Books; ISBN: 9781847805959]. Really silly, really funny and really enjoyable! This light-hearted rhyming text is perfect for all ages – yes, even if you are a grandparent who loves reading to your grandchildren, I promise you that you will enjoy this as much as the children.

Emergent readers will particularly love it because it does the predictability of the text, the rhyme, repetition and use of high frequency words are all ideal aids to support them as they learn to read.

The big, bold colourful illustrations are as compatible with the text as they are with the protagonist hippo, so children will end up reading this book and revisiting it as an all-time favourite again, and again, and again and… you get the picture.

*Silly Dizzy Dinosaur* by Jack Tickle [£6.99 from Little Tiger Press; ISBN: 9781848690455]. What a wonderful excuse for shouting ‘BOO!’ It feels like you are at a pantomime reading this story to the children. Wonderfully interactive with plenty of opportunities for tickling, shaking and shouting, this is ideal for two to five-year-olds and ideal for reading aloud with a dinosaur soft toy or hand puppet.

*What a Wonderful World* by Tim Hopgood [£5.99 from Oxford Children’s Books; ISBN: 9780192744470]. Think the title sounds familiar, well you should, because the title and the text of this brilliant board book are taken from the Bob Thiele and George David Weiss song that was made famous by the voice of Louis Armstrong.

The illustrations are wonderful and the board book format makes it something that little fingers will want to explore over and over again.

The lyrics/text are ideal for early years settings... ‘I see skies of blue/and clouds of white/the bright blessed day/the dark sacred night/and I think to myself… what a wonderful world…’ This is a simple and deep sort of poetry that is as effective spoken as it is sung (you know you won’t resist trying to impersonate Armstrong’s deep languid voice)!

I know I did [Ed].

Altogether now: ‘I see friends shaking hands, saying how do you do?/They’re really saying I love you/I hear bears cry, I watch them grow/They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know/And I think to myself… what a wonderful world…’

Just make sure you listen to the song together at some point as well.

*Miffy’s Birthday* by Dick Bruna [£8.99 from Simon and Schuster; ISBN: 9781471143786]. Miffy is back and celebrating her 60th year as a favourite children’s character. To mark the occasion, Simon and Schuster has produced an updated set of books, with rhymes tailored to modern ears by British poet, Tony Mitton.

These classic texts are ideal for younger readers and pre-readers, with their engaging but simple rhyme, repetition and use of high frequency words are all ideal aids to support them as they learn to read.

The lyrics/text are ideal for the text, the rhyme, repetition and use of high frequency words are all ideal aids to support them as they learn to read.

And I think to myself… what a wonderful world…’ This much more than I’ll ever know/And I think to myself… what a wonderful world…’

I love you/I hear babies cry, I watch them grow/They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know/And I think to myself… what a wonderful world…”

9781847805959
Marvellous Maths Songs by Niki Davies
(ISBN: 9781906988739). Paperback with CD. £23.99. Published by Out of the Ark Music. Tel: 020 8481 7200; music@outoftheark.com; www.outoftheark.com

Review by Martine Horvath
From learning your 10x table by digging for pirate treasure to counting back in ones while singing and spinning a spider’s web, children and adults will simply love this for many reasons.

The main reason to love this resource is that you have everything you need in order to reduce precious time planning, resourcing and preparing because it has all been done for you, including teacher’s notes, words transcribed for all the songs, CD and music score.

Another quality resource from Out of the Ark, this book and accompanying CD are all you need (even if you are not musically inclined in the least) to improve children’s addition, subtraction, number bonds, symmetry, shapes and so much more, in a fun-filled musical way that has all round benefits, such as raising levels of wellbeing, thus impacting on personal, social and emotional development positively, and so on.

It is ideal for three to seven-year-olds and practitioners with or without a musical bone or two in their bodies.


Review by Martine Horvath
This is an academic book for students on all early years and early childhood courses. Each chapter analyses historical, philosophical and political developments in the respective country alongside looking at theorists and concepts of childhood that have shaped the workforce and pedagogical approach.

Countries covered in this text, include: Australia, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Russia, Germany, The Philippines, Sweden, and the UK.

The unique aspects of each country are highlighted along with a consideration of what the future might hold for the workforce.

It is important to understand that current practice is underpinned by a set of beliefs that impacts directly on practice, so that practitioners can question their own values and correlating practice.

This book will help practitioners to do just that – to analyse and reflect upon how ‘what’ they believe and think comes out more concretely in actions.


Review by Neil Henty
This is an academic book – that much should be made clear from the start. The focus is on picturebooks, but they are not your run of the mill nursery books, nor are they likely to feature in the reviews section of this magazine. So why review this book?

