

Leading the Organisation

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Leaderful Governance

Tessé Akpeki

“The cohesive board has members who think together, rather than think alike, arriving at the best decision

Governance boards play a vital role in leading organisations and in being at the forefront of change. With the children's centre terrain experiencing shifts and being outsourced, effective governance is even more crucial. As Advisory

Boards take a greater strategic role in ensuring the requirements of Local Authorities are being met by their service delivery partners, looking at effective models of governance in other fields helps the sector sharpen its approach. Commissioners are keen to know that the organisations they partner with are well run and are being organised as efficiently and effectively as possible; Ofsted inspectors expect Advisory Boards to be strategic in approach, planning and assessing outcomes of the centre(s) with criticality based on valid data and evidence. While there is no one template for getting governance right, there are nationally accepted tenets that can help strengthen good practice. In this article, I have singled out five issues which if addressed can strengthen the governance of children's centres.

PEOPLE

Spend Time on Advisory Board Recruitment

Good Governance - A Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector (Principle 3) states 'An effective board will provide good governance and leadership by working effectively both as individuals and as a team'. The best boards take time out to attract the skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and experience they need to build an effective board. Twinned with this, board diversity eliminates the presence of group-think. Having recruited board members, it is crucial to take time to give them a warm welcome to the organisation and induct them into the role.

“An effective board will provide good governance and leadership by working effectively both as individuals and as a team”

Role of Chair

Board chairs can have considerable influence on board operations. Recent research by Chris Cornforth of Open University shows that the traits of an effective Chair, which parallel our findings, are very similar across a range of organisations. Effective Chairs are goal directed, are socially aware and emotionally mature (also known as emotional intelligence). These Chairs are creative, flexible, persistent, committed, independent-minded, understand the big picture and are compassionate. As Advisory Boards mature, recruiting chairs from within the parent users of the centre ensures the development of the centre services fully reflect community need.

Address Board/Centre Team Relationships

Lack of clarity about what is governance and management can plague even the best of boards. Effective governance emerges through the joint work of board members, the Cluster/federation leader and the centre leader. Board members should agree with the Cluster leader the nature of the contact between the Advisory Board and senior centre team members. This level of clarity helps them to recognise appropriate boundaries and how they can work better together. Within the charitable and business sectors alike, more boards are introducing confidential sessions attended by board members only. These sessions are useful where the board members need to discuss their performance and matters that keep them awake at night with a view to working better as a strategic team. It may help board members view the work of the centres with greater objectivity and better prepare them to hold centre teams to account for their performance.



The Board as a Team

An organisation may have sound processes and good structures but often these are not sufficient. The trend today recognises that people matter to shape effective governance. The Compass/Cass Business School Report, Delivering Effective Governance written by Mike Hudson and Jacinta Ashworth, highlights the importance of teamwork and trust. The cohesive board has members who think together, rather than think alike, arriving at the best decision.

Review Board Effectiveness

Effective boards need to reflect on their effectiveness. Where are they excelling? Where are they not doing so well? What activities does the organisation need to start doing, keep doing? Is the organisation supported by an able board moving in the right direction for the long term? Really small changes can make a difference. Board member appraisals provide a way to supporting board members to contribute meaningfully to the organisation.

Confidential sessions may help board members view the work of the centres with greater objectivity



Is your board meeting the challenge?

Finding a Purposeful Voice

— Vicki Lant

Listening to Mary Beard delivering the **London Review of Books Lecture**, 14 February 2014, taking as her theme the ways in which the voices of women are silenced or not heard in public, your editors acknowledged the resonance that many centre leaders will feel, female and male, in a context where the contribution of centres can feel compromised, marginalised and decidedly unheard in an environment that appears increasingly *schoolified*. Mary Beard visualised this systemic deafness parodied in an old *Punch* cartoon:

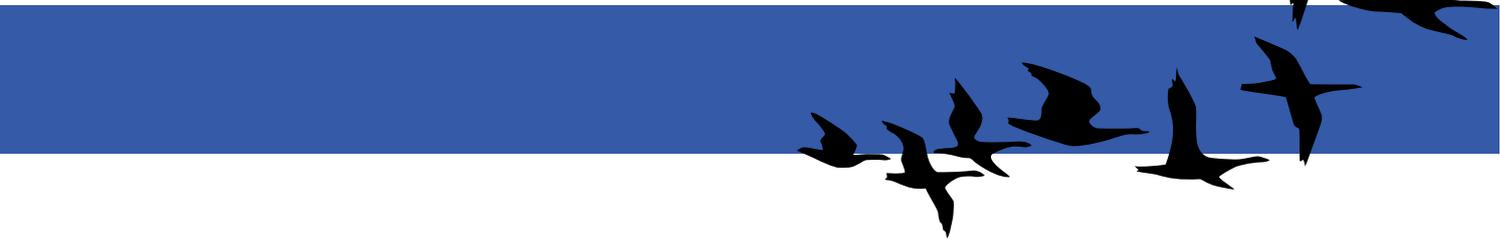
“That’s an excellent suggestion, Miss Triggs. Perhaps one of the men here would like to make it.”

It felt rather like that as Sir Michael Wilshaw delivered his **appraisal** of key messages within the first **Annual Report - Early Years** of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (Education, Children’s Services and Skills). Whilst the early years sector representatives in the room (largely female) were informed at the outset that the quality in the sector has been rising, a series of well-aimed challenges to the sector’s communication about its services, performance and outcomes highlighted that only nursery schools were sustaining that quality for children who need it most. Despite some robust responses, the early-years-Miss-Triggs, may be forgiven for having felt admonished that only schools know how to make a difference for children who may be least advantaged. There was an abiding sense in the room that Mary Beard identifies of the failed intervention; “you’re at a meeting, you make a point, then a short silence follows, and after a few awkward seconds some man picks up where he had just left off:

‘What I was saying was ...’ You might as well never have opened your mouth, and you end up blaming both yourself and the men whose exclusive club the discussion appears to be.”

Paraphrasing Mary Beard, *How do we get our point heard? How do we get it noticed? How do we get to belong in the discussion?* Careful reading of the report is a very good starting point, as is very careful reading of **Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on**. This is a repetitive twenty year story of evidence that children experiencing the poorest starts in life, environmentally, emotionally and economically, might expect lower levels of aspiration and achievement as they progress through life. Those passionately engaged in early local Sure Start programmes around fifteen years ago will have been motivated by a desire to support parents and communities to be better first educators, healthier role models, more aspirational learners, more

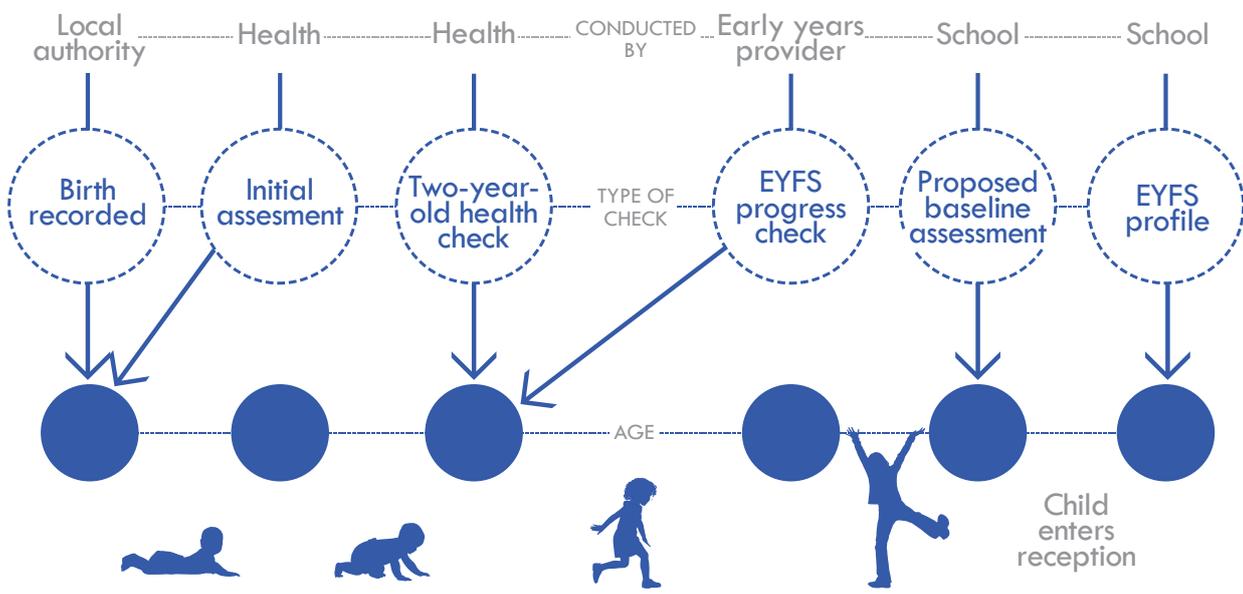




economically secure and keener to safeguard their children and communities. But a lack of systemic join-up is acknowledged in this **Annual Report**, with a clear illustration of the many points at

