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## Transformations: Theory and Practice in Early Education: Proceedings of the Conference held in University College Cork, Saturday, 5th April, 2003

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# **l'Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire**

*Proceedings of the Conference  
held in  
UCC  
on  
Saturday, 5th April, 2003  
entitled*

## **Transformations: Theory and Practice in Early Education**

Edited by  
*Nóirín Hayes & Margaret Kernan*

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## Welcoming Address

I want to welcome you all here to UCC this morning especially the esteemed representatives for the various child care Organisations in this country and abroad.

OMEP Ireland is in existence since 1965 and has played a significant role in the Development of Education and care in this country. It has experienced Highs and lows. But we are now in rebirth hence this is our 3rd conference in 2 years

I want to extend my thanks to the committee who have done Trojan work in organising these conferences.

Many thanks to our Patrons Mary Horgan UCC Noirin Hayes of DIT and Francis Douglas UCC

Special thanks to Professor Fred Powell of UCC who will give the Keynote address.

Earlier this year I had the privilege of attending the OMEP UK conference in Liverpool. We are delighted to have Anabell Lewis from OMEP UK with us today and we are delighted to have such close links with OMEP UK

I would like to thank Margaret Kernan and Noirin Hayes of DIT for agreeing to edit today's proceedings.

I hope you enjoy the day.

Many thanks

**Ann Fanning**  
**President OMEP Ireland**

## Introduction

This collection contains the proceedings of the Annual OMEP Early Childhood Education Research national conference in Ireland held at NUI Cork in April 2003. In its second year, the conference has developed to include papers from researchers and practitioners from a broad range of 3rd level institutions and voluntary organisations, North and South. The collection draws on a rich body of theory and research and includes papers from researcher-practitioners engaging in a daily process of reflection, action and analysis with the children they are working with.

At a time when more young Irish children and families are availing of early childhood care and education services than ever before, the question, “What do we want for our children?” posed by Madigan in Part IV of this collection is timely. This question can be debated and reflected upon at an individual child level, within the ongoing programme development and evaluation in early years services, and at a national policy level. This presents a challenge to all of us involved in early childhood care and education to consider thoughtfully the kind of services young Irish children and their families should have access to, the day-to-day experiences of children, the nature of the interaction between adults and children in these services, and the learning that is valued. Influencing this debate, of course, are the resources available, both human and financial, which in turn are influenced by the value Irish society places on children and the level of public responsibility for an integrated approach to the provision of early childhood services.

In recent years, deficits in service availability, in programme quality, in agency co-ordination and in staff training have been recurring themes in Irish early education research papers and policy documents (DJELR, 1999; DES, 1999; DHC, 2000; Hayes, 1995; Horgan & Douglas, 2002; Kernan, 2000). Whilst there has been increased public attention and support for early childhood education, much remains to be done to fully meet the needs of young children in a rapidly changing Irish society, which poses multiple competing demands on children and families.

A sound research base both national and international must inform the debate on the needs of young children (Wilson, 1999). The proceedings which follow

offer some fundamental insights into educative work with young children in a variety of settings which include both pre-school and primary schools. The title of this collection ‘Transformations: Theory and Practice’ captures the intention of the OMEP organisation to explicitly connect theory to practice in early childhood education in a way that transforms both practice and research and enhances the quality of educational experiences available to young children internationally. The papers are characterised by the diversity of subject matter offering a broad spectrum of topics. To assist the reader, the collection has been organised into six parts representing six inter-related themes which are reflective of current concerns in early childhood education: Part I – Development and practice; Part II – Aspects of development and pedagogy; Part III – Pedagogical styles; Part IV – Issues of professional development; Part V – Supporting quality; Part VI – Looking to the future.

Two overarching themes emerge on reading the complete collection. Firstly, the critical role of the skilled reflective practitioner in relation to the children in their care and secondly, the need to develop a better understanding of interpersonal dynamics in early childhood settings, particularly with regard to how daily on-going interactions operate in learning and development.

Part I of the collection provides insights into different aspects of young children’s development and socialisation. The authors of the first two papers, Douglas and Murphy respectively, have placed the importance of the development of a positive self-worth in children at the centre of their concern. This issue is also addressed by Madigan’s paper in Part IV who highlights the supporting role of the early year’s practitioner in the process.

In the opening paper, Douglas provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on self-esteem drawing on multiple perspectives. Throughout the paper implications for practice for both parents and carers are identified. Douglas concludes by advocating a holistic spiritual approach to helping children concentrate on their inner spirit rather than on circumstances beyond their control. He contends that:

The more young children experience their true nature, their inner self, the greater will be their self-concept. Where the inner self of children is strongly influenced by external circumstances outside

their control, they may constantly seek approval of others in order to enhance their self-esteem ... The question that the pre-school educator has to ask is “What can I do to help children concentrate on their spirit to the exclusion of circumstances outside their control?”

Self-worth is also given attention by Murphy in her paper *Cultivating emotional development through physical activity*. She focuses on an area often neglected in education – physical activity and argues that opportunities for physical activity in the early education setting enables self-awareness. In her paper she highlights the importance for educators in setting realistic physical challenges for children, which in turn develops a sense of physical competence and identifies a need for further Irish research in this area.

Ní Mhurchú captures the relationship between playfulness and creativity, central in the early childhood tradition. This aspect of younger children’s development often becomes constrained as children move into middle childhood when the need to conform becomes more central. Ní Mhurchú points out that encouraging children to engage in a way that is meaningful to them helps them come to understand their world. The challenge for adults is to show interest, recognise the extent of young children’s creativity and allow it expression. She calls on early years practitioners to use research data to inform their practice. In the final paper in Part I, Cunneen describes her research which focused on the differential patterns of interaction between adults and children in early years service as a function of gender. Differences between the sexes, particularly in respect of outcomes at school leaving stage attracts perennial attention amongst the media but is also of interest to educationalists seeking to understand the dynamics of the learning environment. Cunneen’s research provides some insights into the different social experiences of boys and girls in early education settings, particularly how adults treat boys and girls quite differently. The findings presented in this paper provide some insights into the relationship between early socialising experiences, and later expectations and school performance.

Part II of the collection comprises three papers which focus on specific aspects of development and learning. Ridgeway provides an overview of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (MI) Theory, outlining the 8 intelligences, the theoretical basis of the theory and a summary of the principal critiques of

Gardner’s work. She considers how MI theory assists in identification of entry points for teaching any topic while facilitating area of strength. She illustrates the value of this approach in early childhood through reference to Project Zero in Harvard.

Drawing on his experience as a drama teacher, Donohue explores the links between Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). NLP focuses on language and behaviour in communication. Research demonstrating the importance of the mode of delivery i.e. body language and voice intonation over the content, has been widely used as a guide for effective communication in the business, marketing and political world. In his paper, Donohue argues that it also has applications in the world of education as a tool for educators to maximise the learning potential of the students they are working with. By identifying a learners favoured learning modality (auditory, visual or kinaesthetic), teaching strategies can be tailored to support students to access prior knowledge more efficiently resulting in a more stimulating learning environment for both partners in the process. Such a flexible approach on the educators part, is also more equitable in that the possibility that the needs of all students will be met is greater. This is an issue also highlighted by Byrne as being critical in respect to meeting the needs of adult women learners engaged in training in early childhood care and education. Echoing Ní Mhurchú’s recognition of the potential of young children’s creativity, and Madigan’s and Hayes’ support of active learning Donohue concludes by favouring the kinaesthetic learning modality as an approach in early childhood education.

Automaticity is a term probably quite unfamiliar to the education community. In the third of the papers which focus on aspects of development, Gray outlines the links between automatic processes and learning disorders. In a useful introduction to this area of research, Gray describes how automaticity of basic facts is fundamental to acquisition of more complex [te] skills and for development of higher order thinking and learning. Gray draws together research, highlighting how automaticity might be used in the early years. Crucial for the practitioner is Gray’s cautionary note that practice should not be interpreted as rote learning or meaningless repetition.

Four of the five papers in Part III of the collection, titled Pedagogical styles, invite the reader to re-evaluate attitudes and the nature of daily interactions in

early childhood education settings. In the opening paper titled “Towards a nurturing pedagogy: re-conceptualising care and education in the early years” Hayes highlights the critical role of the quality of the daily on-going interactions in a child’s immediate environment for development and learning. She conceptualises an approach to early childhood education framed as a *nurturing pedagogy*, which she argues, confers a more engaging and active role to the adult that the rather passive, custodial role reflected in the frequent conceptualisation of the early childhood educator as carer. Hayes writes “*The caring responsibility of the adult – where it recognises that care should be more than merely ‘minding’ – gives an enhanced educational role to it. The idea of considering care as nurture gives it an active connotation with a responsibility on the adult to provide nurturance and foster learning rather than to simply mind or protect the child.*” Critically, Hayes recognises the early educator as learner, a reflective observer of children who learns from observation and uses this as a basis for pedagogical practice. She makes a case for viewing interactions as doubly transformative since interactions with the environment, people and objects are the central mechanism through which children learn and, it is also through interactions that adults can inform their planning and practice.

Roche’s paper, a rich account of action research in infant classrooms, challenges us to re-evaluate the nature of the questions we pose with children and the active participation of children in their own learning. Roche is one of a number of Irish researchers engaged in using ‘Philosophy with Children’ as a process in their teaching (Donnolly, 1994). Echoing the communal, joint and active process in interactions highlighted by Hayes, Roche demonstrates that ‘Philosophy with Children’ engages adults just as much as children in the development of respectful listening and reasoned argument – key life skills. Her paper provides extensive examples of how to prompt children in their thinking and talking to illustrate the power of this approach with young children.

The data collected by O’Connor for her small-scale study was also gathered within the classroom. This paper gives the reader a glimpse of how prejudice may exist in young children’s attitudes to their peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Attending to the role of the adult, her study emphasises the responsibility of the early years practitioner in developing and supporting relationships and interactions which are based on trust, security and respect.

The fourth of the papers in Part III captures one of the most enduring and pleasurable experiences of early childhood education settings for children and adults alike – the story telling session. In an engaging account of her research into children’s experience of storytelling in a naíonra setting, Mhíic Mhathúna highlights the role of a skilled attentive early years worker in children’s linguistic development, in this case in second language development. Complimenting Mhíic Mhathúna’s paper is Murphy’s review of the pedagogy of writing which focuses on the latter period of the early childhood education and the beginning of primary education. Murphy compares two approaches to writing development: the product and the process model. The publication of the revised Primary School Curriculum (1999) provides a valuable opportunity for further research into the extent to which this model is operationalised in day-to-day practice in primary school classrooms.

The three papers in Part IV of the collection outline particular issues in the professional development of those working with young children in early education settings. In agreement with other authors in these proceedings, Madigan focuses on the supporting role of the early years practitioner in promoting the development of children’s self worth. She describes the process of engaging with adults in this endeavour within the context of a High/Scope in-service training programme through the development of meaningful policy statements. Byrne presented ‘work in progress’ in her paper examining training from an equal opportunities perspective particularly highlighting the needs of adult women learners in disadvantaged areas. Drawing on the work of Gardner’s MI and Reynolds (2002) she demonstrates how important it is to match appropriate training methods to suit different learning styles when working with these group of learners.

In the third of the papers which focus on issues in professional development and training, Dineen draws on a broad range of theory underpinning experiential learning and applies it to the context of supervised work practice for students engaged in training as early years practitioners. The overarching theme of these proceedings regarding the transformative nature of interactions is clearly evident in the process of work-based training with supported reflection. As Dineen herself highlights “*the true benefit of work-based learning stems from the adaptive capacity it confers on those who utilise it as a teaching technique and in their engagement with the educative process at any level*”.

Identifying the features of quality services or criteria for good quality which result in positive outcomes for children dominated international research in early childhood education in the latter part of the 1980's and throughout the 1990's. At the same time, a number of documents published in Ireland highlighted concerns about the variability in quality in services which young Irish children attended. While there has been limited research in Ireland on the topic of quality in early years services (Walsh, 2003) there is increased attention to the quality among practitioners. Corbett's and Daly's papers provide accounts of two separate recent initiatives established to encourage practitioners to engage in a process of self-reflection in order to improve the quality of early education services in Ireland. Corbett outlines the process involved in the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA) Centre of Excellence Award which was launched in March 2002 and which is open to the membership of the NCNA. In an innovative action the NCNA has taken the opportunity provided by the award scheme to link into the NAEYC – an international link with great potential for early years practice in Ireland. In addition the award structure provides a valuable framework for individual practitioners to carry out a self-assessment of their service.

The Community Playgroup Initiative (CPI), as its name suggests, is characterised by a particular focus on supporting quality improvement in community playgroups. A belief in the key role of community playgroups for family support is clearly evident in Daly's paper. Having in mind that quality in early childhood care and education can be enhanced by both human and financial resources, the CPI was designed to provide both these forms of support through the employment of a co-ordinator/mentor/advisor to the participating services in addition to the provision of an annual grant for each participating service. In her paper, Daly highlights the precarious position of community playgroups in 2003 with regard to their sustainability in a climate of state support (through the Equal Opportunity Childcare Programme) for early childhood services which favours supporting full day care places over sessional services.

There are a number of common features across the NCNA and CPI initiatives. Both emphasise the on-going dynamic process which is the pursuit of quality and address the dynamic or process features in addition to static or structural features of quality. Both initiatives included parents in the

evaluative process and both are being evaluated by independent evaluators. The findings of these evaluations should prove useful to all those interested in developing meaningful and effective quality improvement measures in early years services.

The collection concludes with two papers which provide the context and suggest some parameters to guide future research in early childhood education in Ireland. Both of these papers are authored by researchers from the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) which was established in 2002. The CECDE is the forerunner of the Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged in the White Paper on Early Education, Ready to Learn (Department of Education and Science, 1999). In the first of these papers Fallon, focussing on educational disadvantage outlines key research, which highlights how family circumstances and intergenerational transmission of disadvantage family can impact on educational outcomes. Recognising the importance of early intervention, Fallon goes on to outline key features of a number of national and international early intervention models highlighting particularly those which demonstrate integrating mechanisms. Her paper illustrates the consultative nature of the research being carried out by the CECDE and extends an invitation to practitioners, researchers and others interested in early education to become involved in further consultative processes planned for the future.

The audit of research in early childhood care and education undertaken by CECDE in support of their principal remit of developing, co-ordinating and enhancing early childhood care and education in Ireland, when published, will be a valuable resource to all those involved at any level in early childhood care and education. The gaps in Irish early childhood education research, made possible through the process of collation, analysis and classification of research as part of the audit are worth highlighting. Walsh draws attention, for example, to the absence of Irish research in relation to quality, noting that this makes discussion on the issue difficult to ground. Other gaps highlighted include young children's rights and voices; transitions from early years education to the formal primary system; parental involvement; integrated approaches to educational disadvantage; inclusion of children with special needs; the impact of training on quality of services; language needs of minority groups; comparative research; longitudinal research and policy research.



In conclusion, it is hoped that the publication of these proceedings will provide renewed impetus to rigorous research in early childhood education in Ireland. The research reported here and the research anticipated provide the foundation of a sound basis from which to develop quality policy, provision and practice for early education services in Ireland and the young children and families they serve.

Nóirín Hayes  
Margaret Kernan  
Department of Social Sciences  
February 2004

## PART 1

### Development & Practice

## “The Breath of Life”: The Young Child and Self Esteem

*Francis Douglas*

“What I need to realise is how infinitesimal is the importance of anything I can do, and how infinitely important it is that I should do it”.

Herbert Spencer

### INTRODUCTION

Self-Esteem is a state of being. It concerns how we judge or evaluate ourselves as human beings. To make the concept even more complicated, it seems that a whole chain of events are sparked off either in a flash or over a period of time as a result of this experience of the self. There are many words that are closely associated with self-esteem and which help to define it. Some of these are: Self Concept; Self Perception; Self Efficacy; Self Acceptance; Self Respect; and Self Worth. All these words refer to aspects of the way we view ourselves, and the value we place on ourselves as people. They are a measure of the second part of the Commandment to “Love thy neighbour as thyself”.

The central beliefs that people hold of themselves affects their Behaviour, Emotions and Bodystate. Low self-esteem can impact upon, among other things, a child’s mood, interest, pleasure, appetite, weight, sleep patterns, fidgeting, lethargy, energy, guilt, concentration and feelings of despair.

The etymological roots of “soul” and “spirit” mean “breath” in many old languages. The words for “soul” in Sanskrit (*atman*), Greek (*psyche*) and Latin (*anima*) all mean “breath”. The same is true for the word for “spirit” in Latin (*spiritus*), in Greek (*pneuma*), and in Hebrew (*ruah*). These too, mean “breath”. The soul or spirit is the breath of life. In ancient times, the rational human mind was seen as merely one aspect of the immaterial soul, or spirit. The basic distinction was not between the body and the mind, but between body and soul, or body and spirit. If we view self esteem as a process that drives the body it is not unreasonable to describe it as the breath of life.

This paper attempts to explore self-esteem from a number of perspectives. The

views of Behavioural, Psychoanalytic, Humanistic, Cognitive and Neuroscientific Theorists are taken into account before exploring a holistic spiritual approach to the subject.

### SELF-ESTEEM: A BEHAVIOURAL PERSPECTIVE

Behavioural Theory can explain some, but not all, of the reasons as to why a child has low self-esteem. Behavioural Learning Theorists assume that lack of reinforcement plays a major part in low self-esteem. Inactivity and feelings of sadness are due to a low rate of positive reinforcement and/or a high rate of unpleasant experiences [Lewinsohn, et al, 1980. Lewinsohn, et al, 1985]. Many of the events that precipitate low self-esteem such as the death of a parent, bullying, impaired health, etc. reduce accustomed reinforcement. In addition, such children may lack the social skills either to attract positive reinforcement or to cope effectively with aversive events.

However, behavioural theory provides a major insight into one aspect of the enhancement of self-esteem. Positive reinforcement from parents and educators cannot be stressed strongly enough (Watson, 1930; Thorndyke, 1898). Children need to feel that they are supported, cherished, valued and important – their contribution must be praised.

### SELF-ESTEEM: A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Freud is undoubtedly the most significant Psychoanalyst of the 19th and 20th Centuries. His greatest contribution has probably been his notion of the Subconscious: his construct of the “Id”, “Ego”, and “Superego” have become part of our everyday language and thought. However, several psychoanalysts – such as Jung, Adler and Erikson – held humanistic views of motivation and personality that diverged from those of Freud. For example, Jung’s notion of the “Persona” and the “Shadow” give considerable insight into a child’s behaviour. The Persona develops as the child grows and learns that some behaviours are acceptable and others are not. However, some aspects of behaviour then become secret as they are perceived to be undesirable and these form the Shadow. The contents of the Shadow, which are the rejected aspects of the individual, carry a sense of personal identity and continue to be active, rather like a volcano. In times of crisis or vulnerability the Shadow will manifest itself. For example, the young child who steals a tulip knows that it is wrong and hence feels that he or she cannot tell anyone. This repressed anxiety may

manifest itself in that child having nightmares. As children and adults do not like facing unpleasant or embarrassing facets of their personality they employ a variety of defence mechanisms such as running away, repression, projection, daydreaming, intellectualisation, displacement, denial, idealisation, regression, addiction etc, (See O Donnchadha (2002) for a more detailed explanation). Some of these mechanisms will be used by children and will impact on their self-esteem.

Another important concept that Jung introduced was the notion of the Collective Unconscious. This term was used to explain how we all have access to a pool of genetically inherited wisdom, which came from our families, extended family and community. This source of wisdom, he maintained, can be accessed through intuition that is the opposite of our logical, thinking, judging side. The language of the unconscious is, therefore, symbolic and intuitive, and is best interpreted by the creative right side of our brain.

In general, psychoanalytic theories interpret low self-esteem as a reaction to loss. Whatever the nature of the loss (rejection by a parent, loss of support from other children), the child reacts intensely because the current situation brings back all the fears of earlier losses and conflicts. In other words the child's need for affection and care are not being satisfied. A trauma in the present causes a regression to an earlier stage when he or she was even more helpless. Part of such a child's behaviour thus represents a cry for love – a display of helplessness and an appeal for affection and security [White and Watt, 1981].

Reaction to loss is accompanied by angry feelings towards the deserting person. An underlying assumption of psychoanalytic theory is that people who are prone to low self-esteem have learned to repress their hostile feelings because they are afraid of alienating those on whom they depend for support. When things go wrong they turn their anger inwards and blame themselves. For example, a young girl may feel extremely hostile towards her mother whom she feels is constantly criticising her, but because her anger arouses anxiety (she should not be angry with her mother who loves her), she uses the defence mechanism of projection to internalise her feelings: she is not angry; rather others are angry at her. She assumes that her mother has a good reason for rejecting her: she is incompetent and worthless.

Psychoanalytic theories suggest that children's low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness stem from a need for parental approval. Indeed, young children's

self-esteem does depend on the approval of supporting adults but as they grow and develop, feelings of worth should also be derived from a personal sense of accomplishment and effectiveness. In Psychoanalytic Theory it will be noted that self-esteem depends primarily on external sources; the approval and support of others. When these supports fail, the individual may be thrown into a state of depression.

Therefore, psychoanalytic theories focus on loss, over dependence on external approval, and internalisation of anger. They seem to provide a reasonable explanation for some of the behaviour exhibited by depressed individuals, but they are difficult to prove or refute.

### **SELF-ESTEEM: A HUMANISTIC APPROACH**

Humanistic Psychologists believe that Behaviourists are overly concerned with the scientific study and analysis of the actions of man as an organism, to the neglect of basic aspects of man as a feeling, thinking individual: too much effort is spent in laboratory research which quantifies and reduces human behaviour to its discrete elements. Humanists also take issue with the deterministic orientation of psychoanalysis, which postulates that man's early experiences and drives cause his behaviour. Humanists tend to believe that the individual is responsible for his or her life and actions and may at any time creatively change his or her attitudes or behaviour through Intention and Desire.

Rogers (1902-1987) was impressed with what he saw as the individual's tendency to move in the direction of growth, maturity and positive change. He came to believe that the basic force motivating human beings was "Self-Actualisation" – a tendency towards the fulfilment, or actualisation, of the potential or capacities of the organism. A growing organism, he felt, would seek to fulfil its potential within the limits of its heredity. A child may not always clearly perceive which actions lead to growth and which activities are counterproductive, but given the opportunity the child will always choose to grow rather than to regress. Rogers did not deny that there were other needs, some of them biological, but he saw them as subservient to the organism's motivation to enhance itself (Rogers, 1970).

The concept of the SELF is central for most humanistic psychologists. In the Personal Construct theory of Kelly (1955) and the Self-Centred Theory of

Rogers, the individual perceives his or her world according to personal experience. Thus, the central concept in Roger's theory of personality is the SELF. The Self consists of all the ideas, perceptions, and values that characterise "I" or "ME"; it includes the awareness of "what I am" and "what I can do". This perceived Self, in turn, influences both the person's perception of the world and his or her behaviour. For example, a child who perceives that he or she is strong and competent perceives and acts upon the world quite differently from a child who considers him or herself to be weak and ineffectual. The self-concept does not necessarily reflect reality; a person may be highly successful and respected but still views himself or herself as a failure. According to Rogers, the individual evaluates every experience in relation to this Self-Concept. People want to behave in ways that are consistent with their self-image; experiences and feelings that are not consistent are threatening and may be denied admittance to consciousness. This is essentially Freud's concept of Repression, although Rogers felt that such repression is neither necessary nor permanent (Freud would say that repression is inevitable and that some aspects of the individual's experiences always remain unconscious (Atkinson et al, 2000)).

Thus, the greater the number of areas of experience a person denies because they are inconsistent with his or her self-concept, the wider the gulf between the self and reality and the greater the potential for maladjustment. An individual whose self-concept is incongruent with personal feelings and experiences must defend himself or herself against the truth because the truth will result in anxiety. If the incongruence becomes too great, the defences may break down, resulting in severe anxiety or other forms of emotional disturbance. The well adjusted person, in contrast, has a self concept that is consistent with thought, experience and behaviour; the self is not rigid, but flexible, and can change as it assimilates new experiences and ideas.

The other Self in Roger's theory is the *Ideal Self*. We all have a conception of the kind of person we would like to be. The closer the Ideal Self is to the real self, the more fulfilled and happy the individual becomes. Rogers believed that people are likely to become more fully functioning if they are brought up with unconditional positive regard. This means that they feel themselves valued by parents and others even when their personal feelings, attitudes and behaviours are less than ideal. If parents offer only conditional positive regard, valuing the child only when he or she behaves, thinks or feels correctly – the child is likely

to distort his or her self concept. For example, feelings of competition and hostility toward a younger sibling are natural, but parents disapprove of hitting a baby brother or sister and usually punish such actions. Children must somehow integrate this experience into their self concept. They may decide that they are bad and so feel ashamed, may decide that their parents do not like them and so may feel rejected, may deny their feelings and decide that they do not want to hit the baby. Each of these attitudes contain a distortion of the truth. The third alternative is the easiest for the child to accept, but in so doing they deny their real feelings, which then become unconscious. The more people are forced to deny their own feelings and to accept the values of others, the more uncomfortable they will feel about themselves. Rogers (1963) suggested that the best approach is for the parents to recognise the child's feelings as valid while explaining the reasons why hitting a younger child is not acceptable.

The psychology of Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) overlaps with that of Carl Rogers in many ways. He was influenced by Behaviourism and Psychoanalysis but developed his own theory. Specifically, he proposed that humans have a Hierarchy of Needs, ascending from the basic biological needs to the more complex psychological needs that become important only after the basic needs have been satisfied. The needs at one level must be at least partially satisfied before those at the next level become important determiners of action. The highest need – Self Actualisation – can only be fulfilled after all the other needs are fulfilled. Maslow (1970) states that many people experience transient moments of self actualisation which he calls "peak experiences". A peak experience is one which is characterised by happiness and fulfilment – a temporary, non-striving, self centred state of perfection and goal attainment where self-esteem is, by definition, at its highest.

Another technique developed by the Humanist school was Transactional Analysis (Berne (1910 – 70)). This proved to be both a method of examining human interactions and a way of labelling and systematising the information gained from observation. The goal of this approach is to build a strong state of maturity by learning to recognise the "child" and "parent" aspects of personality in oneself and others. Finally Gestalt therapy emphasises the "here and now" (immediate present); feelings, body language, expressiveness, spontaneity, acceptance, and responsibility for oneself. Gestalt therapy adopts an essentially positive view of human beings and their potential to achieve real joy. This form

of therapy believes in the concept of wholeness and its restoration in human life (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1991).

All these theories give an insight into the child's self esteem but, despite their strong appeal, Humanistic theories of personality are incomplete: they do not provide sufficient analysis of the causes of behaviour. A person's self concept may be an important determinant of behaviour, but what determines the particular self-concept he or she holds? Just how does the self-concept affect behaviour? These theories do not say.

### **SELF ESTEEM: A COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL VIEW**

Cognitive Behavioural Theories of self esteem focus not on what people do, but on how they view themselves in the world. Such theorists integrate many aspects of the aforementioned theories. One of the most influential cognitive behavioural theories has been developed by Beck and is derived from extensive therapeutic experiences with depressed patients (Beck, 1976; Beck, 1991; Beck, Rush, Shaw and Emery, 1979). Beck was struck by how consistently these patients appraise events from a negative and self-critical viewpoint. They expect to fail rather than succeed and tend to magnify failures and minimise successes in evaluating their performance. When things go wrong, they tend to blame themselves rather than the circumstances.

Experiences from the past trigger emotions, or put another way, people's appraisals of situations can determine their emotions (Bower, 1981; Isen, 1985). We all constantly appraise and evaluate our behaviour and its consequences. Sometimes we are aware of our appraisals, but at other times we are not. It seemed to Beck that the negative thoughts of depressed individuals tended to arise quickly and automatically, as though by reflex, and were not subject to conscious control. Such thoughts were usually followed by unpleasant emotions (sadness, despair) of which the patients were very much aware, even though they were unaware of, or barely aware of, the preceding automatic thoughts. Later, in working with more severely depressed patients, Beck noted that the negative thoughts were no longer peripheral but occupied a dominant place in consciousness and were repetitive (Beck, 1991).

Beck grouped the negative thoughts of depressed individuals into three categories, which he called the cognitive triad – negative thoughts about the

self, about present experiences and about the future. Negative thoughts about the self (a negative self schema) for example, consist of the depressed person's belief that he or she is worthless and inadequate. Any present misfortune is blamed on these personal inadequacies or defects. Even in ambiguous situations, where there are more plausible explanations for why things went wrong, the depressed person will blame him or herself. The depressed person's negative view of the future is one of hopelessness. He or she believes that his or her inadequacies and defects will prevent success ever occurring at any time.

Beck proposes that the depressed person's negative self schema ("I am worthless"; "I can't do anything right"; "I am unlovable") is formed during childhood or adolescence through such experiences as loss of a parent, social rejection by peers, criticism by parents or teachers, or a series of tragedies. These negative beliefs are activated whenever a new situation resembles in some way, perhaps only remotely, the conditions in which the beliefs were learned, and depression may result. Moreover, according to Beck, depressed individuals make some systematic errors in thinking (Cognitive Distortions) that lead them to misperceive reality in a way that contributes to their negative self-schema. Greater insights can be formed with respect to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and its use for understanding and enhancing children's self esteem by considering the following five case studies that are based on those of Fennel (1999). They are important because they illustrate different hypothetical reasons for children's feelings of worthlessness.

- (1) If parents treat their children in such a way as to focus on their mistakes and weaknesses rather than concentrating on their successes and strengths, then invariably the children are left with a sense that there is something fundamentally wrong with them. For example, Declan's Father was a failure in his own eyes and was thus determined that his children would not be likewise. Every day at the supper table he interrogated his children on what they had learnt that day at school. Each child had to give an account and it had to measure up to their Father's expected standard of reply. Declan dreaded these sessions as his mind always seemed to go blank. When this happened his Father's face would fall in disappointment and Declan could both see and feel his Father's sense of betrayal. It became clear to Declan, through repeated reinforcement, that he would never be good enough and would become a failure in later life.

- (2) Unexpected external events can sometimes impact on a child's self esteem. John lived in a small flat and was the apple of his Mother's and Father's eye until his two very demanding twin sisters were born when he was three. His Father and Mother became stressed and irritable. His Mother was constantly tired. John became the target for their anger and frustration and was too young to understand why this change in his circumstances had occurred. He tried to sit quietly and keep out of trouble but, again and again, he ended up being shouted at and sometimes smacked. It was no longer possible for him to behave as himself without being told that he was naughty, disobedient and uncontrollable. He grew up to feel that he was unloved, unacceptable and worthless.
- (3) Other family circumstances can also have an effect on the development of self-esteem. Kahlin grew up in a family of immigrants – twelve children living with his Mother and maternal Grandmother. His Father was in prison. Life was very tough: there was little money and little permanence of any kind. When he was walking to school with his Grandmother he used to watch the faces of the people that they met; full of disapproval and disgust. When he entered the school the other children wouldn't play with him and called him "smelly". Throughout the day Kahlin felt a deep sense of shame. He saw himself as a worthless outcast, whose only defence was attack. He was constantly fighting and paid little attention to what was taught. The only time he felt good about himself was when he had successfully broken the rules or stolen something without being caught.
- (4) The absence of material goods can contribute towards feeling bad, inadequate, inferior, weak or unlovable. However, these feelings can also occur with a child who appears to have everything. Angela, an only child, was brought up by elderly parents from a wealthy middle class background. She received everything that a child could want in material terms but she was never touched, hugged or kissed. She did her best to change these circumstances. She would take her Father's hand as she walked along and became rapidly aware that he let it go as soon as he could, and she would hug her Mother and notice how she would stiffen up. Angela concluded that their behaviour towards her must reflect

something about her. Her parents did their duty by her, but no more. Such behaviour signified to her that she was fundamentally unlovable.

- (5) Yet another more subtle experience that can contribute to low self esteem is the experience of being the "odd one out". Fiona was an exceptional artist whose Mother and Father were both teachers. They both thought that academic achievement was the most important thing in life. Fiona, unlike her two older brothers, was not really interested in academic pursuits. Her real talent lay in her hands and eyes. Fiona's parents tried to appreciate her artistic gifts, but they saw art and craft work as essentially trivial – a waste of time. They never openly criticised her, but she could see how their faces lit up when they heard about her brother's achievements and could not help but contrast this with their lack of enthusiasm when she brought her artwork home. They always seemed to have more important things to do than to look carefully at what she had done. Comments such as "Very nice dear," reinforced Fiona's conclusion that she was inferior to other, cleverer people. As an adult, she found it difficult to value or take pleasure in her talents, tended to apologise and downgrade her work as an artist, and fell silent in the company of anyone she saw as more intelligent or educated than herself, preoccupied as she was with her own self critical thoughts.

The examples cited above indicate that children's self esteem is decreased if they are over punished, threatened, or subjected to inappropriate sexual innuendo or contact. This is exacerbated by being given a label that devalues their individuality such as calling them "Dimbos", or being over-fed a diet of unachievable and unattainable aims. Furthermore, over protection can have the same effect on children as having their feelings persistently ignored or denied. In the same vein, being put down, ridiculed, humiliated, being compared unfavourably with others, deprived of reasonable explanations, required to assume a "false self" in order to impress others or being forced to engage in activities in which they show no aptitude such as music, or speech and drama, indicate more about the state of mind of the adult carer than the child, but are devastating nonetheless.

Intention and Desire play a very important part in combating low self-esteem. People constantly have to raise their awareness of their own self critical

thoughts; have to question these thoughts; and have to experiment with new ways of viewing themselves in a more positive light. This takes motivation that by definition involves both intention and desire. However, low self-esteem is not something with which a child or adult is born. This opinion is based on experience. It is often the result of a perception formed when the child was too young to stand back from the situation or, take a good look at the negative experience and question its validity. Biases in thinking contribute to low self-esteem by keeping negative beliefs about the self active and can take two forms: a) a biased perception of oneself and b) a biased interpretation of events, which often occur simultaneously. Once a pattern has been established it is often very difficult to persuade the child or adult to detach themselves from it (Atkinson et al, 2000).

Parents pass on rules to their children, so that they will be able to deal with life independently. Children also absorb rules from their families and other “Early Years” settings purely by observation. They notice connections “*If I don't tidy my room, Mam will do it for me*” and these can become a base for more general rules – “*If things go wrong, someone else will pick up the pieces*”. All these experiences can become a basis for personal rules with a lasting impact on how children live their lives. Being given too few rules and guidelines can cause low self-esteem especially if the lack of them results in the child making numerous mistakes which could have been avoided and for which the child is then punished. For example, not making a rule about playing with matches and then getting cross when he or she is burnt.

Furthermore, it is vitally important that parents and carers are consistent in their behaviour towards young children. They should not blow “hot and cold”, with their love and attention as this often leaves the child with the feeling that there is something wrong with them which is preventing them from being consistently lovable or pleasing to be with. Of particular importance is the notion that the child is leading someone that they love astray. “If you hadn't been so naughty in the supermarket I wouldn't have needed this cigarette”. **ADULTS AS WELL AS CHILDREN HAVE TO LEARN TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN ACTIONS!**

In contrast, helpful rules tend to be tried and tested and based on a solid foundation of experience. They are flexible, and allow the person to adapt to

changes in circumstances and to respond appropriately to different people. Rules, of course, are part of our cultural, social and family heritage. Unfortunately, like negative self-critical thoughts, personal rules for living do not necessarily match the facts. Unhelpful rules are over-generalisations that do not recognise what is useful and adaptive with respect to the circumstances in which the person finds themselves. This is often seen in the language in which rules are promulgated. “Always / Never”, “Everyone / No-one”, “Everything / Nothing”. Rules are usually absolutes, especially for children, and they do not allow for shades of grey. Thus bad rules can contribute to a great deal of anxiety and low self-esteem in a person's life and as Lindenfield (2000) says, “Psychologically deprived and damaged children will find themselves very much less able to withstand even the normal wear and tear of adult emotional life”(p,16).

People attribute self-esteem to a whole range of ideas such as: being young, beautiful, fit and healthy, a particular weight and shape, loved, secure and so on. However, all these things are fragile and could be taken away. **THE IMPORTANT POINT IS FOR THE PERSON TO BE HAPPY WITH THEM SELF SIMPLY FOR EXISTING JUST AS THEY ARE.** This places the person in a much stronger position as he or she becomes detached from any material outcome that could affect him or her. It is undoubtedly true that children tune into expectations that may never be put into words. They notice what is criticised and what is praised. In other words, children learn to detach themselves by copying the example of those around them and this places pre-school educators and carers in a pivotal position.

As Fennel (1999) says, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy concentrates on thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and opinions and as already noted, a person's opinion of him or herself lies right at the heart of feelings of low self-esteem. What is required is a balanced self image which appreciates the person, completely and fully, warts and all. In other words the person has to exhibit **SELF-ACCEPTANCE.**

#### **SELF-ESTEEM: A NEUROSCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE**

The specific role that genetic factors play in mood disorders is far from clear. However, it seems likely that a biochemical abnormality is involved. Mounting evidence indicates that our moods are regulated by the neurotransmitters that transmit nerve impulses from one neuron to another. A number of chemicals

serve as neurotransmitters in different parts of the nervous system, and normal behaviour requires a careful balance among them. Two neurotransmitters believed to play an important role in mood disorders are Norepinephrine and Serotonin. The unresolved question is whether the physiological changes are the cause or the result of the psychological changes. Lack of self-esteem has many causes, which may range from being determined almost entirely by an inherited biochemical abnormality to being exclusively the result of psychological or emotional factors. Most cases fall in between the two extremes and involve a mixture of genetic, early developmental, and environmental factors (Atkinson et al, 2000).

It has been noted that at approximately the same time as the language areas of the child's brain become active (about 18 months) myelinisation begins in the frontal lobes, which results in the development of self consciousness. The child no longer points at the reflection in the mirror as if it is another child. If a dab of coloured powder is put on his or her face while looking in the mirror at their reflection, he or she rubs it off – he or she doesn't just rub the mirror as younger children do. This self-consciousness suggests the emergence of an internal executor – the “I” that most people say they feel exists inside their heads (Carter, 1998). This is the true birth of the SELF. However, this does not necessarily mean that early traumas do not matter. Unconscious emotion may not be strictly speaking experienced, but it may lodge in the brain just the same. We cannot remember things before the age of about three because until then the hippocampus – the brain nucleus that lays down conscious long-term memories – is not mature. Emotional memories, however, may be stored in the amygdala, a tiny nugget of deeply buried tissue that is probably functioning at birth (LeDoux, 1996).

In a different vein, Pert *et al* (1985) identified a group of molecules, called peptides, as the molecular messengers that facilitate the conversation between the nervous system and the immune system. They found that these messengers interconnect three distinct systems – the nervous system, the immune system, and the endocrine system – into one single network. In the traditional view, these three systems are separate and serve different functions. The nervous system, consisting of the brain and a network of nerve cells throughout the body, is the seat of memory, thought and emotion. The endocrine system, consisting of the glands and hormones, is the body's main regulatory system,

controlling and integrating various bodily functions. The immune system, consisting of the spleen, the bone marrow, the lymph nodes, and the immune cells circulating through the body's defence system is responsible for tissue integrity and controlling wound healing and tissue repair mechanisms. According to Pert (1993) these three systems must be seen as forming a single psychosomatic network.

The peptides, a family of 60 – 70 macromolecules, were originally studied in other contexts and were given different names – hormones, neurotransmitters, endorphins, growth factors etc. These messengers are short chains of amino acids that attach themselves to specific receptors, which exist in abundance on the surfaces of all cells of the body. Peptides are the biochemical manifestation of emotions; they play a crucial role in the co-ordinating activities of the immune system; they interlink and integrate mental, emotional, and biological activities. Thus self-esteem affects the whole body: the classical distinction between Mind, Body and Spirit is breaking down, everything is interwoven.

#### **SELF ESTEEM: A HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL APPROACH**

The key to self-esteem is knowing yourself. It is an awareness, as Froebel (1837) said, that underlying the infinite diversity of life is the unity of one all pervasive spirit. The more young children experience their true nature, their inner self, the greater will be their self-concept. This reference to their inner self relates to their own unique sense of self not to events outside their control. Where the inner self of children is strongly influenced by external circumstances outside their control. They may constantly seek the approval of others in order to enhance their self-esteem. Thus, their thinking and behaviour is dependent on an uncertain, external response which may, or may not, be forthcoming and thus they live in a constant state of fear. This is of course why stressful circumstances are less disturbing to people who believe that they have some control over their situation (Abramson et al, 1989). With regard to circumstances outside their control, children's internal reference point is their Ego. The ego, as Rogers (1970) has pointed out, is not who they really are, rather it is their self-image; their social mask – it is the role that they are playing (Jung, 1963). Their social mask thrives on approval. It lives in constant fear of failure so it wants power in order to control events.

The child's spirit or soul is completely free of such restraints. Like his or her guardian angel it is immune to criticism, not fearful of any challenge and is



inferior to no one. Equally the child's spirit is superior to no one, and humble, because it realises that everyone else is the same. The question that the pre-school educator has to ask is "What can I do to help children concentrate on their spirit to the exclusion of circumstances outside their control?" There are a number of practical steps that can be taken to facilitate this.

The first is the use of periods of silence as advocated by Montessori (1936). The second is the exploration of nature as advocated by Rousseau (1762) and Froebel (1837).

The third is the encouragement of non-judgemental attitudes (Rogers, 1963 and Beck, 1976 ).

The fourth is the enhancement of the joy of giving and receiving as implied by the second Commandment, "Love thy neighbour as thyself".

The fifth, which follows on from this, is to promote "sharing and caring". Above all children must learn to be happy in the present (Chopra, 1996).

The sixth is always to love each child as a unique human being. Each has a potential waiting to be fulfilled (Rogers, 1970).

And the seventh is to teach each child to relish life's insecurities and enjoy the adventure of living life to the full (Scott-Peck, 1990).

(1) Practicing silence means to plan for silence in the pre-school day. In Scandinavia children often practice silence as they sit on the floor in a circle with a lighted candle at the centre. The children must be taught to look into their hearts, to think about those whom they love and who love them in return, and the choices in life that they can make. The intuitive component of our nature is one of its great strengths, and the importance of listening to the creative right side of our brain cannot be overstressed (Jung, 1963). If children never have the opportunity to experience silence it creates a turbulence in their inner being. The Bible sums this up when it says, "Be still, and know that I am God".

(2) Spending time in our natural environment and learning to appreciate it to its fullest extent fills children with a sense of awe and wonder. They feel the harmonious interaction of all the elements and forces of life and this gives them a sense of unity with all life. Whether they are delighting in a stream, a forest, a mountain, a lake, a horse, a cow, a rabbit, an oak tree, a daffodil, or the seashore, that connection with

such an inspiring creation will enhance each child's inner development and self-esteem.

(3) Judgement is the constant evaluation of events as being either right or wrong, good or bad. It is about making choices. Every action results in a reaction. Every child has set out before him or her an infinite set of possibilities with an infinity of choices. Some of these choices are made consciously, while others are made unconsciously. The key to the child's self esteem is for that child to become as aware as possible of the choices that he or she is making. Thus, young children have to be taught to ask themselves two questions. Firstly, "What are the consequences of the choice that I am making?" and secondly, "Will this choice that I am making bring happiness to those around me?" This is empowering and is yet another aspect of children knowing themselves. However, children must be taught to guard against rumination. Rumination involves isolating ourselves to think about how bad we feel, worrying about the consequences of the stressful event or our emotional state, or repeatedly talking about how bad things are without taking any action to change them.

(4) A child's self-esteem is also based on giving and receiving. This is because it is important that we take the other's point of view, and that we make the desires of others our own – like the good Samaritan. Giving and taking are the basis of positive social relationships. Giving engenders receiving, and receiving engenders giving.

The most important aspect of a child's giving and receiving is the intention. The intention should always be to create happiness for the giver and receiver. The child's frame of mind has to be joyful in the very act of giving. If through the act of giving the child feels that he or she has lost something then the gift is not truly given. Children have to be taught the principle of "What you give you shall receive" – that if you want joy then give joy to others; if you want love, learn to give love; if you want attention and appreciation, learn to give attention and appreciation. The fundamental message is that the easiest way to get what you want is to help others get what they want. The principle works equally well for individuals, corporations, societies, and nations (Chopra, 1996).

Pre-school educators should encourage children to give something whenever they come into contact with another person. The gifts of caring, attention, affection, appreciation and love are some of the most precious gifts that a human being can give and in material terms they cost nothing. There is an almost infinite list of possibilities when it comes to giving and receiving. If children are taught, for example, that they should never go to someone else's house without giving something they could take a flower or a drawing, complement the person on having a nice house or give them a kiss or a hug. Nature surrounds us with an abundance of resources. We have only to act in order to bring joy to others.

The obverse side of the coin of giving is that children must be taught to delight in receiving. The gifts of nature, the sunlight, the sound of birds singing, the showers of rain, the autumnal colours of the trees, the winter snow. The gifts of parents, grandparents and others, whether material or spiritual. The gifts of appreciation, love, caring and affection. To be valued these gifts must all be identified. Without a realisation of their true value each and every child will be short changed.

- (5) The promotion of "sharing and caring" involves each child giving up his or her attachment to toys and objects and forgoing them for the good of others. This means that young children must be taught to accept (Fennel, 1999). They must accept people, situations, circumstances and events as they occur. This requires them to accept life as it is. The child can wish for things to change in the future but it is a waste of energy to be constantly dissatisfied with the present moment ( Chopra, 1996 ).

When a child feels frustrated or upset by events, remember that the child is not reacting to the person or the situation but to his or her own feelings which have been triggered off by the event (Beck, 1976). It is very important that the child does not think that his or her feelings are someone else's fault. This misconception feeds and lowers self-esteem. If young children learn to take responsibility for their feelings by not blaming anyone or anything for their circumstances they are then in a strong position to provide a creative response to the situation as it is now. When the child becomes defensive, blames others and does not accept life as it is at the moment they lower their self-esteem. He or she should

learn to be like the tall pine tree that bends and shakes in the storm but always remains upright despite the tempest.

- (6) All children have a unique talent and mode of expression. They have a potential which is a vacuum waiting to be filled ( Rogers, 1970). By helping others they will enhance their own self-esteem and create joy and happiness for themselves. "What you give you shall receive ". There is something that each child can do better than anyone else in the whole world – and for every unique talent and unique expression of that talent, there are also unique needs which the pre-school educator must try to provide. If the pre-school educator tells the children again and again that there is a reason why they are here and that they have to find out that reason for themselves they will begin to think and reflect. Equally important is that they should be loved and told again and again that they have a contribution to make to humanity. They must constantly ask themselves how they can use their unique talents to help and bring joy to others.

- (7) People are constantly seeking security, and there are those who chase security for a lifetime without ever finding it. The search for security is an illusion: the solution lies in the wisdom of insecurity. As Scott- Peck (1990) says, people must learn to relish life's insecurities. What many people strive for is an attachment to the known. However, the known is merely the prison of past conditioning. Uncertainty, on the other hand, is the fertile ground of pure creativity and freedom. Torrance (1962) has shown us with his experiments that the adult's instructions are of paramount importance when it comes to childrens' creative responses. Children must be encouraged to accept that they are different, unique human beings, in order to find themselves. Conformity may make it easier for the educator but the children are being shortchanged. If children learn that they are stepping into the unknown in every moment of their existence and that this is fun, they will find that they are rewarded by the joys of life – the magic, the celebration, the exhilaration, the exultation of their own spirit.

However, the reality is that most adults and children have become merely bundles of conditioned reflexes. As a result of conditioning we

have repetitious and predictable responses to the stimuli in our environment. Our reactions seem to be automatically triggered by people and circumstances: we simply make choices unconsciously (Lewinsohn et al, 1985). Nevertheless, the more often children bring their choices into the open, the more they come to know themselves. Taking responsibility for their own actions will be empowering and result in greater feelings of self-esteem.

In conclusion, the most important thing to remember, as Chopra (1996, p 97) says, is that:

Each of us is here to discover our true Self, to find out on our own that our true Self is spiritual, that essentially we are spiritual beings that have taken manifestation in physical form. We're not human beings that have occasional spiritual experiences – it's the other-way around: we're spiritual beings that have occasional human experiences.

THIS IS THE "BREATH OF LIFE".  
THIS IS THE SECRET OF SELF-ESTEEM.

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## Cultivating Emotional Development through Physical Activity

*Vanessa F Murphy*

‘... the human heart is an abyss, for the hairs on a man’s head are easier by far to number than are his feelings, and the movements of his heart.’

*Augustine of Hippo*

We are all steered by emotional based patterns of behaviour that have been carved early on in our lives, some of which may be unconstructive or damaging. Physical activity can act as a catalyst for positive change, or is equally beneficial in maintaining a healthy emotional life, by creating an acceptable channel of personal expression. Personal expression is emotional expression, and it ought to be encouraged, nurtured and trained, that is to say, cultivated. Some definitions of the term ‘emotion’ are nebulous, as it affects the body and mind in a complex manner. A brief definition would be that – when one or more of our senses are stimulated, they instigate a succession of physiological responses so that we may act or react in a suitable manner. For instance if we see something funny – our brain releases ‘happy hormones’ or endorphins, we smile or we may even laugh.

The data detected by the senses is sent to the comprehension centre, located near the brain stem, which is known as the ‘neocortex’. It is from here that commands are sent to the amygdala. The amygdala, which is situated in the pre-frontal lobes, receives instruction and generates the appropriate hormonal or muscular action. This scientific insight is important as it substantiates the concept of emotion affecting the body and mind. The symbol of a ‘heart’ is at the epicentre of emotion, love and loss, but as we know, emotional activity is based in the brain. Nevertheless, this definition shows that an emotion may actually have an impact on the heart – so the saying about following your heart not your head now makes sense as we can often dismiss physical reactions like ‘going all tingly’ or ‘heartache’, when in truth we should learn to understand and interpret these physiological cues. “Ironically, we probably no more about the rings of Saturn than the emotions we experience everyday.” (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; 689)

## CONVEYING EMOTION PHYSICALLY

It is vital to understand that emotions are conveyed physically. Emotional reactions have display signals, such as, facial and vocal cues, body language, and physiological responses (Planalp, DeFrancisco, Rutherford 1996; Table 1). Emotion generates modifications in heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, sweat, gastrointestinal and urinary activity, pupil dilation, hormonal reactions, brain waves and muscle tension, to mention a few (Frijda 1986; 124-175). Primarily involuntary cues, for instance, sweating, crying, nausea, and blushing, show the biological impact of emotions. (Planalp et al. 1996) Such modifications are regarded as a central element of emotion.

To date, the majority of research in emotion is based on facial cues, which are undoubtedly one of the predominant means of conveying emotion (Camras, Holland, Patterson 1993; Ekman 1993). As John O Donohue eloquently put it – “One could imagine that the oceans went silent and the winds became still the first time the human face appeared on earth; it is the most amazing thing in creation.” (O’ Donohue J., 1997, p. 61) Vocal cues include the pitch, and the speed of the speech, whether an individual laughs, trembles, sighs, or does not speak at all, expresses a great deal of information as to their emotional state. Body language and gestures also speak volumes, people fiddle, slouch in their seat, or scratch their heads in confusion; nail biting is seen as a sign of nervousness and thumb sucking as a classic sign of insecurity. Therefore, as teachers, parents or caregivers, it is imperative that when a child expresses an emotion; it is understood, as clearly as though it was articulated, and that it is responded to. In so doing, the child’s emotional needs are met, the impact of which leads to healthy emotional development.

Physical reaction and body movement, however, is undoubtedly the most neglected as regards research. This is untenable considering that ‘motion’ is a fundamental aspect of emotion, both linguistically and theoretically. The word emotion stems from the Latin ‘to move out’, signifying that emotions are discernible in bodily movement or activity. Given that emotion involves the body and mind, it follows that a wide variety of body movements would be affected. This outlook suggests that the conveyance of emotional cues is purely the outward demonstration of what is primarily an internal process. The purpose of the various emotional cues, which act as a warning, is conceivably to enlighten others as to an individual’s emotional state, therefore enabling them to pre-select their responses.

A child may not be aware of an emotion being experienced, it is nevertheless, evident in their physiological state and behaviour, and therefore, can be addressed. For example, a child who displays classic signs of insecurity and lack of confidence may be enthused by being presented with a series of carefully selected physical challenges – suited to their ability. In this manner, a child’s level of competence will increase, as will their confidence. This boost to the child’s self-confidence sets in motion a series of physiological responses, including a positive hormonal reaction leading to an improved self-image, social relations and emotional expression.

