

## **GROUP 2 WORKSHOP – Birth to Three Matters – the relevance for parents and the impact of recent research**

Participants raised the following issues of concern for discussion:

- Birth to 3 phase – lack of support and still dominated by inappropriate watered down criteria.
- Paper by Iram Siraj-Blatchford raised interesting issues around levels of qualifications, training and quality of practice.
- This phase needs ample time for unhurried exchanges and developing relationships.
- The value of signing with hearing babies - for accessing their thinking.
- Crucial importance of children's private worlds – these are small worlds at first and rely on stable, sensitive relationships with key persons.
- Huge problems around banding very young children into age phases – produces competitive ethos and undermines the normal range of children's social contacts and relationships. Serious issues/problems for siblings who are split up between 'baby' and 'toddler' rooms.
- Deep concerns expressed about the 'schoolification' (MW's term!) of babies and toddlers
- Some scepticism around the notion of 'choice' for parents - and concerns about 'choice' for young children.
- Deficit models underlie so many medical child development norms – dangers when used in the context of child development in care and education contexts.
- Complex issues around age, gender and culture in the birth to 3 phase – lots of pressure exerted now from birth – sure starts, flying starts, etc. – is this deskilling parents?
- Adults who work with babies must have the ability/instinct for tuning in and engaging with them – does some of the training promoted now militate against these intuitive abilities/gifts?

*Chair – Rod Parker-Rees  
Scribe - Marian Whitehead*

## **GROUP 3 WORKSHOP – Differences/Parallels despite differences: the Welsh perspective**

Discussion began by focusing on the differences between Wales and England in terms of both policy and practice. I was able to share with the group information about the gap between the rhetoric and the reality, that is, despite the original proposals, practice has changed very little in south, west and mid-Wales, as far as I know, even in the pilot schools (with a few exceptions).

The group discussion then evolved and the following issues were raised and discussed:

- Problems, in particular about health and safety, arising from the unrealistic expectations of both ESTYN and OFSTED inspectors;
- Ways in which those present had countered the culture of negativity created by schools' over-reaction to health and safety restrictions;
- The urgent need to promote risk-taking and resilience in both educators and children;
- The lack of a framework for a curriculum based on teaching and learning through play;
- The inherent dangers in trying to prise early years frameworks/curricula from other countries rather than, given the opportunities which exist in Wales, co-constructing with the children a culturally appropriate curriculum. (There is widespread practice of this in Wales at the moment);
- The over-laden content of the draft curriculum for the foundation phase in Wales;

- The positive impact that the provision for the Welsh language has on children in terms of their acceptance of and interest in other cultures;
- The existing culture of teaching to the inspection framework rather than allowing knowledge of pedagogy to inform practice;
- The general lack of knowledge teachers have of pedagogy and research findings;
- The need to change ITT courses in order to prepare students in Wales and England for learning and teaching through play;
- How to address the lack of knowledge of child development in the teaching profession which is a matter of urgency in Wales and England;
- The implications of the Foundation Phase for changes in the inspection framework in Wales and England;
- The lack of sufficient inspectors in both Wales and England possessing appropriate experience and qualifications in early years education.

*Chair: Branwen Llewelyn-Jones*

## **WORKSHOP 4 - Exploring continuity, integration and creativity through integrated services**

The group discussed a wide range of issues around the focus of continuity, integration and creativity through integrated services. There were professionals representing education, social work and health, including lecturers, trainers and teachers. From the notes taken during the discussions – the group compiled 12 key issues that they believed were important, that there was a need to promote:

- Shared objectives across the professions;
- Need to use existing resources [of all types] creatively;
- No more change for change sake;
- Clarification of roles;
- Raising the status of all roles; raising the bar as professions;
- Keep the child at the centre of the process – this is what all the professionals are about; our business is children – care, learning, health;
- Clear terminology – what happened to ‘educare’;
- Continuity – why birth-5 in England when the Foundation Phase in Wales is to age 7?;
- The need for a seamlessness – 0-18, not age phases;
- Shared communication and information across the professions;
- Prescribed consultation is no use; it still sounds as though the NPS/QCA/SureStart are prescribing even though they proclaim advance consultation this time;
- Need to articulate the shared voice loudly and effectively so that we are listened to by policy makers.

*Chair: Avril Brock  
Scribe: Jonathan Doherty*

## **GROUP 6 WORKSHOP – Continuity, integration and creativity: how can we support best practice and implement change?**

The discussion began by considering some recent research on creativity in mathematics and the potential of creative thinking and learning throughout the curriculum. We then moved on to a general discussion related to the question (above) and summarised below.

Whilst many there were many expressions of concern and frustration raised about both real and perceived barriers to creativity and effective practice, there was a consensus about the tremendous potential of young children; those present felt that teachers wanted to do the best for children's learning and recognised the value of creativity through the arts and throughout the curriculum.