which we could have and should have shared intelligence about families who needed our support most, but where we worried more about the letter rather than the spirit of the data sharing law:

Checks conducted in a child's first five years



The report highlights that Local Authorities having the strongest children's centres have powerful strategic links between stakeholders, including schools, health professionals and adult learning providers, engaging them in decision-making and governance. Clear outcome frameworks are in place and everyone understands the accountability they share in achieving highly for all children and families, especially

those least advantaged. Hackney's journey to turn around the difference it made for its most vulnerable children since 2009, shows that connected commitment by all enables the neediest children to thrive.

How do we get to belong in the discussion?

In all of the reports above, high quality leadership counts significantly toward enabling groups to understand their own role and perform it, collaborate generatively and positively hold peers to account and communicate effectively in ways

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that help potential service users to engage with the service offer. Paragraphs 70-82 (The role of children's centres) hold up an accurate, but uncompromising mirror to the current state of children's centres. The picture is confused and muddled. Whilst the government may have articulated a core purpose for children's centres, few leaders feel it is understood by all who should be bound by or benefit from it. Some clear visioning is required with a unified voice and a straightforward message about benefits to children and families.

This edition is about leading our wider organisation with clarity and accountability in governance (Tessé Akpeki), through system leadership (Elaine Hallet) and partnership (Sue Owen), whilst Jo Grace and Carol Matta help us to understand that we learn and lead in different ways and require more than just concepts to nourish us. Sue Webster, imbued with family weddings and The Great British Sewing Bee challenges us

to communicate in a current idiom, whilst James Hemsall and Sue Egersdorff refocus our purpose to those most in need and what we are actually achieving to have a positive impact.

“purpose is a key to exceptional performance”

Nick Craig and Scott Snook (From Purpose to Impact, May 2014)

suggest that the leader's most important role is to be the steward of the organisation's purpose and that business experts purport that **purpose** is a key to exceptional performance, whilst psychologists believe it underpins well-being. However their research suggests that fewer than 20% of leaders had a strong sense of personal purpose - fewer still could distil this into a concrete phrase. Can you? They suggest the first step to uncovering personal leadership purpose is to mine your life story for major themes that reveal your lifelong passions and values - then craft a concise purpose statement that emboldens and energises **you**. From this you can develop an effective *purpose-to-impact* plan that:

uses language meaningful and motivational to you - not others' management jargon

focuses on big-picture aspirations, using shorter term goals and working towards now with greater specificity - future focused

emphasises your strengths to achieve aspirations - self-belief

takes a holistic view of your work and your family-contextual reality.

“seeking the join-up, clarifying and simplifying the purpose and language of why we do what we do and who for, may help to bring purpose and strong voice to a debate that really needs our contribution”

Going back to the basics that energised early Sure Start programmes, seeking the join-up, clarifying and simplifying the purpose and language of why we do what we do and who for, may help to bring purpose and strong voice to a debate that really needs our contribution. Sir Michael Wilshaw is clear that this is urgent and important for all of us in the sector. Who will you engage in the debate and where will you start?



Effective and Caring Leadership for Empowering Change

Elaine Hallet

Recent government reviews, the Nutbrown and Truss Reports (DfE, 2012, 2013) recognise the importance of leadership in the early years for improving the educational, social and health outcomes for young children. The ELEYS study, (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007) highlighted the contribution of early years leaders for successful organisations. In the current climate of change due to government reform and policy development, it is important for

children's centre leaders to be up to date with policy, practice, current thinking and research with a sound knowledge base to lead policy into practice within the evolving early years landscape. Recent professional development programmes as the National Professional Qualification for Children's Centre Leaders (NPQICL) for children's centre leaders, Early Years Professional and Teacher Status (EYPS, EYTS) for Early Years Professionals and Teachers as leaders of practice and pedagogy have focused on professional learning for leaders of educational and integrated practice.