Solomon (1993; 3) identified that since the time of Plato, and Socrates, emotional expression has been perceived as a danger to logic. de Sousa (1987; 172) contends the reverse, that emotion is entirely indispensable to reason. Current advances in neurology (Damasio 1994; Vogel 1997) propose that de Sousa is correct. Such reasoning, or rational thinking requires reflection therefore; it is logical to propose, that self-awareness is necessary. Physical activity enables self-awareness by promoting sensory understanding of space, movement, agility and the environment, in particular through dance and gymnastic activities, which heighten such physical perception of size, height, weight, speed and so forth. Moreover, these activities generate a creative conduit for children to identify with, and express, themselves.

The awareness of self is universally linked to self-image. Encouragement and challenges to this self-image occur daily and when they are favourable, they are a definitive source of fulfilment (Argyle 1987; 14-15), however, when such exchanges become disparaging the outcome is distressing. This form of criticism can lead to a degree of social exclusion, which can be devastating. Inevitably, such distress has profound physical affects, (Atkins, Kaplan, Toshima 1991; et al) for example, muscle tension, heaviness or tightness of the chest area, sensations of coldness, mental and physical lethargy, loss of confidence and optimism, behaving in a self-punitive or destructive manner is common, thus reinforcing the social exclusion, and beginning the cycle all over again. Social relationships in childhood greatly influence overall development and the effectiveness with which we function as adults, all of which depends on healthy emotional development and communication. Hartup (1992) suggests that the best predictor of adult adaptation is not a child’s IQ, or school grades, but rather their level of sociability. The strength of emotions people experience,

both positive and negative, is linked to social belonging and that one of the central functions of emotion is to manage behaviour in order to shape and maintain social bonds (Beaumeister & Leary 1995).

People have a deep-seated need to belong to a group. Confirmation of this assertion stems from the compelling connection between emotional security and social relationships. Feelings are personal, or private, and revealing them demonstrates trust in another. Consequently, emotional expression becomes 'social'. It has been documented that cognitive or academic excellence does not seem to occur without conducting close observation and providing professional guidance. It is judicious, therefore, to infer that social and emotional development, which affect cognitive evolution, demand equivalent respect and be perceived as equally significant as intellectual growth.

### EMOTION IN SOCIAL SETTINGS

"It is important to realise that society is not just a social overlay on a biological foundation; the social nature of emotion seems to be built into our genes." (Planalp S. 1999). Emotion thrives in social situations (Anderson, Guerrero 1998c; 57-64) children experience sadness, anger, and fear frequently when in a group, less when in pairs and least often when alone (Scherer et al 1988; 18). The question therefore, is what occurs in such social interaction to produce these emotional responses. The possibility of public rejection manifests as apprehension, arguments between friends can cause both anger and misery, receiving approval, respect, or affection elicits contentment, whilst advanced communication generates happiness (Shaver et al. 1987).

In practical terms, for instance, in a P.E. class, one can assume that; reducing the possibility of rejection; by offering realistic challenges, monitoring and negotiating debates so that they do not escalate into arguments, moreover, being respectful and encouraging, will allow the child to feel secure, content and competent. Developing a sense of physical competence increases self-awareness, improves self-image and generates a sense of well-being. Well-being incorporates health, happiness, and security, in other words, a positive sense of self-worth (Mandler 1984; Oatley 1992; Stein et al. 1993).

Self-worth is such a personal, internal feeling that a varied approach is necessary to facilitate its development. In practice, this translates to observing an

individual child's stage of development and behaviour and responding to it by presenting the child with a range of physical activities that will appeal to the child therefore, encouraging them to evolve. For example, if a child is good at running but only interacts with one or two classmates, then one could set up a relay scenario in PE class and pair her initially with a pal, then add a third member to the team and a fourth. In this way, she begins from a comfortable position of competence and security, and the introduction of variables is gradual. Soon the child will feel relaxed when interacting with others in the class, and receive positive feedback for their talent for running, in this case, resulting in an increased sense of self-worth. Children who have a positive sense of self-worth feel like they have something worthwhile to give. They are willing to venture out into the world, be productive and embrace life.

Nevertheless, self-worth needs to be reinforced with respect. There are countless ways in which children may be shown respect, such as, providing explanations about decisions that affect them, the reasons behind rules and regulations, or creating situations whereby they can make their own decisions. Demonstrating trust in a child's ability to make decisions helps build his self-esteem. The basic elements of self-esteem are self-worth, self-respect and self-confidence. Children who experience poor self-esteem tend to focus on difficulties instead of possibilities, for example, a child with low self-esteem may not want to attempt new challenges due to fear of failure. Considering this, the new challenge ought to be presented in a familiar manner and include aspects of activity at which the child is already proficient. For instance, in basketball if a child is good at passing the ball but not as proficient in shooting hoops, then set up groups of four wherein each child has to pass the ball to each team mate before attempting the dunk. In this way, a child has the opportunity to display their strengths whilst developing a new skill, thus develop emotionally at their own pace. The pace of emotional development, however, is not the only issue. Difficulties arise as individuals vary emotionally; some appear to be more sensitive to their emotions than others are (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield 1990, 1994, 1996). Emotional communication is further complicated by the reality that people are not equally communicative (Gross, John 1997; Kring, Smith, Neale 1994) The extent of expressiveness is directed by cultural convention, social class, gender roles, family norms, and principally by the individual's personality (Halberstadt 1991; Manstead 1991). Factors that shape a child's personality are numerous and varied, however, it is greatly

influenced by temperament, which is a pre-disposition to certain moods or emotions, together with the manner and extent to which these are expressed. Individuality is the result of all the inter-personal relationships, which the child experiences; consequently, the parent-child relationship is of immense significance in formation of the personality. In a communication study, parents of pre-school children were found to agree on about 70% of their children's experiences of happiness and sadness but less well on anger and fear (Stein, Trabasso, Liwag 1991, cited in Oatley & Duncan 1992; 286), such studies highlight areas that are misunderstood or perhaps suppressed.

### SUPPRESSING EMOTIONS AND ASSOCIATED HEALTH RISKS

Children learn from a young age which emotional responses to suppress. According to Saarni (1990), six-year-old children are aware of when to shun feelings of sadness, grief or disappointment as they may receive a negative reaction or that they may result in hurting the other person's feelings. "Tears are stupid, tears are childish, tears are a sign of weakness, important people don't cry, clever people don't cry" (Carmichael 1991; 186). Suppressing emotion is directly linked to physical and psychological impairment, alternatively, supportive social dealings can nourish both physical and psychosomatic health (Albrecht, Burleson, Goldsmith 1994; Hirsch 1980; Lazarus 1991) The struggle to intentionally contain emotions is perhaps one of the key explanations as to why those who do not divulge their feelings, are inclined to fall ill. "If children are not allowed to express their own assertiveness, authority and natural anger they will end up full of rage, and revenge and hate." (Kubler-Ross 1997, New York)

Unless an emotion is expressed or dealt with internally, the body and mind remain in an aroused, agitated state, which may last a few moments, hours or years, for instance, a young child who has just had a scare – may be told to 'be brave', in other words, don't cry, don't make a fuss, 'suck it up'. The child's physiological response has already begun, so the child's neck, shoulders, and spinal column remain tense, heart rate is increased, adrenalin is pumped into the muscles – but the child remains impassive, this puts tremendous unnecessary stress on the heart. Suitable physical actions, such as screaming or running, in this case, will allow the body to regain its composure, however if the emotion has been suppressed for a long period, a physical response may not suffice, and an internal process may be required in order to identify the trigger that instigated the suppressed emotion.

This, as you can imagine, can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Therapists and counsellors direct such internal processes and dub the deliberate outpouring of emotion as a 'ventilationist' or 'cathartic'. The definition of the term catharsis has altered over time, Aristotle's 'katharsis' was used in reference to 'medical purgation', whereas, Nussbaum's (1986; 388-391) applied the term to 'clarification'. The contemporary use of the phrase, however, is that the role of catharsis is to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, and others, through the medium of emotion (Scheff 1990).

Conversely, numerous studies have indicated that aggressive children become more, as opposed to; less angry as they mature (Tarvis 1989; 136-137) as uninhibited, demonstrative behaviour habitually presents an opportunity to become proficient at negative feelings and actions. It is alleged that unrestrained venting of emotion will generate lasting impairment unless carefully managed (Epstein 1984; 84). The suggestions that 'if you're cross try hitting a cushion', creates a habitual physiological response to anger, which is to lash out and strike an object. This response involves a series of actions, such as, – the feeling of anger rises, facial muscles contort into a frown or grimace, back and neck muscles become taut and an injection of adrenaline is released enabling an aggressive reaction.

On the other hand, breathing techniques or gentle exercises, can be used to induce a sense of calm; this allows an individual to react appropriately. The sense of calm is generated by endorphins being released, which are triggered by physical exercise. As Aristotle put it, "Anyone can become angry – that's easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – that's not easy." (Aristotle cited in Lindenfield G. 1997 p.136)

Emotional damage, unlike physical injuries, do not all heal with the passing of time (Tait, Silver 1989). In fact, the reverse is often the case with the manifestation of such symptoms as, chronic back pain, recurrent infections as the result of a suppressed immune system, or post-traumatic stress disorders. Fortunately, these conditions can be managed. The orientations that families have toward managing, feeling and talking about emotion vary widely. Some families consider emotion unacceptable, or appropriate only for major issues 'I can't afford to be sad' or 'what does a kid have to be sad

about' (Dunn, Brown, Beardsall 1991; Gottman, Katz, Hooven 1997; Hooven, Gottman, Katz 1995; 230).

Studies show that, children whose parents communicate meagre compassion appear to develop minimal self-worth, and convey little empathy themselves. They are effectively egocentric and this prompts them to behave reprehensively towards others. A prime example of this, is that avoidant children will react negatively or even aggressively to signs of distress in their peers; for instance, they may hit a crying child whereas their more secure counterpart, is able to demonstrate sympathy and sadness (Main & George 1985). The aggressive behaviour of these children, to those in distress, could stem from the way their parent dealt with their tears, or perhaps that they find their peer's distress unbearable as it reminds them of their own pain.

The failure to understand the root cause of childhood violence stems from our difficulty in acknowledging how much human beings need one another, and how vulnerable they are to failure in their attachment relationships (Zulueta, 1995). Children who grow up in more emotionally reflective families tend to be able to recognise and manage their own emotions better, tend to deal with inconsistencies and function better in their close relationships.

#### EMOTIONAL ADAPTATION

Certain inconsistencies are associated with the latter stages of the foundation period (birth to six years), in particular, the inclination to display first one extreme then soon after, the exact opposite. These diametrically contrasting reactions seem to hold equal sway over the child. The six-year-old appears to be encumbered with bipolarity – wavering from one view to another. It can be exhibited in numerous ways, like tears being effortlessly diverted to laughter, or exclamations, such as, 'you're my best friend' and in another breath may say 'I don't like you'. During this period the child yearns to be the best, be top of the class, or first in the race and so on, but often a child's eagerness is contradictory to their level of proficiency, and this can result in altercations or disappointment. The parent or teacher, therefore, should interpret their conduct as indications of a development progression, which calls for practical instruction.

Taking these into consideration, the P.E. curriculum guidelines ought to accommodate such bi-polarity, in other words, a teacher could use clear

instructions and perhaps adopt a more lenient, or understanding attitude to a child's outbursts. It is imperative to observe the superficiality, hence, exposing the naiveté of the child's actions. This will create an atmosphere of inclusion, tolerance and security, which embrace the child, and may alleviate the disruption of this characteristic tensional behaviour. The child's irresponsibility ought to be discouraged, yet, appreciation that these contradictory outbursts and tendencies are novel experiences for them, and are essential to healthy development.

A further aspect of healthy development is the establishment of a firm boundary for the self within which a sense of one's own identity can be established. Winnicott (1958, cited in Troy M. et al 1987 p. 142) made the point that caregivers also need a system of support and firm boundaries for themselves. Effective control over boundaries gives a stronger sense of belonging to what is inside, of there being something comprehensible to identify with, of there being 'a place where I belong'. Children form their identity through secure attachment on a small scale initially, and then on a broader scale. Similarly, it is important to create awareness of physical boundaries, it and vital to realise that physical contact is not always welcome. This is directly linked with respect, respect for oneself, and respect for others. Putting this in perspective, adults often disregard this notion in their dealings with children.

For instance, it is familiar to see a child being physically moved out of an adult's way without any form of verbal exchange, considering one would not do so to an adult, it is only fair that the child receive the same respect. It is recognised that a child satisfies their needs through imitation, thus it follows that suitable role models ought to be provided for them.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS

Healthy development is reliant on the store of suitable archetypes, these role models may be found in teachers and caregivers. Interactions between the adults, and between the adults and children, furthermore, the milieu in which the experience occurs is central to emotional development. Children observe an adult's verbal and physical communication closely, it is through such observations that they learn, in part, how to behave. The idiom 'actions speak louder than words' is quite pertinent in this regard. Though children are not miniature adults they do deserve the same level of respect that is proffered to a grown-up. A child who is immersed in such an



environment will naturally absorb good manners, appropriate reactions and noticeably responsibility.

It is, in general, good management practice to delegate tasks and responsibilities to the lowest level at which they can be competently carried out and to the point at which decision-making is most effective, nevertheless, this has not traditionally been the practice in many schools. Effective delegation implies more than taking responsibility or authority for oneself, it implies that the individual can accept and respect the authority of superiors and in turn, develop leadership skills. Moreover, it allows a child to feel as though they are contributing, and that their contribution has a positive impact.

For instance, when planning an outdoor pursuit, such as orienteering, each child may be given 'a responsibility', or task. One child may be given the job of setting up the obstacles and another child may be asked set a route, and so on, resulting in an enjoyable experience due to their contribution. The delegation of physical tasks improves a child's self-esteem, enhances his communication and social skills, in addition to, increasing his physical independence.

## EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT

The ability to form meaningful relationships depends on the development of emotional skills and physical independence. The goal of being physically independent begins in infancy; however, this aspiration is reliant on secure emotional attachment. Likewise, the people in a child's social circle also have attachments to each other, which are important to children for identification. It is because of this innate behavioural system, as chronicled by Darwin in 'The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals' (1872), that a human infant selects a principal attachment figure. As the child develops, secondary attachment figures play a progressively significant role. The child tends to accept the second adult more easily if they have seen him in a good relationship with the first – that is to say, 'if a mother gets on well with teacher, then the teacher must be acceptable'.

The 'Strange Situation Paradigm', formulated by Ainsworth (1978), also observed attachment. Studies have shown that if the primary caregiver became either aggressive or rebuffed physical contact, (Main et al 1979), their children learn to transfer their attention elsewhere, to 'cut themselves off' from their

emotions of anger and fear concerning the caregiver. Studies on such avoidant children found that they convey wanton aggression to both adults and children and that their social relations are generally negative. These findings were corroborated by Troy and Sroufe (1987), who established that children with secure attachment relationships were generally not either victims or abusers. As indicated by Bowlby (cited in Troy M. et al 1987, p249), failure in attachment relationships can have a negative impact on the child's willingness to communicate. Even when they are willing, children are not always aware of, or able to articulate their feelings. Klein proposed the notion of projection; in other words, the emotion is 'acted out', in order to externalise internal feelings. Feelings are externalised, or communicated physically, through play, self-expression, and body language. Once these feelings are construed, and addressed, the child experiences an additional level of independence, subsequently; his physical competence improves, through newfound confidence, as does his communications skills, resulting in positive emotional development.

## CONCLUSION

According to Maslow (1908-1970), the founder of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, human beings have a hierarchy of needs, which he categorised as physiological, social, emotional, cognitive and finally spiritual, or self-actualisation. His theory suggests that, in order for an individual to develop, they must satisfy one need before the next becomes relevant. For instance, if a child lacks social skills, is unable to communicate adequately or interact with others, then emotional development is deemed extraneous. Similarly, those who experience difficulty in developing emotionally may experience obstacles to cognitive development. Physical activity cultivates emotional development by reinforcing social adeptness, via group activities; encouraging creativity, by means of interpretive dance; increasing self-awareness, through movement; and consequently boosting a child's inner sense of worth. Evidently, enhancing emotional development through physical activity is an involved process; but does not imply an agenda separate from a school's current educational approach. P.E. is an integral part of education; it promotes physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional development.

It is imperative to maintain a holistic approach to child development, that is to say, not to isolate one area of development but rather highlight the connection

between them. The most straightforward way to do this is to create continuity. Physical activity is the ideal medium through which continuity may be successfully established. The positive association between physical activity and physical development is acknowledged, however, the link between physical activity and emotional development, to date, is not as familiar. Parents, and equally teachers, ought to be fully aware of the vital role physical activity plays in a child's life, as it is essential to wholesome emotional development. Wholesome development incorporates meaningful social and personal attachments, as well as, physical or self-awareness. In other words, through physical activity, a child learns how to express and interpret emotions, thus improving his social interactions, leading to enhanced self-image, which ultimately results in constructive emotional development.

“Though the human body is born complete in one moment, the human heart is never completely born. It is being birthed in every experience of your life.”

(O'Donohue J., 1997, p.26)

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## Children's Early Representations: Reflections of Creativity

*Nora Maria Ní Mhurchú*

Howard Gardner (1980) described the early years of life as “a golden age of creativity, a time when every child sparkles with artistry”. Young children are indeed very creative and anyone who has the privilege of working with them is very aware of their natural ability to tell creative stories, their creative uses for materials and toys, their creative answers and creative drawings.

What is creativity? There are many meanings and understandings of the word. Hoffer (1968) wrote that creativity was a child of playfulness and that of all mammals only man retained this ability throughout his life. “The tendency to carry youthful characteristics into adult life is at the root of man's uniqueness in the universe.”

Torrance, (1970) a pioneer in the study of creativity, defined it as “The process of sensing gaps or disturbing missing elements: forming ideas or hypotheses concerning them: testing these hypotheses and communicating the results, possibly modifying and retesting the hypotheses”. May (1975) defined it as “the process of bringing something new into being”. Marzollo & Lloyd (1972) offer the following definition of creativity: “Creativity is basically an attitude –one that comes easily to young children but must be sustained and strengthened lest it be sacrificed in our too logical world.” Mayesky (1995) defined it as “a way of thinking and acting or making something that is original for the individual and valued by that person and others”.

No matter how creativity is defined or understood, all agree that it is a precious element of human life and intelligence. Two criteria have been widely accepted in understanding the creative process: firstly the product must be novel in the sense something new is discovered, perhaps an idea, a plan or an answer. Secondly, it must be of value, in the sense that it works or is possible.

Creativity involves divergent thinking, in which there are no right or wrong answers. Creative thinking is the mainspring of our civilisation, from the wheel

to modern technology and including great works of art, music and drama. The progress of civilisation is dependent on creativity. It is inextricably linked with the arts and the development of representation and symbolism. Children who fantasize a lot and spend a considerable amount of time in imaginative thinking have greater tendencies towards being creative with materials and situations.

To be creative one has to dare to be different. Research in the U.S. by Torrance & Myers (1971), reveals that children of 9 years of age are greatly concerned with conformity to peer pressure and as a result lose many of their creative abilities. When they move onto High School they are even more concerned with conformity and their thinking becomes more “obvious, commonplace and safe”. Research undertaken prior to this by Nichols-Pulsifer (1963) and Kincaid (1964) concur with this finding, but the researchers contend that the drop off in creative thinking is not a natural developmental change, but rather “a sharp man-made change which confronts the 5 year old and impels him by rules and regulations”. (Nichols-Pulsifer, 1963) Gardner (1983) found that “sparks of original creativity remain in only a small minority of the population”. It appears that the most crucial time to encourage creative thinking is when a child is young, prior to beginning formal education, as that is the stage when initial attitudes are formed.

Children benefit enormously from creative thinking: they learn to feel good about themselves, they find many answers to a problem, they enjoy the feeling of being different to other children, they develop new ways of looking at problems and their potential to think is developed, as are new skills.

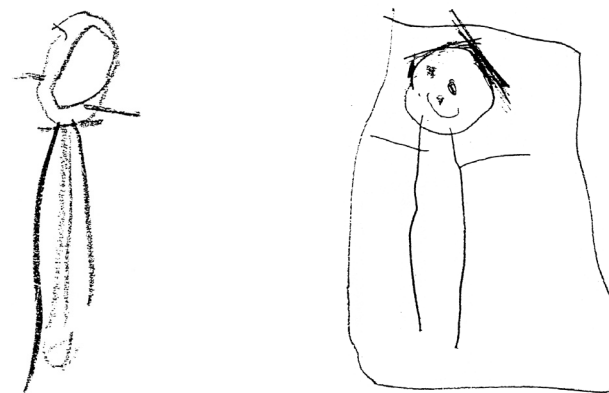
For the young child, play and art are very closely related and the longer this relationship lasts the better individual creativity can be pursued. In both instances young children try to make sense of their physical world and symbolise it. Creative achievements in art contribute to a sense of personal identity and self esteem, which are two very important aspects of personal development which need to be developed at a young age.

The Revised Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) recommends the following media for creative expression for all classes from Junior Infants to 6th class: drawing, paint and colour, print, clay, construction, fabric and fibre. The elements or concepts of the Visual Arts to be developed throughout the Primary school are:

an awareness of line, shape, form, colour and tone, texture, pattern and rhythm and space. These elements are the language of artistic communication. The media already outlined form what is known as a strand within the curriculum and each strand consists of two strand units. Drawing for example is divided into making drawings and looking and responding. Looking and responding involves the visual environment and other art works.

Drawing is the natural way for a child to communicate his/her understandings, feelings and imaginary world. It is generally accepted that a child begins mark making during the second year of life. This is for pleasure – the motor sensation of banging the pencil or any writing tool on the paper or any other surface. By 3 years of age a child produces a vast range of geometric shapes and forms, which during the next year s/he attempts to combine into more intricate patterns and relate to one another.

Before a child reaches 5 years a recognisable representation of something in the world is produced – the “tadpole” man, who stands for everyone. This figure is so named, as it is reminiscent of the first stages of the frog. The figure consists of a closed irregular shape, which has certain features contained inside and radials extending outwards.



In this first example, the circular shape contains another circle within. We can interpret this as the head- perhaps this second circle is the mouth. In the second example, there are more facial features included. The appendages are accepted as the arms and legs. In all tadpole figures, the appendages extend outwards and downwards from the head, the torso is always omitted.

By the time a child enters primary school his drawings are often his most striking creations – vibrant, colourful, balanced, rhythmic and expressive – a primary vehicle for expression. This reinforces the idea of the child as an individual participating in a meaningful way in the process of creation and self-expression.

Torrance (1979) devised Tests of Creativity, both verbal and figural. The figural tests consist of Incomplete Figures, Picture Construction and Circles and Squares. The figural tests are particularly suitable to use with young children as their creativity may be assessed for fluency, flexibility and originality of thought most effectively through figural rather than verbal activities.

For the purpose of this researcher's study, the Picture Construction was the first test selected to test children's creativity in drawing. In Torrance's Picture Construction test the children were given a shape, which was to be an integral part of a picture they were to draw. The shapes used were a triangle and a jelly-bean shape. Responses were considered in terms of originality, elaboration, sensitivity, communication and activity. In this small-scale study a group of boys and girls aged between 3 and 5 years of age were the subjects. A triangle was displayed to the children and a discussion ensued about its shape. With the younger children the shape of the triangle was discussed and other matters such as where it may be found, where they may have seen it before and what it reminded them of. The most common answers for where the triangle may be found were: the roof of a kennel, a clown's hat, a kite and a rocket. Each child was then encouraged to think of how they could make a picture using a triangle. They were urged to think of something that was not already mentioned and that no one else would think of. They were also asked to think of a title for their picture. During the test there was no discussion held and no help was provided to them. Afterwards the younger children were asked for a title for their creation which was written down: the older children were asked to write this down themselves.



The creations by these children capture a sense of movement. This is created in the first picture, a boat, by the rippled lines for waves. In the second drawing, the aeroplane, the sense of movement is captured by the arcs for the wind. Nothing else has been added to either picture to identify or elaborate on it – it was the movement inferred by the lines and arcs which identified both pictures. Studies by Bower (1974) and Spelke (1985) reveal that young children are interested not only in configuration of objects but also in their location and movement through time and space. Spelke has produced evidence proposing that young children initially place more reliance on the location or flight path of an object than on its colour and form as a means of identifying it. This is certainly bourn out in these two pictures – apart from the coloured triangle no other colours are used. Both drawings rate highly for creativity and originality and even without a title, both are comprehensible.



The drawing by the 5 year old of the teacher is more elaborate in terms of colour and detail. The use of the triangle as a hat is not very creative however. All facial features are present and other details such as the teachers' earrings and scarf are added. The bow of the scarf is actually an attempted copy of the triangle. Studies into children's ability to copy geometric shapes show that 40% of 5 years olds and 95% of six years olds can correctly copy a triangle. It is a difficult shape for them to master as it has an apex and only three sides. A navel is included in this picture, which is interesting as this child always included it in his

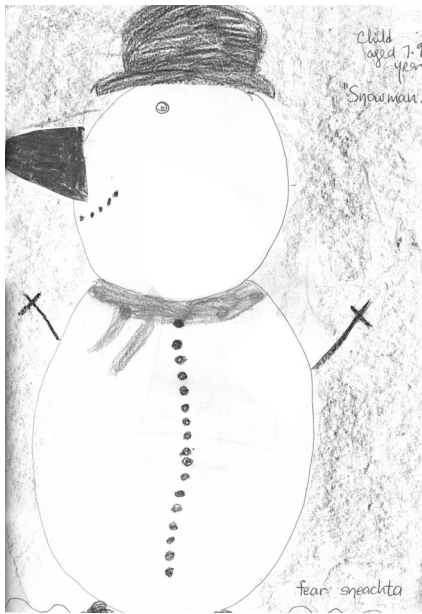
drawings of the human figure, revealing that he draws what he knows to be there, rather than what he can actually see himself. This picture would score well on elaboration, sensitivity and communication.



The use of the triangle as an umbrella or a sun-shade is also rather creative. Here we see the inclusion of more of the environment than in previous drawings by younger children. There is also the inclusion of a ground line, a sky-line and a no man's land in-between. There is more depth in this picture than in previous ones. The child tries to over-come translocational problems of representing the front and back legs of the table and chairs by drawing them in a line

and at an angle. The child has elaborated in this drawing and communication and sensitivity are evident. An awareness and use of the visual arts elements colour, line, pattern, space and rhythm are also evident.

The seven year olds' use of the triangle as the snowman's nose is rather clever. The snowman's body is drawn facing the viewer, but the head is turned to the side, to make it possible to use the triangle as the nose. The body includes much detail – buttons, arms, a scarf, which is patterned and feet. A ground line is also included. This drawing is quite big and the triangle forms only a minor part of it. In the drawings of the younger children, the triangle formed a larger part of a smaller picture. This drawing shows evidence of pattern in the scarf and the buttons and one can sense rhythm in it. A variety of lines are included and there is good use of space and colour. At this stage children's drawings of human figures are always facing the observer and smiling. The snowman in this drawing is smiling also.



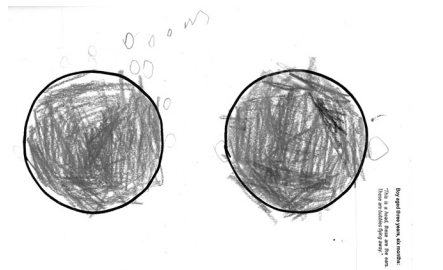
Child 8:8 yrs



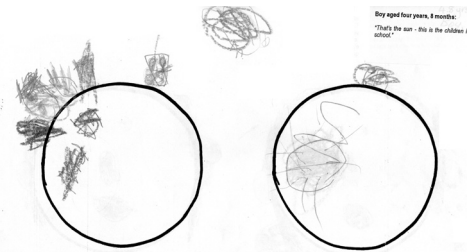
The use of the triangle as the roof of a house by the 8 year old is most unoriginal, as this was one of the ideas that had been discouraged at the discussion stage prior to the test. Very little extra detail has been added apart from the necessary door and windows to identify the object. The spacing of these is very poor. No elaboration of the environment is evident. Use of colour is limited to one other colour apart from the colour of the triangle. This is the most uncreative and un-original of all drawings by the test subjects.

The second test which was administered to the children was an adaptation of Circles and Squares (Torrance, 1979). Each child was given a page on which two circles had been drawn, 5cm in diameter. The task was that the children had to draw something which had the circle as the main element. They could draw two separate pictures if they so wished. A discussion took place before the administration of the test about objects that had a circle as a main part. The most common responses were a clock, the sun, a football, a wheel and a face. The children were encouraged to think of something which hadn't already been mentioned and which no one else would think of. When the test was completed the children were interviewed individually about their drawings and their answers recorded.

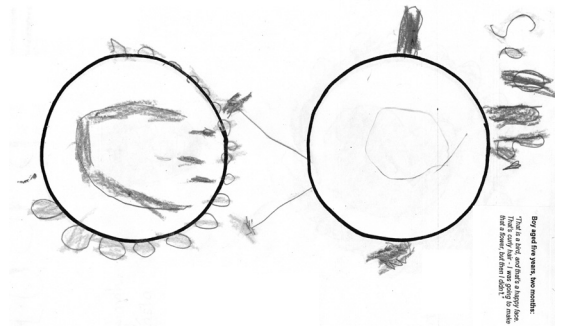
Analysing the responses, one notes the re-occurrence of features such as the sun in 27% of the drawings, the human face in 54.5% and the clock face in 27%. A common feature of the creations of children aged between three and five was the drawing of items within the circle and the use of the circle provided as a periphery, which had no relationship with the picture contained within. These young children failed to grasp the idea that the circle was to be a main feature of their drawings, perhaps this was too difficult for them to comprehend and visualise. In some cases a circle was drawn within the circle, proving that they understood the spatial order of enclosure.



This drawing was only comprehensible with his verbalisations as there were very few marks or co-ordinates added. There was much colour used, the circle being completely filled in with mixtures of red, pink, orange and blue crayons. The pleasure principle was operating here – the child drawing and colouring what pleased and delighted his eye, irrespective of what the product looked like. This would not be considered a creative drawing.

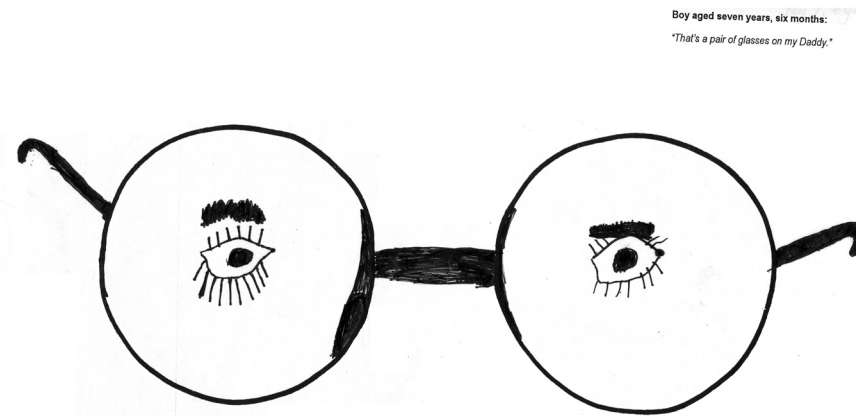


Title: *Children in School*. This is an interesting aerial viewpoint of children seated at a table in school, the table at which this child sat. One can see four children grouped together at one end of the round table and one on his own at the far end. The remainder of the circumference is left empty. Bower (1977) has shown that proximity of objects is the earliest perceived topological space relationship. As young children place objects very close to one another, in heaps or bundles, so are marks made close together in their early drawings. Even though the drawing does not portray spatial relations between the parts with accuracy, there is a visual logic to the placement of parts on the page. This first drawing is very creative, however, his second is very un-original as it is the sun. Interestingly, this representation of the sun differs greatly from that of older children, as the child enclosed it within the circle provided. The circle had nothing whatsoever to do with the sun! Older children who drew the sun, used the circle as the sun's circumference.



Title: *A Bird and a Happy Face*. This child said that he was originally going to draw a flower, “but then I didn't”. The detail around the circumference of the circle, which initially represented the petals, is now “curly hair”. Athey (1990) states that children often label drawings as one thing and come back later and label them as another. In this case the graphic theme underlying the representations was the circle, and the petals double up very well as curly hair. The depiction of the bird, made by adding a beak, a tail and two legs, is like the original “tadpole” figures, where the circle represents the head and body. These were two quite original drawings.

Much of the drawings among the 6, 7 and 8 year olds were very un-original. The human and clock face were very common; the human face containing much detail and the circle used as the circumference. No original uses for the circle appeared apart from the following by a 7 year old:



Boy aged seven years, six months:  
 "That's a pair of glasses on my Daddy."

The use of the circles to represent “Daddy's glasses” by this seven year old is very creative. Both circles are combined to make a pair of glasses. Overlay is not a feature – the child represents the sides of the glasses by laying them out flat on the page. Goodnow (1977) refers to these type drawings as “aerial perspective” drawings. The child has some difficulty with spatial relations as the eyebrows are contained within the glasses and the eyes are very small. In terms of creativity however, this drawing would score highly, firstly as the child viewed both circles together rather than individually and secondly, as it is original, elaborate and communicative. A drawing as creative as this is most unusual among this age group

## CONCLUSIONS

Analysing the drawings in the two tests one can conclude that children aged between 3 and 5 years of age are far more creative than older children. A drop off in creative ideas reflected in drawings is evident around 6 years. The essence of the younger children's creative thinking is only captured when the test is extended to include their verbalisations about their drawings. We then get a clearer picture of what they want to represent, as this elaborates their thoughts. The older children's representations are more clearly understood, even without verbalisations. This is due to the fact that older children's drawings relate more to adult expectations of images and to stereotypical representations. This finding concurs with other studies of creativity, where a drop off in creative thinking has been noted at around 5 years of age. The pre-school period is therefore particularly crucial in developing creativity and fostering its growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Young children are naturally creative. Unfortunately, as they mature many of them lose their creative ability. Creative thinking is promoted when they are allowed and encouraged to think divergently. Creativity in drawing may be fostered through young children's play. Allowing children to meaningfully engage in play, with a variety of materials, helps them come to an understanding of their world. Everyday problems arise in play, problems which they must learn to solve for themselves. They must be provided with an opportunity to think about how such problems may be resolved. This allows for creative thoughts and possible workable solutions to be discussed. Play is closely related to drawings, as in their drawings, children are also attempting to come to an understanding of their physical world, their imaginative world and their feelings and express it visually.

Children's active participation in all learning experiences, where they have an opportunity to use all their senses, stretches their creative talents. Therefore, listening, feeling, touching, smelling and even tasting helps them develop a better mental image of what they want to represent, rather than drawing solely from memory and results in a more creative and meaningful drawing. An interested adult talking to a child about his/her work and creations enhances the child's self esteem and confidence in his/her own ability in drawing. If a child has confidence in his own ability and feels good about his own creations, there is less of a chance that he will be concerned with conforming to peer pressure and stereotypes and will instead foster his own creativity.

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## A Portrayal of Practice: Gender Socialisation in Early Years Education and Care Settings

*Maura Cunneen*

Kindergarten is a triumph of self-stereotyping. No amount of adult subterfuge or propaganda deflects the five-year-old's passion for segregation by sex. They think they have invented the differences between boys and girls, and, as with any new invention, must prove that it works.

*(Paley, 1984, pix)*

### INTRODUCTION

Issues relating to Gender have occupied much attention in the recent past. The publication of the Report of the Equality Authority (March, 2003) noted that cases relating to gender discrimination accounted for the highest number of submitted complaints – 33 per cent of the total. In a similar vein, the questioning of men's societal role occupied much discussion time on national radio. How does such a situation still pertain in the Third Millennium? Why are the life circumstances of so many people affected by their sex/gender roles? The answers to these questions might be found in the gender socialisation practices of any human society. The differential expectations of females and males begins even before birth, as is evidenced by the results of research conducted by Rothman (1987). In this study, mothers who had learned the sex of their baby through amniocentesis described the male foetus as vigorously moving in the womb, whereas the female foetus was considered quieter and less energetic. Mothers who did not know the sex of their foetus discussed the pregnancy without describing the baby in such terms. Furthermore, from the moment new born baby girls and boys are dressed in Pink and Blue respectively, the process of gender socialisation has begun. However, meta-analysis of many independent studies has concluded that "In general, such reviews have concluded that differences between the sexes are small, accounting for less than 5% of the variance ..." (Ruble, 1988, p420).

The relationship between the sexes is one of the most fundamental in human

society and the pattern of interaction established in the early years is of seminal importance. The attitudes and expectations of Parents and Practitioners are extraordinarily influential in the development of sex stereotypical behaviour. In an attempt to illuminate the patterns of gender socialisation of children aged Zero to Six Years as they occur in Homes, Pre- and Primary Schools, a study was undertaken in Cork City during the school year 1999-2000 involving the observation of 160 children. This study was eclectic in nature, encompassing a Target Child Observational Schedule (providing a general record of children's activities, language and social settings), a study of the Physical Environment, Interviews and an Interaction Analysis System (children aged 3 – 6 only). Concurrent with the observational study, a questionnaire was circulated nationally, to a randomly selected group of 100 Parents of children aged under six and 100 State and Voluntary Practitioners. The results of these investigations are presented in the following sections.

### ACTIVITIES

During the pre-school period, the differences between the sexes are apparent in both toy preferences and type of play. Most boys prefer to play with bricks, trucks and cars, while most girls prefer to play with dolls, kitchen sets and dress up activities. Boys engage in more rough-and-tumble play and activities which are loosely-structured, while girls' activities are more structured. (Montemayor, 1974; Harper & Sanders, 1975; Carpenter, 1979; Di Pietro, 1981; Paley, 1986; Cameron, Eisenberg & Kelly, 1985; Charlesworth & Dzur, 1987; Browne and Ross, 1991; Murphy, 1997).

In this study, the observation of 160 children under six years of age was undertaken, to investigate the prevalence of gender-specific activities, language usage and social groupings in Early Years settings. The thirty code category of the Target Child Observational Schedule (Sylva *et al*, 1980) was considered suitable for use with children under three years of age. The thirty activity code categories are divided thus: categories 1 – 12, categories 13 – 16 and categories 17 – 30. Cognitive Challenge can be assessed in the first sixteen categories. Patterns of gender-specific activity were also assessed using these thirty categories. The manipulative, dramatic and experiential learning, so essential to children's cognitive development, was allocated to categories 1 to 12. Categories 13 to 16 included rudimentary Three Rs activities and Examining or Exploring an Object, while categories 17 to 30 contain an indefinite amount of cognitive challenge (these are labelled Inscrutable).

With regard to children aged three to six years, the forty-two categories of Jowett's (1981) modification of Sylva *et al* (1980) Target Child Observation Schedule was deemed appropriate. These categories are divided in three groups, namely categories 1 – 12, categories 13 – 28 and categories 29 – 42. The first twenty-eight categories can be assessed for Cognitive Challenge. In this study, these categories were examined with respect to the amount of gender-specific activity which may be contained therein. With regard to Categories 1-9 the results were as follows:

Table 6.44 Time spent participating in Activity Categories 1 – 9, according to Age and Sex

<b>(Total time: 37.9%) Zero to Three Years</b>					<b>(Total Time: 36.8%) Three to Six Years</b>				
	Total No.	Girls %	Total No.	Boys %		Total No.	Girls %	Total No.	Boys %
~	~	~	~	~	Block Play	20	2.1	218	21.8
Structured Materials	45	21.5	75	34.7	Structured Materials	313	32.9	251	25.0
Art	2	1.0	18	8.3	Art	159	16.7	120	12.0
Cars/Animals	13	6.2	14	6.5	Sand/Water	177	18.6	106	10.6
Home Corner	7	3.3	0	0	Cars/Animals	17	1.8	75	7.5
Handling Objects	82	39.2	78	36.1	Home Corner	79	8.3	34	3.4
Pretend Play	24	11.5	12	5.6	Handling Objects	87	9.1	88	8.8
Music	5	2.4	0	0	Pretend Play	62	6.5	81	8.1
Gross Motor Play	31	14.9	19	8.8	Music	22	2.3	0	0
~	~	~	~	~	Gross Motor Play	16	1.7	28	2.8
	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.0</b>		<b>952</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1001</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A cursory glance at these findings reveals differences between the activities chosen by the under threes and those of the over threes. Girls under three exceeded boys in Gross Motor Activity and Pretend Play and were almost equal to them in choice of Cars/ Animals and in Handling Objects. On the other hand, boys' choice of Art activities and Structured Materials was greater than that of girls'. With regard to the over threes, boys dominated Block Play and Cars and Animals, and they were in the majority in Pretend and Gross Motor Play. Girls and boys

were almost equal when Handling Objects of all kinds. Conversely, girls dominated Play with Structured Materials and the Home Corner. They also had a greater share of Art activities and, most interestingly, Sand and Water Play and (once again) girls alone showed any interest in Musical activities. With regard to Activity Categories 10-12 the following results emerged:

Table 6.45 Time spent participating in Activity Categories 10 – 12, according to Age and Sex

<b>(Total time: 13.1%) Zero to Three Years</b>					<b>(Total Time: 2.5%) Three to Six Years</b>				
	Total No.	Girls %	Total No.	Boys %		Total No.	Girls %	Total No.	Boys %
Informal Games	0	0	11	19.3	Social Play	32	41.0	29	53.7
Social Int. Non-Play	90	100.0	46	80.7	Informal Social Play	7	9.0	0	0
~	~	~	~	~	Social Int. Non-Play	39	50.0	25	46.3
	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In these findings, it is notable that the majority of boys' time involved "horseplay" (i.e. Informal Games and Social Play), with few instances of the use of language. In fact, the majority of all instances of language based Social Play (involving chatting, turn-taking and cuddling) in both age groups was initiated by girls. The fact that girls have been found to possess greater verbal fluency than boys and have superior recall of socially relevant information (Ippolitov, 1972; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Bahrack *et al*, 1975) finds expression in these particular findings.

While activity code categories 1 – 12 presented children with opportunities which could provide high cognitive challenge, other forms of highly challenging behaviour were recorded under activity codes 13 – 16 (Zero to Three Years) and codes 13 – 28 (Three to Six Years). For children aged under three, Examination of an Object and Adult-directed Art and Manipulation skills provided a high cognitive challenge and 8.5 per cent of their time was spent in these activities. Boys of this age spent 5.2 per cent of their time Looking at Books, while the equivalent amount of time for girls was 3.0 per cent. Children aged over three spent 9.4 per cent of their time engaged in activities such as Looking at Books, Counting and Examining and Art Skills. The greater amount of girls' time was spent Examining an Object (98 instances recorded), while that of boys was expended in Art Skills (66 instances recorded).

The activity code categories 17 – 30 (Zero to Three Years) and 29 – 42 (Three to Six Years) revealed the extent to which girls and boys participated in Adult-led Group Activities and the amount of time they spent Watching and Waiting. Children under three and over three spent 40.5 per cent and 51.3 per cent of their respective total time observed engaged in such activities.

The aforementioned “Inscrutable” activities category illuminated some interesting trends, with respect to gender difference in the behaviour of girls and boys according to age. Boys in the under three group participated in more Adult-led Group Activities and paid more Attention to Staff than did girls of a similar age. Meanwhile, in the over three age group, girls participation in Adult-led Group Activities and Attention to Staff were slightly greater than those of boys. In both age groups, boys recorded the highest incidences of Aimless behaviour. These Inscrutable Activities provided very little (if any) cognitive challenge to either girls or boys.

In conclusion, this analysis of the 30/42 activity code categories has also unearthed a difference in the amount and type of highly cognitively challenging activities in which girls and boys engage. It has been found that, in general, boys in both age groups engaged in pursuits which required a higher level of activity, developed their spatial and problem solving abilities and encouraged creativity to a greater degree than did those of girls. Therefore, the importance of providing, and encouraging, the use of as much varied equipment as possible by both sexes cannot be overemphasised.

Note: It must be stated that, whilst the Target Child Study Schedule did provide a general record of children’s Activities, Language and Social Settings, it became necessary to devise additional codes to outline, in particular, the use of gender-specific language and the occurrence of gender-specific social pairs and groupings. The findings shown in the following Language and Social Settings Tables utilise these additional codes.

## LANGUAGE

Research studies have shown that girls are more responsive to feedback from teachers and peers of either sex, while boys are much less responsive or teacher-orientated. Boys appear to lack interest in girls’ activities and ignore feedback from them. Further, girls tend to seek the approval and assistance of adults more so than boys. (Caplan, 1979; Carpenter and Huston-Stein, 1980; Eiszler, 1982; Whyte, 1983).

It has been noted that, beginning in pre-school, teachers give boys more attention (and a different form of attention) from that which girls receive. Such differential attention includes: asking boys more questions, giving them more individual attention, praise, encouragement, opportunities to answer questions correctly and social interaction (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Stallings, 1979; Fennema *et al*, 1980; Becker, 1981; Stake and Katz, 1982; Gore and Roumagoux, 1983; Putnam & Self, 1988; Luke, 1994).

In this study, the seventeen settings provided differing levels and qualities of language. Interestingly, silence reigned for 61.8 per cent of the total time observed in the under three settings. Language utterances amounted to 22.7 per cent of total time observed and included instances of Ego-Centric Speech and Dialogue. It is interesting to note that, in this age bracket, girls initiated a greater share of Utterances to Practitioners but they received practically the same response as did boys. Furthermore, the desultory instances of recorded Dialogue (0.2 per cent) were directed totally by (and at) boys.

In a further attempt to elucidate the patterns of gender socialisation which occur in Early Years Settings, the amount of Admonitions and type of Responses (such as “Wait”) received by Target Children were examined. Moreover, the instances of Gendered Speech (such as “Girls” and “Boys”), together with Praises (such as “Very Good” or “Excellent”), were also investigated. Not surprisingly, the results would appear to concur with the hitherto mentioned research findings, i.e. boys receive a greater share of many kinds of practitioner attention.

Table 6.54 Percentage of Admonitions, Responses, Gendered Speech and Praises received by Target Children, according to Age (Zero to Three Years) and Sex

Initiate Adult to Target Child	Girls Tot. No.	Boys Tot. No.
Admonitions	5	12
Responses	0	0
Gendered Speech	11	5
Praises	2	6
<b>Total:</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Percentage:</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>56</b>

In analysing the findings pertaining to the language domain of zero to three year olds, an underlying pattern of gender socialisation is evident. Although Female Target Children initiated greater instances of recorded Language Utterances to Practitioner, the Response they received was approximately that given to boys. Another area of difference concerned Gendered Speech, where girls were in receipt of a greater share of such language. However, boys were in receipt of a greater amount of practitioner attention (such as offers of help, admonitions and praises).

In the over three settings, silence reigned for 60.8 per cent of the total time observed, while children spoke for 26.2 per cent of total time observed. Girls addressed other children and the practitioner for 6.3 per cent and 4.9 per cent of their total time observed, while the equivalent percentages for boys were 5.9 per cent and 6.4 per cent respectively.

In accordance with research conducted into the frequency of Admonitions, type of Responses, Gendered Speech and amount of Praise received by zero to three year olds, a similar study was conducted in these areas with regard to their occurrence in the three to six year old cohort.

Table 6.58 Percentage of Admonitions, Responses, Gendered Speech and Praises received by Target Children, according to Age (Three to Six Years) and Sex

Initiate Adult to Target Child	Girls Tot. No.	Boys Tot. No.
Admonitions	3	18
Responses	12	6
Gendered Speech	9	25
Praises	34	47
<b>Total:</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Percentage:</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>62</b>

Thus, in analysing the recorded Language Utterances of Target Children aged three to six years, the following findings resulted – boys were in receipt of a greater share of practitioner attention than were girls. Boys received more offers of help

(sometimes unsolicited), Admonitions, Praises, Gendered Speech and instances of Dialogue than did girls. Girls received a greater share of practitioner response (such as “Wait a minute”) than did boys. Also, boys tended to have more Disagreements with other boys than girls did with other girls. Finally, in this study, an analysis of the patterns of gender socialisation with regard to recorded Language Utterances tends to concur with the findings of empirical research conducted in this area.

The findings of Brown’s Interaction Analysis Schedule highlighted some further gender differences. Practitioners spoke for 51.4 per cent of time, while Silence and Unclassified language accounted for a further 6.1 per cent of time. Voluntary utterances on the part of pupils amounted to 35 per cent of time. However, further analysis of the remaining 7.5 per cent of time (devoted to pupils responses) indicated that boys were questioned approximately twice more frequently than were girls. Thus, it emerged from these findings that the pattern of gender socialisation in the linguistic domain produces somewhat different results for girls and boys, with the latter sex being in receipt of a greater share of practitioner attention.

### SOCIAL

As any Western infant teacher will confirm children in the early years of schooling have tremendously stereotyped views about gender-appropriate group membership and behaviour ... (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992; Francis, 1997, cited in Paechter, 1998, p45)

It has been found, in research conducted by MacNaughton (1997) and Howe (1997, 2000), that single-sex groupings are a feature of pre-school life. When an analysis was undertaken of the gender construction of groups in which the Target Children participated, the following outcome resulted:

Table 6.61 Social Groupings of Target Children, according to Age and Sex

Zero to Three Years			Three to Six Years		
Category	Girls %	Boys %	Category	Girls %	Boys %
Solitary	22.0	25.1	Solitary	13.0	13.5
Pair (including Adult)	19.1	19.6	Pair (including Adult)	5.8	8.1
All Female Pairs and Groups	3.5	0	All Female Pairs and Groups	21.2	0
All Male Pairs and Groups	0	2.4	All Male Pairs and Groups	0	18.2
Mixed Pairs and Groups	5.4	2.9	Mixed Pairs and Groups	10.0	10.2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>50.0</b>

In a further breakdown of the percentages for All Female/Male Pairs and Groups and all Mixed Pairs and Groups, the following results emerged:

Category	Zero to Three Years		Three to Six Years	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Female Pair	16	0	22.8	0
Male Pair	0	11.7	0	27.5
Mixed Pair	46	38.3	8.9	9.1
All Female Group	0	0	15.3	0
All Male Group	0	0	0	8.8
Next to Girl	0	0	18.3	7.4
Next to Boy	6	0	4.8	13.4
Between two Girls	24	3.3	11.4	3.4
Between two Boys	2	33.4	2.5	14.4
Between a Boy & Girl	6	13.3	16.0	16.0
<b>Total Percentage:</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Much of the activity conducted in the under three settings allowed the children great freedom of movement and the social groupings observed were of a very fluid nature. The social groupings which emerged among the three to six year olds had some element of teacher direction, especially in the Junior and Senior Infant classes. In the Pre-School settings, very little teacher direction was given and freedom of movement was allowed. Research conducted in such settings has noted that boys are in receipt of a greater amount of teacher attention and social interaction (Serbin *et al*, 1973, 1984). In this study of the over threes, boys did receive a greater share of teacher attention and social interaction – 8.1 per cent, compared to that of 5.8 per cent received by girls.

It was interesting to note that boys received such attention whether or not it was sought. On more occasions than can be recounted, boys were asked by practitioners in all eleven over three settings if they “were alright there”. Quite an amount of this attention was unsolicited but, as seven of the eleven practitioners stated, “you have to keep an eye on the boys”. In many instances, this interest was totally unwarranted. The attention girls received was of a

different quality – practitioners usually asked them to “wait a minute” if they required assistance. In fact, eight of the eleven practitioners voiced the opinion that girls were “much more capable than boys” and that it was “best to leave them to it”. Consequently, girls sought help from one another to a greater degree than did boys from other boys. It was interesting to note that girls did play more co-operatively than did boys, and boys did argue among themselves to a greater degree than did girls.

In summary, the main findings regarding social play and social groupings is that single- sex groupings begin to form even before the age of three. However, it is also noteworthy that girls of this age group are almost twice as likely as boys to play in mixed groups. With regard to the over three age group, the pattern of girls forming all female groups is intensified – in fact, such groupings accounted for the majority of girls’ social settings in this study. Likewise, it was noted that boys also formed single-sex groups (which accounted for the majority of their social settings), although not to the extent of those of girls. Again, with relation to this age group, an interesting result was illustrated in the “Pair including Adult” category – boys were in receipt of the greater amount of practitioner attention and interaction, yet, in the under three group, both sexes were in receipt of almost the same amount of adult attention. Thus, the patterns of gender socialisation illuminated by these findings reveal trends which appear to be consistent with empirical studies conducted in this area.

## INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

In informal interviews conducted during the Pilot Study and the Main Study, the following phrases emerged with regard to opinions voiced on girls and boys:

### GIRLS

- Quieter
- Eager to please
- Easy to manage
- More independent than boys
- More industrious (in school setting)
- Need to get things right
- Do not need to impress other girls
- Neat (in their school work) situation

### BOYS:

- Physical, e.g. fight/punch/prefer sports
- Loud
- Boisterous
- Demand more attention
- More fun
- Throw tantrums
- Attached to their Mothers
- Longer to settle in school

- More competent than boys
- Linguistically more developed than boys
- Better concentration than boys
- Easily distracted
- Need to impress other boys
- Vulnerable (at pre-school level)
- Aggressive
- Lack Concentration
- Need assistance with language and communication skills

As will be noted from the foregoing, the participants voiced more opinions concerning boys than they did girls.

### THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The study of the physical environment indicated that freedom of movement was unrestricted in Voluntary Sector Pre-School settings. However, often this resulted in boys dominating most of the free space. It was noted that, in the Primary Schools, lack of space and a high pupil-teacher ratio did not facilitate free movement of children in these settings.

### QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

In conjunction with the observation of 160 children, a nationwide questionnaire was circulated to Early Years Practitioners and Parents of children under six. Seventy seven per cent of questionnaires were completed and returned by Parents. Of the questionnaires distributed among Practitioners, seventy-six per cent were completed and returned.

The analysis of Section II (Attitudinal Section) of the questionnaire survey illuminated the opinions held by the respondents, in relation to the issue of gender. It highlighted some very interesting facts, such as the difficulties fathers have with regard to boys playing with “girls” toys; the different behavioural expectations held by parents of their daughters and sons; and the fact that the majority of respondents agreed that young boys need a strong male role model. Of even greater interest are the responses to statements relating to the “natural” abilities of girls and boys. The majority of respondents agreed that boys are more disruptive and physically more competitive than girls. Meanwhile, in the opinion of the respondents, girls have greater determination and concentration than boys.

In relation to education, the majority of the respondents agreed that co-education in the primary school is healthy. However, an ambivalent attitude was held by respondents with regard to girls’ achievements in single-sex schools, which was surprising considering the overwhelming support given to co-education and the idea that young girls and boys should be encouraged to play together.

However, a worrying feature of the responses given in Section II was the number of respondents aged under 35 who exhibited very acute gender-specific expectations and attitudes. Since the majority of these respondents were parents and educators of young children, the sex stereotyped attitudes they hold may have a profound affect on their children/pupils.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Target Child Observational Schedule, recording children’s Activities, Language and Social Settings, produced the following results:

- With regard to the gender specific nature of children’s choice of activity, whereas girls and boys selected many common activities, they did not always use the equipment in a similar fashion. Girls under three years spent the majority of their total time observed engaged in activities such as Shape Matching and Handling Objects. Boys of a similar age engaged in Shape Matching and Peg Board activities for the greater amount of their total time observed. The Pretend Play of girls aged under three involved Cooking, while that of boys involved Shooting and Cooking. Further, the Social Play of girls consisted of Cuddling for the majority of their time, whereas the greatest share of boys’ Social Play was spent being teased.

The activities which commanded the largest amount of the time of girls aged over three were Jigsaws and Sand Play, while Block Play and Painting occupied the majority of boys’ time. The Pretend Play of girls of this age in the main consisted of Cooking and Serving, whereas boys’ Pretend Play involved being Policemen and Shooting. Regarding Social Play activities, girls spent the majority of their total time observed Chatting, while the activity most often engaged in by boys was Horseplay.

While girls and boys engaged in many types of play, boys in both age groups (more so than girls) spent the majority of their time pursuing *goal*

structured activities (Sylva *et al*, 1980). Consequently, boys' activities provided a higher level of creative, problem solving and spatial development that did those of girls and they also accounted for a greater share of linguistic and social interaction with parents/ practitioners.

- In this study, research in the language domain revealed that boys were in receipt of the greater amount of language utterances on the part of practitioners. Furthermore, boys under three received the greater share of admonitions, praise and offers of help, while the greater amount of gendered speech was directed at girls. For children aged over three, boys received the majority of instances of admonitions, gendered speech and praise, while girls received the greater share of responses such as "Wait".
- The results of this study highlighted the fact that the most common type of social setting observed for both age groups was that of the Pair, with either an Adult or Child. However, such was the strength of children's desire to form single sex groups that, of those aged over three, 22.1 per cent of girls' time and 18.2 per cent of boys' time was spent in such pairs and groupings. In fact, it was noteworthy that incursions by the opposite sex into a single sex play situation, particularly those of the over threes, were initially greeted with shrieks of either "No boys here!" or "No girls here!". If the intruder did not withdraw, different strategies were adopted by girls and boys. The majority of girls tended to close ranks physically and stare in silence at the intruder. On the other hand, boys generally had a tendency to physically push the interloper aside or else knock over the intruder's equipment if it were placed nearby.

In conclusion, the patterns and practice of gender socialisation illuminated in this study highlighted a dualistic view of humankind, i.e. feminine/masculine, female/male, sex/gender, which often subsumes the fact that both sexes have more in common than they realise. The differential treatment of children in the pre-school years "... in devaluing one sex, limits the development of both". (Pitcher & Schultz, 1983, p156). Furthermore, the behaviour of Parents / Practitioners may convey a message to children which might make it appear "... as if there were one law for girls and another for boys". (Walkerline, 1989, p79). Perhaps, if similarities rather than differences were dwelt upon, the vision of society enunciated by Bailey (1993, p104) might become a possibility:

For if we can envision a classroom where being a child is more important than being a boy or a girl, then the vision of a society which values being a person more highly than being male or female becomes clearer.

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## PART 2

### Pedagogical Styles

# Using a Multiple Intelligences and Teaching for Understanding Approach with Young Learners

*Anna Ridgway*

In many ways, the Multiple Intelligences seem a particular gift of childhood ... Nowadays, the average children's museum simply has a better fit with the minds of children than does the average school.  
(Gardner 1999b, 111)

## INTRODUCTION

Multiple Intelligences theory (Gardner 1983) is a cognitively based, pluralist view of intelligence, which is in direct contrast to the traditional notion of intelligence as a unitary, measurable capacity. Multiple Intelligence theory is a cognitively-based descriptive view of intelligence which requires a pedagogical framework to bring it into the classroom. This framework may be found in the work on Teaching for Understanding (TfU) (Blythe 1998, Gardner 1999a, 1999b) done at Harvard, which espouses a performance view of understanding in a constructivist classroom. These theories require that we move from a transmission model of teaching to a transformational one, as we seek ways to enhance the child's understanding of topics being taught. It is essential that this work commences in the early childhood years, when the child's 'absorbent mind' (Montessori 1988) longs for stimulation and when the foundations for later learning are laid down.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN NEUROSCIENCE

The importance of the period from birth to six years has been recognised by educational theorists and psychologists for a long time. The power to learn resides within the child from the earliest moments and the learning environment we provide is crucial if the child is to achieve his/her potential. Advances in neuroscience are confirming theoretical positions on the development of the brain, which have been advanced by developmental psychologists for many years. The collaboration of neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists and developmental psychologists has allowed for the formation of a more complete picture of how

intellectual development occurs. Using non-invasive imaging technologies, scientists have studied human learning processes directly and the significance of their findings has implications for early years providers.

It is humbling and indeed, awe-inspiring to realise that at birth the newborn's brain has one-third of its trillions of synapses and neural pathways in place (Bransford *et al* 1999). It is the rich sensory experiences after birth, which drive the neural activity that will progressively refine this blueprint (Nash 1997). The implications of these increased understandings of how infants develop are enormous, for both parents and educators, as each must provide an appropriate environment in which the child may learn and develop. Bransford *et al* (1999, 103) summarise the key findings from neuroscience and cognitive science as follows:

1. Learning changes the physical structure of the brain.
2. These structural changes alter the functional organisation of the brain; i.e., *learning organises and reorganises the brain.*
3. Different parts of the brain may be ready to learn at different times

This last, vital point, which has huge implications for pedagogy, is reiterated by Gardner when he states, 'Unlike the carefully interlocking parts of a watch, the structures of the mind – and of the brain – seem to be able to evolve in different directions and at different paces' (Gardner 1991, 29).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD

To understand the needs of this complex being, the child, it is necessary to look at the individual areas of development, which constitute the whole child. Although the areas are inter-related and must not be thought of solely in isolation from each other, it is necessary, initially, to look at the components of each area individually. Physically, the child experiences very obvious changes in the early months of his/her life. This development follows two broad patterns such as development which proceeds from the head downwards, called cephalocaudal and that which comes from the trunk outward, called proximodistal. We see the operation of these principles in the manner in which the child holds up his head before he can sit, and sit before he can crawl. The physical development of infants is governed by built-in sequences, hence, care must be taken to provide the child with an environment in which s/he may grow. The child's developing gross and fine motor skills require him to be

physically active, with sufficient freedom to move within the realms of the usual safety requirements. Both Fröebel and Montessori were influential in their views on the child's need to manipulate objects and to experience things sensorially to aid development, the latter stating 'it is through movement that the higher life expresses itself' (Montessori 1988, 130). The development of gross motor skills, requires the co-ordination of sensory information and muscular responses, involving running, crawling, jumping, throwing items and other physical activities. These activities help the child to control and to refine his/her bodily movements. The child acquires spatial awareness alongside bodily awareness. Bee (1992) asserts that because of physical challenge, children learn to take risks. As the child experiences success in these activities his level of self-esteem will grow, therefore, physical activity and the freedom to grow, through movement, is of great importance in the holistic development of the child.

The cognitive development of the young child involves the development of perception, memory, language and the ability to differentiate and make sense of the world which surrounds him. In developing cognitively, the child must feel empowered and be allowed to develop his potential through play based activities, which are an important and valuable way to help the child to learn, particularly as they help the child to interact socially, to form relationships and to develop language. Garvey (1977, 1) states that a child's play is

The product and the trace of man's biological heritage and his culture-creating capacity. Play is most frequent in a period of dramatically expanding knowledge of self, the physical and social world, and systems of communication; thus we might expect that play is intricately related to these areas of growth.

Perception and learning are fundamental processes by which the child comes to understand and respond to his world. As the child grows, his development depends on the growth of the capacity to think meaningfully in more abstract settings, to make translations from the material contexts of the experiences provided for him and to develop more abstract forms of reflection and thought. Everyday physical and social experiences allow the child to encounter unexpected and puzzling outcomes that require re-organisation of his thought processes. The Piagetian stages of cognitive development, show how the child interiorises his own actions through a series of conceptual operations which

allow him to adapt to his environment as he moves from the concrete, sensorimotor stage, through pre-and concrete operational stages until he becomes capable of abstraction in the formal operational stage. Piaget outlined the manner in which the child progresses through each of the stages sequentially, and he showed how each stage may be defined by a qualitatively different level of thinking. The child develops an increasingly sophisticated form of knowledge and achieves greater intellectual balance in his/her responses to the environment. Each stage arises from the integration and incorporation of earlier ways of thinking. Phillips & Soltis (1998) note that the concepts formed in the child's mind are interrelated and organised, forming a network or cognitive structure. Piaget (1963) succinctly states

Actually, in order to know objects, the subject must act upon them and therefore transform them: he must displace, correct, combine, take part, and reassemble them. From the most elementary sensorimotor actions (such as pushing and pulling) to the most sophisticated intellectual operations, which are interiorized actions, carried out mentally (e.g., joining together, putting in order, putting into one to one correspondence), knowledge is constantly linked with actions or operations, that is with *transformations*. (Piaget, 1963, 104)

The social development of the child depends on the time allowed to him to interact with peers and adults. We adults play a vital role in providing a mentoring role for the child, together with a loving, non-threatening, challenging and nurturing environment. The development of language encourages and helps the child in his quest to become a social being. Vygotsky looked to the influences of play on the social development of children, in contrast to Freud and Piaget, where the former studied the affective influences of play and the latter, the cognitive influences of play; each agreed, however, on the vital importance of play to the developing child.

Saracho & Spodek (1998, 7) look at Vygotsky's view that children use their ingenuity to create imaginary events, based on real world experiences, through play, and state that the freedom from reality 'allows children to play with meanings and objects'. Therefore they use higher-order thought processes in their play'. Fromberg (1999, 29) states that Piaget looked at play as a distortion

of reality, which fits the child's current level of understanding, but that Vygotsky suggested that children at play subordinate themselves to rules, thereby acting against their immediate impulses. Play, in Vygotskian terms, constitutes the creation of a zone of proximal development.

Social and emotional development are frequently linked together as the former underpins the latter by helping the child to achieve a stable self concept. Izard (1991, 14) defines emotion thus, 'an emotion is experienced as a feeling that motivates, organises and guides perception, thought and action'. Emotional development, therefore, helps to link the other areas of development for the child. Furthermore, Hyson (1994) asserts that because children's emotions are central to their lives, they should also be central to the curriculum, hence, she decries the movement towards a more academically orientated curriculum for young children.

The development of the child's creativity is essential to his holistic development. Creativity and imagination are part of the process of learning across the curricular areas and through opportunities for creative work, the child may be encouraged to express his feelings, thoughts and responses. Duffy (1998, xvi) states that 'such experiences stimulate open-ended activity which encourages discovery, exploration, experimentation and invention. All these skills are vital to creativity and imagination', and all of which are espoused by a Multiple Intelligences approach. To facilitate the child's creative development he should be encouraged to explore concepts like shape, form, texture and colour through creative play based activities, where the emphasis is firmly placed on the process rather than the product of the activities. The child who experiments in play may then transfer the activity to real life situations. This is a central tenet of Multiple Intelligences and Teaching for Understanding, where knowledge must be constructed and be seen to have transferability.

Gulbenkian (1982: cited in Duffy 1998) states that creative and imaginative experiences give us the opportunity to develop the full range of human potential, thereby improving our capacity for thought, action and communication. They also help to nurture our feelings and sensibilities while extending our physical and perceptual skills. Activities that foster creative development help the child to explore values, by understanding his own and other cultures more fully. When the development of creativity and imagination

are encouraged and promoted, visual literacy develops. This involves the ability to identify and describe the world about us in practical and aesthetic terms; allowing the child to gain ownership of his environment. It also involves looking at works of art, materials, architectural designs in terms of their effect and fitness for purpose. Creative development, therefore, integrates many areas of the child's development and in outlining the manner in which creative development contributes to all the other areas of learning, Duffy (1998) asserts that this must form an integral part of any early years curriculum.

It is clear that an appropriate, play based curriculum for young children must incorporate all areas of development, and it is in this respect that a Multiple Intelligences approach to an appropriate curriculum will help the child to achieve his full potential.

Blenkin (1994, 28) in looking at the provision of a developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children, states that most early years practitioners would be committed to several 'inter-related theoretical positions'. These include viewing education as a process of development rather than mere acquisition of knowledge, where experiences are planned in relation to, and in harmony with, the developmental level of the individual child. The holistic development of the child to which we all aspire may, therefore, be catered for by providing a play based curriculum where

Cognitive development is seen as dependent on, or interlinked with, psychomotor and affective development. This leads to a holistic approach to curriculum planning. In addition, the social context of learning is identified as the most crucial element in human learning. Informal and interactive styles of instruction are, therefore, advocated. Finally the importance of play in learning and development is emphasised. (Blenkin 1994, 28)

New (1999, 282) in looking at a developmentally appropriate, integrated curriculum states that one of the benefits of such a curriculum is that we may expect that children can 'benefit from working hard at learning together' and that they should receive help in applying their new found knowledge. Children, she states, who are participants in a community of learners, contribute to the quality of that community and gain a sense of self as a competent individual.

Upon advocating the integration of academic content with social cause in the curriculum for young children she stresses that

Children living in a democratic society need to be provided with ample occasion *and need* to use their new skills and understanding to make a difference in their own circumstances or those of a friend or someone in the larger community.

(New 1999, 282)

Early years practitioners must, of course, be familiar with the areas of child development and the type of curricular approach required to meet the needs of the growing child. It must be remembered that the child is more than the sum of these component areas, and a holistic approach must be taken to providing for his education. Paley (1979, 66/67) reminds us of the need to show faith in a child's ability, stating,

When you lack faith in a child's ability, you show it in subtle ways. You don't introduce them to certain activities, or if you do you stop at the first sign of trouble. You avoid giving them time and attention in certain kinds of discussions. Somehow the children who excel are given practice in excelling. The children who begin slowly receive a different set of experiences.

Therefore, it is important that we consider the theory of multiple intelligences, which honours cognitive diversity and, which offers us an appropriate approach to teaching the young child.

### **MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY**

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (M I Theory) is based on neuro-biological, neuro-psychological, psychological, historical and evolutionary evidence and specific psychological tasks (Gardner 1983, 1991; Armstrong 1994). Gardner developed this theory from a psychological premise that the standard notion of intelligence, as a single capacity, was in error. Gardner (1983, 1991, 1995) defined intelligence as the capacity for solving problems and fashioning products deemed valuable in society. However, he *refined* this definition in the light of his subsequent work and experience, by emphasising the potential that may be developed or lost, when he stated intelligence to be,

a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture. (Gardner 1999b 33/4)

This revised definition places the focus more clearly on intelligences as potentials, a very clear move away from the idea of a measurable unitary intelligence. Gardner outlined eight ways of thinking and knowing, thereby naming eight intelligences. He envisages the intelligences as having emerged over the millenia, as a response to the environments in which humans have lived, constituting, as it were, 'a cognitive record of the evolutionary past' (Gardner *et al* 1996, 3). It appears that we, as humans, develop *what* we need *when* we need it, thereby placing different demands on our society and our system of formal education. This emphasis on the development of our potential intelligences, makes it clear that the value placed on any intelligence will vary, depending on the needs of the society one lives in. Certainly, many of the activities we deem to be intelligent in the western world would have little value in a tribal society in the rainforest, with the reverse also being true.

Gardner purposefully chose to use the word 'intelligence' rather than 'talent' to emphasise the existence of a plurality of intelligences, in contrast to the existing concept of intelligence as a single entity. But, he also wished to challenge existing ideas by seeking to place equal value on each of these intelligences, contrary to the general practice of valuing linguistic or logical intelligences only. Gardner cites Piaget's comprehensive model of logical-mathematical intelligence, Erikson for personal intelligences and Chomsky or Vygotsky for developmental models of linguistic intelligence. This concept is not unrelated to Dr. Montessori's premise of *Sensitive Periods* for learning, and both have enormous implications for early-years practitioners in the differentiated classroom

### **EIGHT INTELLIGENCES ... PERHAPS MORE?**

Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999) outlines the different capacities of the eight intelligences as described below; he has contextualised these by citing examples of 'endsates' or occupations which would embody the relevant intelligences in action, thereby moving his theory into actual living examples (see also Hyland 2000):

LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE: This intelligence indicates the capacity to

use words effectively both orally and in written form. It also includes the ability to manipulate the structure, phonology, semantics and pragmatic dimensions of language. Those who exhibit high linguistic intelligence include poets, playwrights, journalists and those who engage in rhetoric, or have competence in metalanguage. This was the most highly prized skill one could develop and was, traditionally viewed as the indicator of intelligence. Consequently pedagogical practices centred almost exclusively round this approach to the detriment of children who cannot process information in this manner.

**LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL INTELLIGENCE:** This intelligence includes capacity with numbers, logical patterns and relationships. Persons who exhibit high logical mathematical intelligence use processes such as categorisation, classification, calculation and hypothesis testing, and include mathematicians, accountants, statisticians, philosophers and scientists. Together with linguistic ability, mathematical ability was also highly prized, and constantly assessed in school settings traditionally.

**SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE:** Spatially intelligent people have the ability to perceive the visual spatial world accurately. This intelligence is in evidence in architects, artists, inventors and designers as one needs to be sensitive to colour, line, shape, form and space, and to be able to orient oneself in a spatial matrix. Ability in this intelligence area ‘makes it possible for people to perceive visual or spatial information, to transform this information, and to recreate visual images from memory (architects, engineers, sculptors)’ (Hyland 2000, 7).

**BODILY-KINAESTHETIC INTELLIGENCE:** This shows expertise in using one’s body to express ideas and feelings. The physical skills necessary for bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence include co-ordination, dexterity, flexibility as well as proprioceptive, tactile and haptic capacities. Person’s who exhibit strength in this intelligence may be notable for the use of their hands to produce or transform things as a sculptor, mechanic or surgeon would.

**MUSICAL INTELLIGENCE:** The development of this intelligence area involves the capacity to *perceive* musical forms as a music aficionado, *discriminate* as a music critic, *transform* as a composer and *express* as a performer. Musical intelligence allows people to ‘create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound’ (Hyland 2000, 7). Musically intelligent people

have high sensitivity to the rhythm, pitch or melody and timbre of a musical piece. People who exhibit musical intelligence usually need music to make their lives full, even if this entails listening to music rather than playing an instrument or being part of a musical group. This is a very important distinction as the majority of people who find their lives enriched by music do so as listeners rather than performers.

**INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE:** This intelligence includes having an accurate picture of one’s strengths and limitations and an awareness of one’s inner moods, intentions, motivations and desires. It means that one has a high degree of self-knowledge and the ability to act adaptively on the basis of that knowledge. This intelligence is very relevant to most occupations. Traditionally, this author believes this intelligence was linked to introversion in an over simplistic and narrow manner, without acknowledging that introverts draw strength from within, rather than from other people necessarily, but this does not mean they cannot function very well as team members. In fact, one needs the reflective nature of the introvert to balance any team, as they can provide a stabilising force.

**INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE:** This is the second of the personal intelligences and includes the ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations and feelings of other people, which is, of course, a very necessary quality in teachers. Again, this has been linked to extroversion in an overly simplistic way, with both of the personal intelligences being seen as personality types only, without the status of an intelligence.

**NATURALIST INTELLIGENCE:** In 1995 Gardner, invoking new data that fit the criteria, recognised an eighth, *naturalist* intelligence which is demonstrated by the ability to function well in the natural environment and ‘the recognition and categorisation of natural objects’ (Gardner 1998, 20). It allows people to ‘distinguish among, classify, be sensitive to, and use features of the environment (farmers, gardeners, botanists, florists, geologists, archaeologists)’ (Hyland 2000, 7). Having reviewed the criteria used to consider the Naturalist intelligence, Gardner shows that he had considered some of the elements of this in originally citing seven intelligences,

My review process indicates that the naturalist’s intelligence clearly merits addition to the list of the original seven

intelligences. Those valued human cognitions that I previously had to ignore or smuggle in under spatial or logical-mathematical intelligence deserve to be gathered together under a single, recognised rubric. (Gardner 1999b, 52)

The reference to having to 'smuggle in' certain human cognitions clearly indicates that this is not an exclusive list. Gardner (1999b) looks at the possibility that other intelligences exist and indeed, he has never proposed that the original list is exhaustive. He has considered, in particular, the possibilities of Spiritual and Existential Intelligences, but having applied the criteria he states that he cannot find sufficient evidence for the former, but feels that it may be included in some way in the latter. He has not confirmed the existence of this ninth intelligence, stating 'I find the phenomenon perplexing enough and the distance from the other intelligences vast enough to dictate prudence – at least for now' (Gardner 1999b, 66). He has reiterated that point (Gardner 2001) by stating that he now believes in eight and a half intelligences, therefore, he is still considering the possibility of admitting existential intelligence to the list.

Gardner does not accept the existence of a separate and distinct Moral Intelligence, but he emphasises that each intelligence is amoral and may be used for either moral or immoral purposes. While we may consider the actions of certain figures, historic and contemporary, to be lacking in morality, nevertheless, Gardner argues that each was given an individual intelligence profile and chose to use his/her intelligences in an amoral manner.

Gardner identified four stages in the development of *each* intelligence in an individual. From the moment of birth our earliest encounters activate the senses and stimulate the brain, therefore, each intelligence develops as one encounters opportunities to practise its use. Guidance and adult help scaffolds an individual's effort to develop problem solving skills and, finally, one immerses oneself in the intelligences as one *applies* what one has learned to solving more complex problems (Chapman 1993). Gardner succinctly states that individual differences or profiles may be seen in the following manner:

Where individuals differ is in the strength of these intelligences – the so-called *profile of intelligences* – and in the ways in which such intelligences are invoked and combined to carry out different

tasks, solve diverse problems and progress in various domains. (Gardner 1991, 12)

## THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES (GARDNER 1983)

Gardner (1983) subjected each potential intelligence to rigorous testing using the eight criteria set out below, before he considered each to truly be an 'intelligence':

### 1. POTENTIAL ISOLATION BY BRAIN DAMAGE.

Gardner worked with individuals who had suffered accidents or illnesses that affected specific areas of the brain and found that in many cases, when the development of brain lesions impaired one intelligence, the remaining intelligences remained functioning. As a result of this, Gardner believes in the existence of eight relatively autonomous brain systems.

### 2. EXISTENCE OF SAVANTS, PRODIGIES AND OTHER EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUALS.

Gardner postulates that Savants exhibit extraordinary ability in one intelligence while maintaining low functioning levels in some other intelligences, hence, a logical-mathematical savant might calculate multi-digit numbers in his head but be unable to function well in the linguistic or personal intelligences, which lends credibility to point one above.

### 3. A DISTINCTIVE DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY AND A DEFINABLE SET OF EXPERT 'END-STATE' PERFORMANCES.

Gardner states that individuals are motivated to develop their intelligences because of culturally valued activities, and that an individual's growth in an activity follows a developmental pattern. Each intelligence-based activity has its own developmental trajectory, with each activity having its own time of arising in early childhood, its own time of peaking during one's lifetime and a rapid or gradual period of decline.

### 4. AN EVOLUTIONARY HISTORY AND EVOLUTIONARY PLAUSIBILITY.

Gardner found that each of the intelligences met the test of having its roots deeply embedded in the evolution of human beings or in the

evolution of other species. Historically, certain intelligences have been more important in earlier times than they are today. In pre-industrial times, for example, when the majority of people lived in rural settlements, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence was much prized.

#### 5. SUPPORT FROM PSYCHOMETRIC FINDINGS.

Although he has been a supporter of alternative means of assessment, Gardner finds support for his theory of Multiple Intelligences in the area of standardised testing. Many standardised tests assess multiple intelligences in a decontextualised manner, but a variety of formal tests do tap into all the intelligences. It is clear from Gardner's writings that he feels that standardised tests need to be complemented by other more authentic forms of assessment, not replaced altogether.

#### 6. SUPPORT FROM EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGICAL TASKS.

Psychological studies have shown that people display selective abilities in certain cognitive functions such as perception or memory. This demonstrates that each of these cognitive faculties is intelligence specific, with individuals exhibiting different levels of proficiency across the intelligences in each cognitive area.

#### 7. AN IDENTIFIABLE CORE OPERATION OR SET OF OPERATIONS

Each intelligence has a set of core operations that serve to drive the activities indigenous to that intelligence. Linguistic intelligence requires a sensitivity to the sound and structure of words, while those who are particularly strong in spatial intelligence usually perceive the visual spatial world very accurately.

#### 8. SUSCEPTIBILITY TO ENCODING IN A SYMBOL SYSTEM.

Gardner cites the human being's ability to use symbols as one of the best indicators of intelligent behaviour. He also found that each of the intelligences has its own unique symbol system, and he posits the view that each word or collection of marks on a page, generates a range of associations, images and memories. This unique ability is one of the important factors that separates humans from all other species. Gardner's (1998) view that all human beings possess all the intelligences, which is a cognitive definition of *Homo Sapiens*, is a vital point for educators and

educational policy makers who must consider the most appropriate environment, curriculum and teaching methodology to stimulate, rather than hinder, each child's development of his/her unique profile of intelligences.

By applying these rigorous criteria to each intelligence, Gardner has firmly rooted his Multiple Intelligences theory within a framework of cognitive development.

### CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Some psychologists have questioned the empirical basis of the Multiple Intelligences theory. Eysenck (1999) cautions against assuming a relationship between brain damage and cognitive ability. He states that some of the impact of brain damage on cognitive functioning may be camouflaged, because patients develop compensatory abilities. This challenges Gardner's theory of different intelligences being situated in specific areas of the brain, a point taken up by Eccles (1996), who concurs with Eysenck, in stating that our brain is a democracy of thousands of millions of nerve cells, which provide us with a unified experience.

Mesnick (1992) also reminds us that psychometric research has shown abilities to be positively correlated, with no traditionally measured intellectual capacity distinct from another. Gardner's answer is that positive correlations are obtained because psychometric measures detect skill in taking paper and pencil tests, common to many psychometric measures, as well as detecting aptitude within a given intelligence. Gardner (1999b, 80) argues for the use of 'intelligence fair' and culturally situated tests, which is in marked contrast to traditional narrow focused psychometric testing.

Intelligences must be assessed in ways that are 'intelligence fair' – that is, in ways that examine the intelligences directly rather than through the lenses of linguistic or logical intelligences.

Mesnick (1992) also believes that the intelligences must be harnessed together by an executive function, which Gardner attributes to the personal intelligences (Gardner *et al* 1996). He terms this executive, in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, a 'Central Intelligence Agency' and cites the considerable evidence that



suggests that this function is handled by structures in the frontal lobe of the brain. He does not feel this is, however, a separate intelligence but rather a function of the Intrapersonal intelligence in particular (Gardner 1999b, 105/106).

Ceci (1990) states that there are no test results to prove Gardner's claims. However, Gardner rejects this criticism by stating that Multiple Intelligences theory is based entirely on empirical evidence, which is clearly outlined in his publications. He states, 'The number of intelligences, their delineation, their sub-components are all subject to alteration in the light of new findings'. In fact, he named the naturalist intelligence only after 'evidence had accrued that parts of the temporal lobe are dedicated to the naming and recognition of natural things, whereas others are attuned to human-made objects' (Gardner 1998, 21).

Gardner (1991) demonstrates that students learn in identifiably distinctive ways, and shows how necessary it is that subjects should be taught through a variety of means and strategies. He argues for a form of assessment that will allow students to demonstrate their understandings in meaningful ways, which are more suited to their learning styles and intelligence profiles. Gottfredson (1998) conversely states that IQ testing is the most effective predictor of individual performance at school and in the workplace, and argues in favour of a single factor for intelligence, called *g*. She also feels Gardner's intelligences may tap personality traits or motor skills rather than mental aptitudes, but neither of these could be subjected to the eight criteria upon which the intelligences were tested. Gottfredson upholds a traditional view of intelligence that results in what Gardner refers to as the casualties in learning, the large numbers of students who 'are motivated to learn but whose own learning styles or profiles of intelligence are not in tune with prevailing instructional practices' (Gardner 1991, 244). Students who exhibit a 'scholastic' mind, those who are most comfortable in linguistic or logical-mathematical intelligences and who may achieve high scores in standardised tests, are deemed to have achieved understanding 'even when real understanding is limited or abstract' (p12). However, a demonstration of true and deep understanding must have multiple representations, or ways of knowing, where students are assessed on not just the content alone, but on the other dimensions of understanding; namely the purpose, form and method of understanding. Thus, Gardner (1991, 13) states:

Genuine understanding is most likely to emerge, and be apparent to others, if people possess a number of ways of representing knowledge of a concept or skill and can move readily back and forth among these forms of knowing.

White (1998) questions Gardner's assertions that each of the intelligences has its own unique symbol system, citing his own inability to find symbols in the interpersonal intelligence. However, interpersonal symbols are culturally bound; eye contact in one culture celebrates the interpersonal dynamic, while in another culture this may be seen as insulting or threatening.

Sternberg (1988) argues unconvincingly in favour of using the word *talents* instead of intelligences stating, 'it seems strange to describe someone who is tone deaf or physically uncoordinated as unintelligent' (Sternberg 1988 cited in Eysenck 1994, 193). Gardner (1998, 21) counters this by stating that the narrow view of musical or bodily-kinaesthetic intelligences as talents 'devalues those capacities so that orchestra conductors and dancers are talented but not smart'. Goleman (1996) has argued that the world would be a better place if our emotional intelligence were cultivated to the same degree that our cognitive capacities are. Gardner, in reviewing this work, focuses more on cognition and understanding than on feelings and finds that this fits comfortably with his own proposed Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences (Gardner 1998, 1999b).

Traub (1998) suggests that Multiple Intelligences theory has not widely accepted by the scientific world because all the intelligences cannot be measured with psychometric or intelligence tests, which are rooted in linguistic and logical mathematical abilities. Gardner (1998) reminds us that the human species has evolved to a stage where we can analyse different kinds of information about the world, ranging from language and music to interpersonal and intrapersonal data (Gardner 1995, 16).

Levin (1994) criticises Gardner for not offering a programme for educators to use in implementing a Multiple Intelligences programme. Gardner (1993, 24) counter argues that 'it is not possible or appropriate for the originator of a theory to attempt to control the ways in which it is used'. He also points out that this theory is best seen as a pathway or approach, which allows teachers and educators to consider a variety of strategies to teaching and learning (Gardner

1994, 1999a). He stresses that a flexible Multiple Intelligences approach should be 'employed in studying sharply focused topics as well as generic ones' (Gardner 1999a, 188). Campbell and Campbell (1999, 91) support this in stating, 'because MI is a construct about human intelligence, it does not mandate any prescriptive educational approach'. This is reiterated by Armstrong when he says 'MI theory suggests that no one set of teaching strategies will work best for all students at all times' (Armstrong (1994, 65). In fact, Gardner's work is now linked very closely with the work on Teaching for Understanding, which is dealt with later in the chapter.

Armstrong (1994) credits multiple intelligences theory with demystifying intelligence and making it into a functional concept, which could be seen working in peoples' lives. It has returned the ownership of intelligence to individuals, as we can view our own behaviour as intelligent, or otherwise, without having to be assigned an IQ number to validate what we know. It allows us to look at the way we learn and process information as uniquely our own, without having us believe that only one way exists. It provides a means of mapping a broad range of abilities possessed by humankind, a point of view reiterated by the following,

The distinctions among these intelligences are supported by studies in child development, cognitive skills under conditions of brain damage, psychometrics, changes in cognition across history and within different cultures, and psychological transfer and generalisation. (Silver & Strong 1997, 24)

Multiple Intelligences theory has been criticised on the bases of the empirical evidence underpinning it. Many of its critics differ in their understanding of what intelligence is, and how it is manifest in human beings. In general, theories vary from a unitary view of intelligence, which is measurable, to a view that each individual has of a multiplicity of intelligences. However, these critiques do not concern themselves with its pedagogical uses, and it is generally agreed that the pluralist re-conceptualisation of intelligences as *potentials*, allows us to look at our students in an altogether more holistic manner. Multiple Intelligences theory is a descriptive theory of intelligence, which requires a pedagogical framework for use in the classroom. Multiple Intelligences theory requires that we view each child as an individual who learns in a multiplicity of ways, thereby challenging us to adopt a differentiated approach to teaching.

## EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS OF THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory was taken up with interest by educators, many of whom saw it as a validation of what they had been doing in the classroom. The eight intelligences outlined are recognisable through common life practices and experiences and are visible, to some extent, in everyone as each person has a different profile of these intelligences. This is crucial for educators as it makes the provision of differentiated instruction an imperative. Gardner (1999b, 111) states that 'in many ways, the Multiple Intelligences seem a particular gift of childhood....Nowadays, the average children's museum simply has a better fit with the minds of children than does the average school', therefore the child's 'natural mind' often clashes with the agenda of the school. To respect and honour the child's 'natural mind' it is imperative, therefore, that we look to the provision of an appropriate curriculum and pedagogical approach.

Multiple Intelligences Theory seeks to describe how we use our intelligences to solve problems or fashion products valued in a culture. It is, therefore, concerned with the application of knowledge and intelligent behaviour, rather than the garnering of mere facts, which has considerable implications for the provision of an appropriate educational system. Gardner (1999b) has defined intelligence more clearly than in his earlier works as by stating that it is a biopsychological potential to process information, and this potential may be activated or not by the environment in which the child inhabits. He emphasises that intelligences are not things that can be seen or counted, but are

potentials...that will or will not be activated depending upon the values of a particular culture, the opportunities available in that culture and the personal decisions made by individuals and/or their families, schoolteachers and others. (Gardner 1999b, 34)

The traditional transmission model of teaching does not allow each individual to show his/her individual intelligence profile, by demonstrating understanding in different ways or learning styles. This model of teaching required that we all learn in the same manner and be assessed in the same manner, regardless of our learning styles or intelligence profile. Gardner has questioned the validity of determining intelligence by asking the individual to perform isolated or

decontextualised operations, as this commonplace educational practice is at variance with his definition of intelligence in terms of one's potential to process information, in a context-rich and naturalistic setting. We must, therefore, provide a curriculum that is rich in opportunities for exploration, and an appropriate series of assessment tools that are capable of probing deeply, in myriad ways, to assess the child's understanding of that curriculum.

Gardner (1996, 5) clearly states that it is *not* possible to access one individual intelligence reliably through testing specifically for this intelligence, particularly as most individuals use a combination of intelligences to accomplish any task. He cautions educators against labelling their students in terms of their perceived strength in any one area or intelligence. Furthermore, he elaborates by stating that each intelligence does not have to be independent of the others, and that each intelligence is comprised of constituent units, or 'subintelligences' (Gardner 1999b, 102/3). It is vital that we try to access all these areas of the developing child, by using a multiplicity of entry points to each topic *and* by providing a rich and stimulating environment, which is challenging and engaging for each individual child. This poses an enormous challenge to educators and educational policy makers.

Chapman (1993, 1) summarises Gardner's philosophy in four areas that show, very clearly, that as educators we must undergo a paradigm shift in our thinking of what constitutes an appropriate curriculum and approach to teaching. She states that intelligence is flexible, rather than fixed and static and that each intelligence is modifiable, therefore, it continues to expand throughout one's life. This has significant implications for classroom-based learning and clearly shows that the traditional transmission model of teaching is inappropriate; meeting as it does, the needs of just a small segment of the class. Thirdly, Chapman reminds us that each individual is born with all the intelligences, but one usually develops one or two to a higher level than the others. This implies that we suffer a lack of opportunity to develop the areas of least competence, which must be redressed by the provision of an enriched environment where students may develop and demonstrate their full range of intelligences.

Multiple Intelligences theory, therefore, is a cognitive model of intelligence that seeks to describe how we use our intelligences, and may be used as a framework for understanding cognitive diversity, therefore, it provides an ideal approach to teaching and learning in the early years. It takes cognisance of the different

facets of the developing child and offers us many *entry points* to teaching any topic, which allows us, as educators, to facilitate the child's areas of strength and to help him to work on his less developed areas. Multiple Intelligences theory does not label the child in terms of strengths and weaknesses, rather it provides an intelligence profile, which is dynamic and constantly changing, as the child is offered chances to develop his full potential in all areas.

## ENTRY POINTS

Gardner (1991, 1995, 1999a, Veenema *et al* 1997) helps to bridge the theory practice divide by offering 'entry points' into each topic, which ensure that understanding is nurtured, and learning opportunities maximised.

The framework of multiple entry points is a particularly good way for teachers to stretch beyond the obvious in approaching a new topic or beyond what they have already been doing to teach a concept. Multiple entry points provide not only different ways for students to gain access to a concept or topic, but also ways for learners to develop multiple representations of that concept or a topic, thereby building deeper understanding. (Veenema *et al* 1997, 79).

In using a *narrational entry point* one presents a story or narrative about the material to be learned. Narrative activates the linguistic as well as the personal intelligences, but it is possible to convey narrative in other symbolic forms, like mime or film and thereby engage other intelligences.

The *quantitative or numerical entry point* may be invoked by using deductive reasoning processes or numerical considerations and is particularly suited to students who like to deal with numbers and numerical relations.

In earlier works Gardner looked at a logical mathematical entry point, but has now separated the two and advocates a *logical entry point* 'related to yet distinct from an interest in numbers' which he states is 'a preoccupation with logical propositions, their interrelations and their implications (Gardner 1999a, 192).

A *foundational/existential entry point* examines the philosophical and terminological facets of the concept, which facilitates those who like to pose fundamental questions about the meaning of life or the necessity of death.

Students who favour an artistic approach may learn better and more comfortably if one uses an *aesthetic entry point*, which emphasises sensory or surface features of a topic. This entry point allows for works or art to be understood in terms of their organisation, sense of balance and appropriateness as well as their colour or tone. Key ideas and examples also have aesthetic properties, and Gardner does not wish this approach to be considered only in terms of art appreciation, but it may also be a very useful entry point to history or literature.

An *experiential entry point* deals directly with the materials that embody or convey the concept of what is being studied, and is useful for those students who learn best through a 'hands-on' approach. This is a particularly effective approach for young people who are stimulated by the opportunity to work with concrete materials.

The final entry point is the *participatory/interpersonal* one, which encourages individuals to work together on projects, where they assume or play different roles, and where their strengths can complement one another. Projects provide a valuable opportunity for students to use this approach. Teachers may maximise the use of this entry point by using group work, which generates rich feedback, through the use of well thought out performances of understanding and skilful questioning.

There is no prescribed formula for generating promising entry points, as all experienced teachers know that what works with one student will not work with another. Gardner advises teachers to 'draw on judicious blends of analysis and imagination, followed by mindful experimentation' rather than being prescriptive in their approach to teaching (Gardner 1999a, 199). Experimentation is key here, one can no longer choose one teaching strategy to suit all of the learners in the class; neither can one remain static in one's approach over a period of time. A varied approach will ensure that the teacher reaches the widest number of students possible, but it is usually necessary to experiment with different approaches and through reflection, choose the most suitable for each individual group of students. This approach ensures that all children are given an opportunity to achieve their potential, rather than the limited numbers who are comfortable and most at home with either linguistic or logical approaches.

It is advisable to envision a synergy between the frameworks of multiple intelligences and entry points where both are concerned with the *process* of learning and focus on individual differences (Veenema *et al* 1997, 79-80). Both Gardner and Veenema portray Multiple Intelligences and Entry Points as approaches to teaching and learning, not as methods or formulae to which one must strictly adhere. Using entry points and a Multiple Intelligences approach involves a different conceptualisation of how children learn, and ultimately brings about a paradigm shift in planning an appropriate curriculum, which goes beyond 'a reflexive invocation of the categorical scheme' (Gardner 1995, 16).

Teachers may keep their students interested, having initially chosen the most suitable entry point, by making 'powerful comparisons...and through complementary attempts to represent the core aspect of the concept' (Gardner 1999a, 199). To get to the core of the subject requires that one focus on understanding rather than coverage, thereby streamlining the curriculum to the essential concepts. Working with comparisons or analogies, representing examples drawn from another realm of experience, will serve to provide an integrated and interrelated curriculum. This approach represents a move from the assimilation of huge numbers of facts, to an understanding of concepts, which may be applied to new situations, thereby encouraging the student to develop thinking and analytical skills rather than memorisation.

Multiple Intelligences theory is a cognitive model of intelligence that seeks to describe how we use our intelligences, and may be used as a framework for understanding cognitive diversity, therefore, it provides an ideal approach to teaching and learning in the early years. It takes cognisance of the different facets of the developing child and offers us many entry points to teaching any topic, which allows us, as educators, to facilitate the child's areas of strength and to help him to work on his less developed areas. Multiple Intelligences theory does not label the child in terms of strengths and weaknesses, rather it provides an intelligence profile, which is dynamic and constantly changing, as the child is offered chances to develop his full potential in all areas. Multiple Intelligences theory is a descriptive theory of intelligence, which requires a pedagogical framework to transport it to the classroom. The work of the Teaching for Understanding team does this very well; it provides a performance based view of understanding which is underpinned by a Multiple Intelligences approach.

## TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING (TfU) (Blythe 1998, Gardner 1999a)

Why do we need to emphasise understanding so forcefully? Is it not true that all teachers teach for understanding anyway? Of course, all teachers wish to do so, but this is not always successful. Hyland (2000, 191) sums this up by stating that ‘teachers...indicated that even though understanding had always been a goal in teaching and learning, it was one they had not always consciously pursued’. Gardner (1999a, 43) reminds us that current methods of teaching cannot keep up with the very rapid rate of change in the world, thus making it imperative to look to our pedagogy, including our current modes of assessment, with a view to change. A school graduate in this century will need to be ‘highly literate, flexible, capable of troubleshooting and problem-finding, and, not incidentally, able to shift roles or even vocations should his current position become outmoded’. If our students demonstrate intelligent behaviour, thereby showing that they can apply what they have been taught, then we are teaching for understanding. Gardner believes that formal school testing has moved too far in the direction of ‘assessing knowledge of questionable importance in ways that show little transportability’ (Gardner 1991, 134). He states that the understanding that schools *ought* to inculcate is virtually invisible on standardised testing instruments and new assessment forms must be sought to document student understandings. While emphasising that the interests of the children are paramount and that assessment must enhance their lives and learning, Drummond & Nutbrown (1996, 103) remind us that,

Children’s learning is so complex, rich, fascinating, varied and variable, surprising, enthusiastic and stimulating, that to see it taking place...is one of the great rewards of the early years educator. The very process of observing and assessing is, in a sense, its own justification. (Drummond & Nutbrown 1996, 103)

It is clear that our assessment methods should be as rich, fascinating and stimulating as the ways in which children learn if assessment is to be truly an integral part of teaching and learning.

The work of Project Zero at Harvard concerning Teaching for Understanding (TfU), calls on us all to look more deeply at the ways in which we introduce material to students and, correspondingly the manner in which we assess students’ understandings of that material. The research began by seeking to

answer the question posed concerning the lack of applicable understandings displayed by very successful students. In some cases, despite years of study and good examination results, students could not apply their knowledge in new situations, and the same type of misconceptions and lack of understanding re-occur in scholastic settings all over the world (Gardner 1991).

The Teaching for Understanding Project formulated a view of understanding called the ‘performance perspective’, which is consonant with ‘both common sense and a number of sources in contemporary cognitive science’. It defines understanding as a matter of being able to do a ‘variety of thought-provoking things with a topic, such as explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalizing, applying, analogizing, and representing the topic in new ways’ (Blythe 1998, 12; see also Gardner 1999a, 128). In effect, students should be able to explore a topic and demonstrate that they truly understand its dimensions, thereby advancing their knowledge by carrying out a series of performances to show this understanding. To succeed at this, students must be given time to explore activities and issues, to explain and to make generalisations while receiving appropriate feedback. In relation to this search for ways to build understanding, Gardner (1991, 20) outlines two shortfalls in educational achievement to date. These he terms, *fragile knowledge* because students do not remember, understand or use much of what they have learned and *poor thinking* as students do not think very well with the information they possess. These do not equip students very well for the increasingly difficult and changing demands of the 21st century as outlined earlier.

## TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK (Perkins & Blythe 1994; Veenema *et al* 1997; Blythe 1998)

The Teaching for Understanding Project has provided a framework for use by teachers, which is divided into four categories:

- **Generative Topics:** These answer the question, ‘What shall we teach?’ Generative topics should be rich and interesting to students and teachers, and provide opportunities for multiple connections. Topics should be central to one or more disciplines.
- **Understanding Goals:** These refer to the question, ‘What is worth teaching?’ These may be expressed as either statements or questions, but they are intended to focus both teacher and students on the important

elements of a course or unit to be understood. By explicitly stating his/her objectives, or understanding goals a teacher may plan a class which is focused and stimulating. This is a very difficult part of planning a class. It is difficult to focus clearly at the outset on what you want your students to understand in the class. It is easy to be vague and unspecific without realising it because the concept may be clear to us as adults, but we need to break it down to its constituent parts to present to our students. With young children learning to add numbers, we may state that our understanding objective is that at the end of the class the pupils will be able to add single numbers. However, our understanding objective might be more clearly stated if we consider that we really wish them to understand the concrete notion that combining quantities gives us a larger amount; it involves the bringing together of smaller amounts to make a larger amount. Our understanding goals often need to be simplified by distilling what we want our students to understand to the essence, and building on that understanding.

- Performances of Understanding: These performances answer the question, ‘How shall we teach for understanding?’ These activities allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the *understanding goals* set between teacher and students. Cleverly designed Performances of Understanding allow for differentiated teaching and ensure that students are given an opportunity to approach the topic in many different ways, thereby, developing different intelligences. Having set our understanding goals we must focus on what we want our pupils to do to gain this understanding. If our performances of understanding are not inextricably linked to our understanding goals, true understanding cannot take place.
- Ongoing Assessment: Teachers must ask ‘How can students and teachers know what students understand and how students can develop deeper understanding?’ Students must receive ongoing feedback about their performances to help them to improve them. This ongoing feedback is crucial if students are to improve their work, by drafting and re-drafting as they move to their best work. This may be facilitated in a non-threatening manner using the Ladder of Feedback developed by the Project Zero team at Harvard, (Ridgway, 2002, 227)

Formulating a Teaching for Understanding approach to teaching, and integrating the principles to classroom practice requires ‘profound rethinking of curriculum and pedagogy’ (Wiske 1994, 19). Wiske continues to point out that teachers may find it difficult to articulate understanding goals and assessment criteria with students, particularly if they have not previously made their goals explicit. The idea of teacher as learner is fundamental to teaching for understanding; a concept which is mirrored in the Reggio Emilia approach. This requires the teacher to forsake the usual role of ‘expert’ in the classroom, ‘shifting from a perspective of intellectual privacy,’ to one of encouraging students to develop their own ways of exercising authority, or ‘shared intellectual empowerment’. Students who have been accustomed to being told *what* to learn, in the transmission model of teaching, may resist this new approach, but schools and teachers must support ‘attempts at unlocking the doors to understanding’ thereby aiming for a transformational model of teaching and learning. (Wiske 1994, 21).

Gardner calls for an education that inculcates in students an understanding of major disciplinary ways of thinking and he singles out science, mathematics, the arts and history as major disciplines within which students should strive to have an in depth knowledge of substantial topics. He states that students should probe ‘a manageable set of examples’ within these disciplines to come to know how ‘one thinks and acts in the manner of’ a scientist, a geometer, an artist or a historian. Students will then be in a position to draw on these modes of thinking in coming to understand their world (Gardner 1999a, 118/119). This approach is fundamentally different to the one experienced by many students, who have to grapple with an inordinate amount of material, with little or no depth of understanding of what they study. Gardner’s alternative educational vision is firmly centred on understanding, where the concepts learned by students in one domain of knowledge may be applied in new situations. This implies new ways of assessing knowledge, with an emphasis on the application of one’s learning rather than a mere recitation of learned facts.

Of particular interest to early years educators are the ‘obstacles to understanding’ cited by Gardner (1999a, 121) which he states lie firmly in the theories that children develop in early life. Children develop theories about animate and inanimate objects, their self -concept and concept of others, and

other theories, without being formally taught. These concepts may be, and frequently are, in error, featuring misconceptions that prove to be robust and long-lasting, which can be thought of as:

powerful engravings that have been incised upon the mind-brain of the child during the opening years of life. The facts learned in school may seem to obscure this engraving ... However, all along the initial erroneous engraving remains largely unaffected ... And then a lamentable event happens. Formal schooling ends, the facts gradually fade away, and the same misconceptions – the same flawed engraving – remains unaltered.

Gardner (1999a, 121/122)

One is reminded here of Montessori's cautionary premise that nothing learned in childhood could ever be erased. Teachers, Gardner states, are complicit in the survival of these misconceptions, particularly in their use of a text-test context for learning and a drive to complete text books, or 'coverage'. He makes a very powerful argument for authentic assessment to challenge students to apply their knowledge in a more meaningful way, stating 'only rich, probing and multifaceted investigation of significant topics is likely to make clear the inadequacy of early misconceptions' (Gardner 1999a, 122/123). This has profound implications for the early childhood educator, who has the responsibility of teaching the child in the formative years. Montessori has argued that the seeds of everything we know are sown in the early years, which is borne out by Gardner's premise. One might argue that by the time the child reaches junior or senior infants many opportunities may have been lost, nevertheless, it is clear that we have a responsibility to look closely and critically at the provisions we make for our youngest children, to ensure that we are, in fact, helping them to achieve their full potential. The Revised Primary Curriculum (1999) recommends a process model of learning by acknowledging that all learning should be integrated, with the fostering of 'skills that facilitate the transfer of learning' (Introduction, 9). The process of learning is key here, with a recognition that *how* the child learns is as important as *what* he or she learns. The Introduction (11) states plainly that 'Strong emphasis is placed on developing the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems and to interact effectively with others'. These are fundamental tenets of the Multiple Intelligences and Teaching for Understanding approaches.

## CONCLUSION

The active young learner requires a learning environment that allows him/her to actively construct his/her own learning at a self-directed pace. Developments in neuroscience have deepened our understanding of how children learn, and the Multiple Intelligences theory shows us how to plan an appropriate approach to teaching and learning for this developing child, through the use of entry points. A Teaching for Understanding framework helps us to move from surface to in-depth knowledge. Research shows that the many benefits of using a Multiple Intelligences approach include, an increase in learner participation and interaction in class, together with an increased sense of responsibility among students, combined with a lack of alienation of students whose needs were being met in the classroom. Significantly, students also stated that the new approach ensured that they were more interested in the subject being taught (Hyland 2000, 189/190). To bring this about requires considerable planning, and a commitment, from all the stakeholders, to move from a traditional transmission model of teaching to a transformational one, which will allow students to truly achieve their potential. It is essential that this work begins in the early years of school to enable the child to become a reflective, critical and flexible thinker, who can take his/her place in this ever changing and demanding world.

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# Gauging the Students Preferred Learning Modality as a Foundation for Future Learning

*Peadar Donohoe*

... knowledge has the capacity to appear both meaningless and meaningful ...

*Deborah Britzman*

If people learned to walk and talk the way they were taught to read and write, everyone would limp and stutter.