Evans’ book explores the growing popularity of a genre where the age of the implied reader is questionable, they deal with often unsettling subject matters that require interpretation of meaning and that will not always sit easy with many people.

This book will challenge any teacher, consultant or academic researcher interested in the wider picturebook genre.


Review by Martine Horvath
This book begins by questioning the meaning of childhood while exploring the historical, social and cultural views of childhood and children.

It looks at parenting from a global perspective before examining the relationship between the state and children by evaluating international approaches to education, health, welfare and what the impact is of inequalities on children.

Race, class and gender are discussed and readers are actively encouraged to reflect on how global perspectives can be used to support an understanding of inclusion and diversity in their practice.

Chapters include details on children’s rights and children’s needs, a global view on health and welfare, global inequalities, and research and children.

It is a text most suited to students on early years courses that include a module on global childhoods.
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www.nurseryworldshow.com
It looks to me that our lovely and lively Mrs Blossom is in the family way, yet again,” smiled Mrs Frisby from her excellent viewpoint from the window in the staffroom kitchen. ‘It only seems 10 minutes ago that she produced the twins… not that I’m criticizing her in any way whatsoever…

‘Little Pansy-May, Freddie, Arnold and Brenda are delightful children, and their mother is an excellent supporter of our school in a thousand different ways. Whether it’s summer or winter, nativity plays or sports afternoons, rain or shine, fog or frost, Mrs Blossom will be there, an extra pair of hands whenever and wherever they are needed.’

Mrs Holdall, the school secretary, smiled in agreement as she (yet again) battled to slide open the awkward little office window where Mrs Harpoon’s silly ‘booking in’ ritual took place every morning.

‘Mrs Blossom’s husband drives kipper lorries from Whitby right through the night,’ announced Sue Holdall in one of her serious voices, ‘then he drops them off at one of the major southern food depots. That’s what he does, but I am uncertain regarding which retail depot he actually drives for… I think it might be Aldi or Marks & Spencers, it could even be Tesco’s for that matter. I just don’t know… but maybe it is (or was) a Morrisons delivery. Actually, I have a funny feeling that it could have been a Sainsbury’s vehicle…

‘Or even a Co-op one,’ interrupted Freda Footfinger, ‘because he took one of his massive articulated trucks to my sister-in-law’s school for their topic about transport. Obviously, the serious learning about mileages, maps and so forth was done by the older children, but the little ones managed to do some lovely little sketches of spare wheels and foreign number plates, plus colours and names, of course.’

‘Was it a Co-op one?’ enquired Mrs Holdall. ‘Because we could ask Mrs Blossom to ask her husband if he could bring his lorry into our playground for the early years children to see…’

‘No!’ interrupted Mrs Frisbie (quite sharply). ‘Our Mrs Blossom does more than enough for this school and we can’t keep asking her for help… whether it is the tea urn at the jumble sale, sports day or the nativity tombola, or quiz nights, school concerts, sponsored pie eating or stacking the chairs at 10 o’clock at night, she is there to assist.

‘She even volunteers to be a helper on those long coach journeys for school trips to the zoo or dull castles, and weasiswa. museums. Even when she has to sit and/ or settle over the coaches bumpy back wheels, draughty door or quell the noisy boys’ larks… she never moans… and, of course, being a first aider she has to battle with the sponge/towel and big yellow bucket on those dreadful never ending motorways.

‘I reckon Mrs Blossom is worthy of an OBE or CBE or whatever people get for noble service to schools.’

A semi-glum and rather awkward feeling of embarrassment settled around the secretary’s office. ‘Well, if we can’t ask Mrs Blossom’s husband to come along with his lorry, and if Mrs Harpoon has already told all the parents that their children are going to practise some very exciting learning units in our school playground…

‘Have you found another lorry driver willing to let the children climb into his cab, show them where he’s been, or allow them to take photos, read tyre pressures and show them his cargo, then I would like to know who they are!’ demanded Mrs Holdall. ‘We need families like the Blossom’s, they are an example to us all.’

When we went to London
The coach was blue and white.
We went all round the tower
And we saw every sight…

We walked all round Trafalgar Square
We walked all round St Paul’s
And whispered things that didn’t work
On whispering gallery walls…

…and so you see we had to leave…

Peter Dixon is a poet and writer from Winchester, although in a past life he was a senior lecturer in education. Contact 01962 854607 for ‘talks’ or Let me be, which is also available from 30 Cheriton Road, Winchester, SO22 5AX.
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