An understanding of leadership within an organisation working with young children and their families is beginning to unravel. Leadership in early childhood appears to be more about the result of groups of people who work together to



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Her Majesty's Chief Inspector - Education, Children's Services and Skills (2013); *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on*; Manchester; Ofsted

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector - Education, Children's Services and Skills (April 2014); *Annual Report - Early Years*; Manchester; Ofsted

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influence and inspire rather than the efforts of one single person who focuses on getting the job done (Rodd, 2013). As changes in schools, early years settings and children's centres are introduced, those working in the early years 'are all parties to leadership' with differing leadership roles and responsibilities within a 'leaderful community' of shared or distributed leadership (Raelin, 2003: 44). Leadership may be shared by all those working in an organisation, regarding all staff as being leaders within a collective leadership team. The collective team can undertake differing leadership roles, actions and functions under the deliberate action of a designated leader who delegates leadership tasks and responsibilities (Jones and Pound, 2008). This is particularly evident in leading integrated practice in which health, education and social service professionals work together in a multi-agency way in children's centre services.

Leading, implementing and sustaining change seems to be part of everyday life for those working in the early years sector and particularly in children's centres. Change can be unnerving for some as it is a step away from routine ways of working. An effective leader ensures that all colleagues are part of the change process, leading collaboratively through professional dialogue underpinned by sound early years knowledge and values. The speed of change can affect implementation and sustaining change. Successful change is introduced gradually

through understanding, ownership and all being involved in decisions for implementing change. Resistance to change can occur when change is introduced too quickly, those affected by change are not involved in the change process so they feel threatened and insecure. An effective and caring leader needs to explain the benefits of change for children, parents and carers, practitioners or, the organisation to help the whole setting or children's centre to understand and own the change, as this children's centre leader reflects.

“ There is constant change within the centre and we all have to adapt our ways of working to respond to government changes and requirements. I also feel patience is vital – change is a slow process if you want to be effective. You can't climb a mountain in a day and I encourage our team to feel relaxed in their approach to change – it's good to take time and reflect as we go along.”

Change can be transformative for an organisation and empowering for those individuals leading change and those involved in change. Change can provide a new perspective to professional and integrated practice, by giving newly found knowledge, theory, research or, new or modified ways of working.

'Empowering leadership' is a theme within the model of Effective and Caring Leadership Practices, the leadership practices of promoting agency and the process of change constitutes empowering leadership (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014). The four leadership themes and eight leadership practices in the model of leadership provide a framework for practicing and aspiring leaders to understand effective and caring leadership in the early years.



LEADERSHIP THEMES

Directional leadership

Collaborative leadership

Empowering leadership

Pedagogical leadership

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Developing a shared vision
Effective communication

Promoting a team culture
Promoting parental collaboration

Promoting agency
The process of change

Leading learning
Reflective learning

Model of effective and caring leadership practices from the book *Effective and Caring Leadership in the Early Years* by Siraj-Blatchford and Hallett, 2014.

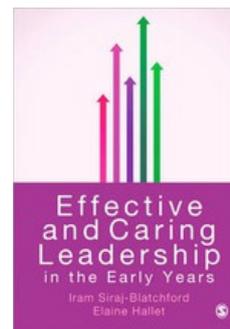
Successful change is introduced gradually through understanding, ownership and all being involved

organisation, an effective leader should care for their staff who are in the forefront of implementing and sustaining change within professional and integrated practice.

More information about 'Empowering Leadership: the process of change' is in chapter 8, in the book 'Effective and Caring Leadership in the Early Years' by Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Elaine Hallett, published by SAGE. (2014)

There are research studies and books about effective early years leadership, yet this leadership model includes caring behaviour along with effectiveness. An ethic of care underpins the nature of working with young children and families and therefore permeates into caring leadership. The ethic of care involves promoting, developing and maintaining caring relationships with staff, children, parents and carers and multi-agency professionals, and it guides professional action and leadership.