*Mark Twain*

## INTRODUCTION

Although some of the latest brain research has revealed that we have many ways of being intelligent, the standardized testing we do in our school does not address the full range of intelligent abilities and skills that we all have.

Lazear (1994, p. 14)

For far too long there was an assumption that intelligence could be viewed as a single item/part of a human being that could be measured by I.Q. tests, exams, essays, etc.

For those unfortunate human beings who failed to excel under this model, assessments were made of their intellectual/psychological capacities. Because a key assumption was that we were correct in our pedagogical methods and therefore the problem lay with the student.

We are a good bit wiser now, but still, most teachers acknowledge that the tools to engage students don't always work and there are many students who do not comprehend even under our most advanced models of teaching and learning. Many of these students are designated as ADD, dyslexic, etc. and many of them never make it through our secondary school system. The labels for those deemed learning disabled are dangerous because we run the risk that the person labelled dyslexic, dysgraphiac, dyscalculiac, etc. will associate too closely with the label. They may come to see themselves as handicapped individuals and this

negative "self-fulfilling" and soul-destroying identification can shut down the learning potential of the student. To avoid these kinds of outcomes we have to continuously strive to improve our pedagogical methods.

## PEDAGOGY EXAMINED

Why is improving pedagogy so important and what can we do to improve it? I will first address the initial part of this question. Lusted (1986) contends that pedagogy is important, as a concept, as it draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the "how" questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we "come to know"

As teachers, we all know of students who excel in such areas as Maths, Art, Music, Science etc. Yet within a subject area there may be parts of it in which the student excels and other areas where the student does not (e.g. In English a student could do very well with grammatical structure but be a very poor story teller). How a student learns in school can be reflected back to their pre-school childhood. As Piaget pointed out:

The uniquely personal nature of the child's representations during these years restricts his use of them in a social context. When he does not respond to the thoughts of others, this is due in part to his inability to fit such thoughts to his own.

Piaget (1970, p. 29 – 30)

How the child learns and the representations s/he uses to interpret their world depends greatly on the child's home environment. How they come to know/learn in that environment can vary greatly from child to child. So, by the time they come to school, they can have a method for learning about the world that can be totally rubbish by the pedagogy a teacher may bring to his/her work.

Now, of course, the good teacher mitigates this. This teacher is reflective. This ideal teacher thinks about what does (and doesn't) work in the classroom during and after school time. The reflective process could entail thinking about, writing about, transcribing, etc. Whatever the reflective tools are they should enable the teacher to ponder practice in order to evaluate learning in the

classroom situation. A good teacher will reframe ideas and knowledge for the student in an effort to help them become at least competent, if not excellent, in a given subject area.

And I would go further to say that a good teacher of today would be aware of the *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. This theory, put forth by Howard Gardner in his questioning of intelligence as a single quantifiable entity, postulates that human beings have evolved to exhibit several intelligences and not to draw variously on one flexible intelligence. He has conducted empirical studies to identify ways in which people are intelligent. Thus far, Gardner has identified 8\* intelligences:

- Verbal/Linguistic
- Mathematical/Logical
- Visual/Spatial
- Musical/Rhythmic
- Bodily/Kinaesthetic
- Naturalist
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal

\* Gardner is currently working on the theory of Existential Intelligence.

Teachers who use multiple intelligences as part of their pedagogy are well aware of the ways they transmit and reproduce knowledge and they are also aware of the way students may “come to know”. By mixing learning outcomes with the intelligences above (I will expand on this later.), they can aid the student to become a more proficient, creative and flexible learner. This brings us to the second question posed previously: What if the student cannot be engaged in the learning process by the teacher? What if, despite all his/her efforts, the teacher cannot impart the knowledge to the student?

Is the student a no-hoper? Is the student lazy? Is s/he dyslexic? Does s/he have ADD?

The label “Attention Deficit Disorder” is sometimes mistakenly applied to individuals who are kinaesthetic learners or have unique learning strategies. These individuals typically experience learning difficulties not because of an inability to hold attention,

but rather because of a mismatch between their learning styles and traditional teaching methods

Neuro Linguistic Programming University (NLPU, 2000 p. 62)

I put forth *what if the teacher's method does not take into account the student's learning style?* This ironically brings to mind Gardner's statement “we cannot say a person is intelligent unless we can say in what way he or she is intelligent” (1983). What if we lack the means to assess the child's intelligence correctly? What if we do not have the ‘know how’ to assess in ‘what way’ the student is intelligent. If we assume that the student is not brain damaged then how could we possibly declare them unintelligent?

The teacher has a job to do. S/he has to try every means available to bring the young student into the wider world of learning. How is this done? Let's assume that the “good teacher” is aware of the work of Vygotsky and has many tools to assess the student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This method of assessment is very valid and has a lot of advantages. But if the teacher does not know how to engage the young student in terms of their learning style, then even this very powerful means of assessment is lacking. In fact, as far as creative teaching strategies are concerned, it would be a bit like throwing darts blindfolded in the hopes that something will stick.

Maybe the teacher is also aware of the work of Jerome Bruner (1973) who has suggested that children construct knowledge through three basic modes of instruction: the enactive mode (doing), the iconic mode (imagery) or the symbolic mode (words). But once again, if the teacher cannot assess which learning style dominates then their ability to engage the student's ZPD is limited.

This leads me to a connection that I made in readings of Multiple Intelligences and Neuro Linguistic Programming. I saw in this connection a possible aid to teachers; a way to enable them to open doors for their students' learning.

### NLP

*Neuro* – the way you filter and process your experience through your senses

*Linguistic* – the way you interpret and describe your experience through language

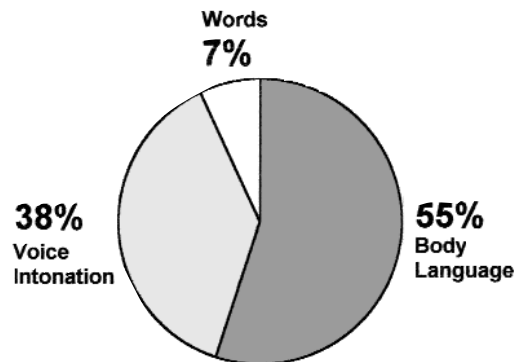
*Programming* – The way you learn new skills and behaviours and integrate them into your way of thinking and living

Quite simply, NLP offers tools, which can be taught to anyone, to give him or her an efficient, effective way of approaching a task.

## ORIGINS OF NLP

The origins of NLP are in the early seventies with the collaborative research endeavours of John Grinder, who was then an assistant professor of linguistics at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Richard Bandler, who was a student of psychology at the university. They modelled patterns of language and behaviour from the works of Fritz Pearls (founder of Gestalt Therapy), Virginia Satir ( a founder of Family Therapy and Systematic Therapy) and Milton H. Erickson, M.D. (founder of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis). Their first book together, *The Structure of Magic*, was a demythologising of the idea that certain people have a 'way with things' (charisma) and some don't. It contended that these people communicated specifically in language, voice intonation and body behaviour and put forth that when one illuminated the deeper structures, and relevant pieces of behaviour that these people either consciously and/or, even more importantly, subconsciously accessed, that these structures and behaviours could be organised into a working model for anyone to use in a way or ways that had the potential to be productive and enriching.

A paper that is often cited in NLP literature is 'Inference of Attitudes from Nonverbal Communication in Two Channels' (Mehrabian and Ferris p. 248 -52, 1967). This paper put forth that communication is much more than the words we say. This research showed that in a presentation before a group of people, 55 percent of the impact is determined by body language (posture, gestures and eye contact), 38 percent by tone of voice and only 7 percent by the content of the presentation itself.



According to this research it is not what we say, but how we say it that counts ... If the words are the content of the message, then the postures, gestures, expression and voice tonality are the context in which the message is embedded, and together they make the meaning of the communication ... *to be an effective communicator, act on the principle that: the meaning of the communication is the response you get.* (O'Connor, Seymour (1990) pp. 17-18)

*(Imagine if teachers everywhere accepted the above statement as a central tenet of their pedagogy? The response that the teacher gets from the students reflects back to how well the teacher communicated knowledge in the classroom. What might be the implications for practice? I will expand on this train of thought later with presentation of *The Cone of Learning*.)*

Bandler and Grinder saw implications for NLP not only in therapy but also in other areas. Progressive businesses have embraced NLP techniques, especially for sales and negotiating. The communication aspect of NLP has been used by many famous and influential people (i.e. Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Andre Agassi, Nelson Mandela) and, in the last ten years in the U.S., it has become increasingly used in the classroom.

So, how exactly can NLP assist the teacher? Before I expand on this I offer the following quote:

How do you take a child that is a bad speller and teach them to use the same strategy that a good speller uses? They will learn automatically if you teach them an appropriate process, instead of content."

Bandler and Grinder (1979, p. 33)

## FAVOURERED LEARNING MODALITIES

NLP embraces many techniques that aid learning potential. It asks one to question and identify the processes by which one learns. One of the keys to using learning processes as a pedagogical tool would be to ascertain which sensory system the learner prefers, also known as favoured learning modalities. Generally, one of the following learning modalities tends to dominate:

- Kinaesthetic
- Visual
- Auditory

(Smell and taste are, of course, important and practitioners of NLP associate these with the Kinaesthetic learning modality.)

Students who are particularly good in certain subject areas have certain Kinaesthetic/Visual/Auditory strategies for accessing what they know.

For an example of this accessing, consider the following:

When I say the word “Ocean”, what comes to mind (Think about it and answer for yourself before looking below)?:

- A picture? Maybe you *saw* ocean waves lapping on a beach.
- Or maybe you *heard* the sound of the waves lapping.
- Or maybe you *smelled* the briny sea air and remembered *feeling* an ocean breeze caressing your face.
- Or maybe it was some combination of the above. Or possibly it was something different to any of the examples I gave. In any case, it was likely that you engaged with some sensorial aspect of your own in relation to the word *ocean*.

After a number of other modality accessing questions, a pattern may begin to emerge. You may find that you favour the visual modality or the kinaesthetic or the auditorial.

In terms of the young student, I hypothesized that if one could determine what parts of their sensory apparatus they favoured at an early age then one could use this knowledge to aid teaching strategies in the classroom.

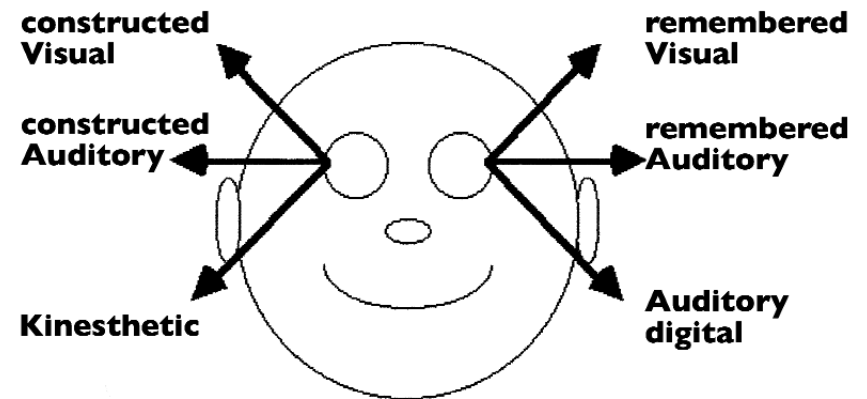
### HOW CAN THE TEACHER DETERMINE THE FAVOURED LEARNING MODALITY OF THE STUDENT?

I will touch upon three procedures that teachers could employ to ascertain their students favoured learning modality:

- 1) By asking accessing questions and noting which direction the student’s Eyes move
- 2) By noting what modality language the students employ and respond to
- 3) By making general observations and keeping a journal or checklist

With respect to the eye movements as mentioned in procedure 1 above, human beings tend to make certain eye movements when accessing types of information. This accessing with the eyes was first proposed by Williams James in his book Principles of Psychology (1890) and this visual accessing is a cornerstone for NLP practitioners in learning to recognise thought patterns in others. For an illustration please look at the chart below:

### ACCESSING CUES\*



### EYES UP AND LEFT – VISUALLY REMEMBERED

This is where we look when we are remembering images we have seen before, e.g., the face of our mother, the last place we went on holiday, our school, what we did yesterday.

### EYES UP AND RIGHT – VISUAL CONSTRUCTED

This is where we look when we are constructing images we have not seen before or memories we have forgotten, e.g., ourselves in a location we have always dreamt of but never have been to, ourselves with a hairstyle we don’t have or remembering badly the colour of the eyes of a passed away relative

### EYES STRAIGHT AHEAD DEFOCUSSED – VISUAL

The clue as to whether this is remembered or constructed can be determined by how the weight is distributed in the rest of the body: to the left and it is remembered, to the right and it is constructed.

#### EYES TO THE SIDE AND LEFT – AUDITORY REMEMBERED

This is where we look when we are remembering sounds that we have heard before, e.g. a piece of music, the sound of a friend's voice

#### EYES TO THE SIDE AND RIGHT – AUDITORY CONSTRUCTED

This is where we look when we are creating a sound that we have never heard before, e.g. someone we know speaking in a completely different voice

#### EYES DOWN AND LEFT – AUDITORY DIGITAL, INNER DIALOGUE

This is where we look when we are having a conversation with ourselves or asking questions in our head

#### EYES DOWN AND RIGHT – EXTERNAL FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

Where we look when we experience feelings.

*(The chart above is illustrated for a “Normally Organised individual”. Directions may vary in that left and right may be reversed (left-handed people can be reversed for example). The best thing to do it to keep asking questions and keep note of what patterns emerge. But visual is always up or straight ahead and defocused, and auditory is always looking toward the ears.)*

\*Accessing Cues have been used as part of police interrogation technique to determine if a suspect is constructing or remembering. Say, for example in the interrogation scenario, if the officer already has the facts of when and where a crime has happened and has testimony to back it up. S/he could interview a suspect and ask the person a number of questions to see if s/he was constructing or remembering. Of course, a skilled interrogator wouldn't only use this technique, s/he would also look at: pupil dilation, pore size, skin flush, muscle tone changes, breathing, etc. From this s/he might be able to deduce if the suspect is lying or not and if they are worth further investigation.

*\*A colleague inquired if children were a bit too young for these types of accessing cues. It gave me pause for thought. As a drama teacher I see kids accessing all the time when being asked questions about scenes and assimilating direction but obviously this wasn't enough. I contacted Owen Fitzpatrick of The Irish Institute of NLP concerning this issue and he replied*

*that children are accessing as soon as they start daydreaming (the age of 3). At this age imagination is activated. The child at this point has a wealth of experiences to draw upon from their interaction with the world around them. As Vygotsky said in his theories about imagination, “Like all functions of consciousness, it originally arises from action” (1978 p. 129)*

Below are questions that could be used to determine which modality the student favours. A teacher who is not familiar decoding eye movements might wish to videotape students as they are interviewed.

- What colour are your mother's eyes?
- Spell Cat. (Or if they are a good speller try and have them spell it backwards.)
- What shape are the letters on the sign outside the room (i.e. The room could have the teacher's name on it).
- Where have you never been but would love to go on holiday?
- What would you look like with green hair?
- What's your favourite song?
- Which door in your house sounds the loudest when it's slammed?
- Who's your best friend?
- Is your best friend's voice loud or quiet?
- What's your favourite TV program?

From asking these questions a pattern may begin to emerge of a preference for visual, auditory or kinaesthetic ways of accessing information but don't expect a particular visual cue because of the type of question. The human mind works in complex ways. For example, when asked “What colour are your mother's eyes?” One might be inclined to think that this would be visual but the student could give a visual cue that shows s/he is trying to remember visually what the colour of their mother's eyes are. Or in response to the same s/he could give an auditory cue that shows that may be hearing the mother's voice, or they could give a kinaesthetic cue that shows they may be associating a feeling with the mother.

For example, let's look at how a student may access information after being given a spelling question:

How do you spell cat? They could give a(n):  
Auditory focus: Eyes Move Down and to the Left

or  
 Visual Focus: Eyes move up to the right  
 or  
 Kinaesthetic Focus: Eyes move down to the right  
 (One might want to try several words to test if this is consistent)

The second example of how to test is to ask students about things, people, their familiar environments, events in their future or past (for more examples refer to *NLP At Work* p. 30 –33), and then ask them what comes to mind. You could even propose a selection of answers for them and ask them which they would prefer (helpful for junior and senior infants). For example:

Think about your mom. What comes to mind?

- A) Is it the *sound* of her voice (auditorial)
- B) Is it an emotion, *feeling* about her or something *tactile* (i.e. hugging) (kinaesthetic)
- C) Is it what she *looks* like or do they *see* a place they have been with her (visual)

Another exercise that the teacher could employ is to give the students a handout that may be a story, an article from a newspaper, an historical piece, etc. And then the teacher could question the students or they could fill in the blanks with the language of their preferred learning modality.

For example, if it is a story where the student is asked what they think the future holds for the protagonist or antagonist they could be given a choice of answers and be asked to pick the phrase that they would most likely employ. They could be given a choice of:

- a) The future *looks* bleak for them (visual)
- b) It doesn't *sound* too good for them (auditory)
- c) It *feels* as if things aren't going to go well (kinaesthetic)

Many more questions could be asked in relation to the story with similar choices. Finally, for the teacher who has limited time in the classroom, the simplest solution would be keep to keep a journal or checklist and sort them according to the learning modalities listed above. For example, the teacher

could note if the child has a preference in using modality words and the types of modality words that the child responds to. The teacher could look at giving the child choices of doing one activity over another (say a choice between music and spelling) and seeing where the preference lies. Also, the teacher could note what activities does the child participate in fully, partially or not at all. For the list to be accurate the teacher needs to ensure that they provide learning experiences that include all the modalities and intelligences. Once the teacher has determined the preferred learning mode of their student they can then commence structuring activities and learning experiences with the student that builds on their preferred learning modality and overlap into other learning modes and intelligences. This will build a solid foundation for their future learning. A great tool for the teacher to use would be various exercises from Multiple Intelligence's Books (Lazears *Seven Pathways of Learning* (1994) and Armstrong's *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (1994) are highly recommended). To aid this I've grouped the 8 intelligences with the 3 learning modalities.

#### NLP MEETS MI – NEW POSSIBILITIES

VISUAL	KINAESTHETIC	AUDITORY
Visual/Spatial	Bodily/Kinaesthetic	Musical/Rhythmic
Logical/Mathematical	Intrapersonal	*Interpersonal .
**Verbal/Linguistic	*Interpersonal	**Verbal/Linguistic
Naturalist		

#### HOW I MADE THE LIST

In reviewing the literature I noted that there were definite parallels in the teaching aims of Multiple Intelligences and learning modalities. Where there was doubt I looked at two criteria: first, what was the research saying about people who excelled at a particular intelligence, and second, what language was employed in the description of an intelligence exercise.

For example, in the case of *Intrapersonal* exercises and their explanations I identified an abundance of the following *Kinaesthetic* words and phrases:

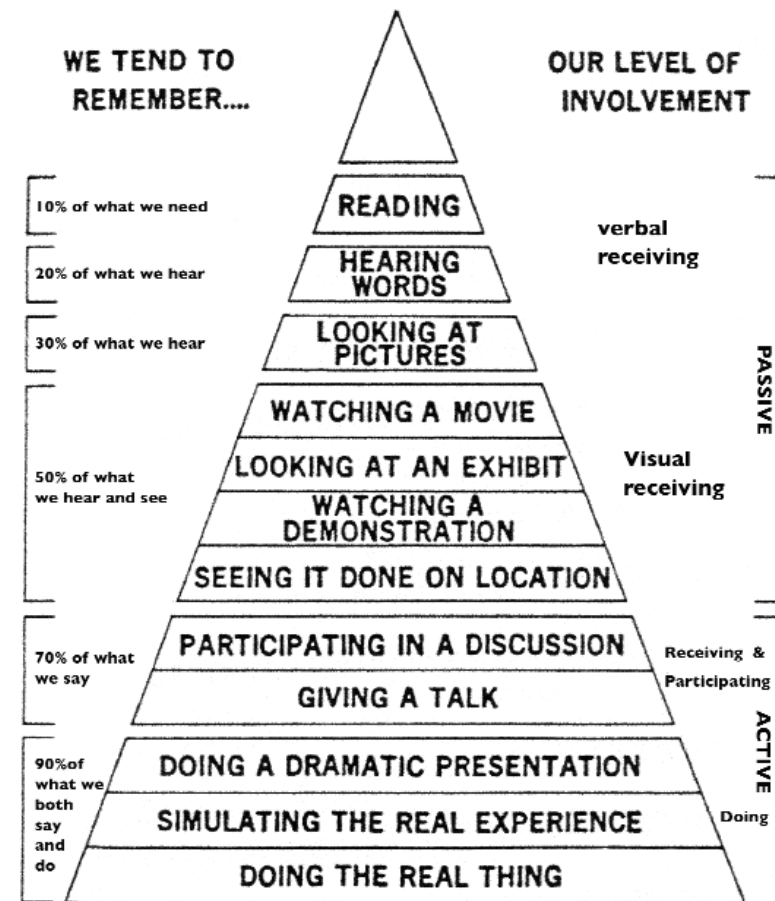
Mood, boring, high point, low point, attractive, feelings, taste, smell, express your feelings, anger, playfulness, anxiety, different moods, textures  
 Also, as intelligence is not something that can be compartmentalised, neither

is the list. For example, in the case of *Verbal/Linguistic*\*\* the people who do very well in this intelligence see and hear words. In the visual modality they spell very well because in their mind's eye the word is written out for them. And they do very well in conversation because images are continually appearing in their head that they verbalise. In the auditory modality a person who has proficiency in the Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence can be a good listener, conversationalist and they may like to finish the sentences of a more kinaesthetically aware student or when the teacher utters a phrase or question and leaves a gap for the students to fill in.

Also, I've put Interpersonal in both Kinaesthetic and Auditory as there seemed to be an equal orientation of both in relation to the learning modalities. And as stated previously, people have grounding in all three modalities, so I see the list as an aid to the teacher.

In the classroom situation, once the teacher has ascertained a student's favoured learning modality or modalities, the teacher can then engage the student in the child's preferred way of learning. For example, if the teacher has determined that the child has a kinaesthetic preference, by referring to the list the teacher sees that they can begin engaging the student in MI learning strategies of the Kinaesthetic, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal. Let's assume that this initiated and the student is happy with the kinaesthetic learning activities. Then the teacher can use this engagement to begin the task of increasing student learning flexibility by overlapping learning in the modalities in which the student is not as proficient in. Eventually, the desired outcome would be to enable the student to be proficient, if not excellent, in all the modalities and individual intelligences. And I would argue further that the more Kinaesthetically orientated the teacher could make the learning the experience the quicker the student will assimilate the lesson. What are the possible benefits of having a student educated in this manner? This might be best illustrated by Edgar Dale's (1969) cone of learning:

## EXPERIENCE & LEARNING



**GONE OF LEARNING**

developed and revised by Bruce Myland  
from material by Edgar Dale

The things we remember most are those that engaged most of our neurology  
(Diana Beaver (2002) p. 11)

According to Dale our tendency to remember increases with our level of involvement.

When the activity is:

- Reading – Retention rate: 10%
- Hearing Words – Retention rate: 20%
- Looking at Pictures – Retention rate: 30%
- Watching, Looking, Seeing – Retention rate: 50%
- Participating, Giving a talk – Retention rate: 70%
- Doing a Dramatic Presentation, Simulating and doing the real thing – Retention rate: 90%

As you may infer from the above, at least one of the learning modalities (auditory, visual and kinaesthetic) is represented in every area of the cone. Dale argues that when the learning experience is passive (verbal and visual receiving) our tendency to remember the content is lower than when the experience is active (receiving and participating, doing). Therefore, the more sensorially involved the task, the more the 3 learning modes are in use, hence the retention rate of knowledge and acquired skills is increased. Furthermore, if one were to isolate any one modality that seems to greatly increase learning potential, then it would be the kinaesthetic. Dale argues that the enhanced learning of the Active (kinaesthetic learning modality) is not just the preferred learning mode of young children (as put forth by Bruner, 1973) but of all ages.

Imagine if we were to look at incorporating the kinaesthetic learning modality as part of any learning outcome. If what Edgar Dale argues is true, the learning curve would be greatly increased. This brings me back to the statement I posited earlier. *“The response that the teacher gets from the students reflects back to how well the teacher communicated knowledge in the classroom.”* So I ask: If the teacher is unsuccessful in their communication, did the teacher neglect to use the most important aspect of transmitting communication, the kinaesthetic? In early years education this would mean incorporating as much play as possible in learning outcomes. As Vygotsky has stated, “In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (1978, p. 129). And in play the child is often *participating, talking, doing dramatic presentations* for themselves and others, *simulating the real experience* and even *doing the real thing*. If we agree that the child uses play

as their greatest learning tool then we should accommodate and facilitate use of this learning tool as much as possible in the classroom. As a drama teacher I have direct experience with how the kinaesthetic learning modality can be a great tool in increasing the speed of student knowledge retention in learning outcomes. For an idea of this please look at example one below.

#### EXAMPLES OF TYING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES WITH LEARNING MODALITIES:

- 1) Student A is equally strong in the auditory and kinaesthetic modality but s/he is weak when it comes to letter identification. The teacher has identified that s/he has weakness in recognising (Visual) and pronouncing (Verbal/Linguistic) letters. The teacher could use the kinaesthetic and auditory strengths and play a game where the teacher writes letters on the blackboard and the students are asked to make a body shape similar to the letter on the board whenever the teacher calls out the letter. Before each letter is called, music is played (For this exercise I play the guitar and have written a song entitled “Rock Around the Alphabet” but music on a CD player could work just as well.) and the students engage in simple physical activity (i.e. hopping on one leg, tip-toeing, running in place, etc.). At any time the music is cut and the teacher says “give me an A”, for example. The students immediately form the letter with their bodies. Then the students repeat the letters when the teacher points to the blackboard. As the students become used to the exercise and have repertory of body shapes for letters they are able to identify on the blackboard, they then begin the task of writing the letters in their copybooks. (*Marie Montessori anticipated this kinaesthetic approach to teaching at the beginning of the 20th century when she encouraged the use of sandpaper letters and numbers to facilitate recognition of same. She would instruct the child to trace over the sandpaper letters and numbers with their eyes closed.*)
- 2) A student is very visual but is weak in the auditory modality. The child is given a picture of a street scene and it is discussed. Then the child has to listen to a tape of street noises and identify in the picture where the sounds are coming from.
- 3) Student B has a strong kinaesthetic modality but is very weak in the auditory modality. Getting him/her to listen to instructions is very time consuming. A game is played in which emotions or activities are called



out and the student has to become a statue that best displays the emotions or activity. Kinaesthetic students love this exercise and they respond very well to it. Then, as statues the student has to create a sentence that is part of a story about the activity or emotion and, to play the story well, s/he has to listen to everybody. Finally, the story is put into motion with everyone moving and talking and making logical sense.

These are just 3 examples that work. There are books for MI learning activities that detail how to overlap intelligences (Lazear's (1994) *Seven Pathways of Learning* and Armstrong's *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* and two good places to start). I the list *NLP meets MI* as a tool to help the teacher who takes this approach.

Piaget (1963) wrote about the fact that children have frequent experiences of 'synesthesia'. They can often hear colours, see sound, and mix the senses (the lens' of the intelligences) together in unique and interesting ways. As we grow and we 'learn', we are taught the 'correct' way to view and experience our world. We lose touch with this highly creative individual that is the young child. Could creative use of multiple intelligences and NLP be a method to nurture this innate creativity? To keep the child's sensory apparatus heightened and open? To foster 'synesthesia'? This truly beautiful and unique human gift.

## CONCLUSION

What is a human being? How and in what ways is s/he intelligent? The more I study and read about intelligence the more elusive the description (if there is a satisfactory one out there). But I will humbly make some observations. What I feel (I favour the kinaesthetic learning modality) is that human beings are complex organisms that we are only beginning to learn about. We have a long way to go in education to create learning environments that are stimulating, enriching and of service to all our students. When dealing with fellow human beings we must not take anything for granted for there are no limits to the human body, mind and spirit and when we can create educational institutions that mirror this philosophy, not only in espoused theories, but also in practice, then we will be well on the road to a great age of enlightenment. And where does this road end? It doesn't. In the words of Howard Gardner:

"...we can never expect to complete our search." (1983, p59)

Teachers must be aware that they have to be flexible in their pedagogy if they are to meet their student's needs. 'Learning is a lifelong process' and this

aphorism particularly applies to teachers and their methods. This is what the teacher of the future must think about in relation to pedagogical methods. If they want to maximise the potential of their students, they must also maximise their own.

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# Learning & Automaticity: An Early Years Perspective

*Colette Gray*

## ABSTRACT

In recent years a growing body of evidence has implicated deficits in the automaticity of fundamental facts such as word and number recognition in a range of disorders: including ADHD, Dyslexia, Apraxia and Autism. Various described as habits, fluency, chunking and over learning, automatic processes are best understood in terms of their distinctive properties. While typically identified as fast, parallel, attention free processes, a commonly agreed definition of automaticity continues to elude theorists investigating this concept. Most theorists would, however, agree that since attentional resources are finite, automaticity of basic facts serves to free sufficient mental resources for a learner to focus their attention on the novel or more complex aspects of a task. Yet despite the importance of automaticity to the learner, the term remains largely unfamiliar to most educationalists and early years practitioners. In order to address this issue, the present paper seeks to review several influential theories of automaticity, to describe the problems associated with defining a process as automatic and to draw from relevant research to demonstrate how the early years environment can be organised to promote automaticity in the young learner.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last decade a growing body of research has investigated the relationship between automaticity and a wide range of learning disabilities including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dysgraphia, and dyscalculia (AASU, 2001; Warshaw, 2002). Evidence from these studies suggests an association between deficits in automaticity and difficulties in reading, reading comprehension, reading fluency, writing, numeracy, spelling, memory, speed, hearing, vision and balance (Gray, 1999; Nicolson & Fawcett, 1999). Similarly deficits in automatic word recognition have been shown to underpin dyslexia, while other research suggests that children with apraxia of speech (a difficulty in sequencing the motor movements necessary for volitional speech) have failed to automatise the basic components of speech (Vellerman, 2001).

## AUTOMATICITY & LEARNING

Among the earliest studies of automaticity was Huey's research into alphabet learning in young children. From this Huey (1908) concluded that practice and familiarity are essential for children to develop automaticity when learning the letters of the alphabet, new words and new word sequences. Support for this view comes from more recent research into the relationship between automaticity and higher order thinking. Gray (1999), for example, used a computer programme to measure individual levels of automaticity for addition facts in a large sample of children (n = 410) aged between 6 and 11 years of age. Her results offered empirical support for the commonly held view that children with high levels of automaticity for addition facts have correspondingly high scores on tests of mathematical ability. Gray concluded that in reducing the demands placed on limited mental resources, automaticity of simple arithmetic facts enabled children to focus their attention on the novel or more complex aspects of problem solving. Similar results were obtained from studies of preschool children who showed automaticity for paired addition problems such as 1 + 1 and 2 + 2 (Lemaire *et al.*, 1994), and from a range of other studies investigating links between automaticity and second language learning (Perfetti, 1996), writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980), reading (Hook & Jones, 2002), and spelling (Mulhern *et al.*, 1997).

Non-academic examples of automaticity include walking, riding a bicycle, dancing, driving and ice-skating. For example, a child's first faltering steps generally require intense concentration. On hearing their name the child may stop, turn towards the speaker, lose concentration, totter and fall. With sufficient practice the child may walk while talking and listening at the same time.

Another more commonly cited example of automaticity involves driving. Initially each of the sub skills required to get the car in motion demands a considerable amount of attention, however, with practice these skills become automatic to the extent that the driver may listen to the radio, talk to a passenger or check for road signs while driving. Implicit in these examples is the notion that automaticity develops through practice, that it is transferable, effortless and that it enables individuals to divide their attention between several tasks (i.e. to multi-task).

## DEFINING AUTOMATICITY

Yet despite the evidence presented above, a commonly agreed definition of automaticity continues to elude theorists. For that reason many prefer to focus on the processes involved in automaticity. For example, Schneider and Schiffrin (1977) and Schiffrin and Schneider (1977), who provided the first and most influential account of automaticity, described learning as a two-stage process, with controlled or serial processing at one end and automatic or parallel processing at the other. They also claimed that automatic processes (those which are well learned) were inflexible and impervious to change. Cheng (1985) was critical of this account and disputed the notion of automaticity. She claimed that changes attributed by Schneider and Schiffrin to automaticity were the result of information restructuring or chunking. According to this theory, a young child who frequently visits a hospital may develop an elaborate 'hospital schema' which might include information about uniforms worn, job titles and the roles performed by individuals including doctors, nurses and patients. They are therefore less fazed when a doctor appears in green scrubs or a suit than a child who associates doctors with white coats.

Despite the popularity of schema theories, other evidence indicates that similarly related information is not always recalled with equal speed, suggesting that it might not be stored collectively as suggested by Cheng (Eysenck & Keane, 1992). In attempting to account for differences in speed of recall, Flor and Dooley (1998) suggested that more than one schema could develop at a time with processing time slowed due to competition between similar schemas. According to Flor and Dooley over time a single schema would emerge to become dominant. This view is similar to a previous theory posited by Mackay (1982) who argued that, practice under consistent conditions leads to an increase in neural firing between the nodes in an existing neural network. Therefore modification in the network is not necessary to explain gains in speed and accuracy. This is the worn-path view, where connections are strengthened, or made easier to follow, due to repetition. While this may offer one explanation for gains in processing speed, it seems likely that there exist limits in reaction times due to limitations in the neurological and electric-chemical reaction speeds.

Consistent with this theory, Logan's (1990) Instance Theory of Automization describes the development of automaticity in terms of a progression from a

search algorithm schema to a direct retrieval schema. In the early stages of this model, a child or an adult might progressively work through a problem using a simple step-by-step problem solving approach. Each time the performance was repeated an instance (i.e. a memory trace) would be laid down. With repetition and practice, the number of steps required to solve the problem would reduce until eventually the solution would be recalled directly from memory. As new pathways were strengthened, other less frequently used routes would be forgotten.

## AUTOMATICITY DEFICITS

Although initially controversial, in recent years a number of theorists have argued a biological basis for automaticity deficits. Frith (1995), for example, was among the first to associate abnormalities in cerebral functioning with dyslexia. Support for this view was provided by Nicolson and Fawcett (1990/2001) who undertook a series of experiments with pre-school children spanning a 10 year period. Their initial work involving tests of balance and time estimation was based on the premise that automatic processes are fast and require little conscious effort. According to this theory, performance will degrade when dual-task conditions necessitate conscious effort. In order to test this hypothesis, Nicolson and Fawcett (1990) examined the performance of twenty-three thirteen-year-old dyslexic children on a test of motor balance, and compared it to that of same age controls. To test the "conscious compensation hypothesis" they introduced a secondary task to divert attention away from the primary task. They employed two groups, a control group who performed a single motor balance task and an experimental group who performed the motor balance task and a concurrent secondary task, designed to take up "conscious processing capacity". Their findings indicated that children with dyslexia performed at a lower rate and had significantly more impairment problems than non-dyslexic children. Based on this evidence and the results of behavioural and anatomical studies and brain imaging research, Nicolson and Fawcett (2001) concluded that cerebellar problems present at birth lead to problems in the development of skill (including articulation) fluency and automaticity.

## AUTOMATICITY DEFICITS

Paralleling the theoretical debate, in recent years another school of research has argued a biological basis for deficits in automaticity and learning. Frith (1995), for example, was among the first to associate abnormalities in cerebral

functioning with dyslexia. Support for this view was provided by Nicolson and Fawcett (1990/2001) who undertook a series of experiments with pre-school children spanning a 10 year period. Their initial work involving tests of balance and time estimation was based on the premise that automatic processes are fast and require little conscious effort. According to the “conscious compensation hypothesis”, performance will degrade when dual-task conditions necessitate conscious effort. In order to test this theory, Nicolson and Fawcett (1990) examined the performance of twenty-three thirteen-year-old dyslexic children on a test of motor balance and compared it to that of same age controls. They employed two groups, a control group who performed a single motor balance task and an experimental group who performed the motor balance task and a concurrent secondary task, which was designed to take up “conscious processing capacity”. Their findings indicated that children with dyslexia performed at a lower rate and had significantly more impairment problems than non-dyslexic children. Based on this evidence, findings from brain imaging research and the results of behavioural and anatomical studies, Nicolson and Fawcett (2001) concluded that cerebellar problems present at birth lead to problems in the development of skills including articulation, fluency and automaticity.

#### **AUTOMATICITY & LEARNING**

While automaticity has a pejorative ring for those who associate it with mindless rote learning, it can also imply as is intended here an opportunity for young children to gain familiarity with the basic concepts which form the building blocks of higher order thinking and learning. A number of interesting methods have been suggested to aid the early development of automaticity. For example, Kelly and Johnson (2001) argued that screening in the preschool years would enable practitioners to identify children at risk of automaticity deficits. Although initially confined to children with a history of dyslexia in the family, screening would ensure that, from their earliest years, those vulnerable to similar developmental difficulties were offered intensive training in word recognition to facilitate the development of automaticity. Despite their good intent, caution is required with programmes that may be interpreted as labelling children as failures, most especially when they occur in the early years of a child’s education. The long-term consequences of labelling are well documented and have been found to negatively impact on the developing child’s self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth.

Allied with early identification, other theorists have argued that motor skill intervention can help learning disabled children achieve automaticity (Farnham-Diggory, 1992). Although these studies indicate a significant improvement in motor tasks (e.g., Cammisa, 1994), there is little evidence of skill transfer to academic and social domains. Further criticism of these intervention programmes comes from research by Bluehardt and Shepard (1995), who found a significant improvement in the performance of both the control and experimental group members, which they attributed to the Hawthorne effect. Consequently, educators have been slow to adopt these methods.

Less controversially, perhaps, Koda (1996) suggested that classroom environments should be structured to reinforce learning and the development of automaticity through the use of visual displays and pictures associated with a learning task. Koda was also concerned that learning should not be viewed as domain specific and argued that teachers were responsible for ensuring that children understood how knowledge learnt in one context might be applied in another. Consistent with this view, Dewey (1998) claimed that the classroom environment should assist children in grasping the essential similarities between tasks. Dorn and Soffos (2001) went further when they argued that teacher’s should create the conditions necessary to promote the transfer of information across contexts. They also considered varied and repeated practice in a structured and supportive environment essential for the development of automaticity. Using basic numeracy as an example they offered the following set of guidelines, which they proposed could be adapted to a range of activities and modified to suit the needs of all children, irrespective of ability:

- The task must promote problem-solving strategies based on what the child already knows;
- Initially the task should be introduced with guidance and coaching from the teacher;
- The teacher should ensure the child understands the goal of the task and the specific instructions for carrying it out;
- Tasks should develop along a continuum from basic introductory units to the more challenging and complex aspects that involve higher order thinking;
- The skill should enable the child to track their own performance through journals and logs (Dorn & Soffos, 2001: 74).

Within this framework, teachers are encouraged to design a classroom program that reflects the expressed needs and interests of the child. For example, an environment that promotes practice with numbers in a variety of settings can be used to encourage the development of basic numeracy skills, without the need for mindless repetition and rote.

By acknowledging that many children come into early years settings having picked up some numeracy skills at home, teachers can initiate developmentally appropriate experiences in the classroom that build on the child's existing knowledge base and ultimately serve to develop automaticity.

The benefits of guided learning were summed by Collins *et al.*, (1991. p.38), who described them as 'the interplay between observation, scaffolding, and increasingly independent practice aids, apprenticeship both in developing self-monitoring and correction skills, and in integrating the skills and conceptual knowledge needed to advance towards expertise'. From a developmental perspective, the establishment of a system that emphasises skills such as planning and monitoring in the development of automaticity must play a central role in cognitive growth (English, 1992). Of equal importance is the flexibility of the programme, which can be tailored to suit the ability level of the most or least able pupil. However, a cautionary note was provided by Perfetti (1996), who argued that it would be unrealistic to expect high levels of automaticity to develop in the short time available to early years practitioners. Nevertheless, he claimed that even in one year practitioners should expect some dramatic increases in processing efficiency. Perfetti (1996: 16) offered teachers the following advice, 'lots of practice makes perfect, less practice makes less perfect, but when time is limited you do what you can'.

## SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

While a growing body of evidence implicates deficits in automaticity in a range of learning disabilities, theorists have failed to agree a common definition of automaticity. Most would, however, agree that automaticity is fast, that it involves parallel processing and that it reduces the demands placed on limited cognitive resources. Although it was beyond the scope of this paper to examine the extant literature in detail, theories pertinent to this discussion were briefly reviewed. Their findings suggest that automaticity of basic facts is fundamental to the acquisition of more complex skills and for the development of higher

order thinking and learning. An important and recurring theme of this paper was the role of practice in the development of automaticity. As was pointed out, practice should not be interpreted as rote learning or as meaningless repetition; rather it should be innovative, varied, interesting and appropriate to the developmental needs of the individual child. While it might be argued that the evidence presented here is not new, in drawing on research from a number of previously disparate areas it may serve to highlight the role that an early years practitioner can play in the development of automaticity.

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## PART 3

### Pedagogical Styles

## Towards a Nurturing Pedagogy – Re-conceptualising Care and Education in the Early Years

*Noirín Hayes*

### INTRODUCTION

Learning to make sense of the world dominates in early childhood education and characterises it as different from other levels of education. Research over the last three decades supports the fact that ‘human learning ... is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative, and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them’ (Bruner, 1996, p. 84). This recognition of the active and social nature of early learning is key to refocusing attention on to the relationships within early education. Young children learn to make sense of the world through active, participatory experiences; they also develop and learn by making sense of the world. Adults can play an important part in assisting children as they try to make sense and in directing their curiosity and questions in the way that is most appropriate to the context.

Learning is a complex, interactive and dynamic developmental process which happens in all environments – one way or another. Increasingly the focus of attention in contemporary educational research has moved away from considering the most effective methods of instruction for learning towards understanding the power of the interpersonal and the role of process in learning.

An emphasis on the process of learning requires a renewed attention to the role and practice of the adult. Teaching in early education is primarily about relationships. It is a social endeavour which is as much about developing with and in children a sense of belonging as it is about learning skills or acquiring knowledge (David, 1996). High quality early childhood education responds to the social nature of learning and the co-construction of knowledge is prized over the more traditional notion of individual learning. In this context it is prudent to take a closer look at the mediating process of learning as the actual process of interacting itself appears to be central to development.

### INTERACTIONS IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Child development research provides a strong basis for supporting the argument that quality early educational practice, highlighting the interpersonal and the educative value of interactions, is effective in enhancing young children’s learning. Apart from the intuitive notion that it is good for children to feel secure and to have a sense of belonging through the experience of positive interactions what is it about interactions that make them so important? Findings from studies into early brain research have confirmed the importance of intense, positive relationships as the basis for development (Blakemore, 2000; Shore, 1997). Models of development, such as the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Cecci, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), emphasise the crucial role of the interface between the biological and the social in child development and learning.

In writing on the topic of development in early education, Katz & Chard (1994) point out that, traditionally, early childhood education has drawn heavily on studies of human development with child study and child development being the key academic specialities of influence. Development is, they contend, most usefully considered as having two major dimensions, the normative and the dynamic.

The normative dimension of development addresses the question of what most children can and cannot do at a given age or stage and owes much to the work of Gesell in child study and Piaget in studies of cognitive development. ‘When we say that an activity is developmentally appropriate, speak of grade level achievement or apply a Gesell-type developmental measure, we are employing the normative dimension of the concept of development’ (Katz and Chard, 1994, p.18). Emphasising a stage approach to development commits to the notion that development follows a prescribed pattern – which in young children is to miss the point that they develop in a far messier and entangled way than the proposed linearity.

It is a weakness in early educational literature and debate that less attention is given to the dynamic dimension of development. The dynamic dimension of development matters more than the normative to the immediate development of young children. Its importance lies in the acknowledgement that human beings change over time and with experience and it allows for delayed impact and the long-term cumulative effect of repeated or frequent experiences.



Viewing development as a dynamic and discontinuous process, or as the 'to-ing and fro-ing' process proposed by Lambert and Clyde (2000) allows one to view behaviour and development in early childhood as adaptive to the demands of the niche of childhood. Such a perspective to development and context it provides an alternative and augmenting view of 'appropriate' to that proposed by Bredekamp & Copple (1997). Pellegrini and Bjorklund (1998) argue that 'appropriate' should be seen to refer to the role of individuals, materials and activities in meeting the immediate and particular needs of childhood rather than as a preparation for the next stage of development or for adulthood. 'This view suggests that individual children may take many different pathways to developmental competence in different periods' (p. 12). They propose an approach to early education which is not tied to the age and stage of development of the child but rather linked in to the socio-cultural context of development for the child in the present. Such an approach is exemplified by the practices at Reggio Emilia in Italy and in the Te Whariki early years curriculum of New Zealand where pedagogy is directed by the connections, interactions and relationships between children and the wider world, social, physical and emotional, rather than by prescribed expectations of developmental outcome (New Zealand, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1995.)

Sensitivity to both the normative and dynamic dimensions of development is critical in early education. To distinguish between what young children can do and what they should do is especially serious in the early years because most children appear willing, if not eager, to do what is asked of them even where this may be inappropriate. This is a central issue of debate when considering curriculum and practice in the early years and one that has been recognised by a number of authors (Bloom, 1981; Bruce, 1987; Bruner, 1996; Elkind, 1988; Gardner, 1991).

#### TOWARDS A NURTURING PEDAGOGY

Bruner (1996) suggests that if education is to empower humans to go beyond their potential it must transmit the tools appropriate to the society. These tools include empowering children to explore their own way of thinking and problem-solving. To assist this Bruner stresses the importance of intense interactions in language rich environments. References to such intense interactions echo the 'proximal processes', or engines of development, proposed by Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994;

Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) as the basis from which to extend our understanding of why it is that interactions are so important to development.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the extensive data emerging from neuropsychological, brain and psychological research, which support the importance of interactions to development. However, authors such as Aubrey *et al* (2000), Greenfield (2000) and Shore (1997) give useful reviews of research findings from various perspectives and theoretical stances which underpin the critical importance of early interactions to the development and learning of young children. Development is a process of continuous change that is self-maintaining, self-restoring and self-regulating (Bronson, 2001; Gaussen, 2002). Early brain research indicates that the brain is only partially mature at birth and continues to refine and develop over the first years of life (Shore, 1997). This makes it immediately susceptible to the ongoing influence of experiences of all types. Changes in development result from reciprocal transactions of the biologically maturing child with the social, physical and cultural environment and the quality of interactions impacts on development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Trevarthen, 1992). Culture is an organising influence in development (Bruner, 1996; Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978) and the learning context is important. Studies indicate that 'meaning-making' activity is enhanced by quality interactions. Results from observation of infant-caretaker interactions highlights the importance of joint attention to objects and events in assisting infants to come to attend to objects and recognise meaning-making and intention on the part of the other. Such data suggests that the co-construction of knowledge does not simply involve a cumulative effect of multiple individual contributions, but represents a stronger view of learning and the importance of the act of interacting, of shared meanings growing out of participation in shared activity. While research in neuroscience is providing exciting data about early brain development and the importance of interactions with people and objects there is, as yet, no clear link between results from such research and implications for teaching and learning in practice. However, a review of such research by Blakemore (2000) and Blakemore and Frith (2000) did conclude that 'there is no biological necessity to rush and put the start of teaching earlier and earlier. Rather, late starts might be reconsidered as perfectly in tune with findings from ... brain research' (p. 4)

In addition to research studies investigating how interactions impact on development there is research, from a variety of disciplines, providing us with

rich and powerful evidence about why they are important to how children learn; the nature of learning and the ways in which early experiences shape the patterns of progress, achievement and fulfilment, throughout an individual's life. This research highlights the importance of developing learning dispositions (Katz, 1995; Carr, 2002; Lambert & Clyde, 2000); encouraging a mastery, or learning, orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1989); promoting metacognitive skills (Kuhn, 1999; Shayer & Adey, 2002); developing cognitive and social self-regulation (Bronson, 2001); providing for multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1991, 1993) and fostering engaged involvement and emotional well-being (Goleman, 1996; Laevers, 1994, 2002). The picture emerging is one of quality early education settings as dynamic environments rich in interactions and communication where learning and development occurs in a complex, dynamic and shared context and not simply as a result of individual differences in ability or a specific model of practice.

Adults in early education are a critical mediating tool for development and learning – through their planning, preparation of the physical and social environment and their relationships with the children. The quality of interactions relates to the quality of development and learning. Adults assist young children in making sense of the world through a variety of mechanisms. These mechanisms include the 'scaffolding' of children's learning through carefully planned supported learning. Bruner comments on the importance of scaffolding and notes that 'as a teacher, you do not wait for readiness to happen; you foster or 'scaffold' it by deepening the child's powers at the stage where you find him or her now.' (Bruner, 1996, p.120). In placing fostering and scaffolding as central to effective teaching Bruner is acknowledging the nurturing role of the adult in early education. The scaffolding metaphor is well known but it has been subject to renewed criticism (Rasmussen, 2001) and to review (Berk and Winsler, 1995; Bickhard, 1992; Lambert and Clyde, 2000). It is a somewhat limiting metaphor in that it emphasises a uni-directional relationship from the expert to the novice rather than capturing the dynamic nature of educational practice and the learning process.

Vygotsky's idea of children's development having different zones gave rise to the popular concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is often considered co-terminus with scaffolding although both concepts were developed independently. Within the ZPD the role of the adult or expert is

highlighted as instructional rather than interpersonal and as a consequence it too can be considered as an insufficient mechanism to capture the dynamism of learning. There is a requirement in early educational discourse to consider both the interpersonal and instructional aspect of practice. Given the strength of the instructional focus in education literature it is important to highlight the interpersonal as educative in the same way as the instructional is regarded.

Recognising the child's part as an active participant in the process of learning, compatible with a similar rise in attention from psychological, sociological and rights research (Hayes, 2002; David, 1999) requires a shift in pedagogical approach from the traditional didactic approach of the classroom and the more 'laissez-faire' approach of activity based settings towards what Bruner calls a 'pedagogy of mutuality' (1996, p. 56) Such a pedagogy presumes that all minds are capable of holding ideas and beliefs which, through discussion and interaction, can be moved towards some shared frame of reference. 'It is not simply that this mutualist view is 'child-centred' but it is much less patronising towards the child's mind. It attempts to build on exchange of understanding between the teacher and the child: to find in the intuitions of the child the roots of systematic knowledge, as Dewey urged' (p.57). The importance of shaping and nurturing such learning dispositions to assist the development of critical thinking is now becoming a central issue of debate in relation to early educational pedagogy (Carr, 2001; Katz, 1995). The development of generative learning dispositions is largely about learning to recognise and search for opportunities to apply one's abilities. Quality early education environments provide such opportunities and the adult has a key role in shaping disposition through careful observation of children to identify and respond to the emerging dispositions particular to individual children at particular times and in particular contexts. Feedback to children from the learning environment needs to be clear, explicitly articulating the features of the context, the task, the process and their function in it.

It follows that the role of the adult in early education is central to the effectiveness of this pedagogy. The role of the early years teacher is multi-layered (Athey, 1990, Bowman *et al.*, 2001; ECEF, 1998; Spodek, 1996). Analysis of the various tasks of an educator reveals a cluster of functions, which fall into management and educational roles, which are intricately interconnected in practice. The management role of the teacher encompasses

planning for children's learning, resourcing and organising opportunities for learning; recording and documenting children's learning and evaluating practice and adapting to the interests and needs of children. The educational role of the teacher involves reflective observation to inform practice, supporting and extending learning in groups and with individual children, understanding what is happening as children learn and responding to this understanding and working in partnership with other adults and children themselves in the process that is early education. Bowman and her colleagues (2001) expand on the importance of the adult in early education, particularly identifying those characteristics to be developed through training. Well trained teachers are confident in their knowledge of child development and familiar with the skills and knowledge appropriate to the age group in their setting; they are careful and sympathetic listeners and respectful to children; they negotiate meaning rather than impose it; they are reflective observers who are able to adjust to children and provide sensitive feedback. Such practices are the manifestation of what could be characterised as a 'nurturing pedagogy' and embody a trust in the educative value of care in early education.

### RECONCEPTUALISING CARE

The independent development of the educational and childcare sectors has been identified as one of the key problems facing the development of early education in Ireland as, traditionally the communication between the two traditions has been rather limited (Kellaghan, cited in ERC, 1998). The power and influence of this historical distinction can be seen in the government White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Ireland, 1999) which commits to the underlying principle that 'for young children, education and care should not be separated.'(p.4) while at the same time noting that 'care is the dominant requirement of children aged less than 3 years and ... education is a more significant need of older children.' (p. 4). Despite references to the care and education aspect of early education there is a tendency to underestimate the educative role of caring.