Many of the perceptions of limitations to creativity related to the endless imposed curriculum changes, to hated 'ring binders' and restrictions on time to be creative. There was a strong feeling in the group that it was time for teachers to regain professional responsibility for teaching and learning, rather than continually be told what to do and how to teach.

#### **Concerns / barriers:**

- Schools that plan in clusters - this has implications for individual children, if all teachers in the cluster were teaching the same things
- many KS2 teachers and heads have no Early Years experience and fail to understand the importance of these issues
- pressures from LEAs – 'standards'; teaching as preparation for SATs (still) top down pressures - especially literacy and numeracy – creativity marginalized
- The curriculum is overloaded with content that must be 'delivered'
- shared thinking – 'school improvement' is a huge issue – standards versus creativity
- time – the time-table; the school day divided and ordered by bells: creative thinking takes time – there are many positive outcomes from taking time on something, rather than being hurried to complete in a given time
- ring binders – teachers need to think for themselves and develop their professional reading and understanding – a culture of fear related to ring-binders which restrict what can be taught
- concern about the dispositions and skills that the imposed curriculum appears to develop – children fail to develop personal skills such as independence, adaptability, risk-taking – resulting in 16 and 17 year olds who can't think for themselves
- there were strengths of the 'project' approach that were killed off by the National Curriculum
- concern that the document 'all our futures' appeared to have been suppressed
- the 'personalisation' agenda – it only means what the government want it to mean
- pressures on HE institutions from OfSTED – courses for student teachers narrow and standardised – don't encourage creative thinking, ideas

#### **Recommendations:**

- that the Welsh Foundation Phase would look closely at creativity
- that creativity should be an essential part of the Birth -Three phase, and something we build on
- would like to see equity of provision – suggestion that we should follow the Finnish model, with all Early years settings state run
- children must have a voice – learning should be a partnership
- child development should be part of all student teachers' degree courses
- importance of the individual child
- important to recognise that creativity includes creative thinking processes
- recommend 'professional spontaneity' – teachers being creative and following best instincts: throw ring-binders out!
- the curriculum needs to excite and stimulate!
- Importance of thinking skills
- emphasis needs to be on mastery of learning rather than 'covering' endless content
- recommend that all early years staff should have a degree (like Finland)
- there needs to be high quality provision and choices
- explore ways of providing larger blocks of time for children to explore aspects of learning in

- depth and without interruption
- don't under-estimate young children

*Chair: Maulfry Worthington*

## **GROUP 7 WORKSHOP – Exploring the curriculum for 3-8's; Foundation stage to Yr1**

Interest in this topic came from LEA advisers; School Improvement Officers; teachers and teaching assistants; Higher Education colleagues;

The group acknowledged the work of the Primary Strategy in the transition work currently under way, although 'Continuing the learning journey' document is now out of print and was not made available to all settings. No reprints are expected and the funding to cover the training only will also not be repeated.

Discussion centred round the issues of Yr.1, particularly:

- The needs of the year 1 children in accessing a foundation stage experience for longer.
- Year 1 teachers are under pressure from other colleagues, and there are issues re the accommodation; space; resources and training.
- Many Year.1 teachers lack understanding of foundation stage principles and practice.
- The SEF (school evaluation form) has focused attention on the foundation stage, although there are cases where inappropriate use of data has been made by head teachers and OfSTED inspectors.
- Year 1 teachers are often not included in discussions with foundation stage colleagues and miss out on opportunities to share good practice.

*Chair: Jo Elks*

## **GROUP 8 WORKSHOP – A Sure Start – what is the philosophy of Children's Centres?**

Some members of the group remained uncertain as to what a children's centre was; it was described as providing an integrated service of educational childcare, health provision and social service provision in a community context. A key part of its remit is to offer family support and family learning opportunities with a route through to further education and training for those parents that might want to pursue that route. For all centres there is a stipulated core offer with which they must be compliant.

Children's Centres are emerging from different histories and these are influencing their ongoing development. So, although they must all make the core offer, their ethos may be different. Some group members were concerned that local diversity is being placed at risk by the bureaucracy of total provision.

Because of their histories, some do and some do not have a teacher involved; the current ruling is for a .5 teacher in each centre. Some centres feel ambivalent about teacher involvement, others have more than the minimum requirement involved and wish to retain that.

Parents may still be confused about the purpose of the Centres; they also need support in developing their understanding. Different centres have involved parents in different ways in service development; whilst this was an integral part of Sure Start, the governance for Children's Centres is different with parents taking a less prominent role in decision-making; more like that of a governing body than the previous model of a Parents' Network..

Leadership is a key issue and Centre management and leadership can come from any sector. Multi-professional practice needs to emerge across previously disparate professions; the new workforce agenda should be driving this forward. It's time to move out of our comfort zones and reflect and plan together. Only in this way can we collectively influence policy development – using our political voice alongside our personal voice.