A passion to work with young children is a driver to work and lead in early childhood, in a nurturing and caring way. Children's holistic learning and development is at the heart of caring early years leadership. Effective early years leadership should advocate caring as a social principle with a commitment to improving educational, social and health outcomes for children and their families, and for continuing professional development of staff. In leading change within an



Elaine Hallett
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Children's Centre Leaders are unique people. Since the introduction of integrated early childhood projects such as Sure Start Children's Centres there has been a need to recruit and retain leaders who have the passion, energy and commitment to juggle the management of people, partnerships, premises, and provision often in a landscape of rapidly changing policy and funding.

In the time I have worked as a Children's Centre leader I have found the job rewarding - feeling I have made a real difference for children, families and communities, but sometimes scary with the need to make tough judgment-calls in situations unfamiliar to me, diffusing conflict in or across teams and at times working with little direction, support or guidance.

The particular challenges faced by leaders of integrated centres include multi-agency working, integrating staff from different disciplines, sectors

Nourishing Leaders

Carol Matta

and pay structures, preventing burn-out in a team, coping with demands and rapid changes in early childhood and family and community support services, whilst maintaining a focus and vision for improving outcomes for children and families (National College for Schools Leadership, 2004). Change inevitably places even more demands upon a leader including dealing with one's own thoughts, feelings and emotions or those of others. Developing, downsizing or decommissioning projects, buildings or services brings with it specific challenges and the need to draw on skills, knowledge and experiences

in an uncertain environment. This type of work can leave leaders of integrated centres feeling overwhelmed by conflicting roles and responsibilities.

Change can leave leaders of integrated centres feeling overwhelmed by conflicting roles and responsibilities

Fulfilling this work requires a certain level of physical and mental well-being along with a high level of emotional resilience. This can quickly slide into feeling physically drained or emotionally depleted - which over time can impact on short or long term leader health. Acknowledging and then limiting potentially destructive forces, which may include denial of negative feelings or hearing or



believing that we are not quite good enough are features of being an effective leader.

Thorpe and Gasper (2003) explored the positive and negative aspects of being a leader in an integrated centre and the type of support available. In their paper Who Cares for the Carers, centre leaders who participated in their research favoured being able to talk to someone - a peer or a mentor - as their preferred support and on the NPQICL programme this has often been one of the most highly-rated components of the programme by participants.

Earles-White (1994) has suggested that "if we receive the right nourishment, and are supported and

helped, we shall grow into giant oak trees, standing tall, confident and competent," adding "for acorns, truth and knowledge come from within. We just need the right environment in which to grow."

Physical and emotional well-being are intertwined - so on a day-to-day basis, here are some suggestions for maintaining positive leadership health to create the right environment to flourish.



“If we receive the right nourishment, and are supported and helped, we shall grow, standing tall, confident and competent”

PEOPLE

1 START THE DAY WITH BREAKFAST

How are you going to work effectively or cope with a demanding day if your blood sugar levels are low? We all need to boost our energy intake after a night asleep. Go for toast or cereal - slow release carbohydrates - which will top up your blood sugar levels. Add yogurt or fruit if you have time and definitely something to drink. If you really can't face breakfast have something to eat as soon as you can and keep your blood sugar levels up by through the day with lunch and an evening meal.

2 GET YOUR 5 A DAY

Including fruit and vegetables in your diet is going to mean you are not going to miss out on several vital vitamins or other nutrients. Fresh, frozen, canned and juiced can all count.