In the context of the continuing distinction made between care and education, a distinction which mirrors that made between play-based and academic models of early education, Caldwell (1989) attempted to find a balance by coining the terms 'educare'. This concept was intended to bring together care and education as equally important for curriculum development and pedagogy

and was intended to describe an approach to education, which offered 'a developmentally appropriate mixture of education and care; of stimulation and nurture; of work and play' (p. 266). Although the term has not really been taken up in the everyday language of early education it did force further debate about how best to consider these two interconnected elements of early education and, in particular, how to reconceptualise 'care' so that it ranks equally with education in early educational process and practice (Hayes, 2003a; Karlsson and Pramling, 2003). One of the obstacles to this is the strong association between the concept of care and that of mothering. To move beyond this it is necessary to improve our understanding of what it is to be a caring teacher and to acknowledge that it goes far beyond the notion of 'gentle smiles and warm hugs' which obscures the critical developmental and educational value of early education and the complex intellectual challenge of working with young children (Dalli, 2003).

In reading the authors writing in the late 19th and early 20th century it is striking to note their references to nurture rather than care when writing about the needs of the very youngest children. The word nurture has quite a different tone to it than the word care. In comparing the meaning of the two words 'nurture' is far more engaging and active than 'care'. To care is almost custodial in tone and requires a minimum of interaction; the adult merely provides for and looks after the child. To nurture, on the other hand conveys a far more engaged level of interaction and requires the adult to actively nourish, rear, foster, train, and educate the child.

The title Froebel finally gave to his centres for the education of young children – kindergarten – was intended to capture his belief that young children's learning needed to be nurtured. For this reason he also argued that only women should teach very young children! Robert Owens in his educational facilities also recognised the importance of play in a nurturing environment when he dictated that children under six years should not be 'annoyed by books' but, rather should be allowed to play and make music (Tizard & Hughes, 1984). The word nurture – as opposed to care – was used by McMillan (1920) when she claimed that a lack of education and nurturance in the first years of life would 'cloud and weaken' all the rest of life (Curtis, 1997).

The caring or nurturing responsibility of the adult – where it recognises that care should be more than merely 'minding' – gives an enhanced educational

role to it. The idea of considering care as nurture gives it an active connotation with a responsibility on the adult to provide nurturance and foster learning rather than to simply mind or protect the child. Such a shift in emphasis would raise the expectations we have of teachers in early education. The role of the adult in early childhood education is crucial and multi-faceted (Athey, 1990). It is a combination of listener, questioner, advisor, demonstrator, actor, sympathiser, negotiator, assessor and guide. In addition the adult must recognise their role as a 'learner', a reflective observer of children who learns from observation and uses this as the basis for pedagogical practice.

Elsewhere it has been argued that reconceptualising care as nurture would strengthen the attention to the educative value of care and allow for a more appropriate 'nurturing pedagogy' to emerge in early education learning environments (Hayes, 2003b). If adults are to nurture children's learning they must develop skills of observation and reflection to allow for the non-intrusive planning and provision of a learning environment that supports and extends children's own learning. This allows for increased attention to positive interactions between child and adult and also allows for planning by the adult for future opportunities that might extend the child's own learning; it gives a role to the adult which takes the child as central. It encourages the movement away from the organisational/management role of the teacher and fosters the processes of interaction, dialogue and planning leading to the co-construction of knowledge. Such practice is presented here as a 'nurturing pedagogy' in contrast to practice dominated by didactic teaching or activity based learning. The term 'nurture' has been chosen because it confers a more active interpersonal role on the adult than either the term 'care' or the processes implicit in the metaphor of 'scaffolding' and the concept of ZPD. In order to nurture an adult must inter-actively *nourish, rear, foster, train and educate* the child. To nurture requires an engaged, bidirectional level of interaction and confers on the early years teacher an enhanced, educational role.

## CONCLUSION

Research data from neuro-psychology, developmental psychology and early education all provide evidence of the positive, generative function of quality interactions in development and learning. The bi-directional nature of social interactions appears crucial to development. Adults who attend to the active contribution of the child in an interaction can reflect on this to allow for non-

intrusive planning and provision of a learning environment that nurtures and extends the child's own learning. Interactions are the central mechanism through which children learn; interactions with their environment and the people and objects therein. It is also through interactions that adults can inform their planning and practice and so the interactive process has the potential to become doubly transformative. The transformative nature of interactions can be seen in their positive impact on child development and are enhanced, for both children and adults, through a nurturing pedagogy.

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## Setting the 'What If' Free: Some Theoretical Perspectives on Talking and Thinking in an Infant Classroom – an Investigation into One Teacher's Practice

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper I hope to explain how and why I have generated my own theory of teaching philosophical enquiry to young children. I encourage children to use their philosophical imaginations in order to come to think independently and exercise their freedom of choice and creative spirit in deciding how they should live their lives. I explain how the values of freedom of mind and spirit act as animating principles for my work, as I encourage young children to develop their spirit of enquiry, and I show how I try to create a democratic classroom in the interests of fairness for all to think independently and free from constraint, while justifying their right to do so. I explain how I am attempting to transform cultures of traditional didactic pedagogies into cultures of creative and collaborative dialogue in which teachers and students imagine how they can transform their present realities into creative new futures.

It is my belief that young children are natural philosophers. They question persistently in order to understand and make sense of their world. However, many children, who enter primary school full of wonder, soon conform to norms of behaviour in classrooms that often lack opportunities for questioning. Philosophy begins in wonder and is about retaining the capacity to remain astonished at life. It is about imagination, thinking, and asking important questions. Through a process of classroom dialogue called 'Thinking Time', I believe that there is a way of setting the 'what if' free again. This paper addresses the theoretical frameworks, and the learning outcomes, of these weekly classrooms discussions.

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

I am involved in a self-study as part of my doctoral research. This entails an examination of my practice as a primary teacher through an action research

methodology. Through my study I aim to investigate how I hope to understand, develop and improve my practice as I endeavour to engage the children in my class with higher-order levels of thinking. I am also looking at ways in which I can encourage colleagues to develop classroom pedagogies that stimulate imaginative dialogue among their students. My work with colleagues has already generated a noticeable change in school culture. I am fortunate to share my workplace with a group of teachers who are committed to reflective practice and constantly seek innovative teaching and learning strategies. Thinking Time is now part of the weekly syllabus of every class in our school. Transcripts are evaluated on a monthly basis and teacher-to-teacher exchanges are frequently peppered with references to insights they have gained into their students' inner selves from their contributions in the discussions. In my research diary I have several references to colleagues' astonishments at the levels of higher-order thinking displayed by their students. This has the potential to change teaching and learning, I believe, because good teaching – *educare* – is premised upon finding out, and then building on, what the child already knows.

#### EPISTEMOLOGY

The epistemological concerns raised in my study are to be found under such broad headings as emancipatory education and transformative learning (Freire 1970, 1973, 1985; Mezirow 1991); critical education theory (Apple 1985, 2000, Giroux 1988; 1989 Popkewitz 1984,1991,1999), postmodernism (Foucault 1980, 1984, Lyotard 1984); radical pedagogy (Ayers 1993, 1995, Holt 1964, 1967; hooks 1994; Greene 1978, 1988, 1995; Kozol 1991). The methodological considerations are drawn from the work of McNiff 1988, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 2000) whose generative transformational theory in action research informs my methodology, as does the 'living' educational theory of Whitehead (1989, 1993). Specific to the study also is the theory underpinning philosophising with children (Egan 1999; Fisher 1998; Lipman 1991, 1993; Matthews 1980; Quinn 1997; Splitter and Sharp 1995).

#### PERSONAL CONTEXT

I have been teaching for thirty years, in several primary schools, and for much of that time I was acutely aware that not enough time was being given to 'pupil talk'. There is ample research to show that 'teacher talk' is the dominant talk in the classroom. This evidence demonstrates, more than anything else, a view of knowledge that is at conflict with my own values. It is the view that knowledge

is a reified transmissible 'box of tricks' that can be poured into a child's head. It predicated a view of learning as passive acceptance of a body of facts and a pedagogical model of teaching as the technical delivery of a set syllabus. It is reflected in any architect's blueprints for a school building. As recently as last week (12 May 2003), I had evidence of this as I perused the plans for our own new school – all seats are in neat rows and all face forward, for here at the front of the class, it is presumed, is the locus of 'knowledge'. I challenge such a view. I know that I am not the only 'knower' in my classroom and I have come to that knowledge through the weekly discussions and daily conversations with my class of ten girls and fourteen boys all aged between four and a half and five and a half years.

Consider these answers to the question '*What do you think beauty is?*'

- Rainbows that elves goes (sic) sliding on are beautiful.
- I know what beauty means ... maybe it means that things look nice.
- I know what it means ... it's like when an angel is nice.
- The moon is beautiful when it shines out.
- Beautiful is when something smells really good.
- Painting houses is beautiful ... really painting with a big brush.
- A sunny day and people can go out to play—that's beautiful.
- Dinosaurs are beautiful.
- Princesses are really beautiful.
- I like snow. It's beautiful and nice and furry.
- I like beds 'cos snuggling is beautiful.
- Beautiful is being kind.
- My golf set is my favourite thing in the whole world—it is so beautiful.
- Fairies are beautiful 'cos they're made of stars.
- I think flowers are beautiful 'cos they have all different faces and all different colours
- All the different rides in Disneyland are beautiful.
- Butterflies and stars and rainbows make you feel happy – that's what beautiful means.
- I agree with x ... beds are beautiful; it's nice to go to sleep at night.
- Flowers smell lovely and perfume smells lovely.
- Staying up late at night and watching a movie—that's beautiful too.
- Grass smells beautiful when it's crinkled up.

- A hug – ‘cos it makes you feel better when you’re sick
- Rings have diamonds and the diamonds always shine and that’s really beautiful.

My Junior Infant class gave these very individual and lyrical definitions of beauty, in February 2003. At that time sixteen of them were four years of age and the other eight had recently turned five. They may not remember any one of these definitions, but it is likely that they will remember that there was no one correct answer. They have learned that for some questions everybody’s answer is correct. I believe that for these young children this is the very foundation of a pluralistic and inclusive way of knowing.

### LOCATION CONTEXT

I work in a very new primary school, located in an affluent suburb of Cork city. The school has a Catholic ethos and a mission statement that emphasises questioning as the door to learning. The school is growing organically from an initial cohort of 32 children and 2 teachers in 2000, to the present 172 children and 6 teachers. The current projection is that the school will ultimately be a 16-teacher school.

### THINKING TIME

I have already done some work in the area of classroom dialogue through the use of a programme called ‘Thinking Time’. Philomena Donnelly – then a teacher in a suburban primary school in Dublin, now a lecturer in St. Patrick’s College of Education – coined this term in 1994, when she adapted the work of Matthew Lipman to suit an Irish context. Lipman’s work began in the US in the late 1970’s, when, as Chair of Psychology at Columbia University, he became concerned about the apathetic and passive attitude to schooling displayed by the majority of his freshmen psychology students. This, combined with his dismay at falling scores on standardised tests, led him to question if, in fact, it was schooling itself that was failing rather than students. This spurred him to design a programme of thinking skills for children called Philosophy for Children – now called P4C. Working strictly with the Lipman methodology entails undergoing strict teacher training and rigorous adherence to Lipman’s own texts. This is a useful and worthwhile programme, but Donnelly, in conjunction with Dr Joe Dunne of St Patrick’s College, devised an alternative strategy and introduced it to Irish schools in 1989 (Donnelly 2001 p. 278). This movement is now called Philosophy with Children to make a distinction between it and Lipman’s programme.

### FACILITATION

The Irish model is less teacher-centred than the American one. In fact, the ideal is for the teacher to devolve total power of discussion to the children. The teacher sits in the discussion circle with the children and waits her turn to talk. The children take turns to talk, indicating that they are finished speaking by ‘tipping’ the person next to them. This person then has the freedom to choose to speak or not to speak. This is a very liberating experience for a child because they know that not speaking is a choice, and not an indication of ‘not-knowing’.

### EDUCATIVE RELATIONSHIP

Carrying out my research involves looking at the educative relationship that I have with colleagues and with my research collaborators – the children in my classroom – from a perspective linked very closely with the values I hold around issues of democracy, fairness, knowledge and power. As well as *poiesis* – a commitment to learning outcomes, I am also seeking *praxis* – a recognition that my practice ‘should be constitutive of a worthwhile way of life’ (Dunne 1993: 10).

To examine one’s practice necessitates a process of reflection. Conscious reflection does not come easily to me. I tend to be an impulsive person. I go with my hunches, often relying on my ‘tacit or innate knowledge’ (Polanyi 1959: 24). However Polanyi also states that tacit knowledge can only be made explicit and articulated with reflection. To facilitate my reflection I have been keeping a research journal in which I record events in the classroom, conversations with colleagues or parents or with the children themselves. I also record all the Thinking Time sessions and transcribe them. I encourage all teachers to do this as a way of evaluating and reflecting on the children’s dialogues.

According to Rudduck (1991) many experienced teachers do not see the ‘capacity for analysis and reflection as part of their mainstream image of professional practice’ (p 324). However, reflectivity should be viewed as an essential component of a teacher’s practice. It is, states Rudduck, a robust and developmental action not a ‘flabby armchair aspiration’ (p324).

### THE VALUES I HOLD ABOUT EDUCATION

As I gain knowledge and insights into my practice and from my practice, the values that I hold about teaching and learning are evolving. I believe that education is a lifelong ongoing process. I believe that, by its very nature,



education has a moral dimension and is involved with the construction of shared meanings. The view that sees education as the mere processing of information belongs with a narrow mechanistic, behaviourist worldview. Yet on a daily basis we hear pleas for a 'return to basics' in education (Apple 2000). The idea that questioning and critique should be part of the curriculum for young children is, for some, a very dangerous one. Featherstone, in Ayers (ed. 1995: 16-20) likens current right-wing trends in education to Mr. Gradgrind's school in Dickens' *Hard Times*. Gradgrind insists on a curriculum restricted to 'facts, facts, facts'. 'You are not to wonder' he tells the children in his school. The Irish National school system – which was much of mainstream Irish primary education – was bound up with catechetics, a factor which, for many years closed down opportunities for challenging the status quo. According to Murphy (1999:11) cited in Hearne (2002: 67) religious evangelism was part of the education experience for many in the 19th century. Schools founded and run by nuns and brothers were committed to promoting Catholicism. Uniformity and order would have been encouraged through the school rules, says Hearne, so that children would have been in pursuit of both knowledge and piety. Part of the primary purpose of the founding of such schools would have been the socialising of children to a pre-existing value system. This is not to denigrate in any way the excellence of most of these schools. They were of their era and of a worldview that precluded questioning. Until the introduction of the 'Children of God' religious instruction programme in the 1980's which was, in turn, replaced by the 'Alive-O' programme in the 1990's, religious instruction had no space for dialogue or questioning. Catechism, consisting of ready-made questions and ready-made dogmatic answers, was learned by rote. No critical thinking was allowed, no 'wondering' – as in Mr. Gradgrind's school – because wondering causes trouble. It is my belief that teachers and children alike should wonder, challenge, question and critique. Victor Quinn likewise, pleads for teachers to 'interrupt the tabloid culture' by educating for critical thinking.

'I want children to delight in seeing the weakness of the argument to which their parents are prey and victims. I want them to see the hypocrisy and contradiction that are endemic features of moral and political persuaders.' (1997: 5). New scholarship and educative influence

#### NEW SCHOLARSHIP AND EDUCATIVE INFLUENCE

I am old enough to have been schooled in a time when a behaviourist model of teaching and learning prevailed. Children like me sat passively in meek, silent

rows and absorbed facts and figures. Those who could regurgitate these at the appropriate time in examinations generally made it through the system to the next level – if they could afford to, financially. And here too an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo existed. All the pure abstract theory remained still, on 'the high hard ground' of Schon's (1995) metaphor. The post war societal changes of the 1950s and 1960s brought about educational changes and a corresponding assertive challenge from those in the 'swampy lowlands'. And now, just as I know instinctively that a constructivist pedagogical model makes more sense than a behaviourist model, so too my tacit and personal knowledge allows me to feel comfortable with a research paradigm that brings about change and transformation. I feel confident belonging to one that encourages reflection and a critical pedagogy. One that challenges the new threat of the encroaching marketplace culture of education is at ease with my values. I feel no tug on my conscience as I embrace it.

For an example of the power of educative influence we need only look at the transformative effect that Paolo Freire has had on millions of lives by the full living out of his values as he taught, reflected and wrote. Our sophisticated, modern world is still very much affected and influenced by the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Accepting that there is a common good towards which we all aspire, I know now that an educative influence can be reciprocal. The children I teach also impact on and influence me. Schon (1987) refers to this as reflection-in-action. He says ...

When a teacher turns her attention to giving kids reason, to listening to what they say, then teaching itself becomes a form of reflection-in-action ... it involves getting in touch with what kids are actually saying and doing; It involves meeting the kid in the sense of meeting his or her understanding of what's going on and helping the kid co-ordinate the everyday knowing-in-action that he brings to the school with the privileged knowledge that he finds in school

(1987: <http://hci.stanford.edu/other/schon87/htm> ).

To me, this clearly demonstrates the constructivist ideal of building on the child's experience – '*educare*' – to draw out.

In that same 1987 presentation to the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Schon spoke extensively about knowledge. He used the

term 'school-knowledge' for what he considered to be the prevailing view of the epistemology of schools at the time – the notion that knowledge is a product and the more general and theoretical the knowledge is the higher it is deemed to be. He linked this knowledge with ideas of predictability and control, which, he said, were essential features of all bureaucracies and were also features of educational reform.

Because the center-periphery model of reform, through large-scale government intervention ... also demands the packaging of knowledge and the presentation of replicable methods (1987: <http://hci.stanford.edu/other/schon87/htm>).

Kerry and Tollitt (1995: 1) in Costello (2000: xi) comment on the recent 'dumbing down' in education literature – the proliferation particularly in Early Years' Education, of the 'teacher tips' type of literature. They bemoan the dearth of a practical body of Early Years literature of the sort that makes frequent reference to research or to theoretical underpinning in the analysis of teaching skills. Embodied research such as self-studies of practice – practical, lived theory – that are, I believe, ground breaking in the new epistemology of education, while at the same time firmly grounded in the established epistemology, should help to redress this situation. And here is where I believe that I can educatively influence the epistemology of education.

Schon (1987) states too, that yet another view prevails where knowledge is seen as molecular – built up of basic units of information – and that it is the teacher's job to communicate it and the students' job to 'get it'. This reification of knowledge is very comforting for some 'educators'. If the students fail to 'get it' then there is a need to explain this and so, labels like 'slow learner' or 'poor motivation' are applied. These, Schon says, are often strategies designed to remove the failure of the students in not 'getting it' from the range of things with which teachers might have to deal.

He contrasts this with his own view of knowledge-in-action – knowing more than we can say and exhibiting this in what we do. A revolutionary difference exists, he says, between 'school knowledge' and 'reflection-in-action'. There are splits between school and life, he says, that make many students feel that school has nothing to do with life. For teachers there are splits between teaching and doing so that what we teach is not what we do and what we do is not what we

teach. There are splits too between research and practice, which means, he says, that research is divorced from and even divergent from real practice.

Action researchers engaged in critical self-evaluation and working within the framework of 'living theory' (Whitehead, 1989) often feel a split between their values and those of the workplace culture. Reconciling these various divergences between what is and what ought to be is the challenge for those involved in educational action research. The technical rationality and culture of mere schooling that pervades our schools is a major concern at the heart of all reflective practitioners. Inglis (1985:23), cited in Apple's introduction to Egan (1988) states that the curriculum is ...

... no less than the knowledge system of a society ... [containing] ... not only the ontology, but also the metaphysics and ideology which that society has agreed to recognise as legitimate and truthful ... [it] is the reference point and acknowledged definition of what knowledge, culture, belief, morality, really are.(p ix).

Apple continues by stating that our ideas about education tell us a vast amount about ourselves, and about our view of society, as well as about the values we hold around truth, justice, equality and human caring. Because these are extremely political and ethical issues, Apple argues, our education is also extremely valuative. Dewey (1902) wrote in a similar fashion about the American society at the beginning of the twentieth century ...

What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon; it destroys our democracy (p 3).

If I accept these views as true, then I cannot avoid being influential in my teaching as I struggle to impart such values – values that I hold to be important for the common good – to the children in my care. I now know that the impact of Thinking Time on my teaching and on the class atmosphere encourages even greater instances of influence. I wrote some time ago about doing classroom discussions with my young students:

When I engaged in dialogue with my students in 'Thinking Time'

I got to know these children as people. Their individual personalities and characters were manifested to me in a way I had not experienced before with any other class. We built up strong bonds of trust with each other and I suspect that they will always be a close-knit group as a result (Roche 2001:88).

I cannot remain impartial, objective and uninvolved with the people with whom I share my classroom. I influence my pupils. How much of this is due to the person that I am? How much is due to lesson content? They influence me – I am aware of this, especially as I carry out my study. Is this influence educative also? It seems to me that educative influence may be a very elusive and quantitatively unfathomable concept. How can anyone know what influences have been brought to bear on life's choices? Glass (2001) discussing Freire (1970) would have us believe that 'history and culture make people even while people are making that very history and culture' (p 15) – a view echoed in Maclure (1996).

Modelling also takes place in the classroom. The hidden curriculum, referred to earlier, is one often absorbed by children through ambience. Sighs, eyebrow raising, frowns and eye rolling on the part of their teacher can impart far more to a child than a negative written report. It is by how we are rather than by what we say that we teach. I have seen how our classroom dialogues engender respect for, and knowledge of, each other as real people. It is less likely that we will hurt those whom we know, respect, and like. Likewise, by our behaviour towards the others in our school community we may embed lasting impressions, for good or bad, in young minds. One need only read the anecdotal articles entitled 'My Schooldays' in the, sadly now defunct, *Education and Living Supplement* of the *Irish Times*, to see evidence of the influence for good that many inspirational teachers have had on people. What is remarkably consistent in all of the narratives is the way in which the humanity of some ordinary teachers – their qualities of everyday kindness or integrity – is remembered and singled out for special mention as being extraordinary, long after the content of their lessons is forgotten.

And so as an educator involved in self-study and critical reflection, I focus on the quality of the experience of *being* in school and not just on its outcomes – on the living together that teachers and children experience in their classrooms.

I feel that this 'being together' finds a greater niche in Thinking Time than in other curricular areas and is now influencing how we are with each other, more and more throughout the school day. I am now less concerned, in my study, with enunciating conceptual meanings than with applying myself to the ordinary experience and its implications for my practice. In this I echo Schon's (1995) argument regarding the dilemma of rigour or relevance. Using his topographical analogy he contrasted the abstract, pure theory of the academy on the high, hard ground, to the seething, messy – but real – practices in the swampy lowlands. Those of us engaged in new forms of scholarship recognise ourselves in this theory. However, prior to the notion of Schon's 'new scholarship' and practitioner-based research, it would have been unlikely that the theorists would ever have access to such accounts of practice.

### LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

I see my classroom as a 'community of enquiry' in which we learn with, about and from each other. In my opinion we learn best, and most, in community with others and this is particularly true for young children. The focus of 'Thinking Time' is on developing the children's ability to think creatively and abstractedly and their ability to discuss these thoughts with their peers in class. Building on the theories of Dewey, Donaldson, Egan, Fisher, Lipman, Matthews, Piaget and Vygotsky among others, this programme builds up a community of philosophical enquiry where the children learn to think and engage in dialectic dialogue with each other and with their teacher. However, the weekly timetabled sessions are now spilling over into every aspect of the curriculum; our discussions are frequent, lively and have become a way of being and a way of knowing together.

### 'COMMUNITY OF ENQUIRY'

A long tradition of using the classroom as a 'community of enquiry' already exists. Splitter and Sharp (1995: 30) state that the phrase comes from the Pragmatist tradition, notably from C.S.Peirce and G.H.Mead. Despite the fact that these philosophers did not consider the idea of children as philosophers – and so their scientific enquiry was amongst adults – Splitter and Sharp see it, nevertheless, as being central to an understanding of philosophy with children. They go on to state that the idea of community has been a common theme in theories of cognition (Resnick and Klopfer 1989). For me, endeavouring to set up a community of enquiry in my classroom entails engaging with notions of

social and reflective dimensions of learning (Glaser 1992). In my previous study for my MA in Education (Roche 2000), the community of my classroom became an environment of reciprocal care. There was a huge development in the interpersonal relationships between my students and each other and my students and me. Other teachers who have made studies of Thinking Time sessions with their classes have also attested to this phenomenon. (Campbell 2001; Donnelly 1994; Hegarty 2000; Russell 2000) According to Splitter and Sharp (1995: 30) this is the basis of the ethical dimension of co-operative enquiry. They go on to cite Alderman, (1973: 219) who argues that the Socratic mode of argument known as 'dialectic' – which includes dialogue and questioning – is a 'mode of caring in which, when we care for the other, we care for ourselves'.

Noddings, (2002) categorises the three main types of conversation as being

- Formal conversation, such as in Habermas's 'practical discourse' (1983/1990)
- Immortal conversations, such as conversations about the existential or immortal topics: What is the meaning of my life? What is my place in the universe?
- The 'very heart of moral education – the quality of 'ordinary conversation'.

All three kinds of conversation are woven together in Thinking Time, I think. However, as a result of my doctoral studies, I now know that certain classroom conditions are necessary for this kind of work to be a success. The personality of the teacher and the resulting ambience in the classroom are of paramount importance. The 'very heart of moral education – ordinary conversation' will not take place without trust and safety in dialogue. And without the ordinary conversation there will be no formal conversation, I believe. Featherstone (in Ayers (ed) (1995) also speaks of the need for the individual to learn in a community. While Mr. Gradgrind saw school as a small factory in which elite managers make decisions for the passive hands, Dickens viewed education as taking part in a democratic community much as in Dewey's (1916) idea of 'embryonic democracies'.

'Mr. Gradgrind doesn't get this. He preaches rugged individualism but is at bottom an enemy of true individuality. But students who haven't learned to

listen won't have much of a chance of finding their distinctive voices; nor will students who have never spoken in class about something that really matters to them or made some significant choices at some important points about their own learning' (p 20).

The subjectivity of the students in Bloom's 'The Closing of the American Mind' (1987), display values that are nothing more than soft relativism. According to Bloom, these students feel that no one has the right to criticize another's values and that every individual's choices ought to command respect. To allay any fears that that is what we are about in Thinking Time I reiterate my belief that teaching for critical thinking goes some way towards ensuring that such blind subjectivism, as well as hegemony, will be challenged and exposed.

### MY EARLIER STUDY

In researching this work previously, (Roche 2000) I looked at what got the children talking most freely. During that study, I was working in a boys' school located in an area of urban disadvantage on the north side of Cork city. I knew I wanted to improve my practice in relation to giving the children more scope in class for pondering, speculating, wondering and questioning. I wanted them to experience what it was like to do this as part of the society of their classroom – in their own community of enquiry. I wanted them to experience the dignity of speaking to an actively listening audience. I wanted them to do their thinking and enquiring in a safe and free environment. I also wanted to use the sessions as a way towards developing confidence and a positive self-image in children who might be lacking these feelings. The children involved were all boys aged between six and eight years of age.

I began by using stories, pictures, poems and issues from the SPHE programme as 'starters' or stimuli. These got the children talking, but I often felt that I had to prod or drive the discussion along. This negated my view that the children themselves should be able to keep the discussion going, with my role as a mere discussion participant rather than an authority figure. It seemed to me that the dialogue was slightly artificial at times or that only some of the children got involved with enthusiasm. Then I tried asking the children to suggest topics. We held two different sessions called respectively 'What if' and 'I wonder why'. The result was a hugely varying list of topics such as:

Why are girls and boys different?  
What if you could take out some of your bones?  
Why do we get scary dreams and nightmares?  
Why can't we be invisible?  
Why can't we have nine lives like a cat?  
How did God make up all the words in our languages?  
What did God make the moon for?  
Why didn't God just make all men and no women?  
Why can't animals speak?  
I wonder why God made the earth if he didn't know what it was?  
Why do teeth fall out – why didn't we just get the right ones first?  
How did God make the sky?  
Where does magic come from? What if you could have magic for just one day?  
How would it be if we could understand what animals think and feel?  
If you were magic and you changed peoples language what would happen?  
Why did God make both people and animals, why not just people?  
What will happen when the last person on earth dies?  
What would it feel like to know you were the last person on earth?  
Why did we invent trophies?  
If children's bones are stronger than adults' are then why aren't children stronger than adults?  
Why isn't the sun red or blue?  
What if there was no such thing as money?  
Why is everybody's language different?  
Why can't chairs and cars and everything talk? Is it because they can't think?  
Can animals think? What would fish think about?  
Why can't we see when our eyes are closed? How can we see when we are dreaming?  
Why are people different colours?  
What if you could tunnel through the ground?  
Why did God give himself magic powers and why didn't he give some to us?  
Why can't we be unhurttable?  
What is weather? Why do we need weather?  
Do the seeds know that we planted them? Why do they wait until they are planted to begin growing?  
What would happen if there was (sic) no such things as trees?

This list would make an interesting study in itself. It shows the enormous range of interests and questions that these children have about life, about themselves, about God, about the universe. Many of the big existential questions are there. I typed them all out, cut them into strips and we put them into a box called 'Our Thinking Box'. A child made a 'lucky dip' selection every week and we discussed whatever topic was chosen. New topics were added on several occasions, sometimes arising from the discussions and sometimes from other curricular areas. The discussions were lively; interest was held; there was good and respectful listening throughout and when I analysed the transcripts for evidence of higher-order thinking it was there in abundance (see Roche 2000).

This work generated many different kinds of learning outcomes. One of these learning outcomes was for our school inspector who took part in a discussion on Outer Space. Here was the amazing phenomenon of children respectfully listening to the inspector's views and then, equally respectfully, challenging what they perceived to be some holes in his argument. A similarly remarkable outcome for me was that the same children began challenging me in other curricular areas. It was not unusual for a child to say 'Teacher, I totally disagree with you there' and I would accept that, so long as the child could back up the argument. One of the rules of the discussion, devised by our class was that one couldn't say 'I agree' or 'I disagree' unless it was followed by 'because ...'. Out of this work came some highly significant intrapersonal learning for the children. Three children, who were attending learning support, began to show an increase in confidence and to take active parts in the discussions. Their confidence grew to the extent that the learning support teacher remarked on it. 'Inner glow' was how she described it. Parents testified to the fact that the children were coming home from school and continuing the conversation in the car, at mealtimes and in one case in the bath! The following year, the teacher who took these children on to the next class, remarked on the transfer of learning that she observed. She noted how the children in both large and small group discussions were democratic and fair in the way they carried on their dialogues. Colleagues, who sat in on discussions as observers and who had taught these children previously, could scarcely believe the change in some of the hitherto very withdrawn and timid children.

#### **EVOLVING VALUES, EVOLVING THEORY, EVOLVING CRITERIA**

I believe that education is about opening doors to learning and creativity and it is about freeing minds to thinking critically and making good choices. I

now see that children are complete in themselves. They are not embryonic senior pupils nor embryonic secondary pupils nor embryonic adolescents nor embryonic adults. They are complete right now – whatever their stage of development. Thus, another of my educational values is that we must allow and enable each person both the space to be now, and to become, a full and active participant in a democratic society. I believe that teaching for better thinking is a must in today's media driven society. Foucault (in Rabinow, 1988: 388) says that 'thought is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question its meanings, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object and reflects upon it as a problem'. Foucault's interest is in 'detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony' (1980: 132-133). Like Apple, Arendt, Chomsky, Dewey and many others voices speaking out against the closing of minds, 'Foucault calls for reflection on the rules that govern discourse at particular moments in time and on the assumptions that underlie it' (Greene 1993)

## CRITERIA

The judgements that I will make about my work will be drawn from my values. These following questions will be among the criteria by which I will evaluate whether or not I am living to my values.

- Do I encourage my students to think for themselves in a democratic classroom?
- Do I provide opportunities for my students to ponder and question and critique?
- Do I encourage my students to become reflective learners?
- Do I model respect, fairness and integrity?
- Do I foster and encourage dialogue?
- Do I demonstrate that my educative influence is bringing about a climate of mutual respect and care in my classroom and in my workplace?
- Do I show that I value individuality as well as community?

As I carry out my weekly dialogues and look for ways of opening doors to new learning I am evolving as a learner and as a teacher simultaneously. I am also evolving a 'living' educational theory (Whitehead 1993). Rather than simply

taking existing propositional theory and trying to apply it *to* my practice, I am instead generating educational theory *out of* my practice. I now challenge several assumptions. For example, I find myself challenging the behavioural objectivist, value-free and neutral model of theory that assumes an objective domain of values 'out there', a model that is disembedded from the real contexts and lives of my classroom practice. Just as I challenge my four and five year olds to look again at the story of Jack and the Beanstalk and see if the disobedient, lying, cheating, trespassing, thieving and murderous Jack is really a hero; or, if, instead of asking the closed questions of the colour of Humpty Dumpty's shoes, or the number of bricks in the wall, I ask instead the more open-ended questions, such as 'Why is Humpty Dumpty up on a wall?', so do I ask myself critical questions about the purpose of curriculum and of education. Is curriculum a means of coercion to the norms of the dominant group in society? What do children learn along with their spelling and reading from a textbook that shows only white middle-class children? I challenge the idea of a 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum. I challenge the justice and democracy of an education system that allows thirty or more children in a classroom – for how does any one teacher, no matter how idealistic and industrious, hope to put a child-centred, multiple intelligence approach (Gardner 1999) into practice under such conditions?

## WHAT I HAVE COME TO KNOW

The practice of doing weekly discussions has evolved from a way of teaching into a way of being for me. I now ask more questions of myself, I ask more open-ended questions of the children. I ask questions that set them thinking, questions that will open and stretch their minds into making connections and using their significant capacity for higher-order thinking. I invite them to suggest meanings now before I explain anything. An example of this is recalled in my research diary from April 2003 and it occurred as I read a story called 'Too Much Talk'. This West African folk tale introduced the children to the new words 'yam' and 'chief'. As soon as they heard these words, questions flew: 'Teacher, what's a yam?' 'What's a chief?' I had to bite hard on my tongue to stifle the pedagogic urge to give them my definition. Instead I begged their tolerance, asked them to wait until the story was finished to see if they could construct their own answers from the story. At the end I collated the answers they gave as to what a yam *might* be or a chief *might* be from the context and the pictures. I got very detailed descriptions of a yam and a chief from the combined answers. In fact, my four and five year olds and I ended

up having a lively and open discussion about the ways in which a chief might be elected, which led us onto a brief examination of our own electoral system. And all because I have 'unlearned' to supply my answers to their questions without waiting to see if, in fact, they actually already have the answers.

I have also learned that both teaching and learning are all about relationships, interactions, feelings, attitudes and values. Time given in conversation means trust gained and trust gained helps the process of teaching and learning an idea that finds resonance in Noddings (1984, 1992). Out of these discussions I have come to know the children in my class as real people – the people I work with. I see that my educative influence affects not only my classroom but is now generating a change in school culture as colleagues take up the challenge of Thinking Time. I have learned once again from parents that my students are carrying home the ideas from Thinking Time and are modelling the behaviour of respectful listening and reasoned argument. I realise now that the curriculum is enhanced, not negated, by taking time out to talk and think. All of these insights are significant for my own learning, and they have implications for colleagues who are now creating their own 'living theories of education' and, as I begin holding workshops and in-service courses, I can now disseminate these insights to the wider educational field.

### SOMETHING FOR US ALL TO THINK ABOUT

Articles 12 and 13 of The Convention of the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20-11-1989 relate to the child's right to a certain freedom of expression; Article 14 refers to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. I wonder how often are these rights met, generally, by our curricula and in our classrooms? (UNICEF, 1995).

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## Challenging Diversity in the Early Years – The Role of the Practitioner

*Caithriona O'Connor*

### INTRODUCTION

The state parties to the present Convention shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in this Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

(Unicef, 1989)

Ethnic and cultural differences are increasingly the basis of prejudice and discrimination in Ireland, although they are not the only characteristics that we fail to respect. Gender, class, disability, religion, sexual orientation, economic status, language and age differences are also the subject of discrimination, disrespect and bias. Today in Ireland individuals and groups in all these categories have suffered and continue to suffer from prejudice and discrimination on a regular basis. A recent survey (Irish Times, 2001) reports that 42% of settled people have negative views of travellers: 44% would not accept travellers as members of their community and 80% would not want to have a traveller as a friend.

Travellers are often portrayed as "... drop outs and misfits who because of personal inadequacy of voice are unable to function adequately in society" (Pavee Point, 1998).

In Ireland there are indigenous minority ethnic groups which include the Jewish community, the Travellers, Black Irish and others. Also living in Ireland are minority ethnic groups such as Immigrant, Refugee and Asylum seeking Communities. Despite this Ireland has continued essentially to see itself as a monoculture society. It has traditionally been a country of emigration not immigration. It is reported (Ibid, 1998) that members of minority ethnic groups who were born and raised in Ireland have grown up experiencing a

culture of racism and disrespect of their groups' traditions and backgrounds throughout their childhood. One of Ireland's indigenous ethnic groups, the Traveller community, has long suffered a general lack of respect and recognition and it is recognized that a culture of disrespect has been a major problem for the members of the Traveller Community when accessing various services such as education (Ibid, 1998).

Discrimination and inequality are deeply rooted in Irish society and continually and profoundly affect the lives of children and their families. This societal structure is immoral, unethical and most definitely inhumane.

To what extent does education play a role in supporting this cultural mindset? Has the early years educator a responsibility to create a society that is just and equal?

In an effort to find answers to the above I must first define clearly the understandings of certain multi-cultural terms.

I will look at the importance of fostering an environment based on equality in the early years setting and I will investigate the role of the teacher in implementing an intercultural learning environment.

### UNDERSTANDING RACISM AND PREJUDICE

Racism is a combination of prejudice plus power plus ideology. Racism is also the power to act upon a cultural prejudice, which is reinforced by a set of societal notions or ideas, (Crickly, 1998).

Racism can operate at an individual level or at an institutional level, with one often fuelling the momentum of the other. We as early years educators must also remember that racism not only can be sustained on a conscious level, but also subconsciously. In other words the teacher's own beliefs and issues will undoubtedly pass on to the children in an early years classroom. The 'Hidden Curriculum' can have a powerful impact on children's attitudes and beliefs. Cultural backgrounds being ignored can have as influential an effect on children as highlighting cultures in a negative manner.

Racism has not just got to do with procedures, with government / institutional policies and legislation. These formal systems, and structures very often mirror beliefs strongly embedded in the very core of our society.

We often tend to view racism as a mere set of beliefs used to justify one group's discriminatory actions against another. Viewing racism in this way tends to imply that it is some how external to the individual. It is argued though that racism, rather than being something external to the individual, is something that they come to internalise.

It [racism] provides the conceptual framework which not only guides the way people think about themselves and others but also, in turn, comes to influence and shape their actions and behaviour. It can, therefore, be said to have a formative power in the way it can literally 'form and shape' individual and collective identities. (Connolly, 1998).

In looking at the roots of a racist culture we must look at prejudice, and its development. Prejudice, is a preconceived idea, an attitude, opinion, or a feeling formed with a limited amount of prior knowledge, thought or reason. Prejudice can be a prejudgement for or against any person, group or sex. Pre-prejudice is the term given to early ideas and feelings in very young children which may develop into real prejudice through reinforcement by a prevailing societal bias.

Derman-Sparks (1998) believes that children as young as 2 or 3 years are aware of differences and are susceptible to biased attitudes and feelings. She also believes that children are not born with prejudice, it is something that they learn from their environment. It is not something that is intentionally taught, like some other attitudes, but rather learned in a for more subtle and pervasive way. Children can develop both positive and negative feelings about different racial groups, and in this way issues of inclusion, diversity and racism present challenges for Irish society. Children are social and cultural beings, actively learning to make sense of their world. They assimilate information from experiences in various contexts, their own immediate family, their wider community and society generally.

### RESPECT AND EQUALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

In looking specifically at the early years setting, it is clear that this community should be based around trust, security, comfort and a sense of caring. Children raised in security are more willing to take risks and are more readily welcoming of the new. A caring environment encourages time out to listen, to talk, to hear, to encourage, to observe, to respect etc.

If there is a sense of belonging in the early years environment children will in turn develop an increased sense of security in being part of a community: "Complexity is the norm, ambiguity is essential, diversity is enriching, children need guidance in their adventure of discovery and adults are their guides, their role models." (Derman- Sparks, 1998)

In the United States the development of one particular strategy, in dealing with a cultural prejudice, stands out. This programme is called "Anti-bias education", or ABC {Anti-Bias Curriculum}. Derman- Sparks (1998) speaks of this programme as the promise of the American declaration of independence, "the right to the pursuit of happiness of liberty and justice." There are 4 core aims of this programme:-

1. The discrepancy between promise and justice and the realities of society in general.
2. Knowledge of how young children develop identity and positive attitudes.
3. Role of the early years setting in laying a foundation for children developing strong identity and positive attitudes towards difference.
4. Learning to stand up for oneself and others when you see unfairness happen. Giving children the skills to take appropriate action, to ensure a just environment. It is central to the beliefs of ABC that all children can succeed academically. Connections have to be made between culture, language value systems and school and home. Also valued by the ABC is a clear knowledge of how the child develops. An understanding of the life experiences and culture of the child are also necessary for quality teaching.

Echoes of the ABC Anti-bias ideal can be seen in British policy initiatives:

Good social relationships are often fostered by planning a curriculum that provides opportunities for the children to learn more about the lives and work of the people in school and the wider community. The children's awareness of diversity in custom and culture and their respect for and understanding of cultural differences are effectively developed through planned activities and the use of carefully selected stories and picture books, artefacts and materials.

(Pugh, 1992, p.111)

Multiculture is addressed by the Irish Government in many policy documents. Equality is promoted in all schools. The education of each student should be valued equally, whatever their socio-economic background, gender or special educational or curriculum needs. Individual students should be encouraged to reach their full potential as they advance through the education system. It is advised in the guideline on Traveller education (Murray and O'Doherty, 2000) that an 'Intercultural' method of teaching should be adopted in the classroom. This term 'Intercultural Education' displays similarities with the ABC programme in America. Within an 'Intercultural' classroom, conditions conducive to pluralism should be fostered. All children must be aware of their own culture and be attuned to the fact that there are other value systems and other ways of behaving. Children should understand and appreciate each other and in turn develop a respect for lifestyles different from their own. Children should be encouraged to make informed choices about, and to take action on issues of prejudice and discrimination. All children should be empowered to speak for themselves and to articulate their own cultures and histories.

'Intercultural Education' is concerned with the development of skills, attitudes, values and understanding and is reinforced and supported by the atmosphere of the school, thus highlighting the enormous social responsibility of the school in determining future value systems (Ibid, 2000).

The effective implementation of an 'Intercultural' approach requires the development of certain skills such as, communication skills (listening, questioning); critical thinking skills (reflective); and personal skills (self-esteem, confidence, expressing personal opinions).

The newly revised primary school curriculum addresses 'Intercultural Education' through the subject SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education). This newly revised curriculum encourages the fostering of respect for human and cultural diversity. It is stressed that young children will copy their teachers, and hence children should be treated in a fair and just way, and if they experience respect for diversity there is a greater chance that they will respect others themselves. The newly revised curriculum places a responsibility on the school to ensure that the content of lessons taught is free from bias and that issues of inequality in any form are addressed and dealt with. "In learning about

the cultures of others and exploring various traditions and practices the children can develop a sense of respect for difference and appreciate the contribution that such difference has to offer." (Revised Primary School Curriculum, 1999)

### THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

We as early years educators have a major role to play in moulding and shaping future societal beliefs. We have a responsibility to create a society that is just and is based on human rights. We have a responsibility to respond to racism whenever it comes up. It is up to the teacher to ensure that an anti-racist atmosphere exists within the early years environment. In adopting a multicultural approach to education in the early years provision the educator must be, open to changes, reflective, adaptable and clearly secure with him/herself. The educator must also treat anti-racism as of great importance and recognise the responsibility placed on him/her. One study (Hennessy & Delaney, 1999) which looked at the issues of prejudice in the early years showed that 94% of teachers agreed with the importance of providing non-sexist materials but the provision of multi-racial material produced a very different level of response with only 38% considering this important as it was not seen as relevant to Ireland. This view is at odds with another finding of the study that 77% of those interviewed had at one time in the recent past had a child from another ethnic group attending the setting. (Hennessy and Delaney, 1999)

In the early years, the educator is seen, quite strongly, as the role model, in this way in order for an intercultural atmosphere to be fostered he/she must be aware of their own views and beliefs. The educator must be sufficiently secure with him/herself to be able to critically question beliefs, and statements to younger children. The educator must constantly assess the success of their setting with respect to anti-racism and thus build their early years environment on a foundation of fairness which encourages each child to learn through this fair and just system.

In referring to the ABC approach to equality in the classroom, it is clear that its success is based on the ability of the educator to demonstrate pedagogical reflection on what is in the best interest of the child's development. If the teachers are committed to this Anti-Bias programme they have to be willing to look at their own practice, be willing to discuss their practice with colleagues

and others, be willing to question their own practice, and be open to incorporating new ideas and theories into their practice. It can be very painful to examine one's own practices. Gaining insight into your own intolerance and prejudice can be a difficult process. A teacher must be willing to critically evaluate success of teaching methods and the ethos of the classroom.

The educator also has a leadership role to play in the adoption of an 'Intercultural' atmosphere, in which learning can occur harmoniously. In this role as the leader, the early years educator must advocate and promote equality. This notion of equality is also echoed in Irish Government policy.

To make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the state, ... to ensure that the education system is accountable to students, their parents and the state ... and that the education system respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and tradition in Irish society.  
(Education Act, 1998).

After looking at the major role of the teacher in creating an anti-biased classroom I began to look at my own early years setting. I carried out a simple study using 6 pictures from six different countries around the world, (Watoto, Trocaire). I questioned a very small sample (13) of 5 year old children, trying to gauge some level of prejudice, if any, in the classroom. I asked the children, which child they thought was happy, which child they thought was sad, who they would like to be friends with, who they thought would have really good toys, whose party would they like to go to, which child was very mean and nasty. I asked the children to guess which child, 'broke lots of toys in their classroom', 'didn't Santa come to', 'doesn't have any friends.'

85% of my sample chose to be friends with the little Irish girl with blonde hair, they felt she was the happiest, that she had the best toys, that Santa definitely came to her. This 85% of my sample wanted to go to her party. Some of their comments about this blonde haired girl were that 'she is happy', 'I want to be friends with her because she is smiling', 'she has the nicest toys because she is a girl', 'she has nicer toys than that girl' (pointing to the girl from Kenya), 'I want to be friends with her because she has the same hair as me', 'she has the same

clothes as me'. When asked to draw a picture of any of the children 92% drew the girl with blonde hair.

When I turned to asking the negative questions I found no mention of the blonde haired girl. Most comments were made towards the girl from Asia and the boy from Honduras, such as, 'she is bold in school', 'she lies', 'Santa is looking at her, she got a bag of coal last year', 'he is dirty', 'he ran out of school'.

One child took a set against the girl from Kenya, these were some of her comments, 'this girl is different, she is black. She doesn't have the same face as me, her legs are a different colour. She is not the same as me, I don't want to be her friend'.

Another child though chose the little girl from Kenya to be her friend, and felt that they were the same, 'she has the same hair as me, it is brown', she didn't want to be friends with the Irish girl, she saw her as completely different from her. This child was from the travelling community, and following circle time I began to wonder whether her different cultural background might explain her difference in attitude.

There were no definite conclusions from this small study, but it does show evidence of some trends of prejudice. Certain patterns emerged with regard to the attitudes of the children, they were certainly more drawn to the girl with the blonde hair. The language they used undoubtedly showed the biased opinions permeating my classroom.

I began to question where these strong beliefs and attitudes were coming from. This survey highlighted in me the enormous responsibility that the early years educator bears in trying to foster an atmosphere of equality, and respect.

The importance of quality teacher training in this area is sometimes underestimated. Teacher's need to understand their role of responsibility, in creating an anti-bias culture in the school. This area of the curriculum is 'hidden' so to speak, as such it is mostly forgotten in terms of in-service for Irish teachers. Anti-racism is not taught as a subject, but rather subjects are taught in an anti-racist environment. Anti-biased attitudes are instilled in children in an informal manner with the teacher as a role model. The teacher as a role model is particularly relevant in the early years classroom as young children constantly copy and imitate their teacher.

The ABC approach puts a great emphasis on quality training for the early years educator. Teaching through this curriculum needs to be interactive and child centred. There is a need for co-operative learning. ABC advocates the use of multi-cultural content, and authentic assessment. The educator must display positive attitudes about the families of their pupils. Ignoring a child's family and culture is as damaging to the child's sense of self identity as commenting negatively. "Dr. Martin Luther King helped us to understand how the unaware acts or silence of good people can be just as damaging as the aware acts of bigots" (Egedel, 1998,)

## CONCLUSION

Irish Society is changing rapidly, Ireland is a young state, very prosperous and with an increasingly diverse population. The government has addressed issues of equality and racism by providing new legislation on equality issues to ensure Ireland will be a just and fair society. It is clear however that legislation does not change attitudes. The responsibility to lead the Irish culture to one of multicultural equality, justice and fairness, not only lies on the shoulders of the educator but the community as a whole.

Any theory involving the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others perceived as inferior, or which places a value judgement on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity. (UN, 1989)

A research review carried out by the NSPCC (1999) in the UK shows the effects of racism on children's educational achievement to be greatly significant. "Racism within the educational system has been shown to have a profound and diverse effect on ethnic minorities' experiences, if school levels of qualification and achievements" (Murray & O'Doherty, 2000).

To foster a sense of 'Interculture' in the Irish educational system means that the responsibility falls on the educators, and more importantly on the early years educators. As stated in this previously children between 3 and 5 years are already forming the basis of future beliefs, values and ideas, both positively and negatively. These children make sense of their world, by mimicking the actions of

those significant adults around them. It is within this group that early years teachers may be placed. They are clearly an important role model for their pupils.

In saying this though there are other significant adults in a child's life, parents, guardians, older siblings etc. If the educator's beliefs and the beliefs of the child's home are contradictory, positive outcomes of an 'Intercultural' Classroom will be quite minimal.

In order for a teacher to foster an equal and just atmosphere in his/her classroom, that teacher must critically look at his/her own beliefs. It is important that educators of the very young examine their inner feelings relative to diversity. The importance of reflectivity arises from the constant desire for young children to imitate. They imitate the behaviour of those adults whom they wish to please. Children will emulate their teachers as much as possible.

The teacher also has a basic role to play in implementing the SPHE content of the revised curriculum and to ensure the aims of this curriculum are carried out effectively.

"To develop a respect for cultural and human diversity in the world and an appreciation for the democratic way of life. The child is encouraged to become an active and responsible citizen who understands the interdependent nature of the world in which s/he lives" (Revised Primary School Curriculum, 1999). Thus:

- In order for teachers to fully understand the cultural ideas in this country and ways in which to approach teaching, diversity education must be incorporated fully into training colleges.
- The effective teacher finds ways to make each child feel accepted and valued by all other children in the class.
- Diversity education is not just a subject to be taught, it is clearly a way of teaching, a way of learning, a positive and equal type of atmosphere. It is a safe, unthreatening environment and fundamentally it is a caring classroom.
- Early childhood educators who are dedicated, sensitive and aware will meet the challenge of preparing the next generation to live in harmony.

"Be aware of the present you are constructing,  
it should be the future you want."

(Derman-Sparks, 1998).

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## Narrative in a Naíonra: Learning about Story through a Second Language

*Máire Mhic Mhathúna*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine the opportunity that telling stories in Irish, as a Second Language, presents to young children to learn about narrative. It is part of a wider Ph.D. study of narrative as a vehicle for Second Language Acquisition.<sup>1</sup> Early Education and Applied Linguistic literature will be studied in relation to story-telling in First and Second Languages and practice in a naíonra will be examined to see the opportunities that are available to young children as they participate in story telling sessions. A social-interactionist perspective on Language Acquisition is adopted because this theory recognises that both cognitive processing and verbal interaction are involved in language acquisition.

The term “narrative” includes narratives told *to* young children, such as oral stories, oral retelling of stories in books and, of course, story as text. Hudson and Shapiro, (1991) talk about three different kinds of narratives told *by* young children. They describe scripts: accounts of routinized events, such as going to the doctor or to MacDonald's; fictional stories: based on child's creative imagination; and personal narratives or accounts of personally experienced events concerning people, settings and specific events.

A naíonra is a playgroup operating through the medium of Irish, providing rich opportunities for the children to acquire Irish through a play-based curriculum. Irish can be a first or second language or to use De Houwer's term, bilingualism can be the first language (Ó Murchú, 1985, De Houwer, 1995). Second Language Acquisition is the term applied to the naturalistic learning of a language other than the first, which plays an institutional and social role in the community (Ellis, 1994).