TDA have produced websites that offer substantial training and development materials with particular areas in focus. TACTYC should be asking for one of these to support early years developments and children's centre developments.

*Chair: Karen McInnes  
Scribe: Prof. Pat Broadhead*

## **GROUP 9 WORKSHOP: CREATIVE AND PLAYFUL ADULTS – A LIFELONG APPROACH**

As you would hope from a session focusing on play, this was a free flowing, stimulating, sometimes challenging but ultimately fun discussion.

The main points raised included:

- A unanimous agreement citing the importance of play not only for children but also for adults;
- A need for practitioners to have a more rigorous grasp of the fundamental significance of play in the process of development and learning. There was a feeling within the group that practitioners (especially in school settings) still believe that they will be criticised if they allow the children in their care to 'play too much'. The group discussed how many of these practitioners (or indeed their managers/heads) have received little if any relevant training on child development: they do not have the underpinning knowledge which would give them the confidence to allow children to wallow in their play, safe in the knowledge that this is not simply 'mindless messing around' (and indeed would be a problem if it was!). The group proposed that there is a need to look at the child development content of Further and Higher Education courses, and its links to the importance of play;
- A need for practitioners at ALL levels to have play incorporated into the courses they pursue;
- The group talked at length about the need for practitioners to be playful adults. How being in touch with your own ability to play as an adult enables you to empathise and effectively facilitate play based opportunities for children. Ultimately it was agreed that this would be very difficult for an adult who had no sense of play genuinely to appreciate the need for children to play. This led on to a conversation around how parents own experience of play has a direct effect on the way they play with their child/children. The importance of non-threatening 'play based' groups/opportunities for parents was explored, with individuals providing examples of their experiences in this area;
- The group also suggested that all the curriculum documents relating to young children should be rewritten to incorporate play in all areas;
- The group concluded with a consideration of the types of creative and playful experiences there are for adults, ranging from 'gadgets for men' to 'dressing up' workshops;

The final comment was that as this was a group focusing on 'creative and playful adults' so maybe we should have all gone for an explore and play around Cardiff rather than sit dutifully and discuss the given topic!

*Chair: Dr Deirdre Cook  
Scribes: Dr Claire Mould and Dr. David Whitebread*

## **GROUP 10 WORKSHOP – How can we ensure quality training to support continuity, integration and creativity in early childhood services**

We picked up on the issue of 'learning to learn' from Iram's earlier talk, and felt that learning to learn should be embedded in our early years culture for practitioners as well as children. The concept of 'professional learning communities' appealed to our group, with an example being the 5x5x5 project at Bath Spa University, where artists, LEAs, University staff all link to benefit learning and teaching. The group expressed concern that, at present, practitioners are being de-skilled by the emphasis on curriculum targets, rather than on children's experiences, and training is needed to ensure that practitioners thoroughly understand the need for sharing thinking with children (not just curriculum activities). There is evidence that some universities and colleges (e.g. Brighton) are working with students on, for example, foundation degree courses on exploring dispositions for learning and allowing thinking time for students in what is, particularly in colleges, a very overcrowded course. It was felt vital that all training should encourage professional discourse (e.g. NPQICL mentor time) for all practitioners and particularly those at leadership/management levels. Headteachers of primary schools with early years units are still generally not sufficiently aware of early years practices – this raised the issue of NPQICL versus NPQH qualifications and how disparate the two training schemes are. There is also an issue of NPQH trainers taking on board the developing role of primary heads in providing integrated education and care from early morning to evening for at least 38 weeks of the year and to have an understanding of extended schools, children's centres and other such initiatives and provision.

To ensure continuity of training, it is vital to re-introduce pedagogy (we particularly like this word for what it represents), particularly in relation to considering the 'why' of teaching and learning, not just the 'what' and the 'how'. But how do we reach existing practitioners so that they can change and challenge practice? Concern was expressed that some lower level NVQ training can perpetuate poor practice in settings, where adults simply provide and monitor rather than 'teach'. Some examples of good practice do exist, e.g. Sheffield and Rotherham have a project underway involving a community of professionals, linked (and partly funded by the local TDA), which offers regular on-line contact with teachers/practitioners to think about practice.

The Teacher Development Agency was generally criticised because of its lack of consistency and coherent links with other agencies and government departments. Regular changes of staff (and very young staff) in the TDA did not support continuity and integration of ideas. In general, it was felt that the government needs more joined-up thinking (still) and the concept of a 'continuing learning journey' made more readily available in the early years. Excellence and Enjoyment needs to be more widely used as a basis for such joined-up thinking. Part of this is also the need for 'good' schools to offer student places for all courses, currently not often happening in many areas. Perhaps it is now necessary for the government to insist that schools should take on students.

*Chair: Janet Moyles  
Scribe: Jill Brown*