3 DRINK PLENTY

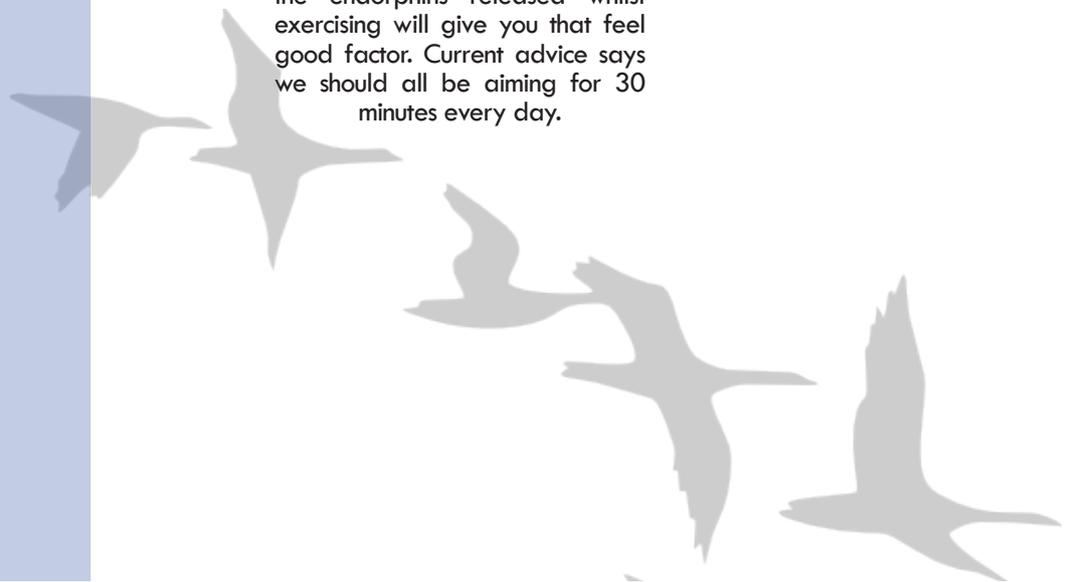
All adults need between 1500mls to 2 litres of fluid every day. More on hot days or working in warm environments. This means at least 6 - 8 cups fluid daily. Choose water, tea, coffee, juice or soft drinks. 73% of the brain is water - so poor hydration is likely to have an effect on concentration. Make sure you have all your drink - don't let your cuppa get cold whilst you are taking that important phone call!

5 STRIDE OUT

Take a walk, go for a swim or engage in another form of physical activity. Not only is this good for your cardiovascular health or overall stamina - but the endorphins released whilst exercising will give you that feel good factor. Current advice says we should all be aiming for 30 minutes every day.

6 KEEP THE BADDIES AT BAY

That's the fat, sugar, alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs. There really is something to be said for 'everything in moderation'.





4 TAKE A BREAK

Tea break, lunch break, screen break, weekend or holiday - they are all important. Accidents or wrong decisions can happen if we are tired and many muscular-skeletal health problems such as back ache or upper limb disorders can be caused or aggravated by not sitting correctly or not having a workstation set up correctly.

7 PHONE A FRIEND

A problem shared is likely to be a problem halved. It could be a friend, family member, colleague, mentor or manager via phone, text, email or social media and if the going starts to get really tough seek some professional help.

8 DIY

This doesn't mean building some flat-packed furniture (although some people may find this activity therapeutic!) - but be prepared to put all this in place yourself. Yes - there are those that can help - but it is probably likely you will have to be the one to organise it!

And what's next for me? Well, after writing this - I think I am going to have a bit of a lie down!

SOURCES FOR FURTHER HELP

Your organisation's Occupational Health or Health and Well-being Service

nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub

bda.uk.com/foodfacts/info

nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/hydration/healthy-hydration-guide

hse.gov.uk/msd/dse

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Leading Sensory Learning

Jo Grace

Sensory stimulation is vital for cognitive development; it plays a key role in the wiring of the mind. Research from neuroscience shows that individuals who experience a rich sensory diet when young experience better memory function later in life. Learning in a multi-sensory way stimulates more of the brain and so supports memory, as well as engagement, because it is more fun if you have things to touch, taste, smell, feel and see as you learn!

Presenting learning in a multi-sensory way is a great way to be inclusive of individuals with special educational needs and disabilities. Communicating through the senses provides an extra dimension to what you are saying in the same way that sign language or pictures can. Some children have their access to sensory stimulation limited by physical disabilities; others may limit their interaction with sensory stimuli because they find it overwhelming. Missing out on sensory learning means these children miss out on all the benefits it holds.

There are many ways of providing children with sensory learning experiences, however I only have the space of this article to talk about them so I will focus on the one in which I specialise: sensory stories. Sensory stories were initially developed for use with individuals with profound

and multiple learning disabilities, but they are wonderfully versatile. Since beginning The Sensory Story Project I have shared sensory stories with nursery school children, mainstream primary and secondary children, children in special schools, adults with profound disabilities, and even two groups of university students. They have particular benefits in the Early Years where they can support the development of communication.

Sensory stories convey a narrative through a combination of text and associated sensory experiences. So where in a normal story you might see a picture of children enjoying a birthday party, in a sensory story this might be represented by a taste of cake, or the smell of candles blown out, or the sound of a party whistle.