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## VALUE OF STORIES AND BOOKS IN FIRST LANGUAGE

Even a cursory glance at the literature on the value of books for young children reveals that there is a focus on deep meaning and higher level skills in the discussion on books for children in their First Language. Any discussion on language itself is very much relegated to second place. This is in contrast to the almost total emphasis on understanding language *per se* in the literature on Second Language acquisition. It should prove interesting to contrast the two approaches and to try to determine if any of the higher level aspects of development are available to a young child acquiring a Second Language.

Browne (2001) states that good stories should offer children the possibility of personal, social, intellectual and linguistic enrichment and details these advantages as

- Personal development: giving enjoyment, developing imagination and empathy
- Social development: reflecting the nature of society, exploring human relationships, expressing a variety of cultural traditions and values
- Intellectual development: making abstract ideas accessible, encouraging reflection, giving access to new ideas and knowledge
- Language development: demonstrating the power of language, permitting listeners/readers to encounter models of vocabulary, spellings, dialogue, punctuation, grammar and story structure,

Language Development is therefore just one of a range of areas to be developed and the language focus is on literacy skills in the model proposed by Browne for children aged three to eight years, though story structure does feature.

Schickedanz (1999) defines story structure more fully when she says that

Events and characters' actions occur in a particular sequence, in specific settings. Analyzing characters and events, engaging children in predicting events and helping children to make connections between story events and real life is cognitively challenging.

Schickedanz (1999) also highlights the fact that book language is decontextualised and that the listener/reader must rely on the words and the pictures to understand

the meaning, as neither the speaker nor the ongoing actions of an event are present. Although this refers to First Language, it is even more true in regard to Second Language situations. The child can use the clues in the pictures and the voice and actions of the story-teller to aid comprehension, but there is still a lot of cognitively challenging work to be done if he/she is to understand and enjoy the story.

## VALUE OF BOOKS AND STORIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE

In contrast with the wide range of higher order skills mentioned above, the literature on Second language is more restricted in the range of skills it describes. The issue of vocabulary looms much larger, because vocabulary is needed to describe a range of familiar as well as unfamiliar items and experiences. Obviously, the emphasis must be on developing understanding and basic oral competency in the early stages of Second Language Acquisition. Both Browne (2001) and Hester (1983) provide lists of activities to develop oral language, which include listening to stories in the Second Language. Romney *et al.* (1989) recommend that reading aloud to young children in their Second Language should commence in the early years setting and should be carried out with small groups of children to obtain maximum advantage. Their study of seven-year old children showed an improvement in receptive vocabulary and ability to communicate in their Second Language compared to a control group who were not read to.

When Hickey (1997) asked naíonra leaders or stiúrthóirí naíonraí which activities they thought best promoted language development, they rated stories and books very highly. It might then be expected that stories would be read to the children every day but only 42% said that they read stories every day, and an additional 49% said that it occurred once or twice a week. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that it is a difficult task to undertake, to tell/read a story to a group of children in a language that they do not fully understand.

The research questions to be discussed are therefore:

- Can children develop understanding and basic oral skills through story-telling sessions?
- Can they access any of the personal, social and intellectual advantages as well as acquire basic vocabulary?
- Which strategies help develop basic and higher level skills and how should the story session be organized?



## EXAMINATION OF PRACTICE

These questions led to an examination of data that was collected in a Dublin naíonra in 1999, during story-telling sessions. The children were aged between four and five years and were mainly in the initial stages of acquiring Irish as a second language. They had had approximately 220 hours of exposure to Irish at the time the study commenced.

The naíonra was selected because I had previously carried out research there (Mhic Mhathúna, 1999) and had noted the particular way that stories were told to the children. One of the stiúrthóirí took a small group of five children aside each day and told/read stories to them for about twenty minutes. Over the course of the week, every child got a chance to hear the story in a small group setting. The stiúrthóirí also told and read stories to the whole group of 20 children regularly. Eleven hours of stories and other activities were audio-recorded and transcribed, between January and June 1999, giving a total of 220 pages of transcripts. Permission to record was obtained from the parents of the children. Pseudonyms were used throughout and anonymity was guaranteed.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

Analysis of the corpus revealed that certain stories were told/read regularly and that over time the children acquired the basic vocabulary and structure of these stories. One of the stories that was read regularly was *Teidí*, by Mairéad Ní Ghráda. The story was recorded seven times in the data and was also told on other occasions as well. This is a traditionally structured tale, in the style of “The Gingerbread Boy.” Teidí meets a series of characters, “an fear, an bhean, an buachaill, an cailín,” etc. {the man, the woman, the boy, the girl} and they each ask him to stop. Each time, he refuses and runs away, “Rith sé agus rith sé agus rith sé.” {He ran and ran and ran.} Then he meets a second set of characters, who try to bribe him to stop. He again refuses, is knocked down crossing the road, and is brought to hospital with a broken leg. The stiúrthóir adapted the story from the book, adding in more explanations in simple sentences, rather than leaving anything out. She then told the story in a very interactive way, showing the pictures, using gestures and asking questions. The notation system used in the transcripts is set out in an appendix at the end of this paper.

The first example is typical of the style of interaction.

## EXAMPLE 1

Stiúrthóir: Chonaic Teidí ---. {Teidí saw ---.}

Úna: Bean. {A woman}

Stiúrthóir: Céard a dúirt an bhean leis? {What did the woman say to him?}

Naoise: **Stop.** {Stop.}

Stiúrthóir: Céard a dúirt Teidí? {What did Teidí say?}

Tomás: **Ní stop mé.** {I won't stop.}

Stiúrthóir: Ní stopfaidh mé. Céard a rinne Teidí? {I won't stop. What did Teidí do?}

Tomás: **Rith sé agus rith sé agus rith sé.** {He ran and ran and ran.}

Most of the children could name all of the characters, when asked by the stiúrthóir, and they could also say recurring phrases, such as “Rith sé agus rith sé agus rith sé” {He ran and ran and ran.} or variants of “Ní stopfaidh mé.” {I won't stop.} What appeared to be particularly helpful was the fact that the story was highly predictable and that the stiúrthóir's questions also followed a set pattern:

- The character is introduced.
- What did he/she say?
- How did Teidí reply?
- What was the outcome?

The stiúrthóir used the same question pattern each time, leaving slots for the children to fill in with words that they knew. Over time they built up the vocabulary of the story. This meant that the children knew what was going to happen in the story, what the stiúrthóir was going to say and most importantly, what they were expected to say.

Regularity of input is viewed by Wong-Fillmore (1985) and Tabors (1997) as being particularly helpful in the early stages of second language acquisition. Other factors such as simplicity of sentence structure, story line and age appropriateness must be taken into account as well (Romney *et al.* 1989).

These then are the basic language skills that are being developed and they are obviously being well developed. Is there any evidence to show that other skills are also being promoted? Are the children for example developing empathy with the character. Are they concerned when he is

injured? Can they follow the episodes? Are they able to make connections to their own lives?

The next example shows how the children were developing empathy with Teidí, the main character.

#### EXAMPLE 2

Stiúrthóir: Tá a chos briste. Ó, féach air sin! {His leg is broken. Look at that!}

Andrew: *Did he get stitches?*

Stiúrthóir: Sin é agus céard a dúirt an dochtúir leis? {That's it and what did the doctor say?}

Andrew: *Is he alright? Is he happy?*

Stiúrthóir: Bhuel, tá anois. Fuair sé deoch agus banana.

{Well, he is now. He got a drink and a banana.}

Andrew: *He looks sad.*

Andrew was clearly concerned about the extent of Teidí's injuries and how he felt. He used both the visual clues in the picture and the input in Irish to gauge Teidí's emotions. He replied appropriately in English to questions in Irish, showing that he understood what was being said, but had not yet reached the stage of being able to reply creatively in his Second Language. It does appear from this story and from other stories in the data that it is difficult to discuss abstract concepts such as emotions in the early stages of a Second Language. The topics that were successfully discussed were either context-bound or were concrete objects or pictures that were clearly visible.

However, these bilingual conversations are a major stepping stone on the way to full command of the Second Language. They make use of the children's understanding of the language, replying to the content of what has been said in Irish, offering further input in Irish and they allow the conversation to continue. The phenomenon of bilingual conversations has also been noted in the Welsh pre-schools, *cylchau meithrin*, and has been shown to be a predictor of success at a later stage (Wyn Siencyn, 1983).

As already noted, this is a predictable story, told in a predictable way. The children knew the structure of the story for the most part, that it was composed of episodes told in a certain order. Sometimes they moved ahead too

quickly, going to the next episode before the current one was finished:

#### EXAMPLE 3

Stiúrthóir: Agus céard a rinne an bus? {And what did the bus do?}

Peter: **Otharcharr.** {ambulance}

The next episode was the arrival of the ambulance and Peter moved ahead, using a holophrase, "otharcharr" {ambulance} to stand for the sentence, "Tháinig otharcharr." {The ambulance came.}

One child asked quite pointedly what the purpose of the story was:

#### EXAMPLE 4

Stiúrthóir: Chas Teidí timpeall. {Teddy turned around.}

John: Why did he still, why did he still run?

Stiúrthóir: Mar tá sé ag rith agus ag rith agus ag rith.  
{Because he is running and running.}

John: Why is he still running?

It proved too difficult to explain motivation in the Second Language in a way that could be understood and the stiúrthóir moved on to the next episode.

The stiúrthóir made a deliberate effort to make direct connections between the events in the story and the children's own experiences. In the following example, she links a banana skin in the picture with the *naíonra* lunch-time routine of putting the banana skin in the bin:

#### EXAMPLE 5

Stiúrthóir: Agus céard a rinne sé leis an gcráiceann banana, meas tú?  
{And what did he do with the banana skin?}

Children: **Bosca bruscair.** {Bin}

Stiúrthóir: Cuirimidne an cráiceann banana sa mbosca bruscair.  
{We put the banana skin in the bin.}

She also linked the children's experiences outside the *naíonra* with the story and the children followed her model of making connections and responded with their own personal narratives. Over the six months of the study, they

volunteered more and more personal narratives during the story sessions:

#### EXAMPLE 6

Stiúrthóir: Bíonn Tomáisín an-chúramach nuair a bhíonn sé amuigh ag siúl.

{Tomáisín is very careful when he is out walking.}

Tomás: My Mommy lets me go cross me and my brother go cross the road by ourself.

Visits to the doctor or hospital held a great fascination for the children in the naíonra.

#### EXAMPLE 7

Stiúrthóir: Dúirt an dochtúir leis, “Caithfidh tú fanacht sa leaba.”

{The doctor said to him, “You have got to stay in bed.”}

Tomás: I’m going to the **dochtúir** today.

Stiúrthóir: Tá tú? Cén fáth? {You are? Why?}

Tomás: Bad cough.

Tomás code-mixes, using the Irish word “dochtúir” in an English sentence. The stiúrthóir follows his lead or change of focus and the conversation continues bilingually. In this way the child feels that his contribution is being accepted and valued and he continues to receive input on a topic of his choice.

#### SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The data from the case study has shown that stories in a Second Language can enrich children in a number of ways. They develop the children’s understanding of the Second Language and their basic vocabulary and syntax. This comes through very clearly in the examples quoted. This was facilitated by the stiúrthóir’s choice of a predictable story; her use of pictures and gestures and the consistent language she employed to tell the same story many times. Her own warm, respectful, relationship with the children created a supportive atmosphere in which they could become meaning makers. She scaffolded the children’s participation so that they experienced success and built up their language and their story skills.

These included empathy with the characters, an appreciation of story structure and the ability to make connections with their own lives. These skills, however, appear to be limited to what can be shown or demonstrated in the physical

context and discussion of abstract concepts may have to wait until the children’s language ability develops further.

These developments were facilitated by frequent readings of the same stories in small groups, with guaranteed regularity of input, so that the children were able to build on their understanding of the story and the language. Above all, both the stiúrthóir and the children obviously enjoyed the shared experience of reading stories and this might be the most crucial factor of all.

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## APPENDIX

Transcription notation adapted from Wells (1985).

Square brackets:	[contextual clues]
Italics in square brackets:	[ <i>appropriate gesture, e.g. nods, shakes head</i> ]
Bold print:	<b>children's utterances in Irish</b>
Italics:	<i>appropriate response in English</i>
---	prompting pause
..	pause (2 dots)
...	silence/incomplete response (3 dots)
Bold italics:	word is the same in both English and Irish, e.g. <i>Teidi</i>
Underlined:	<u>overlap between speakers</u>
***	unintelligible speech
Curly brackets:	{translation by author into English}

## A Right Approach to Writing Development in the Early Years? An Examination of Two Contrasting Models

*Brian Murphy*

Writing is an act of communication and a key element in our search for meaning, since it allows us to reflect on and to order our encounters with the world and the impact they make on us (Willig 1990). As a productive act of communication, writing has both an author and an audience. Thus any writing experience requires a writer to identify not only what and why they are writing but also for whom they are writing. It is the differing perspectives on this “interplay among the purpose for writing, the audience and the content” (Browne 1996, pg. 63), which is at the heart of the writing development debate. Consequently, although two models of writing development have been identified and will be discussed – the traditional product model and the developmental process model, in contrast to reading development in the early years, it must be acknowledged that “the teaching of writing has been far less prone to extremes of debate and far less the centre of research and publications” (Beard 1993, pg. 2).

### (A) THE TRADITIONAL PRODUCT MODEL OF WRITING DEVELOPMENT

No clear common consensus appears to exist in the literature regarding how children learn to write. Consequently, there are many approaches, which differ on points of detail. The majority of these approaches can, however, be grouped together under the general heading of the traditional product model of writing development, as they fundamentally involve the same basic assumptions on how children learn to write. These include a belief that writing is such a complex activity that children learn to write only as a result of formal instruction. This view is extended by many to say that learning to write is dependent on reading ability and should follow on from learning to read. Consequently, according to this approach it is assumed that children should not learn to write until they attend school, and even when attending school, writing instruction should be delayed until the children are suitably proficient in

reading. This rationale for writing instruction was perhaps more tenable in the past, when “children would have much less access to print” (Garton & Pratt 1998, pg. 184), and would thus have known little of writing prior to commencing formal schooling. The role of the school was clearly to initiate children into the world of literacy. This emphasis on the necessity of formal instruction for the development of writing forms part of an overall pedagogy based on a learning theory that assumes that learning literacy is largely a teacher controlled process of building correct habits through regular practice and extinguishing bad habits (Cambourne 1988). Focus is thus on the product of the writing experience through an emphasis on its transcriptional rather than compositional dimensions.

The premise that young children have little or no knowledge about writing and need formal instruction from a teacher in order to learn the skill, has many specific methodological implications for classroom practice, as outlined by Browne (1996):

Traditional approaches tend to pay limited attention to audience, purpose and outcome for the early writing, which children do in school. The main purpose for much of the writing appears to be to gain practice at writing and the audience for the writing that is produced is usually the teacher. When the writing is finished it is corrected by the teacher and generally remains in the child’s writing book. Writing done in this way is rarely drafted and is often expected to be completed in one session ... (Browne 1996, pg. 59)

Thus writing is seen as a skill that pupils have to learn by studying the products of good writers, by practising each of the various sub-skills (e.g. spelling, punctuation and grammar) and by having their efforts assessed regularly in relation to the teacher’s expectations of what constitutes clear correct writing. Errors are clearly to be avoided or stamped out. Smith & Elley (1998) thus characterise the traditional approach to writing development as one where “students are passive recipients of accepted wisdom” (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 39). Early writing activities conversant of this model comprise teaching children letter names and shapes through systematic teaching, followed by copying and tracing activities in copies and workbooks. Much time is allocated to copying of teacher’s writing from the blackboard. Elements of the language-

experience approach where the child draws a picture and dictates a caption to the teacher, which is in turn copied or traced over by the child, would also be representative of traditional product-focused writing practice. Independent writing is the final stage to be reached but throughout the process children are encouraged to focus on the transcriptional spelling and handwriting dimensions of their writing (Browne 1993, pg. 17). This assessment and evaluation of the final product of writing has according to Whitehead (1990), tended “to detract from a deep knowledge about the cognitive and other elements of the process” (Whitehead 1990, pg. 139). Thus the importance of the compositional aspect of writing as well its overall communicative function is overlooked and often lost since “correctness becomes an imperative of equal importance to the child’s message” (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 28). Thus much of the literature contends that teaching writing in a traditional product-orientated way is no longer appropriate (Browne 1996, Clay 1991 & 1987, Hall 1987, Dyson 1987).

Critics of the traditional model of writing development contend that in asking children to write with the emphasis on transcription and without any clear sense of purpose and audience, the communicative function of writing is being concealed and children are prevented from seeing the relevance of writing. The basic reality that children will need “to understand the relevance of writing to their lives ... and ... learn best when they can see reasons for what they are learning” (Browne 1996, pg. 64) is thus clearly ignored. Moreover, the classroom approaches of the model fail to acknowledge in any way the great deal of knowledge that children have abstracted about writing and the writing system from the world around them, ever before they begin formal schooling. The longer-term effect of these practices is, according to Browne (1993), that they inhibit children’s willingness to write for themselves and merely serve “to alienate children from wanting to write at school and at home” (Browne 1993, pg. 18). Whitehead (1990) too sees that the emphasis accorded to the learning of conventions in early literacy activities not only slows down children’s progress, but also seriously undermines their desire to be readers and writers. The negative impact of the equating of writing with transcription is borne out by the work of Wray (1994 & 1993) & Wray *et al.* (1989) who found that 80% of children surveyed negatively associated writing with the transcriptional and secretarial elements of the process. This is in sharp contrast to the acknowledged enthusiasm for and interest in writing activities when children enter school (Garton & Pratt 1998).

Even on the broadest scale, the traditional approach stands indicted on the grounds that “too many pupils disliked writing and indulged in it too rarely” (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 40). Fundamentally, it fails to acknowledge the simple reality that adults do not often get writing right first time and thus children should not be expected to do so. It was in this context, in the early 1980’s, that the alternative process model of writing development particularly emerged and grew in favour, especially with the works of Graves (1994 & 1983). His developmental writing model was born out of his contention that it is “forward vision as well as backward vision that ultimately leads to a major breakthrough in a child’s writing” (Graves 1983, pg. 160). It is this forward vision developmental process model, which will now be outlined.

#### **(B) AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF WRITING DEVELOPMENT – THE PROCESS MODEL**

The process model of writing development grew out of a fundamental dissatisfaction with the enduring traditional product model. In contrast, it views writing as significantly more than transcription, handwriting and orthographic skills and instead prioritises composition i.e. the creative and cognitive aspects of the writing act. Accordingly, this alternative perspective contends that “writing is about content, structure, coherence, clarity, choice of language, style and audience and not just conventions” (Browne 1996, pg. 58). The aim of the process writing movement is to make writing a more substantial, meaningful and successful experience for learner writers. It aspires to achieve this objective by actively involving young learners in the process of writing through the active investigation, exploration and completion of writing activities (Browne 1996, Whitehead 1990, Calkins 1986). From the outset, children are viewed as writers who are to be supported and guided as they progress towards construction of the rules of writing for themselves. As with whole-language approaches to reading, “meaning is central to the process” (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 42). A focus on meaning facilitated by a concurrent emphasis on writing for real purposes and for real audiences ensures that children learn to write in a natural way and come to enjoy writing in the process (Cambourne 1995 & 1988, Graves 1994). At the heart of implementing a process model of writing development is the need to “discover what children know about the functional and linguistic features of writing when they start school and to appreciate how children have learned what they have” (Browne 1993, pg. 14).

Early pioneers and advocates of process writing (e.g. Beard 1984, Protherough 1983, Graves 1983, Smith 1982 & Emig 1971) clearly frame the model in terms of the developmental approach to teaching and learning. Consequently, at the heart of the approach is the linking of the unknown to the known and an emphasis on intervention rather than imposition in the development of writing. Thus, the starting point for the development of writing skills is to work with the considerable knowledge, abilities, judgements and hypotheses that children have constructed about written language before they begin school (Browne 1996, Whitehead 1990, Bissex 1980). Children are aware of many significant features of writing on entering school, acquired from their interaction with print including that “writing is meaningful and purposeful, used to communicate messages, composed of separate marks and ... has certain forms and structures” (Weinberger 1996, pg. 11). This assertion is borne out by the research findings of Temple *et al.* (1988) who discovered that children’s early writing reveals that even before they have been taught to write, children seem to have an understanding of the organising recurring, generative, symbolic and spatial principles of written language. Furthermore, most children come to school with “a natural enthusiasm and interest in writing” (Garton & Pratt 1998, pg. 214) resulting from their pre-school writing activities. Exploitation of this natural desire of children “to want to write” (Graves 1983, pg. 3), to express themselves in writing is at the heart of the process model. The process model thus incorporates the most appropriate professional response to the development of children’s writing, by building on children’s existing knowledge of and attitude to writing.

The second major understanding underpinning the process model of writing development is the belief that “writing is learned by writing, not by exercises in grammar, spelling handwriting or copying” (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 42). This stems from a contention that writing can be learned by similar methods to those used when faced with the challenge of learning to speak. Just as oral language is learned in purposeful, communicative situations, so also the “writing curriculum that is presented in school must engage children in purposeful writing activities” (Browne 1993, pg. 13), where writing is used by children “because they want to achieve some goal rather than learning to write being presented as the goal” (Garton & Pratt 1998, pg. 215). The process writing model assumes that writing is

developed and refined through interaction with other people, that writing is learned by using it and by receiving feedback on the success of its use and that formal instruction plays little part in learning to acquire proficiency in the skill. The process of trial and error, feedback and reformulation should thus characterise children's experiments with the process of writing. It is through such active exploration and practice of writing activity that children make "the gradual discovery that conventions matter because they significantly affect the communication of meaning" (Whitehead 1990, pg. 154).

Process writing classroom practices place a high emphasis on writing activities, which are purposeful and meaningful for all children (Czerniewska 1992). An optimum setting for such writing activities is one rich in examples and demonstrations of writing. Such a setting also provides opportunities for the planning, drafting and editing of written work rather than the product model practice of 'one-try-only' finished written pieces. Drafting necessitates that both discussion and feedback play a central role in writing activities, so the organisation of the classroom is "directed towards maximising the time available for teachers to talk to children, individually or in small groups" (Whitehead 1990, pg.164). Finally, as the school writing experience is to mirror the process of writing in the outside world, the process culminates with the reading and publication of many of the produced pieces of writing. Most of these practices are embodied in the practice of shared writing, which according to Browne (1996) "refers to times when a group of children compose a text together, with the teacher acting as a scribe for the group" (Browne 1996, pg. 79). Learners are thus released from the demands of conventional transcription and free to concentrate on the cognitive and creative processes of composition. Pupils' interest in the content of their writing is exploited as a vehicle for the teaching of conventions in a concrete context. Furthermore, the teacher's modelling of the writing process brings children to the vital realisation that writing does not have to be perfect at the first attempt (Browne 1993, pg. 49). On other occasions in a process model classroom, children are afforded opportunities to write independently, on topics of their choice in situations where the teacher provides encouragement and support. After writing children are given help and feedback on what they have written with the emphasis directed to the elements of composition, structure, clarity and meaning. These teacher to pupil feedback sessions or writing conferences, provide vital insights for the teacher into a child's particular

strengths and weakness. They are, according to Browne (1993), equivalent to hearing a child read during a reading lesson and thus should be an integral part of any writing class.

Some authors have been critical of elements of the process model of writing development. According to Smith & Elley (1998), "extravagant claims for the benefits of a process approach have undermined many of its virtues" (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 55). Gere (1986) claims the process-writing model to be fundamentally flawed in that it lacks an adequate conceptual base. Much of the criticism focuses on the apparent diminished role of the teacher in a process approach. Lensmire (1994) feels that the reduction or even the abolition of the teacher's authority indicative of the approach, together with the child's control of the choice and ownership of the writing topic often results in children producing writing, which is unsuitable for the classroom in tone and content. Dudley-Marling (1995) too expresses similar misgivings, while remaining generally supportive of many of the goals of a process approach to writing.

It is clear that the teaching of writing has shifted from a focus on skills and the written product to a focus on the writing process. More recently however, the pendulum has swung to a more balanced approach that embraces both product and process elements. Bromley (1999) endorses this current position as desirable in claiming that "good teachers of writing find themselves somewhere in the middle, borrowing the best from both product and process approaches to develop writers who are fluent, competent and independent" (Bromley 1999, pg. 152). This middle ground would appear to lie in acknowledging that while it is important to ensure that children learn to follow spelling, layout and punctuation conventions when writing, care must be taken to ensure that these do not become the dominant goal for the teacher or in the eyes of the child. Children should thus continue to write because they are motivated to encode meaning in text and to master different forms of written language. Such a balanced pedagogy contributes enormously to achieving a goal of writing instruction – to establish "the child as someone who enjoys writing" (Smith & Elley 1998, pg. 30).

### **(C) IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULA OF 1971 & 1999 – PROCESS MODELS OF WRITING DEVELOPMENT**

The 1971 primary school curriculum marked a radical transformation in ideology and approach to the teaching of writing in Irish primary schools. It

acknowledged the various weaknesses of the traditional product model of writing development, especially its practices of emphasising “technique rather than content, cultivating skills in isolation from their purpose and doing little to motivate the child to write independently and to use writing for its real end – communication” (An Roinn Oideachais, Primary School Curriculum 1971, Part 1 pg. 95). In contrast, the curriculum proposed a process model of writing development as a radical alternative, highlighting especially its central tenets of emphasising content as the main focus of the writing act and relegating the transcriptional elements of writing to being of subordinate concern. From the very beginning of writing instruction, emphasis was to be placed on cultivating the child’s desire to write, as well as maintaining at all times a clear focus on meaning, purpose and communication in all written activities. It appears however that these curriculum aspirations did not radically alter classroom practice with respect to the teaching of writing. As indicated by Kavanagh (1995), findings from a small number of Irish studies clearly indicate that a traditional approach to the teaching of writing remained in evidence in Irish schools, with “an emphasis on the acquisition of skills rather than on the personal or creative aspects” (Kavanagh 1995, pg. 77). Grammar, written exercises from workbooks and literal comprehension questions appear to form the main diet of writing activity. Similarly, O’Shea (1989) found that only one teacher in his survey of eight schools encouraged the process writing practices of drafting and revising. Clearly, the model of process writing advocated in the curriculum generally failed to impact on classroom practice.

Despite this reality of classroom practice, an even more distinctly process model of writing development is advocated in the revised Primary School Curriculum (Ireland & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1999). The approach clearly presupposes a gradual development of a child’s ability to write through the actual process of writing and places emphasis on this writing process as a means of developing the child’s expressive and communicative abilities. The reality that a child cannot normally be expected to produce a finished piece of writing in a single attempt is also acknowledged. These aspirations are clear from the summary of the approach to writing as outlined in the Teacher Guidelines for English:

It asserts that the child can become an independent writer by attempting to write and by self-correcting his/her writing with the

prompting and guidance of the teacher. This entails a consistent experience of writing, editing and redrafting that involves the child in writing on a wide range of topics, in a variety of genres and for different audiences. (Primary School Curriculum 1999, Teacher Guidelines for English, pg. 3)

Although it is envisaged that learners be afforded a significant amount of discretion “in the choice of topics for their writing, the purposes for which they write, the audience for which it is intended and the form of expression they give it” (Primary School Curriculum 1999, Teacher Guidelines for English, pg. 76), the central role of the teacher as mentor and guide in fostering and advancing the development of writing remains undiminished. This central role for the teacher is clearly facilitated by the emphasis accorded to discussion, interaction, shared writing and conferencing throughout the envisaged process model.

With specific reference to early years writing, the teacher-as-scribe and model of writing, coupled with the provision of a print-rich environment are seen as central to the stimulation of the writing process in conjunction with flexibility of writing materials and formats. Although formation of letters is noted as important at the Infant level, “the bulk of time ought to be devoted to expression and communication” (Primary School Curriculum 1999, Teacher Guidelines for English, pg. 77), albeit through pictorial representation, captioning or copying meaningful letters and words. It is envisaged that children will learn about the conventions and transcriptional elements of writing (grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting) in the context of their own writing and through shared writing experiences, as well as through a process of self-correction based on teacher guidance. Finally, it is envisaged at all times that the writing process will culminate in the sharing and displaying of children’s work, in a process, which is termed publishing.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) clearly embraces the process model of writing development and thus reflects recent major international trends and developments in writing pedagogy. Its actual impact on classroom practice with respect to the teaching of writing, to date, remains unknown. This will however become more apparent in the near future as the revised curriculum is more fully and consistently implemented in primary schools nationwide.



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## PART 4

### Issues of Professional Development

# What Do We Want For Children?

*Imelda Madigan*

## INTRODUCTION

Here in Ireland we are living in exciting and indeed challenging times as far as childcare and education is concerned. It is a time of great change particularly in the areas of policy, legislation and practice. The following is a list of the developments given in the *Supporting Quality* document produced by Barnardos which gives us a very clear picture of the happenings over the past ten years:

- The Child Care Act, 1991
- Irish ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992
- Children's Rights Alliance established in 1993
- Working Group on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents established in 1994
- Full implementation of the Child Care Act, 1991 during 1995 and 1996
- Undergraduate degree course in Early Childhood Care and Education commenced in University College Cork in 1995
- OMNA DIT/NOW Project developed in 1995
- Putting Children First policy documents (Department of Health) in 1996 and 1997
- The Children Bills of 1996 and 1999
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: The First National Report of Ireland in 1996
- Child Care ( Pre- School Services )Regulations, Part V11 of the Child Care Act, 1991 published in 1996 (Department of Health)
- Small Voices: Vital Rights: submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child by the Children's Rights Alliance in 1997
- Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998
- Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme in 1998
- Report of the National Forum for Early Childhood Education (Department of Education) 1998

- Strengthening Families for life: Report of the Commission on the Family (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs) in 1998
- Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Education in 1999
- Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children in 1999
- Postgraduate multi-disciplinary courses in child protection in Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin
- Undergraduate degree courses in Early Childhood Care and Education in the Dublin Institute of technology in 1999
- The National Childcare Strategy: Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform)
- National Childcare Infrastructure 1999
- The National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children) 2000
- Launch of High/Scope Ireland 2002
- Our Duty to Care: the Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People (Department of Health and Children) 2002
- Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 2002
- Quality childcare and Lifelong Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector 2002
- Quality Enhancement Initiative

All of these developments undoubtedly have a major impact on children's lives and on the lives of their families. Furthermore, they do have a very great impact on those of us who work directly with children. Enhancing quality is a common goal for all practitioners, organisations and services that are constructively developing centres of good practice. 'Clearly stated aims and objectives' (Pugh, 1999) is one of the criteria for ensuring a quality service.

Having a relevant Mission Statement is also essential. A Mission Statement which incorporates the core message of any organisation and which defines its purpose and what it stands for. This relevant message or Mission Statement, according to Jane Clarke (1997), shows very clearly the reason why the organisation exists. The Mission Statement highlights the organisations underlying value system. This is a point worth noting particularly for those of

us working in childcare. Our Mission statement, which is usually displayed on the walls of our centres, needs to reflect our value system with regards to the children in our care. It is exactly at this point we need to ask ourselves that very big question ‘WHAT DO WE WANT FOR CHILDREN?’ This question requires time, thought and understanding of the developing needs of children. Then we can truly identify with our Mission Statement and not just have it merely as a poster on a wall.

Different bodies and groups of people may have different values for children and different expectations for children. This of course depends on the adults and the group of children. Some research has been done in this area in different countries ([www.high/scope.org](http://www.high/scope.org)) which shows that parents/teachers expectations for children lie in areas such as:

- Language skills
- Motor/physical skills
- Pre-academic skills
- Self-assessment skills
- Self-expression skills
- Self-sufficiency skills
- Social skills with adults
- Social skills with peers

In my work as a trainer with High/Scope Ireland I put this question “what do we want for children?” to all participants at the beginning of the course. In partnership we develop our own Mission Statement which we review on a continuous basis. The participants, who themselves work directly or indirectly in childcare facilities, want the children to grow and develop in areas of:

- Self Confidence
- Self Reliance
- Co-operation and learning how to be a member of a group
- Empathy and concern for others
- Have an opportunity to play with others
- Self-satisfaction
- Decision makers and problem-solvers
- A sense of self worth

This Mission Statement helps us answer such questions as “why do we plan with children?”, “why do we share control with children?”, “why is it important to review activities with children?”, “why is it important for children to go through the problem-solving process?” In fact we answer all our questions in relation to our Mission Statement. In teasing out these important values for themselves, participants own understanding of the importance of this question “WHAT DO WE WANT FOR CHILDREN” is highlighted. They have now put greater value on this question and their answers reflect the importance of developing these life skills and characteristics in children. Their informed answers will now be reflected in the Mission Statements in their own centres. These Mission Statements will reflect the true beliefs of all who work in the centres. Their practice will reflect their Mission Statement.

In practice, developing a healthy self worth in children, seemed of utmost importance to one and all. We know that each child’s understanding of self develops in collaboration with others. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1950) believed that children go through three major stages of social and emotional development from infancy to pre-school age:

- Trust versus guilt
- Autonomy versus shame and doubt
- Initiative versus shame and guilt

Research conducted by John Bowlby (1969) and Developmental Psychologist, Mary Ainsworth (1978) speaks of the imperative of bonding – with parent and significant other. This bonding affects key aspects of the child’s personality including:

- empathy
- sympathy
- problem solving
- playfulness and sociability

It is clear that attentive adults help children flourish in all areas of development. In creating an environment in which we hope children will grow and develop these important characteristics, we, as supportive adults, need to take steps. The following steps have been influenced by *The Building Blocks of Human Relationships* (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995)

### STEP 1

We need to create a climate where children can trust. This is an environment where the child can have a confident belief in himself/herself and in others. The child needs to completely trust the adults to be there for them, to support them, encourage them, and attend to their needs. Anything we pay attention to grows, anything we take our attention from, withers. This climate allows the child to go forth knowing that the people in whom he/she depends will provide the needed support and encouragement.

### STEP 2

Adults need to provide a climate in which children are encouraged to make choices and decisions, to reach out and explore and say 'I can do it'. What a wonderful feeling this must be for a child. This gives autonomy, they can put on their own coat, pour their own juice, butter their own bread, but only if we encourage this and understand its importance. The child can become self-reliant and self-sufficient with our support and encouragement to a developmental level appropriate to their age and stage.

### STEP 3

Some pre-school children are very articulate and ambitious and there is an onus on adults to encourage children to describe their intentions. This supports them to use their own initiative and so become decision-makers. This indeed reminds me of when a young person attends a job interview, the first question the employer asks himself/herself is whether this person can use their own initiative or whether he needs constant attention and guidance. This valuable life skill takes root in early childhood. A supportive environment helps children to act purposefully and feel confident.

The Psychologist, Janet Strayer, has said that the first glimmers of empathy, which is a child's capacity to understand the feelings of others appears at about six months old, "when a baby reacts with interest and contact behaviour towards crying peers". We need to talk to children and listen when they express their feelings and their empathy for the feeling of others.

This requires listening with care and understanding on the part of the adult. When a child expresses sadness or anger or any other emotion essential in growth it may be a good idea to simply mirror that particular feeling. The child

then knows that the adult has heard. Sometimes when we see a child who is sad or angry we want to fix him; to listen attentively may be the real solution but when we see pain in a child's face we want to heal the agony. The upset child needs to be understood, that is the only solution needed. Listening and allowing the child to cry is indeed an attentive and real response. I think it is important for us to remember that we adults do not have all the answers. We are not meant to have all the answers – listening attentively, however, to a child's entire story, without doubt, validates the child's reality. The child now knows this attentive adult truly understands. Sometimes this is clearly visible in the child's face and words fail me to describe that look that says I am trusted, I am understood, I am accepted as I am and that is good enough.

Self-confidence is the capacity to believe in our own ability to accomplish things. We who provide an environment of support, encouragement and trust contribute significantly to a child gaining a healthy self-confidence. Because we believe in them, they believe in themselves and become more competent and confident. Trust, empathy, autonomy, initiative, self-confidence are the building blocks in a child's emotional and social health. These capacities are bound to flourish in an active learning setting that supports the growth of positive social relationships.

Let's take a closer look at key elements of adult support promoted through the High/ Scope Approach (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995)

The first key element is:

- SHARING OF CONTROL BETWEEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN

This means a give and take between adults and children. Adults take turns being the leader, taking turns following the children's lead. Adults are sometimes the teacher and sometimes the learner, sometimes the speaker, sometimes the listener.

Why should adults share control with children? Let's see what the alternative is. If adults give up control to children altogether, the stronger willed children dominate at the expense of other children. If adults retain total control children lose the opportunity to make their own decisions and learn from the consequences. They lose the opportunity to try out new things, ideas and their own independence. Yet we say we want children to develop independence,

initiative, self-reliance, self-control and we hope they become good decision-makers. How can children become good decision makers if we do not give them the opportunity to make decisions? We need to be their partner and be attentive and co-operative – no mean challenge in practice. Adults need to stay open to children's ideas, feeling and intentions. We need to learn from children, they teach us if only we believe and trust this process .

The second key is:

- TO FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S STRENGTH

To focus on children's strength we need to pay attention to the interests of children. In doing this the children are intrinsically motivated. By that I mean, they enjoy what they are doing, they are in control, and they are interested so naturally they will grow more competent and proficient at the task. Let us at all times remind ourselves of the burning question "what do we really want for children?" Sometimes we adults are a little scared of children's newfound enthusiasm as it can cause further work for adults for example a child feeding herself. However if we truly want that child to develop the capacity to feed herself then we need to give her the control and so the opportunity to do exactly that. As a result self satisfaction and self-reliance grows and develops.

The third element is:

- TO FORM AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

According to psychologist, Carl Rogers (1983) authenticity is 'a transparent realness in the facilitator, a willingness to be a person, to be live to the feelings and thoughts of the moment. When this realness includes a prizing, a caring, a trust, a respect for the learner, the climate for learning is enhanced. When it includes a sensitive and accurate emphatic listening then indeed learning and growth exists. The student is trusted to develop'. The child can say this adult is totally present to me. She listens, she cares, she understands and when she doesn't she is real enough to ask real questions. The child then says "I can do it" I can do it because she will help me, she will be there for me'. Then this authentic support will sustain the child long after he/she leaves your setting.

The fourth element of adult support is:

- MAKING A COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S PLAY

Play is how the child constructs knowledge of her/his world, by using materials

to manipulate as he/she choose. Children ask themselves such question as 'How does this work?', 'How does it feel, taste, smell?' What happens if I bang it or throw it on the floor?' When we know and understand the learning that evolves through play and when we support this we adults are supporting children's spontaneous desire to learn and after all what do we want for children?– surely we want them to develop a desire for living and learning.

Last but not least the fifth element of adult support is:

- ADULTS TO ADOPT A PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH TO SOCIAL CONFLICT

Naturally in the course of children's play conflict arises. The very first thing we need to remember when we find Mary and Kate coming to blows is that this is a natural occurrence. Conflict of desires is bound to happen, both children wanting the same buggy at the same time. However, in a supportive environment adults see these situation as opportunities for children to learn skills – the skills of how to solve problems- as we know a very necessary life skill. It is very important to give children time to chat about the situation. So to approach problems calmly and patiently and not–judgementally is essential. We supportive adults need to encourage children to talk to one another about their needs so that they come up with ideas for a solution. Remember what we want for children – autonomy, which means, 'I can do it.' We need to believe they too can solve problems perhaps with a little support to begin with and later independently. Children need plenty experiences to learn these skills. We need to keep reminding ourselves of the importance of encouraging the process. In time children learn to trust themselves as problem solvers. They become competent, they become confident, they are successful, they do see their own worth, and they do belong.

To conclude, when we adults support, encourage, listen, facilitate, extend, empower and attend to the needs of children, they grow and blossom holistically. Children gain the necessary life skills to support them right now and also life skills to carry them into the future. Daily I ask myself "WHAT DO I WANT FOR CHILDREN?" As I raise my own awareness about how children grow and develop and how important the supportive adult is in the life of the child I truly realise the answer is always in the question.

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## Equality of Opportunity for Adult Women Learners: Transforming the Delivery of Training in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on research being undertaken for an M.Phil with the Dublin Institute of Technology. The purpose of this research is to examine:

“Do childcare training programmes respond to the learning needs of adult women in designated areas of social disadvantage”

In the context of this paper it will focus on the potential to transform the delivery of training in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Sector

### 1. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

A positive aspiration in most Western societies is an ethos that opportunities are equally open to all people, however, it can be difficult for all people to access opportunities equally. This is the basis for mainstreaming equality, as not all groups of people have the same means of accessing opportunities. The strategy of mainstreaming of equality has been undertaken to advance the equality of opportunity for men and women in programmes under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006. Mainstreaming equality is a requirement for all policies and programmes under the NDP. Key areas in which the Government has acknowledged equality of opportunity are training and education. The equality objectives of access, participation and outcome should therefore be applied within the framework of the provision of the delivery of childcare training to adult women learners. To be of value the concept of equality for the target group must have a specific focus or objective.

The research has used a framework identified by the National Economic and Social Forum which identifies the principles of Equality Objectives such as Access, Participation and Outcome. Using this framework the research will

look at the type of opportunities available to the women adult learners in terms of childcare training, for example:

#### ACCESS

- When the training is available
- Where the training takes place
- Who delivers the training
- Why women undertake childcare training
- Providers – statutory or private.

#### PARTICIPATION

- How was the training delivered?
- Classroom setting
- What methods were used?
- Provision of key support person – study groups
- Individual tuition
- Provision of pre training course
- Acknowledgement of previous experience
- Acknowledgement of adult learners
- Acknowledgement of literacy issues

#### OUTCOMES

- Has the training changed the way women work with children?
- Has it made any difference to their confidence, self-esteem and literacy skills?
- Would they undertake further training were opportunities provided?
- What are their employment opportunities?

The Government's Green Paper on Adult Education, 1999, acknowledges some of the points outlined in the above framework, and confirms a link between adult education, equal opportunities and the learning environment.

Ensuring an inclusive approach and teaching materials and classroom practices which are appropriate and relevant to the target group. (Green Paper on Adult Education, 1999).

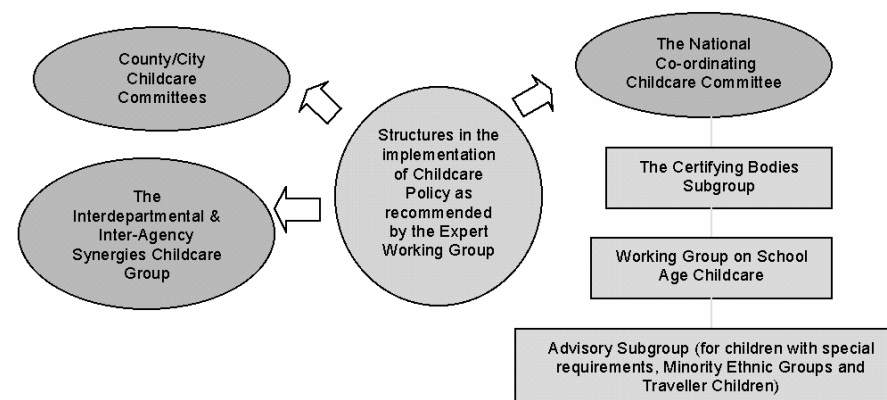
### 1. (i) CHILDCARE DEVELOPMENTS IN IRELAND

Through the Report of the Expert Working Group (EWG) set up under

Partnership 2000 the Government in 1999, for the first time, was provided with a National Childcare Strategy. The Report recommended an implementation framework for new childcare structures, which are now established. These structures continue to endeavour to bring a more formal structure to the whole childcare area and to address the issue of quality. This group has developed an agreed framework encompassing all levels of childcare training. As specific training is not yet an essential requirement in the childcare sector it has led to many workers gaining their skills and knowledge through experience rather than formalised training.

This implementation framework recommended by the EWG has been established and is supported by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to ensure that key players at both national and local levels are brought together to ensure the effective development of childcare. These structures are set out in the following diagram:

Figure 1: Structures in the Implementation of Childcare Policy



The Certifying Bodies' Sub-Group is a sub-group of the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC) which has considered a system that will encompass all levels of childcare training from Foundation Level to teaching on third level courses and will incorporate a multi-disciplinary



approach to the delivery of training. The Certifying Bodies Sub-Group has reported back to the NCCC on this framework. The two bodies, having reached agreement on the proposed structure for childcare training had their report presented by the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in September 2002. The NCCC is now awaiting the response of the NQAI.

Underpinning this study is the wealth of research undertaken to date, which consistently notes that adults working with children should be properly trained in order to provide a quality childcare service. The Manchester Metropolitan University Under Fives Research Project (1995), National Childcare Strategy (1999), Jones (2000), Early Childhood Forum (1995), Centre for Social & Educational Research. DIT (1998), and Clarke-Stewart (1995) are some of the many researchers subscribing to this view.

These views are supported in OMNA's (2002) review of international research in this area:

The most rigorous studies have shown that high quality early education leads to lasting cognitive and social benefits in children, which persist through adolescence and adulthood

Research has shown that professional education for practitioners is a major factor in achieving the provision of high quality early childhood care and education services.

It would appear then, that there is general agreement that training is an essential requisite for those working with children NCCC 2002, OMNA 2000 and DJELR 1999.

#### 1. (ii) AREAS OF SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE PARTNERSHIPS

Twelve pilot area Partnerships were formed in 1991 under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP). In 1992 when ADM was established they come under their remit. The areas of disadvantage are those that have been established where there was a high concentration of poverty and disadvantage and where a large number of people would be affected (ADM.1995). The task of the Partnerships is to encourage links between the statutory, voluntary and

community sectors and to co-ordinate the resources of each agency to develop a cohesive approach to specific actions in response to the needs as outlined by the community and developing a "bottom up" approach.

There are currently 38 Partnership Companies operating in designated areas of disadvantage in Ireland. In 2001, the Government developed the RAPID Programme – Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development. This programme is targeting the 25 areas of most concentrated disadvantage, in Ireland. These areas will be prioritised for investment and development in relation to a number of areas such as childcare, health and education.

#### PUBLICLY FUNDED LABOUR MARKET SCHEMES

The introduction of publicly funded labour market schemes came through FÁS. The development of publicly funded labour market schemes through FÁS initially saw the introduction of Community Employment Schemes, then Jobs Initiative and most recently the development of the Social Inclusion Programme. In principle these schemes provide employment opportunities for eligible unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons.

It should also be acknowledged, that the publicly funded labour market schemes have certainly contributed to the increased participation of women in the labour force and have specifically enabled women from areas of designated disadvantage to re-enter the workforce. Central Statistics Office Reports from 1999 to 2002 continue to show an increase of female's participation in the labour force in general and specifically in 'Other Services', which includes childcare.

Many women participating on publicly funded labour market schemes may have certain requirements as adult learners.

Women maybe early school-leavers, have low self-esteem and some have poor literacy skills. (McKeown & Fitzgerald, 1997)

This was also identified by one of the subgroups (Regulations, Training, Qualifications and Employment) of the EWG set up under the Partnership 2000 to devise a national framework for the development of the childcare sector. The subgroup noted

Flexible training materials and methods of learning and assessment are important particularly in disadvantaged areas where participants may be second chance learners and may have poor literacy skills. (National Childcare Strategy. 1999)

McKeown (1994) clearly acknowledged the importance of proper training for childcare workers. Research clearly indicates that adults need to be trained to work with young children. Yet the women who are the focus of this research are clearly identified as having particular needs as second chance learners. Which highlights the need for

Ensuring an inclusive approach and teaching materials and classroom practices which are appropriate and relevant to the target group. (Equal Opportunities, Green Paper on Adult Education, 1999)

Although the provision of adequate childcare facilities is clearly an important issue in promoting equality of opportunity, especially for women to enable them to return to work or training. It is recognised that the provision of childcare to enable this to happen is an issue for some women participating in training. However the particular focus of this research is the equality of opportunity within training for women adult learners returning to childcare training in areas of disadvantage.

The relevance of equal opportunities and the link to adult learning particularly for women has already been highlighted within adult education and it also emerges within the equal opportunity framework.

Surely then we should afford women particularly those women as identified by the National Childcare Strategy (1999) from disadvantaged areas who maybe second chance learners; may have poor literacy skills and low self esteem, a realistic equality of opportunity in the access, participation and outcome of the training they undertake.

### 1. (iii) RESEARCH GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The South Western Area Health Board is one of three health boards, which comprise the larger Eastern Regional Health Authority. The South Western

Area Health Board has been chosen as the target area which spreads from the inner City area south of the river Liffey, south Co. Dublin, all of Kildare and the Ballinglass area of Co. Wicklow. Within the South Western Area Health Board four Partnerships have been identified under the RAPID Programme. They are:

- Dublin Inner City Partnership
- Canal Communities Partnership
- Tallaght Partnership
- Clondalkin Partnership

The research group participant's will be working in childcare services within these Partnership areas.

### 2. ADULT LEARNERS

The Government's Green Paper on Adult Education in 1999 was the first time an Irish Government had published a paper in this area. The paper highlights the link between adult education and equal opportunities and recommends that the following considerations should be met:

- Insuring an inclusive approach, which is appropriate and relevant to the target group.
- Providing family friendly services in terms of timing and duration
- Ensuring the promotion of equality, which recognises the particular characteristics of the target groups.

Furthermore, the paper states that changes will be necessary in the promotion of access, participation and the achieving of optimum benefit and equality of outcomes for adults re-entering the system of education. Three projects have already demonstrated their capacity to ensure the above points, which were encompassed as part of the overall delivery of their programmes. The details of the projects are highlighted under Section 3.

The Model Framework for Education, Training and Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (ECCE), 2002, acknowledges that the framework should be flexible, dynamic and open to change. This framework would suggest then, that the structures being recommended, for childcare training,

have the ability to meet the training/learning needs of adult learners in this sector. Adults learn best when they do not have to rely on memorising, but can learn through activities at their own pace and with material that seems relevant to their daily lives and uses their own experiences. (Rogers 1977:59)

## 2. (i) WOMEN ADULT LEARNERS

Rogers and Barry's views are supported by an approach taken within a European training project in the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. This university was one of eleven training providers in five member states who delivered the same course. Griffin, Griffith & Murphy (1994) noted that there was agreement to develop women specific teaching methods for the participating women on these courses in all the member states.

Some of the differences relating specifically to women learning were:

- Women's interest to understand the backgrounds of what they are learning and its relevance before they are willing to put into practice learned approaches.
- Women's need to see a link between practice and theory
- Women's ability to look at problems from all angles – taking into consideration what they need to know or relevant to the question or situation posed.
- The importance women attach to understanding the whole problem and putting into context before making suggestions to solve it.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1997) support these differences, in their research carried out in the USA – which explored how women learn and develop.

... women need to see the relevance of and understand the issues before commenting on or giving a view of a situation.

The impact of these views is even more significant, when consideration is given to the fact that the women who are the subject of this research, have been noted as having particular needs in relation to training and education by various reports such as McKeown & Fitzgerald, 1997 and by the National Childcare Strategy, 1999. These needs are supported by the acknowledgement of the Governments Green Paper in 1999.

## 3. FLEXIBLE LEARNING APPROACHES IN ACTION

Research undertaken, in the delivery of childcare training programmes, in Ennis Co Clare, (1995-1999) and in Kirklees, Manchester, (1995), and in a business/communications programme in the University of Ulster, (1993) supports the recently published research by OMNA (2002) for a Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development, within the ECCE sector in Ireland. These programmes also supported the recommendations of the Green Paper on Adult Education, 1999.

The OMNA Childcare/Early Childhood Project, (1995-1999) was sponsored by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and received funding under the European Employment Initiative – New Opportunities for Women (NOW). One of its objectives was to agree a standard for training in ECCE. The Project set up a pilot group for Accreditation for Prior Learning (APL) with a group of ECCE workers initially in Ennis, Co Clare. The research expanded later to include other pilot groups throughout Ireland. Research on this project found that a greater flexibility for training and employment was demonstrated through sector based APL. The final report by OMNA (2002) in relation to this research notes the need for flexible learning, work based learning and APL as well as other methods, as part of the training delivery within the ECCE sector.

In 1995, the Kirklees Early Years Service in conjunction with the Manchester Metropolitan University was also successful in attracting funding through the European Employment Initiative –NOW to deliver a childcare training programme. The course was successfully developed at local level by building existing short courses on the in-service programme and delivering degree level modules to local students through various packages. These involved taught short courses, workshops, (in relation to APL and APEL) distance and open learning; neighbourhood/college study groups etc., together with a variety of other partnerships.

The Equal Opportunities Unit in the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, Northern Ireland, enables women to engage on courses at the level most relevant to them and progress from a Personal Development Course to MSc level. This unit aims to increase women's participation in improving the quality of women's training and reducing barriers to access. The courses are mainly technology and business based, and are delivered from an equal opportunity

basis. In 1993, also through the European Employment Initiative – NOW, the University conducted a European Training Project in Telematics and Telecommunications, which was the subject of research that focused on the specific learning and training needs of woman participants.

The University of Ulster, the DIT/NOW Childcare Project and the Kirklees/Manchester training programmes all recognised and adopted a holistic flexible learning approach encompassing many of the recommendations made by various reports and research on adult education. The DIT/NOW Childcare Project noted that other learning benefits were also highlighted in the APL process, which included:

- Self controlled learning
- Study skills
- Organisational skills
- Self confidence building
- Trained APL Assessors

The Kirklees Project included the following objectives in the delivery of their training:

- A range of teaching methods which included lectures, seminars, projects, discussion, video, visits, research, flexible learning and practice placements, in order to give students a stimulating learning experience thus developing their analytical, oral and written skills.
- A personal tutor system, in order to support students in achieving the aims of the course.
- Valuing practical and previous experiences of the course members, which was linked into assessment in the workplace and placements, giving credit for application of knowledge and the demonstration of their competence in professional settings.

The University of Ulster included similar points as part of their training objectives:

- Confidence building and assertiveness training
- Emphasis placed on experiential learning, problem solving, group work and projects that are related and applicable in real life situations

- Women tutors, who are aware of inequalities of opportunity for women, and who are keen to bring about change are used as role models.

The three programmes promoted:

- The concept of equal opportunities both among course participants and throughout all work settings, ensuring that all unnecessary barriers were removed, and also recognition of the sensitivity of the tutors who responded to the students and assisted in the building of self-confidence.

The assessment and development, of all the courses, whilst having due regard to the wide variety of students backgrounds and experiences, acknowledged that they provided rich opportunities for discussion within the groups, challenged tutors to provide/assess a course which met their varying needs, while at the same time meeting external assessment requirements.

The OMNA DIT/NOW Childcare Project required their APL Assessors to:

- a) Undertake a training course – which included a large element of participant fieldwork and group sessions at which experiences were shared and analysed.
- b) Assessors required a qualification, experience in assessing and tutoring in ECCE.
- c) APL Assessors had to build their own portfolios to research an aspect of APL relevant to their own work.

The Women's Opportunities Unit in the University of Ulster and the Kirklees Early Years Services/Manchester University Project noted the value of trainers having:

- a) Experience of studying as mature students themselves,
- b) An awareness of obstacles to learning in terms of timing and delivery of modules on courses
- c) A clear understanding of their own attitudes to women as learners

The identification of these points established an immediate rapport and common ground between trainers and students alike. They both identified that women trainers provided role models for trainees and that they saw more easily the difference between providing support and undermining independence and

that women trainers appeared to have a better grasp of the issues involved. The significance of tutors having had experience of studying as mature students was important to the success of the course since there was common ground immediately established which reflected an awareness of feelings and values.

It is evident that there are many similarities in the delivery of the training by the OMNA DIT/NOW Childcare Project, the Women's Opportunities Unit in the University of Ulster and the Kirklees Project in partnership with Manchester University. They all focused on the needs of the women to enable them to undertake the course, a variety of flexible learning methods, individual support and a women learner friendly environment.

The delivery of the training in the OMNA DIT/NOW Childcare Project, Kirklees Early Years Service/Manchester University and the University of Ulster Projects, compares favourably to research undertaken by the Centre for Social and Educational Research (2001), on the Evaluation of NCVA Level 2 Childcare Course, run by the Inchicore College of Further Education. The research notes that the content of the NCVA modules is the same regardless of the target participant group. All of the participants on the course were employed through publicly funded labour market schemes. McKeown & Fitzgerald (1997) identified that these women may have certain requirements as adult learners.

A question on the teaching methods, used by the tutors in the delivery of the course to this group of participants was included in the questionnaire and compared with other participants on the same course in the college. The response from course tutors included:

The methods are not substantially different, but I would perhaps take a more empathetic approach, give more time or individual attention and I would relate the subject matter to real life situations as much as possible.

No, but the teaching methods are presented sympathetically.

No, but the students are bringing apriori knowledge so several stages would have to be mixed together (Centre for Social & Educational Research, DIT, 2001)

The findings would indicate that the tutors perhaps did not have the time in terms of delivery of the course to incorporate some of the approaches recommend for dealing with target groups as highlighted in the Green Paper (1999) on adult education.

Whereas the research carried out in OMNA DIT/NOW Childcare Project, the University of Ulster and Kirklees Early Years Service/Manchester University Projects suggests that tutors/assessors were a central point in the delivery of a quality programme. Emerging from these projects was the recognition of the importance of the delivery of the courses in a "women friendly" environment and support structure and the recognition of the reality of women's lives.

Furthermore, the provision of affordable childcare and personal support was highlighted strongly. Although the University of Ulster course was different to the others two courses, they all recognised identically, the requirement of support needs for women participants.

Some of the trainers recognised in the projects identified the value of trainers having:

- Experience of studying as mature students themselves,
- An awareness of obstacles to learning in terms of timing and delivery of modules on courses
- A clear understanding of their own attitudes to women as learners

The identification of these points established an immediate rapport and common ground between trainers and students alike. In particular, the University of Ulster project identified that women trainers provided role models for trainees and that they saw more easily the difference between providing support and undermining independence and that women trainers appeared to have a better grasp of the issues involved.

In the 1993 course, in the University of Ulster, it was established during pre course preparation that there was a shortage of women trainers to deliver the course, therefore they opted for male trainers who had the skills to deliver the course ensuring that all trainers participated in trainer training specifically geared towards women participants. The trainers underwent training

specifically aimed at allowing women to participate at their own pace and through the use of their own life experiences and in particular allowed women to have a voice. Similarly the OMNA/DIT/NOW Childcare Project had only one male trainer and as outlined previously there were specific criteria undertaken by their trainers also.

In the course in Kirklees/Manchester University, one of the developers of the course (John Powell) recognised his role as being

Representative of a dominant educational culture, which can (coupled with being male) silence the personal voice(s) of (female) students. (Powell in Abbot and Pugh. 1998.)

Powell furthermore assumed that students would begin to feel more confident within the dominant education system if they developed a sense of ownership of their own ideas and could link them to the academic programme. By allowing the “women’s voices” to be heard, helped to develop self-confidence through the linking of personal experiences and course content.

Powell and the other tutors, used students to form the ‘structure and content’ of the course as the focus of discussion in which the students were encouraged to use their own language and relate their own experiences as a means to learning. These teaching techniques differed from the conventional and it took the students some time to become accustomed to this process. Likewise in University of Ulster, Jordanstown, Pauline Murphy – course co-ordinator, identifies similarly issues addressed by Powell. Murphy devised a specific training for all trainers (mainly male) which was carried out prior to the commencement of teaching women on this course.

Acknowledgement should also be given to the points highlighted in the Government’s Green Paper, 1999, the National Childcare Strategy, 1999 and McKeown & Fitzgerald, 1997, which supported inclusive approaches, flexible, relevant teaching materials and classroom practices relevant to the target groups. Consideration should also be given to the skills of trainers, as highlighted by research carried out by the OMNA (2002), University of Ulster (1993/4) and Kirklees Early Years Services/Manchester University (1995), particularly where participants come from areas of social disadvantage, may be

second chance learners, and have particular learning needs. The proposed Model Framework for the delivery of Education, Training and Professional Development in the ECCE sector in Ireland is a step in the right direction. The framework places a requirement on the providers of training programmes, to ensure that the delivery of training encompasses various methods.

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## Work-based learning (or experiential learning) as a teaching technique and a learning strategy in Higher Education with specific reference to the training of the Early Years Practitioner

*Florence E Dinneen*

### ABSTRACT

According to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), ideas are not fixed and immutable but are constantly being formed and re-formed. Learning through experience is a process that is best summed up through Freire's concept of *praxis*, which he defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1974, p.36). This paper probes the connections between experience and learning in the workplace for Early Years Practitioners who are following a third level course of training and at the same time addresses such issues as reflective-learning and assessment. Work-based learning is seen throughout the study as the process that links education, work and personal development in a way that revitalises and energises curriculum content while simultaneously establishing a blueprint for life-long learning strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Work-based learning or experiential learning has received much attention in the literature for many decades (Dewey, J., 1938, Freire, 1974; Schon, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Boud *et al.* 1985; Evans, 1992, 1994) and addresses the topic both from the learning developmental perspective of students who are pursuing third-level courses and those who are seeking accreditation for prior experiential learning (APEL) in the workplace (Evans, 1994). Educationists and developmental psychologists have for centuries emphasised that learning from experience is the process through which human development occurs – Plato, Rousseau, Froebel, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Bruner and Bandura. Consequently, this paper argues that, whatever the learning path, a knowledge of the theories of learning and development as well as theories of instruction and their application in the planning and delivery of courses, are pre-requisites for an outcome that has life-long learning as its ultimate goal. Theoretical underpinnings will therefore dominate initially with linkage being made

throughout between learning, development and instruction. The social aspect of learning will automatically expose the role of experience and that of the more skilled partner in the educative process (the instructor) and in so-doing emphasise the need for structure, the setting of learning goals and the manner of assessment. In this context a handbook for supervised work practice for the aspirant early years practitioner will be examined as a model for teaching and learning and through its use the technique of reflective practice will be seen to act as a motivator towards personal and professional development that lays the foundation for learning throughout the lifespan.

#### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY – A THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT

According to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), ideas are not fixed and immutable but are constantly being formed and re-formed. From the outset Kolb asserts the developmental focus of experiential learning theory by drawing on the legacy of key contributors to the experiential/cognitive development debate. In the Preface, for example, he admits that the work of the great cognitive theorist on development, Vygotsky, laid the foundations for the developmental focus of his work. Dewey, an experiential advocate in the learning process comes from the philosophical perspective of pragmatism and contends that inner experience liberates the individual to such an extent that his/her creative capacities add a new worth and sense of dignity to human individuality thus allowing the individual to make contributions that are worthwhile in their uniqueness (Dewey, 1958). Kolb (1984) however, quickly demonstrates his awareness of the individual's capacity for *indignity* as well as dignity with his reference to man's *aggressive creativity* and counterbalances the thought with the claim that the "learning process must be reimbued with the texture and feeling of human experiences shared and interpreted through dialogue with one another" (Ibid. p.2). This latter quotation succinctly combines the work of Vygotsky and Dewey in an interesting way since nowadays Vygotsky is seen as a theorist who fits comfortably into the social-constructivist model of development.

So far, a definition for what experiential learning theory implies escapes us, yet, it has its intellectual origins according to Kolb (1984) in the combined work of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget with further contributions emanating from sources as diverse as Jung, Erikson, Rogers, Perls, and Maslow, not forgetting the revolutionary ideas of Freire (1973,1974) and Illich (1972) from an

educational perspective. Therefore the theory can be defined as pragmatic and humanistic in such a way that clearly identifies learning and development through experience as a process that spans a lifetime.

Divergent sources however find unity according to Kolb (1984) in the very nature of the learning processes on which they are based. Dewey (1938), for example, sees the learning process developing through purposeful action that is based on judgment activated as a result of observation and knowledge gleaned from the self and from others who may have more experience or expertise in a particular area. He states that the crucial educational problem is "that of procuring the postponement of immediate action upon desire until observation and judgment have intervened" (Ibid. p.69). Likewise Lewin, the founder of American social psychology, whose work in the area of group dynamics and the methodology of action research is renowned worldwide, sums up his dedication to the integration of scientific inquiry and social problem solving with the statement, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (cited in Kolb, 1984, p.9). Lewin's methodology in the learning process is centred on the here-and-now experience of an individual followed by data collection about such experience. Clearly, like Dewey's stance, an element of reflective practice is evident in the learning process. For Piaget, the learning process stems from the continual transaction between the processes of assimilation and accommodation in successive stages until a higher level of cognitive functioning is attained. Again, it is clear that experience shapes intelligence according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development and that reflection is included in the process. Freire (1973, 1974), on the other hand, speaks of *critical consciousness* which he interprets as the active exploration of the personal, experiential meaning of abstract concepts through open and frank dialogue between equals and together with Illich (1972) considers the traditional educational system as primarily an agency of social control, a control that is oppressive and discriminatory in the extreme. Open and frank dialogue between equals stimulates a joint process of inquiry and learning which Freire terms *praxis* and which he defines as, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1974, p.36).

Kolb (1984) summarises the concept of experiential learning in terms of it being a process of learning that is continuous throughout life, is holistic in approach and embraces adaptation to the world (Ibid. pp.20-38). From this

point onwards, experiential learning theory as it unfolds will be seen to comply with the social-constructivist model of development when applied to work-based learning (or experiential learning) as a teaching technique and a learning strategy in Higher Education for the training of early years practitioners.

Since experiential learning as *a learning strategy* is part of the main orientation of this paper it would be remiss of me not to address the terms APEL (accreditation of prior *experiential* learning) and APL (accreditation of prior learning), however briefly. Evans (1994) defines APEL by stating that it refers to all learning, which has not been previously assessed. He differentiates it from the term APL, which includes learning that has been assessed for some formal purpose. In the context of training for the Early Years profession at third level colleges in Ireland, the current ruling acknowledges certain levels of certified prior learning for entry to courses at various points, while accreditation for prior *experiential* learning in terms of credits towards a course or qualification has yet to be evaluated. At a recent seminar, which addressed the topic of APEL in the context of technological education in Ireland, it was confirmed that while work is in progress currently towards accreditation, no national document has yet been published on the issue (Murphy, 2003).

Writing as far back as 1994, Evans summarised the attitude regarding APEL in Great Britain in the following statement:

APEL may be a common sense, simple proposition. When it is applied to higher education, further education, adult education, vocational education and professional education or employment, public or private, it shakes the structure. (Ibid. p.104).

Using the tone of a firm advocate and protagonist of APEL he affirms that, “It is part of the future” (Ibid. p.104) and argues at length that it is indeed proper learning, and as such should be acceptable in educational circles as well as with employers. He is ever conscious of course, that acceptance in educational circles would require a monumental mind change as well as a radical reorganisation of the system. In an evaluation of European practices into APEL as a key to lifelong learning, Alheit & Pienng, (Editors, 1998) outline the current trend in third level colleges throughout Europe in relation to their manner of adapting to what is termed a new *learning culture*. Bailie & O’Hagan (1998) as

contributors to the above publication search for a definition for APEL and in the process address many aspects of the debate. Their principle focus however, concentrates on accreditation and assessment. Finally, they conclude that the debate throughout the past few decades on the topic of APEL has been instrumental in advancing the view that learning opportunities should be increased within university programmes to facilitate students in becoming familiar with the work place. They emphasise that the main learning advantage stemming from this experience is that it allows students an opportunity to use the experience reflectively to enhance their theoretical knowledge.

### EXPERIENCE, DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Returning to the main orientation of this paper calls for an in-depth look at matters educational from the perspective of work-based learning as a teaching technique in higher education. The work of key educators Dewey, Vygotsky and Piaget has already been addressed in terms of their emphasis on the role of experience in the process of learning and development and in this context Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly interesting. “We must determine at least two developmental levels” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.85) – one conceives of mental development in retrospect while the other is concerned with mental development prospectively. Defining the *Zone of Proximal Development* he declares that-

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Ibid. p.86)

Actual and potential developmental levels therefore, are the key issues here allowing a ‘zone’ to be recognised where a facilitating adult or more competent peer (in terms of knowledge accretion) can operate in order to influence the transition to a higher level of competency or understanding. Lifespan theories of development, for example Bowlby (1971) and Erikson (1982), concentrate the mind on learning and development as an ongoing process from the cradle to the grave. Vygotsky’s theory regarding actual and potential development complements lifespan theories and is exemplified further in recent research

involving the learning and development of adults through active participation in their children's education (Tijus *et al.*, 1997; Robson & Hunt, 1999). The latter named authors devised an inner city partnership project with parents in the United Kingdom to help realise children's potential and to raise standards. Actual, rather than passive involvement, was the key to enabling these parents achieve the project's objectives, which included taking ownership of their children's education, growing in self-esteem, self-confidence and knowledge of the school curriculum. However, additional to achieving the set goals of the project, another gain accrued for parents. Their new-found confidence in themselves as educators enabled them to make the mental shift from a position that located them "both physically and metaphorically" (Robson & Hunt, 1999, p.190) outside the school to a position that enhanced their perception of how they were valued within the educational process. A further developmental bonus noted in this study is that parents became motivated to improve their own educational standard. All of this demonstrates the fact that active participation in the learning process enhances learning and development while simultaneously motivating the subject towards self-directed learning. Hothersall's (1985) definition of learning – "A relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience" (Ibid. p.37) is fitting at this time and in light of the above quoted research findings, further enhances the concept of change in the development trajectory of adults as well as children as a result of experience.

Both Bandura (1986, 1989) and Bruner (1995) offer themselves as exemplars of a cognitive developmental style that is social in its orientation yet having a strong emphasis on the role of experience. Bandura, whose work is termed "social cognitive theory," is renowned for his contribution regarding the place of associate and observational learning in development. He believes that learning occurs by watching others perform a certain action and labels this type of learning *modeling*. *Modeling* however, according to Bandura, is not confined to the observation of situational experiences but goes on to suggest that it can be a vehicle for learning abstract as well as concrete skills or information. The observer extracts a rule that may be the basis of the modelled behaviour, or adopts attitudes, values, ways of problem solving or indeed standards of self-evaluation through the process. He also argues that learning does not always require extrinsic reinforcement, but rather, that intrinsic reinforcements, or intrinsic rewards, such as pride or discovery are self-motivating in themselves.

Here he touches on the affective dimension of learning and in so doing, pre-empted the work of Boud *et al* (1993) who propose that learning is a holistic process and that no aspect, whether cognitive, affective or psychomotor is discrete or independent of the others. Much of this work also concurs with Montessori's stance on the unification of the personality through the educative process. Bruner is associated with the social-cognitive/social constructivist model of development and is steadfast in his emphasis on the role of culture in the learning process. He uses the term *scaffolding* to indicate the support that is needed during the course of development to introduce new and inexperienced members of society into the ways of the culture. The instructors in this case are "more competent members of [that] culture" (Bruner, 1995, p.6). Bruner however, is unique in his contribution to our understanding of learning and development throughout the life cycle in that he triangulates the process to include a theory of instruction (Bruner, 1971). In this way it is clear to see the intrinsic linkage that exists between learning, development and instruction and that experience plays a key role.

#### BRUNER'S THEORY OF INSTRUCTION (1971)

According to Bruner (1971), a theory of instruction is concerned with the methodology or the "how" of *teaching what can best be learned*. He outlines this by nominating its four key features:

- 1) It should specify the experiences that lead the learner to learn willingly and it should create a predisposition towards learning.
- 2) It should have structure.
- 3) It should specify the sequence of presentation of the materials being used.
- 4) It should specify the nature of rewards and punishments.

In today's parlance this can be interpreted by saying that students should acquire the necessary expertise and knowledge through controlled, structured, sequential and cumulative experiences that are assessed in a fair, just and transparent manner. The process therefore is founded on a certain methodology and requires a mode of transmission. With reference to the training of the early years practitioner in higher education, the chosen mode of transmission for discussion in relation to work-based learning is *The Handbook for Supervised Work Practice*. This is used as a teaching/learning tool that involves the cooperation of the key partners in the learning process. It must be acknowledged

however, that other modes of transmission for example, e-learning could be utilised in the same way with equal effect. Consequently, the ensuing discussion with its theoretical underpinnings covering the areas of learning, development and instruction has general application in the planning and delivery of any third level course that contains an element of work-based (or experiential) learning in its training strategy.

### THE HANDBOOK FOR SUPERVISED WORK PRACTICE

As a model for teaching and learning, the handbook, from the outset, shows that learning is a partnership as well as a collaborative process involving a number of key players – the student, the college supervisor and the placement supervisor. Consequently, formalising this aspect of partnership is recommended where each partner signs an agreement to comply with the guidelines and recommendations outlined in the handbook. Otherwise the handbook has a number of key distinguishing features:

- 1) It should outline the Aims & Objectives of the course.
- 2) It should detail the Philosophy underpinning the course and outline the Course Structure.
- 3) It should outline the Role and Responsibilities of the partners in the learning process.
- 4) The manner of Assessment should be clearly stated.

While the inclusion of all of the above features helps to ensure that the handbook reflects the totality of the course, it is the role and responsibilities of the partners along with the manner of assessment that shall now engage our attention.

### ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARTNERS

It is the responsibility of the college supervisor to utilise the work placement as a unique teaching opportunity and to design a programme of learning around it. This programme incorporates three distinct stages – *Advance Preparation: On-site Visitation: Assessment:* – and in essence has its pedagogical foundations based on a sound theory of instruction (already discussed in this paper). Throughout the *preparation stage*, the student is introduced to the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the course. During this period also, use could be made of video viewing to enable students to become familiar with

methods of observing and recording the behaviour of young children in a wide variety of care and educational settings. On the subject of personal development, tutorials and workshops that incorporate relationship building and skillful communication are seen to enable the student to co-operate and liaise with a multi-disciplinary team as well as training them to become skillful communicators with children, both verbally and non-verbally. The *on-site visitation* widens the learning vista for the student since it allows the college tutor an opportunity to monitor and assess on the basis of practical know-how and also on the student's mode of interaction within the totality of the child's environment. Allied to this is the opportunity for on-site conferencing with the placement supervisor who, during the course of the placement, acts as facilitator and guide for the student. *Assessment* of the student is ongoing once the placement commences since it is taking place continuously by the learning and instructing partners involved in the process. Consequently, it is dual focused since the student is involved in self-assessment through reflective practice while at the same time being subjected to formal assessment through written assignments, which are submitted regularly to the college supervisor and through semi-formal assessment by way of verbal/written feed-back from the placement supervisor.

### REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND ASSESSMENT

Increasingly, it becomes clear that the elements of reflective practice and assessment collectively underpin the developmental aspect of the learner who is engaged in work-based learning. Reflective practice, according to Candy *et al* (1985) empowers the student by providing an opportunity for learning conversations and in-depth analysis to ensue with the more skilled partners in the educative process, thus leading to the conceptualisation of any learning that takes place along with the mapping out of new experiences. Reflective practice however, needs to be encouraged and nurtured throughout the period of training. Again, this is where a sound theory of instruction with its specificity and structure in outlining the learning goals makes it attractive, challenging and manageable for the student undertaking the learning. The key to learning in this way is no different from learning through any other medium and is premised on human motivation, which, according to Wlodkowski (1999) is the energy that drives the learning process. However, Wlodkowski is quick to point out that while motivating instructors *are* unique, the act of motivating adult learners requires core characteristics, which can be learned, controlled and

planned for by anyone who genuinely has the interest of effective teaching at heart. He sees these as the five pillars on which rests “what we as instructors have to offer adults” (Ibid. p.25). The five pillars are – *expertise, empathy, enthusiasm, clarity* and *cultural responsiveness*.

Assessment, on the other hand, is bound up with the student’s interpretation of the reflective practice and demonstrates at one level how students are graded in the course of their learning. *The Handbook for Supervised Work Practice* once again should be specific in detailing the type of observations and/or reflective learning themes that students are expected to present along with clear examples, a time-frame for the submission of work and a definite pass/fail indicator where necessary. Assessment by the various supervisors of the placement should be both cumulative and summative so that students have a clear indication of progress at regular intervals and a summative evaluation at the end of each year of the course.

Assessment at another level is a self-evaluating process undertaken by students on the course. Each student plots his/her personal learning and professional development at the end of the course year in a frank and open manner. Allied to this assessment is a forward development plan for the coming academic year with learning goals clearly identified.

#### **WORK-BASED LEARNING AS A LIFE-LONG LEARNING STRATEGY**

Work-based learning as outlined in this paper so far, clearly links education, work and personal development in such a way that Hothersall’s (1985) definition of learning already quoted as “A relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience” becomes even clearer where learning throughout the life cycle is considered. Reflection on what is learned is the key towards changing perspectives and re-vitalising the learning path for the future. For the Early Years Practitioner this is particularly significant since the most effective and beneficial early years curricula are those that can adapt to the ever-changing developmental needs of children which are governed not only by diverse social, cultural, ethnic and linguistic constraints but also by the uniqueness of each individual child and his/her developmental pathway. The true benefit of work-based learning therefore stems from the adaptive capacity it confers on those who utilise it as a teaching technique and a learning strategy in their engagement with the educative process at any level.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The concept of work-based (or experiential) learning has had ample literature exposure throughout the past century, while educationally, knowledge of the benefit of experience in the learning process has had a much longer history. More recent literature on the subject of the value of experience in the work place outlines its advantages both retrospectively through accreditation for prior experiential learning and prospectively as a vehicle towards professional and personal development. Undoubtedly, this paper demonstrates that intrinsic links exist between learning, development and instruction while at the same time underpinning the pedagogical foundations of any successful learning programme. Work-based learning (or experiential learning) as a teaching technique and a learning strategy in higher education, no more than in any other sphere, is a social undertaking where the learning process is triangulated between three key partners to the process. In the context of training to be an early years professional, *The Handbook for Supervised Work Practice* was seen to be a worthy educative tool for teaching and learning. In conclusion, work-based learning (or experiential learning), which incorporated reflective practice and a transparent mode of assessment was undoubtedly seen as a mechanism through which the appetite for learning was nurtured and developed as a blueprint for life-long learning.

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PART 5  
Supporting Quality



## NCNA Centre of Excellence: The Contribution to Quality

*Máire Corbett*

At the OMEP Conference 2002, the paper read by Mary O’Kane and Margaret Kernan referred to the NCNA Centre of Excellence Award thus: “The NCNA Centre of Excellence Award scheme, ... could be viewed as an initiative designed to support quality improvement.” From “A study of the impact of the Childcare (Preschools services) Regulations (1996) on the quality of Early Childhood services in Ireland: the IEA Preprimary Project Revisited”. OMEP Conference 2002.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the National Children’s Nurseries Association’s Centre of Excellence Award and its potential impact on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education settings. To qualify for the Centre of Excellence Award candidates are required to complete a Self Evaluation Profile (SEP), consisting of 10 sections, and nearly 500 questions. Following submission of the SEP to the NCNA qualifying applicants are visited as part of the validation process. How these 10 sections were identified as key to quality will be described as will some of the questions which applicants answered as part of the SEP. The parameters for the external evaluation will be presented along with some initial findings from the process.

The NCNA has long held a commitment to Self Assessment as a beneficial tool in the assessment and improvement of quality. To support this, in 2000 the NCNA published the Self Assessment Manual of Good Practice. This was compiled by Martin Kelly. In this manual Kelly states “Quite simply, good practice is the provision of quality care. But what exactly is quality? How can we define it? How is it developed? How can we ensure that the needs of children, parents and staff are all reflected in the approach to quality that we take?” In the Self Assessment manual these factors are looked at in greater detail and providers are encouraged to use the process of Self Assessment on a regular basis to support them in the positive aspects of their practice and also, crucially, to identify areas that need development and improvement and to assist them in the development of a road map to work on those areas. In this way the ongoing development of quality is supported and encouraged in the childcare setting.

When we came to discuss the concept of an award for services offering excellence it was easily agreed that a more in depth version of this Self Assessment Manual was the most appropriate tool. What was harder to get to grips with was the concept of “What is Quality”. Speaking at a conference in Cork in 1999 Noírin Hayes said in relation to the broad concept of quality “ It is important to note that the regulations are not only minimum standards, but they also relate to only one aspect of quality provision ... What may be called the static variables of quality such as space, ratios, group size and so on. There is a whole other dimension to quality for which we have yet to develop an evaluative language. However when this dimension is there we know it, as sure as we recognize its absence. This aspect of quality relates to the dynamic variables, or quality of the interpersonal relationships, the pedagogical style within the complex system that is the childcare setting.”

We were obviously also conscious of the Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare’s comments on Quality: “A quality childcare service must be regarded as one which provides enhancing experiences for children and positive interactions between adults and children.”

While it was obvious to include the static variables of quality, it was imperative to also look at and try to develop the “evaluative language” referred to by Noírin Hayes in relation to the dynamic variables. Through discussion, reading and Internet research into best practice, accreditation and evaluation systems worldwide we identified 10 key aspects to quality childcare provision.

- 1 Activities and Programmes for Children
- 2 Relationships in the Nursery
- 3 Partnership with Families
- 4 Health, Safety and Hygiene
- 5 Staff Conditions and Professional Development
- 6 Physical Environment
- 7 Food and Nutrition
- 8 Management and Administration
- 9 Implementation of Policies and Procedures
- 10 Evaluation and Review of Nursery

As can be seen the static aspects of quality are covered, such as Health Safety and Hygiene, Food and Nutrition, and so on. So too are dynamic aspects of quality, such as Activities and Programmes, Relationships, Partnerships, etc. Obviously there is some overlap within this in that some aspects of the childcare service can be static, but should be dynamic!! For example in Activities and Programmes, a written curriculum beautifully bound is no earthly use if it is not implemented in such a way as to meet the needs of the children for whom it is designed. That is when static becomes dynamic and the same can be said for many of the 10 sections probably!

Within these 10 categories are numerous questions designed to elicit information on the quality of the service. At the start of each section applicants are informed what the qualifying criteria are, e.g. all yes answers are required, minimum score of 6 and so on. The age range covered by the SEP reflected the needs of all children, from infant to school age. Obviously, compliance with the Pre School Regulations is mandatory.

The process which we used in the Award was as follows:

The Award was launched in March of last year (2002) by Mary Hanafin T.D. (then Junior Minister with Special Responsibility for Children) at the NCNA AGM and Conference. Speaking at the launch Mary Lee Stapleton, NCNA Director of Services said "This award will demonstrate to parents, visitors and members of the public, a commitment to quality and success in implementing and maintaining consistently high standards of excellence." NCNA members were invited to apply, and following the closing date the Self Evaluation Profiles were sent to all applicants, 77 in all. NCNA Regional Support Workers were available to support members in their region throughout the process of completing the SEP. These SEP's were required to be returned to the NCNA by September 13 2002. The 37 SEP's which were returned were then appraised. As can be seen from these statistics, not all services that applied for the SEP returned the document. For some services this was because they wished to take longer to achieve the required standard and for others events intervened that prohibited them from proceeding in that year. It is anticipated that many of these will proceed with the process in subsequent years. We are also aware of member services who are using the Self Evaluation Profile as a training resource.

The services which complied with the criteria for the Centre of Excellence as outlined in the SEP received a validation visit sometime between October '02 and February '03. These Validation visits were conducted by NCNA National Advisor Ashling Hooper and a Regional Support Worker. No Regional Support Worker validated in her own region to maintain the objectivity and transparency of the process. At the end of February the applicants were notified and we are delighted that 16 NCNA member services achieved the Centre of Excellence Award. The Awards were presented to the 16 successful members at Dublin Castle on May 9 2003 by Michael Mc Dowell T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This was an extremely special occasion for everyone involved and the sense of pride in the Conference Hall was palpable. More than one recipient remarked that after so many years there is now a recognition of the trojan work childcare providers have been doing in the pursuit of excellence for children and parents in Ireland.

Our aim in developing the Award was to develop a mark of distinction acknowledging the member services that are providing excellent standards of care for children in Ireland. We also sought to support and encourage providers to examine their practice and benchmark themselves in relation to the validator guide which all applicants were provided with. We hoped that childcare service owners / managers and staff would look at the broader concept of quality in their services and that the SEP would give staff new ideas, remind them of old ones and encourage them to be innovative and child centred in their practice. We actively encouraged managers to collaborate with their staff in completing the SEP so the approach to the award was a team one with everyone in the service playing their part in the development towards the Centre of Excellence. Parents were co validators with us in that we required the service to distribute questionnaires developed by us to validate the Partnership with Families section. On Validation visits we spoke also with staff and children to enable us to form as full a picture as possible. Validation visits lasted at least one full day and two days in the case of services catering for more than 50 children.

Let us now turn to the SEP itself and look at the kinds of questions we asked in each section.

Section 1, Activities and Programmes for children has 11 parts, covering the range of areas we consider essential in an excellent programme plan, such as:

encouraging children to think, reason question and experiment;  
development and enhancement of language and literacy;  
facilitating physical development;  
encouraging social skills;  
fostering positive identity and creative expression and  
respecting cultural diversity.

We also looked at the flexibility of the plans, age/ stage appropriate activities and so on.

Some questions require a Yes / No answer and others require the service to rate itself on a scale of 1 – 8. To assist this process, both for this section and some others we developed a validators guide.

In Section 1 the service is required to answer yes to all questions requiring such answers and to score at least 6 on all other questions. A sample question is:

*Infants / Toddlers are provided with a safe challenging environment to explore.*

- 1 – 2 No opportunity to explore independently
- 3 – 4 Limited opportunity to explore
- 5 – 6 Opportunity to climb into and over things
- 7 – 8 Various levels to explore ( i.e. slope to crawl, steps to climb and jump).

Another is:

*Staff are available to talk with children while giving them time to express themselves.*

- 1 – 2 little or no time interacting with children
- 3 – 4 limited time to talk with children as other duties take over
- 5 – 6 children have time to talk to staff without being rushed.
- 7 – 8 enough staff available to allow children access to them at all times without distractions. Programme is flexible enough to facilitate this with opportunities and mediums to express themselves.

In Section 2 – Relationships in the Nursery, we look at:  
Relationships between management and staff,

Staff relationships with each other,  
Staff relationships with children,  
Formal and informal links with the community and  
Liaison with local professional personnel.

This section consists of statements to which the service respond yes / no. For example:

*New staff are provided with orientation and training.*

The validators statement for this is:

List of induction methods, induction provided by an experienced member of staff. New staff members are introduced to each child and parent. Time is allocated to discuss the ethos and Policies and Procedures. Policies and Procedures should be signed by each staff member once they have read and understood the document. Record keeping is explained.

So it can be seen that in addition to quantifying quality, very concrete suggestions are being given also to support the process.

The third section is Partnership with Families:

In “People Under Three, Young Children in Day Care” ( Elinor Goldschmeid and Sonia Jackson) the following statement strikes me as having a good deal of truth unfortunately. “... although ‘partnership with parents’ is a popular aspiration, appearing in many statements of aims and objectives and promotional literature, the reality is elusive” . We want to encourage providers to *really* value partnerships with families and to give examples and support of how to achieve this. Again in this section we give a list of statements and require yes / no answers.

So an example of a statement is this section is:

*Families are facilitated and encouraged to take time when settling their child.*

The Validators guide here states: Parents are encouraged to visit with their child prior to starting. Children are gradually introduced to the nursery.

Or another statement is:

*Families are involved in regular reviews of the nurseries service delivery e.g. through meetings, questionnaires etc.*

Yearly, families are consulted in relation to service

is the validator guide for this question.

Remember parents are asked to complete a questionnaire for return to the NCNA and also on validation visits parents are spoken to by the validators in regard to their experience.

In Section 4 we looked at Health Safety and Hygiene. For this section there is not a validators guide as the questions very obviously require yes / no answers.

For example:

*All staff are aware of and implement the Safety Statement, or Outdoor play surfaces are checked each day for animal litter and other rubbish.*

Section 5 – Staff Conditions and Professional Development is similar. The range of questions here covers:

Basic training,  
First aid training,  
In service training,  
Recruitment procedures,  
Child/ staff ratios and  
Student policies.

In Section 6 we turn to the Physical Environment. In recognition of the fact that not every service is purpose built or perfectly designed the scoring criteria in this section has key questions to which a yes answer is compulsory and the service is also required to answer yes to at least 2 other questions. In other words the key questions are minimum standards required to qualify and the others represent a value added factor. In this section there is a validator guide. For example one question is:

*Is space arranged to accommodate children individually, in small groups and in large groups. or  
Can children access a variety of age appropriate levels, safe steps etc. to enhance their physical development.*

Other areas covered in this section include provision for outdoor play, facilities for children to keep work in progress, for parents and staff to meet in private, staff

facilities etc. The maintenance of the childcare service is also covered in this section. Food and Nutrition also requires some yes / no answers and some rating 1 – 8 and again validator guides are given. The range of questions here covers

General Information such as is the food supplied by the nursery,  
the parents or a third party,  
The nutritional aspect of the meals and snacks,  
Feedback to parents,  
Special dietary requirements,  
Multi cultural factors,  
Involvement of adults,  
Flexibility of meal times,  
The provision of a social aspect to mealtimes,  
Provision for children of mixed ages to eat together and so on.

In Section 8 – Management and Administration, we examine the management system i.e. community, private, workplace etc. We also look at:

Record keeping, legislation, labour law, insurance, financial records, tax, child protection and availability of information. This whole section requires participants to answer yes / no.

We quite deliberately titled Section 9 *Implementation* of Policies and Procedures. We ascertain:

What Policies and Procedures are in place and also look at  
If and when they are reviewed,  
The involvement of staff, parents and children  
in their development and review and also  
How well they are being implemented.  
The final section, Evaluation and Review concerns the frequency and method of evaluating all aspects of the service.  
We look at Evaluation of staff, of the service and of the children's programmes.  
This section is also scored on yes/ no.

We in NCNA have commissioned an external evaluation of the Centre Of Excellence Award, through which all services which participated in the process

at any stage will be given the opportunity to give feedback on the whole process and the results of this will feed into the implementation of the Award in the future. The Evaluation is being carried out by Dr. Joanne Benn, from NAEYC ( National Academy for the Education of Young Children).

The Evaluation consists of Focus Groups for each category of participant, i.e.:  
Those who applied for the SEP and did not return it;  
Those who did not achieve the Award and  
Those who did achieve the Award.

All NCNA Staff involved in the development and implementation of the Centre of Excellence Award have also participated in a focus group.

These focus groups took place at the NCNA Annual Conference and AGM in May 2003. Questionnaires will also be sent to each participant at any stage of the process. The questions to which we are seeking answers in the evaluation include: We need to know what the participants experience of the SEP has been. Is it user friendly etc? Did some areas work better than others and so on. Then the process itself – How did the NCNA members who took part experience the process? Did they feel supported through the process?

We are also examining the impact of participation in the Centre of Excellence on quality in the service; In order to qualify did members have to make many changes to their service? What was the impact on staff, parents etc ... Did members feel it improved the quality of the service? Were there areas that needed more work than others by participants?

At this stage having worked through the process we have identified some initial findings. It is interesting to note that of the services receiving the Award the profile of services ranges across the range of service types, e.g. private, community, large, small etc. We feel that this illustrates the fact that all services have the capability to provide excellence. We also feel that the process encouraged collaboration between management and staff and also encouraged parental involvement. We were most impressed by the openness to the process displayed by participants. They gave their all to it. We also hope that by their involvement in the Centre of Excellence services will rethink their practice or look at it a deeper way, that rather than just do things the way things have always

been done, that practioners will question, reflect and change aspects of their practice. We have also identified areas that as a whole need development in childcare services, such as nutrition, anti bias and diversity and toddler programmes. We intend to address these areas through training and information to members, in our magazine and through Regional Support Workers.

It important to state that to achieve the Award services needed to achieve excellence across the board. Scoring is required to be consistent on all ten sections. In recognition of the fact that on a validation visit we are seeing a snapshot of that service we encourage providers to use evidence, e.g. portfolios, photographs etc to demonstrate their programme year round.

In conclusion it is important to say that we consider this a developing and growing work in progress. The Self Evaluation Profile, validation, and award process will continue on an annual basis, enabling all NCNA members to avail of the opportunity to achieve this level of distinction.

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## The Community Playgroup Initiative 2001-2004 – a Project to Enhance Quality in Early Years Settings

*Mary Daly*

The Community Playgroup Initiative (*cpi*) is a three year pilot project which was set up in 2001 by the Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF) in partnership with the South Eastern Health Board (SEHB). The initiative was established to provide support and extra funding to community playgroups in order to enhance the quality of their provision. The underpinning principle of the initiative is the belief in the value of good support systems to the pre-school child and his/her family within the community. The early years of a child's development are of crucial importance and the environmental conditions experienced by children have a strong influence on later development. Research shows that high quality early education leads to lasting benefits which persist throughout adolescence and adulthood. High quality, active learning early years programmes can provide significant life-time benefits for children, especially for children living in disadvantaged circumstances, as they can positively affect educational performance, adult economic status, criminal behavior and family stability (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart 1993; O'Flaherty 1995). *cpi*, as its name suggests, specifically supports community playgroups since the KHF and the SEHB believe that community playgroups can contribute positively to children's lives if they provide high quality, active learning programmes in children's own communities.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the policy context for Early Years Education and Care in Ireland at the present time, to describe the *cpi* and to highlight some of the key issues emerging for community playgroups in the 21st century. *cpi* was initiated during a time of rapid change in Ireland with respect to policy in early years education and care. In 1999 the National Childcare Strategy was published and this strategy is at present being implemented through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-2006 under the National Development Plan. The EOCP was established to develop and expand childcare facilities to allow parents participate in employment, training and education and is jointly funded by the Irish government and the European Union. It has a budget of approximately €436

million, 40 per cent of which has already been granted to groups and individuals in the childcare sector (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform March 2003). While this programme is very necessary and worthwhile it only represents part of the jig-saw of early years education and care in Ireland. Community playgroups form another very important part of this area but due to the increased emphasis on the development of daycare places community playgroups may not be getting the recognition and attention that they should. It is put forward that this is not beneficial to the young children and their families who are availing of these community services.

### COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

A playgroup is a group of pre-school aged children meeting regularly several mornings/afternoons a week to play together for two to three hours. The role of the early years practitioners in this setting is to provide an environment rich in opportunity so that the children attending learn by being actively involved in their play. The practitioners answer questions, encourage discussion, scaffold and support children's learning. In Ireland there are two different types of playgroup, the privately run playgroup and the community playgroup. A private playgroup is run by an individual often in an extension to the home. They provide a very worthwhile service and in some areas are the only playgroup available to young children and their families. On the other hand a community playgroup is organised and run by a committee of parents and community members. Active and responsible participation in the management and planning of such playgroups is required by the volunteers involved in these endeavours. Community playgroups are sometimes run in sports halls and community centres and are often established in socially disadvantaged areas. They are non-profit-making facilities and fees are lower than in private playgroups so that all young children can access the service regardless of means. Parents are very welcome in the group and are encouraged, particularly at the beginning of the first term to stay until their children are settled. In the past, most playgroups had a rota of parents to help out everyday. However, parent rotas in community playgroups are no longer very common as many mothers now work outside the home and also the establishment of the FAS Community Employment Scheme replaced the parent rota in many community playgroups.

The emphasis in a playgroup is on the total development of the child by providing him/her with an environment with ample opportunity for

exploration and discovery. There is no formal teaching of academic skills. Instead the holistic development of the child is aimed at through rich play experiences. Play is recognised as being a natural and universal medium for young children's thinking, learning and development. It is viewed as being as essential to children's lives as good care, food, sunshine and protection since it strengthens their bodies, improves their minds and helps develop their personalities (Abbott 1994). However, for play's value to be realised certain conditions must be fulfilled. There must be sensitive, knowing and informed adults involved; play must be carefully organised and planned; and it must be seen as a high status activity, not just something that is done when the real 'work' is over. Children must be given time to develop their play and careful observation of children's activities must occur. The quality of provision, the value associated with play processes and the involvement of adults all impact on the quality of play (Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn and Almy 1987). Therefore, the quality of play within the each community playgroup is of paramount importance and everyone involved in the group must value play and must ensure that all children experience good quality play.

Ireland's first community playgroup was set up in the Crumlin Social Services Centre, Dublin in 1970 (Douglas 1994). Since then playgroups both private and community have been established all over Ireland as an awareness developed of the crucial importance of the pre-school years for children's development and learning. In 1969 the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association (I.P.P.A.) was formed to support playgroups. Since then the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association has changed its name to IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation. Its brief now includes private and community daycare, private and community based playgroups as well as individual members. However, most pre-school playgroups including community playgroups continue to be members of IPPA and these provide support, advice, information and training for their members. Irish medium playgroups also exist and many of these are community based and receive support and funding through An Comhchoiste Reamhscolaíochta Teoranta. Networks around the country also provide some support to community playgroups and some playgroup federations have also been established in Dublin through the Dublin City Council. Also some community playgroups have come together to lobby support for themselves such as 'Community Playgroups Together' (CPT) in Dublin which has just published a brochure, position paper and research document in order to highlight their role (CPT 2003).

## THE ROLE OF PLAYGROUPS IN COMMUNITY LIFE

Community playgroups are particularly important to our society since they can contribute to the building of a caring community. Having a community playgroup in the village or estate encourages people to help their neighbours as well as themselves (Douglas 1994). Beyond the family and the school, the community has the potential to contribute to the development of supportive environments for children. Strong communities can be a special resource for children, supporting and nurturing the child and in some cases ameliorating difficult family or social circumstances. They can also offer education, a sense of belonging, social networks, accessible services and supports (Carroll 2002). Community playgroups can contribute to the development of supportive environments in a significant way and having a community playgroup which is respected and nurtured by the community in which it is set, can give those involved very positive benefits. Benefits occur not only for the children but also for the adults since as a consequence of being involved in a community playgroup adults may take part in Adult Education, Personal Development and Community Development.

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Traditionally one of the key principles of community playgroups has been the involvement of parents. The involvement of parents in the education of their children is probably the best opportunity for developing the child holistically that we have today so their involvement must be strongly encouraged and supported (Murphy 2001). For a variety of reasons parents may require various forms of support in taking on this role and it is vital that such supports are freely available if children's overall development is to be enhanced. Parental involvement is highlighted as being vital to positive outcomes for children (Schweinhart *et al.* 1993). In those vital early years community playgroups allow parents to be actively involved in their young children's education and care. While parent rotas may not be very common any more parents can still be actively involved in community playgroups by being on the management committee, by fundraising, by going on outings, by helping with repairs, by attending training/talks/meetings organised by the group. Involving parents has many benefits including enhanced parental knowledge about parenting and child development, their skills and confidence grow, their children make better progress in school and in the long-term stay in school longer and have better educational achievements (Blenkin and Kelly 1996). In essence parental

involvement leads to better outcomes for children and community playgroups facilitate parental involvement in a user-friendly and non-threatening way, linking and connecting them with other support services and agencies depending on each families individual needs.

### QUALITY IN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CARE

To be of benefit community playgroups must be of high quality. What is quality when it comes to early years education and care? Quality is a difficult word to define and the term 'quality' is usually used to analyse, describe or understand the essence of a particular thing. It is a value-laden term, a dynamic concept whose meaning evolves over time and one which varies with the time, perspective and place. Quality is not a means to an end but is important in its own right (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999). Thus, any definition of quality is, to an extent, transitory. According to Hayes (1996), it is misleading and dangerous to assume that there is agreement about what constitutes quality regarding early years education and care while Pascal and Bertram (1994) assert that quality is a much over-used word that is in danger of losing its meaning. Yet the concept of quality plays a dominant role in thinking, in language and in practice in early years education and care today.

Moss and Pence (1994 p.172) claim that "Quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and in values, beliefs and interests, rather than an objective and universal reality. Quality childcare is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder". Thus, since the 1990s the idea of quality as some universal and knowable entity waiting out there to be discovered and measured by experts has come to be questioned. In particular there has been a growing awareness of complexity, context, plurality and subjectivity. Researchers are beginning to acknowledge that quality is a subjective, value-based, relative and dynamic concept with the possibility of many perspectives and understandings, and they stress that work with quality must be contextualised, with diversity being acknowledged and accepted. Thus, researchers such as Dahlberg *et al* (1999) have identified the importance of the process in defining quality – Who is involved and how is it done? Has the process been inclusive of all stakeholders? Does it acknowledge and embrace diversity? Does it try to optimise children's development holistically?

In reality, with regard to early years education and care, quality is related to the provision of services which support what is valued by society and which

support the well-being, development, needs and rights of children. Thus, in many ways quality is a socially constructed term dependent on cultural values and beliefs (Smith 1999). Quality is no longer viewed as one standard of excellence identified for all children in all services as perceptions on quality change as a variety of factors evolve. However, every early years settings, including the community playgroup, must provide a variety of experiences, must be culturally relevant, inclusive and adaptable if it is to be of high quality. Services must be resourced well, reviewed frequently and developed in close consultation with stakeholders (all those who have a stake in them including children, parents, staff and communities). Also the greater the richness of the activities and interactions that the curriculum encourages, the greater will be the knowledge and understanding that children have (Smith 1999).

### DEFINING QUALITY WITHIN THE *cpi*

Within the *cpi* vital elements of quality include the interaction of those involved, both children and adults, the development of parental involvement and liaison with others. Attention to staff, playgroup management and committee and the development of the physical environment are also regarded as being very important. This view of quality came about through a discussion involving many parties/voices of what was important for community playgroups at the time of conception of the *cpi*. This consensus view of the fluid, dynamic, evolving nature of quality was later expanded upon and set down in a more structured way by the external evaluator through the development of evaluation headings. These will be discussed later under the section on 'Evaluating *cpi*'.

Those involved in *cpi* acknowledge that while quality can be enhanced in many ways it is believed in particular it can be helped through training, reflection, effective planning, monitoring and review. Thus, in the context of *cpi* quality is seen as an ongoing, dynamic process which incorporates criteria specified by and relevant to the individual playgroups in the initiative with particular emphasis on training, planning, monitoring and the development of reflective practice.

### THE KATHARINE HOWARD FOUNDATION (KHF)

The KHF, the organisation which oversees the running of *cpi*, is an independent grant-making Foundation whose particular emphasis is on the support of community projects. The foundation was started in 1979 by



Katharine Howard who was at her death in 1990 the last surviving descendent of the family of the Earls of Wicklow. After her parents died Katharine spent her childhood in Co. Wicklow and she spent all her adult life in the Gorey area of North Co. Wexford. Katharine supported a wide range of worthwhile local activities during her lifetime and this work has been continued by a board of trustees since her death.

The Trustees of the KHF are keen to support the formation and development of community groups by those who live in the community, especially where this will lead to building or rebuilding a sense of community and community spirit. The development of self-reliance, the willingness of groups to take responsibility and the sharing of knowledge and experience between groups are essential elements of projects supported by the KHF. The Foundation annually allocates grants mainly for projects related to children, young people, the elderly and disadvantaged throughout the island of Ireland, both North and South. In relation to young children since 1996 the KHF has set aside a particular portion of funds for Community Playgroups and Parent and Toddler Groups. This occurred due to an ever-increasing rise in the number of these particular groups looking for funding. Changes in legislation such as the implementation of the Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations (1996) meant that these groups needed to implement many changes in order to adhere to legislation but had difficulties doing so due to the lack of funding. The KHF decided to assist these groups from that time on as it acknowledges that the early years are a vital stage of life while at the same time being very conscious of the supports needed to make the most of the opportunity that these early years provide. Therefore they fund these invaluable community assets and in 2003, for example, the Foundation will provide financial support to Community Playgroups and Parent and Toddler Groups in the region of €110,000.

#### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *cpi***

As a result of providing financial support to community playgroups and parent and toddler groups over the past six years KHF has built up a knowledge and expertise around Early Childhood Care and Development in Ireland and was of the view that a more strategic approach to supporting community playgroups was needed. On the initiation of the KHF discussions were held with the South Eastern Health Board (SEHB) and both organisations agreed to

come together to implement a strategic project for community playgroups, the 'Community Playgroup Initiative' (*cpi*). The initiative formally began in 2001 and will run for three years until the end of 2004.

The primary objective of the initiative is to assist small community playgroups to offer quality sessional childcare. A secondary objective is to highlight the value of community playgroups and to evaluate the impact of funding and support on the quality of service provided to children and their families. The challenge for the initiative is to assist these groups to remain an important provider of childcare and education as developments occur in the area, particularly the implementation of the National Childcare Strategy (1999).

#### **FINANCING THE *cpi***

The overall cost of the *cpi* is in the region of €125,000 per year for three years. Participating groups can apply for up to €15,000 per year, up to a maximum of €45,000 over the three years. The SEHB and the KHF together with some assistance from the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme under Special Initiatives and two other foundations, including the St. Stephen's Green Trust, provide the finances for the project.

#### **THE ADVISORY GROUP**

Once the KHF and the SEHB had agreed a partnership arrangement an advisory group was established to assist in the setting up and ongoing work of *cpi*. The membership of the group was designed to be broad-ranging including representatives from many groups and organisations. The Advisory group comprises representatives from the following organisations: Barnardos, Childcare Network Loch Garman, Clonmel Community Partnership, Dublin Institute of Technology, IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation, the Kilkenny Early Years Project and the SEHB. They helped agree the overall programme plan of *cpi* and sub-committees of the advisory group members were involved in contracting the part-time co-ordinator and in the selection process of the five groups. The advisory group meets three to four times a year to review progress and advise on future progress and development.

#### **MANAGEMENT/CO-ORDINATION**

The overall management of the Initiative is the responsibility of the Katharine Howard Foundation in partnership with the SEHB. Day-to-day operations of

the initiative are the responsibility of Mary Daly, the part-time co-ordinator of *cpi*. The co-ordinator works 20 hours per week and her duties include: being part of the selection process of the groups to take part in *cpi*; establishing a supportive, working relationship with the groups; giving practical assistance and advice; making contacts and links; assisting in the implementation of the evaluation; putting in the financial structures to operate *cpi*; and helping to publicise *cpi*.

### SELECTING THE GROUPS TO TAKE PART IN CPI

A decision was made to invite all community playgroups in the SEHB region to apply for the initiative. Application forms were sent to all of these using contact names and addresses which had been made available by the Pre-school Services Officers in each of the four community care areas – South Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford and Carlow/Kilkenny. The application forms for *cpi* were similar to those for the smaller KHF Community Grants and were designed to be as user-friendly and easily understood as possible. A number of criteria for participation in the *cpi* had been agreed by the Advisory Group and these were clearly laid out in the application form.

In order to apply to be part of *cpi* the groups had to

- Be community-based (urban or rural) and providing sessional care
- Not be in receipt of funding under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
- Have complied with the Pre-school Regulations
- Have 10 or more children enrolled in the group
- Have a management committee which includes representatives from parents and other members of the community
- Show signs of openness to link with other community activities
- Have undertaken previous training of either parents, staff and other volunteers, formal or informal
- Identify readiness and interest to develop the service
- Show willingness to commit to a three-year project aimed at enhancing the quality of the service

Once the application forms were submitted groups were short-listed. In total 28 community playgroups applied to be part of the *cpi*. In November 2001 the Selection Committee reviewed the applications and short-listed 14. Between

November and December 2001 the 14 groups were visited by the co-ordinator and a member of the advisory group or the development officer of the KHF, Noelle Spring. Some time was spent observing the session in progress and afterwards a meeting was held with staff, committee members and parents. There was an agreed framework for the assessment to ensure consistency in approach. Once all 14 visits were completed a selection meeting was held and the five groups chosen to take part in *cpi* were as follows

- Teach na bPaisti Community Playschool, Ferns Lower, Co. Wexford
- Slieverue Community Playgroup, Slieverue, via Waterford, Co. Kilkenny
- St. Oliver's Community Playgroup, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
- Askea Community Playgroup, Carlow
- The Rower Inistioge Pre-school, Co. Kilkenny

The five groups who were chosen were informed of this decision. The remaining nine groups were told that they were not successful and at a later stage each received a small grant from the KHF. A letter of agreement was drawn up by the KHF to formalise the project and to restate the aims and objectives of *cpi*. Groups took time to read this and could ask for amendments or clarifications. Once groups were satisfied with it they, along with the co-ordinator, were asked to sign it and *cpi* formally began.

### EVALUATING THE *cpi*

Since one of the main aims of the initiative is to measure the impact of increased, targeted funding and support on the quality of the service provided by the playgroups involved evaluation is one of the important facets of *cpi*. In early 2002 an evaluation brief was drawn up and circulated and after an interviewing process Geraldine French, Independent Early Years Consultant, was appointed to conduct a formative evaluation which will be conducted in tandem with the initiative.

One of the first tasks of the evaluator in conjunction with the co-ordinator, the development officer of the KHF and an evaluation sub-committee of the advisory group was to devise an evaluation plan. This was devised to decide under what criteria the initiative would be evaluated. After much discussion and deliberation a number of headings were agreed upon. It was decided that the observations, perusal of documentation and development

plans of the playgroups involved in *cpi* will be evaluated under the following headings:

- Profile
- Playgroup Management
- Human Resources
- Child Centred Environment
- Activities/Routine
- Interaction
- Parent Involvement
- Links to Statutory and Voluntary Bodies
- Finance
- Community Playgroup Initiative – model of delivery

Once the evaluation headings were decided upon an evaluation tool/instrument was devised to facilitate the observation by the evaluator of the groups. This was adapted mainly from the High/Scope Programme Quality Assessment (2001), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998), 'Early Childhood Classroom Observation' and from 'Supporting Quality' (French, 2002). The instrument allows for a focus on the child-centred environment, activities, routine and interaction. The evaluation is a three-stage process. Part 1 is now completed and Parts 2 and 3 of the evaluation will take place in later 2003 and late 2004 and will take the same format as Part 1. Part 1 of the evaluation involved perusal of documentation and a review of development plans. The evaluator also visited each of the five groups. She sat in for the full morning session and used the instrument as a tool to record her observations. After the session feedback and recommendations were given to staff. Later the evaluator met with staff and some members of the committee to get their views on the *cpi*. The views of parents were also recorded and 25 per cent of parents were randomly selected to answer questions over the telephone as their input and opinions were acknowledged as being very important. The Community Playgroup Initiative as a model of delivery will also be evaluated and a final evaluation report on the *cpi* will be launched in early 2005 and will be made widely available. It is hoped that the evaluation will plot the course of the *cpi*, highlighting the lessons learnt, and positively influencing future policy in the area.

## DEVELOPMENTS TO DATE

Once the groups were selected it was necessary for the process of engagement to begin and central to this was the development of a good trusting relationship between the groups involved and the co-ordinator. At this stage, mid-way through the initiative, the groups are familiar with the co-ordinator and call on her for assistance as they need it. The co-ordinator visits the groups at least once a term and has a meeting with staff straight after the playgroup session. From time to time she also observes for part of the session and in most cases she has contact with committee members also. Each group draws up and works off its own short-term development plans. These are drawn up by the groups in consultation with the co-ordinator. All five groups are now implementing their second short-term development plan. The first short-term plans drawn up in mid-2002 before the evaluation headings had been decided were wide-ranging and diverse reflecting the particular needs of individual services. The second short-term plans which are set out under the evaluation headings include some recommendations made by the external evaluator after her visit in November 2002 as well as targets set by the individual groups and the co-ordinator. The plans will be carried out by the groups over the next few months and will be reviewed regularly to ensure that progress is being made. Towards the end of the year progress to date will be reflected upon and another plan will be drawn up at that stage. Areas that continue to need much development include committee structure, adult to child interaction, access to the outdoors and Parental Involvement.

## CLUSTER GROUP DAYS

Due to the wide geographical distance between the five groups involved in *cpi* it is not practical for them to meet on a regular basis. However, it was decided to bring the groups together in Kilkenny in August 2002 for a cluster group day. This gave the *cpi* participants the opportunity to meet each other and to meet the external evaluator. Staff, parents and committee members were invited and a participation fee, a caring allowance and travel expenses were given to those who attended. Participants reported on the benefits of the cluster day and it is hoped to repeat the process in early summer 2003. It is also hoped that during the term of *cpi* each of the groups will play host to the other four groups so that they get to know each other better and also so they can see the set up within which each of them is working.

## *cpi* AND DEVELOPMENTS IN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CARE IN IRELAND

In order to further the aims of the *cpi* it was recognised early on that it was important for *cpi* to link in with others who are involved in Early Years Education and Care in Ireland. The advisory group meetings are very beneficial in this regard as much discussion takes place at these regarding developments in the sector nationwide. Also several meetings and presentations to Statutory and Voluntary Organisations have been made and will continue to be made by those involved in *cpi*. In addition an information leaflet on *cpi* was produced and was distributed throughout the country to Pre-school Services Officers, Health Boards, Government Departments, National Voluntary Organisations, County Childcare Committees, Partnerships, Community Groups, training institutions and other interested parties. The *cpi* will take every opportunity to highlight the importance of the early years and to stress its belief in the value of community playgroups. Making all those involved in Early Years Education and Care in Ireland aware that *cpi* is happening is very important for the initiative and *cpi* is keen to link in and be involved with all existing and emerging structures in the area.

## THE FUTURE – ISSUES EMERGING

*cpi* ends in 2004 but what will happen to the groups involved after this? Concern is being raised repeatedly about the demise of community playgroups all over the country. In the Dublin area alone the number of community playgroups has declined by 31 per cent between 1998 and 2002 (Community Playgroups Together 2003). Since the initiation of the EOCP funding some community playgroups have received staffing grants if they extended their service, for example, by providing an afternoon session. It is not clear whether this funding will continue. The Mid-Term Evaluation of the EOCP by the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit (www.ndp.ie 2003) which reviewed progress to date and which examined the extent to which the Programme is meeting its underlying targets tends to focus on the creation of full and part time places as opposed to sessional places. However, it does call for targets to be developed in respect of full-time and sessional places so limited funding for community playgroups may still be available though this is not made clear. Anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that from now on community playgroups will only be funded if they provide full or part-time (longer than the sessional care as envisaged for playgroups under the 1996 Childcare Regulations) daycare to

facilitate parents to either access training or employment. Thus, community playgroups as they are presently organised do not appear to meet EOCP criteria and would have to change to provide daycare in conjunction with their playgroup session if they are to avail of this particular funding. Not all community playgroups are in a position to change their role to this extent and many of them do not feel that doing so would be of benefit to the children and families who avail of their service. They believe they are already addressing a very important need in their own areas which is separate from and different to childcare to facilitate parents working/training. However, a lack of funding, particularly in relation to the EOCP staffing grants, for community playgroups may mean that the quality of playgroups may not be maintained. Trained staff may be forced to leave them to take up good terms and conditions of employment, which state sponsored initiatives and EOCP funded programmes, are providing. On the other hand, community services which are dependent on fees and fundraising will not be able to offer similar terms to employees and the quality of service may be negatively impacted upon (Community Playgroups Together 2003). This means that if community playgroups are to survive and be sustainable and if they are to continue to be quality providers of sessional services they need to target long-term funding and support from elsewhere.

In many areas around the country Health Boards contribute funding to community playgroups through Section 65 Grant Aid but this only entails small amounts of money. Also in the Dublin area, Dublin City Council offers grants in the region of \_400 to \_600 to community playgroups. This financial assistance in no way corresponds to the funds needed to subsidise these groups. Also a limited amount of support is offered to community playgroups by national voluntary organisations such as IPPA and Barnardos but again nationwide these organisations cannot provide the practical support and advice that individual groups need. As mentioned earlier Dublin City Council also funds some Playgroup Federations and Area Based Partnerships and Networks have offered some support to community playgroups though the newly established County Childcare Committees may now be expected to take over this role. However, the remit of County Childcare Committees is very broad and so cognisance must be taken of this.

Instead of this a more extensive, strategic, nationwide system to support and fund community playgroups should be put in place. The potential of

community playgroups as a means of family support is beginning to be recognised. Government policy over the past number of years has highlighted the need to support families. This is evident in such policy documents as the 1998 Commission on the Family – *Strengthening Families for Life*; the 1999 publication *Best Health for children: Partnership with Families; Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (1999); and the *National Children's Strategy, Our Children – Their Lives* published in 2000. The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), ratified by Ireland in 1992, also makes undertakings on behalf of the world's children and again stresses the need to support families particularly those with young children since early intervention is so important. The 'Report on National Forum for Early Childhood Education' (1998) and the White Paper on Early Childhood Education 'Ready to Learn' (1999) both also stress the vital importance of early intervention and the need to get parents actively involved in their children's education. Community Playgroups can be the vital early intervention and stepping stone that families and in particular vulnerable families need. They involve parents and local communities and thus are crucial to children's well-being and development.

Communities and families need to decide what supports and structures they want for their children. Not all families need or want full daycare for their children, and for those that don't other options must be available. Many community playgroups have waiting lists of children wanting to attend so this option does seem to meet the needs of many families (Community Playgroups Together 2003). A commitment must be made to facilitate community playgroups by providing them with funding and support so that they can achieve their real potential. As stated above, early intervention is highlighted as being vital for children and their families. Community playgroups can be a very cost effective and beneficial way of providing early intervention if the settings are of high quality, if they have trained staff who have good terms and conditions of employment and if they are resourced well and reviewed frequently. *cpi* acknowledges that community playgroups can facilitate and nurture children and in return *cpi* aims to have an influential role in facilitating and nurturing the community playgroups involved in *cpi* by funding and supporting them to provide the best quality of service that they can. The five community playgroups involved in the *cpi* in the South Eastern Health Board region are benefiting positively from being part of *cpi*. It is hoped that the

ongoing evaluation of the *cpi* will show that the initiative was a worthwhile one which can be used as a model of support and development for community playgroups on a national scale as these community and family resources must not be allowed to disappear.

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## PART 6

### Looking to the Future

## CECDE and Educational Disadvantage: Context and understanding

*Jacqueline Fallon*

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE] was established by the Department of Education and Science in 2002 under the joint management of St. Patrick's College of Education and the Dublin Institute of Technology. The Centre is the forerunner of the Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged in the White Paper on Early Education, Ready to Learn. [Department of Education and Science, 1999]

While the Centre's brief is to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education for all children in Ireland, in pursuance of the objectives of the white paper we have a particular brief to consider the needs of children at risk of or experiencing disadvantage, and children with special needs. This paper will consider some aspects of the context in which the Centre will progress towards fulfilling that brief in relation to disadvantage.

### DEFINITION AND IMPACT

Common understandings will be necessary to underpin development and co-ordination, and the CECDE welcomes this opportunity to consider some of the multiplicity of issues which constitute our understanding of the experience of disadvantage. As a starting point for that understanding, and in recognition of the fact that our brief is in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, we look to the definition of educational disadvantage therein.

“[T]he impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.” [White Paper, 1999. P. 97]

This definition distils the knowledge and understanding which has been developed over time into a concise form which could provide that common understanding for all those who are involved in addressing educational disadvantage. The CECDE's concern is to ensure that each and every child,

regardless of circumstance, has the opportunity and support necessary to realise her/his potential.

In expanding the understandings which underpin the White Paper, the CECDE also recognises that disadvantage is ‘... a complex phenomenon resulting from the interaction of factors that are usually construed as economic, social, cultural and educational’ as Kellaghan [1995, p. 17] has pointed out in his analysis of educational disadvantage in the Irish context. The sheer number of risk factors associated with a family's experience will have an effect on the child's future. ‘An intriguing ... finding ... is that the mere number of risks ... determines negative developmental outcomes.’ [Leseman, 2002, p. 13] Not only that but ‘[d]ifferent sources of risk may interact to have very destructive effects on children's prospects ...’ [Blakeslee, 1997, p.2] Research, then, paints a picture of a web of effects which families and children have to negotiate together in their daily lives.

### FAMILIES

A child does not experience disadvantage on her/his own, but in the family context. Stressed family settings cannot provide young children with the type of experiences which will be of optimum benefit. Leseman, [2002, p. 13] for example, cites ‘... abundant evidence for a strong causal relationship between stressed family environments in early childhood and poor mental and physical health of the offspring later in life.’ Waldfogel [2000, p. 61] has also observed that ‘[c]hildren who grow up in poverty fare worse than other children on a number of outcomes, for example educational attainment and health.’ Each child's growth and development is dependent on the nature and quality of her/his interactions with the environment into which s/he is born. For the newborn and very young child, ‘... infancy is a unique time of helplessness when nearly all of children's experience is mediated by adults in one-to-one interaction permeated with affect.’ [Hart and Risely. 1995. p. 193] and, therefore, the inescapable conclusion is that to support children means to support their parents.

Implicit, though, in any efforts to support parents must be the principle of partnership, the centrality of the family and the place of the family in the community, a position supported by the National Children's Strategy [2000] and central to the CECDE's values. The National Children's Strategy

states that ‘... external intervention should be to support and empower families within the community’ [National Children’s Strategy, 2000, p. 5], a position closely mirrored by the Centre’s work programme which refers to the ‘... empowerment of parents as educators of their own children; ...’ [CECDE, 2001, p. 9]

It is, however, fair to say that the voices of parents experiencing disadvantage are not currently heard to any degree and the Centre is committed to redressing this situation.

‘Reaching out to support the involvement of parents and guardians in families experiencing the most extreme forms of disadvantage will also be a priority in the proposals developed by the Centre.’ [Ibid. p. 13]

To this end we propose conducting research into possible model structures for involving parents of children experiencing disadvantage in consultative processes. Structures to facilitate all parents being involved are most important given the Centre’s stated position that ‘[c]onsultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards.’ [Ibid. p. 10] While the Centre’s brief is to develop quality standards for all settings, again the ‘... diverse needs of disadvantaged children and children with special needs will form part of the starting point.’ [Ibid. p. 9]

#### **INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF DISADVANTAGE**

While none of the research evidence cited above on the impact of disadvantage comes as news to anyone working with disadvantaged children, what we have perhaps not paid as much attention to in the past is the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Our concern, understandably, is with the child of the moment, rather than with the child of twenty years ago who is now the parent. Evidence suggests though, that in order for intervention to be lasting and effective, it will have to be in place over two to three generations.

‘...[I]t is clear that by the time of a woman’s first pregnancy important risk factors have already been established, some of which may not be amenable to intervention in a single generation.’ [Chapman and Scott, 2001, p. 318.]

Nor are inter-generational risk factors associated only with mothers’ histories; Corcoran [2000] has observed that ‘... fathers’ economic status accounts for about 25 percent of the economic status of sons in their mid-20s, but about 50 percent of the status of sons in their late 30s. Fathers income appears to have an equally strong link to the economic status of their adult daughters.’ [Op. cit. p. 18]

Parents are the key people in a child’s life, and it is entirely reasonable to recognise that a parent’s life experience will have effects on her or his child’s experience. Recognising this effect is not to apportion blame, is not to stigmatise nor to create inequality between children and their parents. Rather it is to support the proposition that intervention must be family centred, and that interventions in educational disadvantage with young children must take place in that context.

‘It is possible to change children’s lives within a generation, ...’ [Hart and Risely. 1995. P. 208] but at what cost? Hart and Risely [1995] describe the Milwaukee Project [op. cit. pp. 206-208] as an example of the type of intervention which would be necessary to effect change in one generation. Very briefly, babies whose mother recorded IQ’s of less than 75 were taken into full time out-of-home day care at between six and eight weeks. The carer who would be the baby’s primary caregiver spent between three and five hours per day for three days a week in the child’s home prior to that time. The mother also entered a programme at the same time as the baby went into full day care. An intervention based on removing very young babies from their home and requiring mothers to become involved in a programme outside their home away from their babies at a very early stage in the developing relationship is not consistent with family centred policy. While this may have been justified in the context of the original Milwaukee Project, it would be difficult to justify this type of project in other circumstances, and it is not compatible with family empowerment values, although ‘[t]he children in the Milwaukee Project, unlike children from comparable families not enrolled in the project and unlike children in other less time-consuming intervention programs, were equal to the national average in accomplishments at age 8.’ [Ibid. p. 206]

Hart and Risely [1995] go on to state that ‘[i]ntergenerational transmission of enriched experience takes years,’ [Ibid. P. 209] Their assessment of the alternative time scale is undoubtedly reasonable, and may well be less attractive



than the dramatic promise of change in a single generation, but with consistency and commitment, and constant attention to the quality of services, family focused interventions can be cumulatively effective.

Hart and Risely [1995] rightly question whether current models of intervention are up to the challenge, ‘... and whether this process will keep pace with the increasing demands of a technological society and the growing numbers of families raising children in poverty remains uncertain.’ [Ibid. p. 209] and we must constantly evaluate our responses. Difficulty, thankfully, does not preclude success, and there is evidence of success, most recently from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE] Project. ‘... the effect of attending pre-school [versus not] on developmental progress is greater than the effect of measure of social disadvantage.’ [Sylva *et al.* 2003. P. 4]

In an earlier overview of the evidence, Sylva [2000] examined a broad spectrum of research literature and a wide range of evaluations of pre-school programmes, and demonstrates the positive effects which accrue to ‘... excellent, cognitively oriented pre-school programmes ...’. [Sylva. 2000. p. 123] She argues for, and produces convincing evidence to support, play based programmes as opposed to more formal systems of pedagogy to afford the most long lasting positive effects;

‘This rigorous longitudinal study with random assignment support the claim that early childhood curricula in which children initiate their own learning are superior to programmes of didactic instruction.’ [Ibid. p. 127]

To alleviate disadvantage in the next generation of children, then, we have to support parents and grandparents in their lives as children. Parents experiencing a range of stress factors need consistent support and outreach, and, as is outlined in the next section, the literature contains many examples and models of how this could be achieved. Every child born should, as a right, have the support and care s/he needs to ensure that s/he is nurtured, loved and kept safe. These earliest positive experiences are the foundation for secure, healthy children. ‘Dropping into’ a child’s life for a year is not the answer to the complex situation which many families experience; ‘... [Slavin] found that the more successful programmes were interventions that combined several ‘strands’ of intervention, involved intensive participation by children and families and lasted for a substantial number of years.’ [Ibid. p. 124]

## INTERVENTION

When to provide intervention and support, then, is a pertinent question. For the most part we think of early intervention in educational disadvantage as beginning around age three with pre-school services. There is substantial support in the literature for considering this to be inadequate for many of the children who need it. As a practitioner myself in Early Start, I was only too aware that while the experience of the year was appropriate for many of the children, for too many more it was inadequate. Every year I met children who had needed, for example, support for language development at eighteen months or so. By the time they came to Early Start, their difficulties were compounded. ‘... Zigler, talking about Head Start, has succinctly expressed the problem: ‘We simply cannot inoculate children in one year against the ravages of a life of deprivation’ [in Reynolds *et al.*, 1997, p.48] – a fact of which practitioners are very well aware. Kellaghan and Greaney [1993] made much the same observation in their follow up study of the Rutland Street Project;

‘While some of the findings of this study point to the important role an early childhood education programme can play in the lives of children living in a disadvantaged environment, they also serve to underline the limited value of a single intervention for children growing up in an environment which is beset by a great variety of problems.’ [Op. cit. p. 22]

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the implications of this finding, a brief consideration of some forms of intervention that could form part of a long term, integrated model will illustrate the possibilities for the future development of intervention strategies.

## EARLY INTERVENTION AND INTEGRATED MODELS.

There is evidence to support the efficacy of intervention that begins even before birth. A study of the Elmira home visitation experiment found that ‘... the investment in the family, from the perspective of government spending alone, was recovered for families of low socio-economic status before the children were four years old’ [Olds *et al.*, 1997 p.48] The Memphis home visitation program which set out to replicate the Elmira project found that ‘[t]he effects of home visits were greater for children born to women who had been identified as having few psychological resources – an assessment based upon measures of

intelligence, mental health, and ... self-efficacy ... the ability to cope effectively with a wide range of challenges and stresses ...' [Ibid. p. 49]

The Elmira home visitation experiment, in brief, was established in 1978 and involved a two pronged programme delivered by a nurse in the home, beginning while the participating mothers were still pregnant with their first child. On the one hand the programme promoted '... effective physical and emotional care of children by parents and other family members. [The nurses] also helped women clarify their goals in life and develop problem-solving skills so that they could complete their education, find work, but adapted their visits to the needs of each family and developed close working relationships with parents.' [Ibid. p. 48] The Memphis programme set out, in 1990, to establish if the positive, long term effects of the Elmira initiative could be replicated in a different context. Comparisons between the two are complex, and will have to await the long term evaluation of the Memphis project, but both programmes demonstrated positive outcomes.

While there is further evidence also from Europe, Ireland has its own model of a home visiting programme, the Community Mothers Programme [CMP]. The programme involves experienced mothers from within the community, who have received training in the programme, visiting first time parents to offer support in parenting. The programme also offers information on play and child development, but in a way which responds to the needs of the family. The CMP has been evaluated and while some commentators [Hanrahan-Cahuzak. 2002. P. 49] have expressed concerns about the reliability and validity of the evaluation, the results are promising. For example, while the scheme supports families on the birth of the first child, the beneficial effects have been shown to persist to the advantage of subsequent children;

'An important finding ... was the persistence of superior parenting skills and cognitive, language and educational development among the intervention families.' [Molloy. 2002. P. 46.]

The CECDE, as well as our focus on disadvantage, also has a particular interest in children with special needs, and we are aware of parallels in approach in both contexts. To illustrate this I will describe one integrated model of Early Intervention which has been well documented, and which is noteworthy also

for the fact that its development was driven by parent groups in the state of Ohio, leading to its being enshrined in legislation there.

This model of Early Intervention takes place in the context of the Individual Family Services Plan [IFSP];

'The purpose of the IFSP is to identify and organize [sic] formal and informal resources to facilitate families' goals for their children and themselves.' [IFSP training pack. 2003. p. 101]

As the name indicates, the model recognises the unique circumstances of each family's needs, allows the family at the centre to determine its own goals and then offers the supports needed to achieve those goals. It also, and this articulates well with our own National Children's Strategy [2000], recognises the place of the family in the community. One of the instruments used as part of the process of building relationships between the family and the service providers is the family mapping template. This helps prevent seeing families solely as defined by need, but instead realigns families as active participants within the extended family and community. [Espe-Sherwindt. 1997]

Anecdotal evidence gathered in the course of an audit of provision for children with special needs currently being conducted by the Centre indicates that the values of the IFSP are widely implemented in Ireland among teams working with families and children with special needs. [CECDE. 2003a. Forthcoming] This evidence indicates that practitioners in this field recognise the centrality of the family, the necessity to empower families and the importance of integration of services. The challenge for practitioners here is to document and evaluate this work, and to disseminate indigenous best practice within the professional community here. This is another aspect of co-ordination of services to which the Centre will be paying attention.

At the inaugural meeting of the Educational Disadvantage Forum [Educational Disadvantage Committee. 2003] '[t]he largest number of groups cited Early Intervention as their priority.' [Op. cit. p. 17] and the 'Summary of Key Themes and Issues from the Forum' [Ibid. p. 26] includes the following; 'Focus on early intervention and prevention, supplemented by systematic targeting and monitoring' [Ibid. p. 26] It is unfortunate, then, to

find no mention of early intervention in the ‘General approach to formulating policy’ [Ibid. p. 27] Neither is there any reference to early intervention in the Chairperson’s introduction. It is entirely true to state that ‘[i]n an environment of budgetary constraints, it is particularly important to target investment in the most strategically effective way.’ [Ibid. p.vi] but the subsequent list of elements makes no mention of the effectiveness of money spent on early intervention.

‘Schweinhart *et al.*, [1993] carried out a cost-benefit analysis of the High/Scope programme and found that for every \$1,000 that was invested in the pre-school programme, at least \$7,160 (after adjustment for inflation) had been or will be saved by society. These calculations were based on the financial cost to society of crime, remedial education, income support, and joblessness – set against the running costs of an excellent pre-school programme.’  
[Sylva. 2000. p. 125]

The participants at the Forum on Educational Disadvantage were nominated ‘... to ensure that all interests were represented as fairly and transparently as possible, and secondly to facilitate the widest possible participation by all relevant interest groups and sectors.’ [Educational Disadvantage Committee. 2003a. p. 2] and this comprehensively representative body indicated that early intervention must be a priority. It is to be hoped that the Educational Disadvantage Committee will reflect that priority in its future deliberations.

Another of the ‘Key Themes and Issues’ [Ibid. p.26] is the following; ‘Greater strategic cohesion and co-ordination of services and policies across ...’ [Ibid. p.26] and certainly this was a recurring theme on the day. It is opportune that the CECDE should be starting work on its co-ordination brief at a time when integration is being recognised as fundamental to effectiveness.

In that context the CECDE has established links with the Sure Start programme in Northern Ireland and will be looking closely as it develops. The Sure Start initiative was established by the British Government throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to provide early intervention supports for disadvantaged families in an integrated way;

## CORE SERVICES

The design and content of Sure Start Local Programmes will vary according to local needs. But we expect all programmes to include a number of core services.

- Outreach and home visiting.
- Support for families and parents.
- Support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children.
- Primary and community health care ...
- Support for children and parents with special needs ...

## KEY PRINCIPLES

To ensure a consistent approach, we expect every programme to work from a shared set of key principles. Sure Start services must:

- Co-ordinate, streamline and add value to existing services ...
- Involve parents, grandparents and other carers ...
- Avoid stigma by ensuring that all local families are able to use Sure Start;
- Ensure lasting support by linking Sure Start to services for older children;
- Be culturally appropriate and sensitive to particular needs;
- Promote the participation of all local families in the design and working of the programme.’

[Sure Start. 2002]

It is interesting to the CECDE in that it sets out to add value to existing services by concentrating on integration rather than instigating completely new services. Building on the expertise and knowledge already there is more appropriate than constant new beginnings. The experiences of Sure Start teams in implementing the integration model will be very useful as the CECDE sets out on its brief to co-ordinate early childhood education. We recognise the wealth of expertise among practitioners here and believe that the way forward is to capitalise on that.

Sure Start serves as an example because of its scale of implementation, not because experience from abroad is valued over experience gained here. There is very little indigenous research on integrated responses to educational disadvantage, as is evidenced by the audit of research which has been conducted by the CECDE [CECDE. 2003b. Forthcoming]. Two models which have been documented here are the Integrated Services Initiative [ISI] and the Combat Poverty Agency’s Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage.

The ISI was established in 1995 in Dublin's North East Inner City with the '... overall aim ... to develop models of provision in the areas of education, health, justice and other social services which will allow everyone in the local community to contribute actively to society and to achieve their full potential.' [ISI. 1997. p. 5] The project focused on the needs of young parents and their children and recommended, among other things, '... a fully integrated, multi-dimensional model, requiring the establishment of joint planning, goals, activities and policy development.' [Ibid. p. 64] To this recommendation can be added the '... experiences of the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage [which] has shown that there is a key role for local networks in stimulating and developing integrated responses to educational disadvantage.' [Haran. N. d. p.26] While the Demonstration Programme did not involve work with young children, and in most instances was concerned with early school leaving among teenagers, the experience gained during the process in establishing and progressing local networks is a valuable resource. In the case of integrated models, as in all other instances, international experience can support development here, but our own experience must always be our starting point.

To recap briefly then, children experience disadvantage in the context of the family. The greater the number of stress factors, the more acute the experience of disadvantage, which is further embedded by intergenerational transmission. Early intervention must take place in partnership with families, in their communities in a consistent, integrated and continuing way. It is the intention of the CECDE that developments will be evidence based and sustainable, and to that end we will be looking closely at what works in effective interventions.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS

However, before we consider the efficacy of interventions, we must be concerned that we can successfully identify the children and families who need support. In order to be able to intervene early and effectively, identification is the crucial issue. Support cannot be offered unless the need is identified, and we cannot be satisfied at the moment that our ability to identify children at risk of educational disadvantage is effective. The Department of Education and Science initiative 'Breaking the Cycle', established in included a rural dimension with the intention of addressing the needs of children in situations of dispersed disadvantage. This admirable effort to tackle a particularly difficult aspect of disadvantage encountered problems which were identified in the course of evaluation;

'... the assumption was made that these pupils attended small schools, and so the scheme was limited to schools with four or fewer teachers... It would seem that pupils with low levels of achievement were attending larger schools [in small towns]... and so were missed ...' [Kellaghan. 2002. p. 25]

We must find a way, based on evaluations such as that carried out on the Breaking the Cycle scheme and on experience, to successfully identify the children who are at risk of disadvantage. We each have only one childhood.

Reference has already been made to proposed research in the area of parental involvement. The CECDE has developed a Research Strategy [CECDE, 2003c], and is proceeding to put in place doctoral studentships and post-doctoral Fellowships to support its implementation. One of the items for which we are developing proposals relates to this question of the early identification of needs.

'[The CECDE will] develop a framework for assessing dispersed educational disadvantage in the 0-3 years age group (that moves beyond global indicators.)' [CECDE. 2003c. p.9]

We recognise that rural and dispersed disadvantage provide particular problems for identification, problems also recognised by the Educational Disadvantage Committee in its submission to the Minister for Education and Science 'Identifying Disadvantage for the purpose of targeting resources and other supports' [Educational Disadvantage Committee. 2003b]. The CECDE proposes to contribute to the effectiveness of identification structures through its research programme.

#### QUALITY

Perhaps the biggest issue for the development of early years education for children experiencing disadvantage is the question of quality. This paper will do no more than consider the question briefly, but the issue of quality is one which the CECDE will consider at length and in depth in the course of its work. The audit of research [CECDE. 2003b.] which is described elsewhere in this publication has shown the dearth of research in the Irish context on this most fundamental of issues.

Evidence from abroad indicates, though, that disadvantaged children benefit most from quality provision. However, '... while disadvantaged children may benefit disproportionately from high quality care, they also appear to suffer disproportionately from exposure to low quality care.' [Currie. 2000. p. 26] At the moment, though, much of the funding available here, for example through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme [EOCP], relates primarily to the provision of places, and we need to look beyond provision and ask ourselves what is best for the children? This was recognised as far back as the White Paper.

'... The provision of places is not sufficient, in itself, to achieve developmental/educational goals, which are basic to the alleviation of disadvantage: the State must be concerned with the developmental experiences of the children who fill these places and must ensure that the provision is actually helping in the achievement of the developmental/ educational goals.' [DES. 1999. p. 65]

Quality provision is the basic minimum requirement for intervention. The development of a national Quality Standards Framework for the entire early years sector, and supporting providers in relation to compliance with quality standards will be a core activity for the Centre.

Quality can be used as something of a catchall concept. It can be reduced to check lists of cleaning activities which are easier to monitor than the '... more dynamic, intangible aspects of quality such as interaction between adults and children and the developmental appropriateness of activities and expectations.' [Hayes. 1999. p.53]

While it is important to provide safe and clean environments for children, the point at which the child experiences the intervention is at the point of contact with the adult in whatever setting educational provision is made. '...[T]he most important aspect of childcare quality is the nature of the interaction between the teacher and the child. Small group sizes, better teacher training ... make positive interactions more likely.' [Sawhill in preface to Currie. 2000] While it is very important to invest in appropriate materials and equipment, the most important type of investment is in the training and development of the personnel delivering the intervention.

In developing the Quality Framework, the CECDE will consult widely with providers and practitioners, and will be active in supporting the acknowledged commitment of all practitioners to quality in line with the White Paper. We will examine best practice both nationally and internationally, and draw on our increasing knowledge and understanding of childhood and child development theory.

## CONCLUSION

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education is committed to working in partnership with all stakeholders to enhance and develop the provision of early childhood education in Ireland. We will continue to develop our understanding of educational disadvantage in consultation with those who work to alleviate it. This paper gives an introduction and insight into some aspects of the context of disadvantage to which we will be paying attention, and also gives some idea of how we understand its impact on the lives of children. The issues which have not been referred to are no less important, and over time the CECDE will consider the issue of disadvantage in as full a manner as possible. The CECDE looks forward to the consultation process, and to becoming familiar with the ongoing work of practitioners in the field.

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## An Overview of Research in Ireland Pertaining to Early Childhood Education and Care 1990-2003

*Thomas Walsh*

### INTRODUCTION

The Centre for early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was launched in 2002 by the Minister for Education and Science and is jointly managed by the Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College. The remit of the CECDE is to develop, co-ordinate and enhance early childhood care and education in Ireland. The 3 objectives of the CECDE are to:

- To develop a quality framework for early childhood education,
- To develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs; and
- To prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper. (CECDE, 2001)

### RATIONALE

As part of this comprehensive brief, the Centre commenced some baseline research in the form of an audit of all Irish research pertaining to early childhood education and care 1990 to date. This piece of research was prioritised within the Centre's Research Strategy (CECDE, 2003) in order to highlight the wealth of research available in the Irish context. It is also valuable in identifying the gaps in current research and taking steps to implement strategies to conduct this research in the future. There has been no such undertaking in the past and this exploratory research is important to centralise the vast amount of research conducted by the sector in recent years. Research is most useful when it is disseminated and made available to the sector as a whole.

This paper provides an overview of the research audit to date, outlines the research methodology, provides preliminary findings of the research emerging and identifies some of the gaps in the research appearing.

### DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

For the purpose of this audit, a liberal interpretation of the term 'research' was

employed so as to include the wealth of publications available in the Irish context. As well as academic research, the audit includes postgraduate theses, conference papers, unpublished reports and research by organisations not released previously into the public domain.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Following the initial gathering of data, the following parameters were placed on the scope of the research audit:

- Research from 1990 to date
- Research pertaining to the Republic of Ireland only
- Inclusion of the Infant classes (Junior and Senior Infants) of the primary school

There is a vast amount of research available prior to 1990, too much to document in this research audit. In choosing the 1990 cut-off point, we recognised the essence of this research has been distilled and carried forward into subsequent research.

While publications were gathered initially from the whole island of Ireland (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland), it became apparent that a comprehensive audit of Northern Ireland publications would not be possible with the time scale and resources available. Research pertaining to comparative studies between Northern Ireland and the republic has been included.

Research pertaining to the primary school is also included in the audit in so far as it relates to the infant classes. This is owing to the fact that the remit of the Centre is children aged 0 to 6 years of age, and in excess of 50% of four-year olds and virtually all 5 year-olds are enrolled in primary schools (Department of Education and Science, 2002).

## METHODOLOGY

A variety of strategies were used in the collection of publications for this research audit. These can be largely assigned to two main categories, documentary desk-based research and the contacting of individuals and organisations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIES

The bibliographies of publications in relation to early childhood education and

care in Ireland proved a rich source of research, ranging from government publications to unpublished conference papers. The analysis of bibliographies also provided an insight into organisations, individuals and journals prominent in the sector that were investigated as part of our secondary-research.

## GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Contact was initiated with a number of government departments with a remit for childcare, including:

- The Department of Education and Science
- The Department of Health and Children
- The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

The department websites also proved useful in the accessing and collection of data.

## NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

A number of non-government organisations were contacted and visited in the collection of publications for the audit. Many have websites and visitor libraries, which was of great benefit in ascertaining the relevance of publications and assist in their categorisation.

Organisations such as the City and County Childcare Committees and the Area-based Partnerships were contacted by letter to ensure their work was reflected in the audit.

## UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

A number of third level institutions were contacted in the course of the audit, primarily those with an interest and involvement in early childhood education and care. The majority of colleges had searchable on-line catalogues, but often, these did not contain up to date records of postgraduate theses. Therefore, the only way to be comprehensive was to sift through drawers of catalogues and pick relevant theses for the audit.

The Educational Studies Association of Ireland Register of theses <http://homepage.tinet.ie/~esai/theses/theses.html> was an invaluable document in gathering together all postgraduate research pertaining to early childhood education and care in all Irish third-level institutions



## INDIVIDUAL RESEARCHERS

Many researchers, including those not affiliated to colleges or organisations, were contacted directly regarding their work. Lists of their publications gathered to date were forwarded to them and they were asked to comment on the suitability of publications for the audit and to forward other publications omitted from the list. This method also yielded results that may not have been sourced elsewhere such as conference papers and localised projects.

## INTERNET SEARCHES

In the course of the research audit, many keyword searches were completed in a variety of contexts. These took place on organisation's websites and on library catalogues. Some searches were initiated on the Internet, using search engines. This highlighted certain sources of information for the audit that were then investigated further.

## JOURNALS AND PERIODICALS

The collection of data from journals and periodicals proved difficult and time-consuming. In the absence of a dedicated early years Irish journal, many articles are published in British and international journals. There is a vast array of international journals in which such articles could be published, owing to the breadth of the early years sector, spanning education, social work, special needs, curriculum, child welfare, psychology and medicine etc.

While many journals are now available on-line, they are not always searchable and the vast majority have on-line records only since the late 1990's. It proved very difficult to locate all volumes and editions of these journals over a 13-year period. I spent many days in the St. Patrick's College Library, Trinity library and other libraries probing journal's Table of Contents but the main focus was placed on the Irish and British journals, as they contained the most articles pertinent to our search. However, we have been as inclusive as possible of this category in the audit with the current resources.

## OTHER SOURCES OF POSSIBLE RESEARCH DATA

A number of sources of data emerged that were not fully investigated in this audit. Many are weekly or monthly magazines that are too numerous to examine, often containing short, non-research based articles e.g. Childlinks (Barnardos), Poverty Today (Combat Poverty Agency) and the Journal of

Child-centred Practice (ISPCC). There is also a great wealth of undergraduate theses in colleges providing early childhood studies, too numerous to include in this audit. There are a great number of research projects in the process of completion at present and these have not been included in this publication.

Many non-government organisations have valuable resources on their websites, which could not be included as 'research', but would prove valuable for providers, practitioners, researchers and academics in the sector. A number of County Childcare Committees are in the process of finalising their Strategic Plans (2002-2006), among other research. A number of organisations and institutions, such as the Combat Poverty Agency, a number of government departments, voluntary organisations and Health Boards produce annual reports on their activities. The Department of Education and Science issue a number of Circulars and an annual Statistical Report each year to primary schools to inform them of policy changes modifications.

## COLLATION AND ANALYSIS

An Access database was set-up to log the publications as they emerged. Thematic analysis was used to organise the publications into a series of themes.

Further thematic analysis produced a series of categories and sub-categories. Table 1 below shows the overall layout of the publication. Each of the 11 themes identified is divided into a number of categories and these change for each theme. The categories are then further divided into a number of sub-categories and these remain consistent throughout. These sub-categories are:

- Description/Analysis
- Evaluation
- Guidelines
- Policy

## DESCRIPTION/ANALYSIS

These publications compose a commentary on or description of current contexts and initiatives without being evaluative. The scope of interpretation of descriptive/Analytic is quite liberal and thus incorporates a wide variation of research topics and styles.

## EVALUATION

Evaluation incorporates the analysis and evaluation of initiatives and projects pertaining to early childhood education and care. This takes place at all levels, from international comparisons and government evaluations to the assessment of the effectiveness of an individual initiative.

## GUIDELINES

This section includes guidelines published by state agencies or individual organisations in relation to initiatives, regulations and services. These are often produced for providers and consumers of the services to ensure common understandings and provision standardisation. Such publications are often in the form of an information pack that is easily disseminated to large numbers of people and is easily understood and implemented.

## POLICY

This section is largely composed of the government's and organisation's policy concerning early childhood education and care in Ireland. Each chapter contains a section on Government publications in which policy papers for this category are outlined. This category also incorporates responses and viewpoints of individuals and organisations in relation to policy, such as submissions, position papers and responses to policy.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The CECDE was surprised and delighted at the vast amount of research collected in the process of conducting this audit. To date, 1,097 publications and research articles in relation to early childhood education and care in Ireland since 1990 have been gathered. A process of thematic analysis of the collected research indicated that it could be divided into these 11 themes. Table 1 lists the themes that emerged and the corresponding number of publications alongside.

Table 1: Research Themes and Corresponding Number of References

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of References*</b>
<b>Children's Rights</b>	62
<b>Cultural Diversity</b>	131
<b>Curriculum</b>	90
<b>Early Childhood Development</b>	362
<b>Educational Disadvantage</b>	133
<b>Irish Language Education</b>	129
<b>Parents and Families</b>	106
<b>Quality</b>	54
<b>Sociological/Historical Perspectives</b>	76
<b>Special Needs</b>	124
<b>Staffing, Training and Qualifications</b>	77
<b>Total</b>	<b>1344</b>

\*This number of references is correct as of May 23rd 2003. This is a work in progress and the above numbers are subject to change in the maturation of the project.

There is some minor overlap between publications in a number of themes; for example, a publication may be relevant to two or three different themes. That is why the overall number of publications in Table 1 (1,344) is in excess of the 1,097 individual publications in the audit database to date.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS focuses on the importance of protecting and championing the rights of children. It also contains a category on promoting children's voices as active citizens in society.

The theme of CULTURAL DIVERSITY in the early years presents research in relation to the education and care of minority groups in Ireland. This includes both our indigenous minority groups such as the Travelling Community and foreign national groups.

CURRICULUM in the early childhood care and education sector is investigated in relation to curriculum development and implementation. It also focuses on the range of methodologies in use and the assessment of teaching and learning.

The theme of EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE in the early years outlines the impediments that disadvantage imply and analyses some of the interventions to reduce its detrimental consequences. These include local based initiatives, integrated approaches and school based programmes.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT is a large theme, incorporating publications from child development and child welfare in the Irish context. Service provision in relation to early childhood education and care is also examined here.

IRISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION in the early years sector focuses on Irish language acquisition for both native and non-native speakers. Publications focus on the role of the family, community and society in this regard and the acquisition of Irish in preschool and school settings.

The crucial role of PARENTS AND FAMILIES in early childhood education and care is outlined in this theme. The publications here examine the importance of parental involvement and participation in out of home education and care settings and supports available to parents to fulfil this role.

The theme of QUALITY examines the provision of services in the early childhood education and care sector. It also outlines the difficulties in defining the more subtle and intangible nuances of quality in the Irish context

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES focuses on the historical, economic, sociological and cultural constructions of childhood in Ireland over the period 1990-2003.

The theme of SPECIAL NEEDS relates to the provision for and categories of needs in early childhood care and education. This focuses on the need for early identification and the provision of appropriate intervention for the needs of the child.

STAFFING, TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS analyses the education

and training of early years practitioners working in the sector. It also focuses on the delivery mechanisms in operation and the development of managerial skills.

For the purpose of this paper, I will examine 4 of these 11 themes in detail; the two themes with the most publications, that is to say Early Childhood Development and Educational Disadvantage and the two themes with the least number of publications; Children's Rights and Quality. Their categories and sub-categories, including the number of references for each will be listed, and a short commentary provided.

#### **THEME – EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT [362]**

Early Childhood development is by far the largest in the research audit, containing 304 references. Following thematic analysis, the categories below emerged and the corresponding number of publications for each category is listed:

- CHILD DEVELOPMENT [60]
  - Description/Analysis [52]
  - Evaluation [3]
  - Guidelines [1]
  - Policy [4]
  
- CHILD WELFARE [33]
  - Description/Analysis [24]
  - Evaluation [1]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [8]
  
- GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS [63]
  - Description/Analysis [4]
  - Evaluation [2]
  - Guidelines [3]
  - Policy [54]
  
- INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES [20]
  - Description/Analysis [15]
  - Evaluation [2]

- Guidelines [1]
- Policy [2]
- SERVICE PROVISION [186]
  - Description/Analysis [48]
  - Evaluation [81]
  - Guidelines [23]
  - Policy [34]

The voluminous amount of research in this area reflects economic and societal changes in Ireland in the last decade. This has led to increased parental involvement in the labour force, thus increasing demand for early childhood care and education outside the home (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999). Child protection and welfare is also a topical issue in the current climate.

There is also growing recognition of the paramount importance of early childhood education and care on future development (Hayes, 2000; 2002). Service provision is a large category within this theme, reflecting a growing societal and state interest and involvement in the area (Department of Education and Science, 1999a; Department of Health and Children, 2000).

Theme – Educational Disadvantage [133]

Educational disadvantage has received much attention in the Irish context in recent years. This theme accounts for 128 of the references in the audit, classified under the following categories:

- GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS [25]
  - Description/Analysis [4]
  - Evaluation [2]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [19]
- INTEGRATED APPROACHES [7]
  - Description/Analysis [4]
  - Evaluation [2]
  - Guidelines [1]
  - Policy [0]

- INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES [4]
  - Description/Analysis [3]
  - Evaluation [0]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [1]
- LOCAL INITIATIVES [21]
  - Description/Analysis [5]
  - Evaluation [8]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [8]
- SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMES [37]
  - Description/Analysis [11]
  - Evaluation [19]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [7]
- SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE [39]
  - Description/Analysis [14]
  - Evaluation [4]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [21]

Research internationally and nationally has emphasised the decisive nature of early intervention to alleviate disadvantage (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin and Morgan, 1995; INTO 1994; 2000) Investment in the early years yields greater returns than subsequent attempts at remediation, both in terms of personal enrichment and societal benefits (Department of Education and Science, 1999a). Children experiencing disadvantage often do not achieve their educational potential and this may reduce their chance of success in life and perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage (Coolahan, 1998; Department of Education and Science, 1999b; 2001).

Despite a myriad of interventions and initiatives to eliminate educational disadvantage, at both national and local levels, disadvantage remains a prevalent issue for a significant number of young children in Ireland

(Department of Education and Science, 2001; Zappone and Haran, 2002). The CECDE will play a pivotal role in addressing this challenge, due to its particular brief to consider the needs of children affected by or at risk of educational disadvantage.

#### **THEME – CHILDREN’S RIGHTS [62]**

The issue of promoting children’s rights and voices in society has come to the fore of Irish policy in recent years, catalysed by Ireland’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. Publications in this area represent 55 of the overall amount and are categorised as following.

- GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS [16]
  - Description/Analysis [0]
  - Evaluation [1]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [15]
- PROMOTING CHILDREN’S VOICES [21]
  - Description/Analysis [14]
  - Evaluation [4]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [3]
- PROTECTING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS [25]
  - Description/Analysis [11]
  - Evaluation [1]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [13]

While much research has been conducted in this area in Ireland, it largely focuses on older children and teenagers (McAuley and Brattman, 2002). Research in relation to methods to ascertain the views and voices of young children must be developed to ensure that children play an active and constructive role as citizens in society (Guardian Ad Litem Group, 2001; O’Doherty, Wiczorek-Deering and Shannon (2002). The recent launch of the ISPC Children’s Consultation Unit is a welcomed development in this regard.

#### **THEME – QUALITY [54]**

It is surprising to note that the subject of quality, which has received so much attention in the Irish context, is relatively unsupported by published research. The 53 research items have been categorised as follows:

- GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS [20]
  - Description/Analysis [2]
  - Evaluation [0]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [18]
- INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES [5]
  - Description/Analysis [3]
  - Evaluation [0]
  - Guidelines [1]
  - Policy [1]
- QUALITY INDICATORS [12]
  - Description/Analysis [10]
  - Evaluation [0]
  - Guidelines [0]
  - Policy [2]
- QUALITY OF SERVICE PROVISION [17]
  - Description/Analysis [3]
  - Evaluation [7]
  - Guidelines [5]
  - Policy [2]

Quality is a complex and subjective term that is difficult to define in simple statements or checklists (Department of Education and Science, 1999a; IPPA, 2002). As quality is a dynamic and context-specific term, the importation of models and research from other jurisdictions must be mediated for the unique Irish context and complemented by our own research.

The absence of Irish material in relation to quality makes discussion difficult to ground and much research needs to be conducted in this area to ensure a

comprehensive and informed discussion of the topic. The CECDE will play an integral role in the progression of this debate in the development of the Quality Framework.

#### GAPS IN THE RESEARCH

This immense number of publications is a credit to the early years sector in Ireland, which has remained under-funded and underdeveloped for many years. On primary analysis of the information to date, a number of research gaps are prominent. These may alter or increase as further analysis of the data takes place.

#### CHILDREN'S RIGHTS/ VOICES

While there have been a lot of publications in relation to the rights and voices of children in the teenage years in preparation for citizenship, the question of consultation with and empowerment of children in the early years is largely underdeveloped.

#### TRANSITIONS

While there is a wealth of research available in relation to early childhood education and care, there is a general absence of publications regarding the transition from early years education and care to the formal education system.

#### QUALITY

As already noted, there has been little research in the area of Quality in the Irish context, both in relation to quality indicators or the evaluation of the more intangible and dynamic elements of quality.

#### PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Recent years have witnessed a welcome focus on supporting the wider family in relation to parenthood. However, there appears to be no direct government policy in relation to parental involvement, although many government policies, such as the Report of the Commission on the Family, make indirect reference to this.

#### EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Much research has been completed in the area of disadvantage, yet there is a dearth of publications that focus specifically on the importance of an integrated approach to tackling educational disadvantage.

#### SPECIAL NEEDS

There is a need for further examination of the issue of effective intervention for children with special needs. In particular, there is a need for critical examination of the process of inclusion and integration of children with special needs in mainstream settings.

#### STAFFING, TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

There is little research in the Irish context relating to the impact of training and qualifications on the quality of services provided in settings.

#### CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The question of the education of foreign national minority groups is relatively new in the Irish context. A considerable amount of research has been conducted in a relatively short period of time. However, there is little research available in relation to the language needs of minority groups in the Irish context.

#### INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

While international perspectives featured as a category in all of the chapters, there is a lack of research that compares Ireland with other jurisdictions.

#### LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

The vast majority of the research is one-off, short-term evaluations of initiatives. This does not take into account long-term effects of projects, which is of vital importance.

#### POLICY

All sections are quite weak on policy that does not emanate from government. There are a few organisations such as the Combat Poverty Agency, Irish National Teachers Organisation, Pavee Point, Irish Travellers Movement and Barnardos, as well as certain individuals, that produce policy papers, but the majority of the research is categorised as descriptive/analysis. Research needs to be undertaken to inform new policy development and to generate debate and discussion on policy issues.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The early childhood care and education sector should take great pride in the vast amount of Irish research produced since 1990. It is hoped that the research

audit will be of great benefit as a resource that draws together in excess of a decade of hard work and dedication within the early childhood education and care sector.

The gaps highlighted will perhaps provide a basis and focus for further research projects in the future. The Centre is in the process of drafting its Research Strategy and this has incorporated these aforementioned gaps in research. Moreover, the dissemination and accessibility of such research is imperative to benefit the sector as a whole.

It is hoped to publish the research audit in the summer and it will be available as a searchable on-line database when the CECDE's website becomes operational.

This on-line database will be updated regularly to take account of new and emerging research and there will be an annual update of the hard copy publication. This will be a valuable centralised resource for the whole of the early childhood care and education sector. It is hoped that the Centre can become a clearinghouse for research in the early childhood education and care sector in the future.

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