Research into story telling has demonstrated that the story-telling space has almost magical properties. Within the story-telling space we are braver, we feel less alone, and we are better able to cope with things. Anyone who shares stories with children will instinctively know the truth of these findings. By telling sensory stories we can share stories with children who might not be able to access typical stories, maybe because they cannot see the pictures, or because they do not understand spoken communication confidently. Using sensory stories we can also deliver a wide range of sensory experiences to children who

Individuals who experience a rich sensory diet when young experience better memory function later in life



might not be able to access them for themselves or who might be resistant to experiencing them.

Typically a sensory story will be repeated on several occasions, this creates a predictability to the narrative and the experiences, which in turn helps children to feel secure in the experience. Recently I had a letter from a father who has been sharing sensory stories with his autistic son; he described how after several tellings his son became willing to take part in the taste experience, where as on the first telling he had refused it. We have all met children afraid of messy play, or those who will not eat sticky foods. Addressing this resistance within the safety of a story, in a non-pressured environment, is a great way of helping children to expand their engagement with the world and their learning opportunities.

A child can use sensory resources to answer questions about the story, e.g. answering “which part was your favourite?” by picking up a particular resource. They can demonstrate their memory of the story and their ability to retell it in the same way, e.g. by facilitating the sensory stimuli in sequence. Sensory stimuli can give children who lack confidence when speaking in public the support they need to vocalise.

“Within the story-telling space we are braver, we feel less alone, and we are better able to cope with things”

If you have ever seen a sensory room, complete with fibre optics and bubble tube, you may think that sensory resources are expensive. All of my stories are resourced with items you could find at the supermarket – stock cubes make great smells, coloured cellophane is a wonderful sight experience, drier balls are good for touching. With a bit of creativity and the right background knowledge you can provide richly stimulating sensory experiences at low cost, and when you do: know that you are doing

“Addressing resistance within the safety of a story is a great way of helping children to expand their engagement with the world”

something worthwhile that will benefit the cognitive development of the young people you work with and have fun!

For more information about sensory learning and sensory stories please visit jo.element42.org or send me an email on sensorystory@gmail.com



Jo Grace
Special educational needs
and disabilities consultant

Leaders as Partners

Sue Owen

Throughout my working life I have found that leadership works most effectively if it is seen as a partnership. I think this is particularly important in the early years sector where we work with so many different agencies, all of whom will have different histories, training, approaches and beliefs. Seeing your leadership role as an opportunity to understand and appreciate these differences and to move practice forward in partnership is a real privilege.

I can't pretend that this is always easy. People (and this includes a staff group as well as the outside organisations we work with) are tightly attached to their differences because these are often the things that give them a sure identity and a confidence in what they do. So establishing true partnerships in which people share their problems and their insecurities can be hard. It takes a long time to develop trust within a partnership, so establishing this way of working early on is vital as you can reap benefits when you find that there are sudden decisions to be made or pieces of work (such as a funding bid) to be done to a tight deadline. Building a partnership just in order to bid for a specific project can be fraught with difficulties.

Of course, leadership comes with responsibilities and a partnership approach should never be a way of shifting these responsibilities onto others. As a manager of mine said many years ago: leadership is about taking the blame but sharing the glory! Both leadership and partnership should be about listening, so that we truly understand the perspectives of those we work with and they feel that their views count. If people's ideas can't be put into practice for any reason then there's a supportive and on-going forum in which to explain why.

A good example of partnership working at the national level is the Early Childhood Forum which was set up initially by the National Children's Bureau's Early Childhood Unit in the 1980s as the Early Childhood Education Forum. It is open to any national organisation that works in the early years field and now has members who meet regularly to hear up-dates from speakers, including central government, and to discuss the policy areas they want to influence. In the 1990s the Forum changed its name to the Early Childhood Forum in recognition of the integration that was taking place between nursery education and childcare. This was one decision which required a good deal of debate and accommodation but the





strength of the partnership was such that it was negotiated successfully and the Forum was made even stronger by its new members.

Another important product of the Forum's partnership was a groundbreaking definition of the term 'inclusion'. This term was being used widely and fairly indiscriminately to cover a range of issues including children with special needs, race equality, gender equality etc. This meant that it was also being used as a kind of shorthand in policies and practice without having to think about what it really meant in any particular setting. Everyone felt that reaching agreement on a short definition for something as varied as this would be difficult, if not impossible. However, the years of frank discussions which ECF members had behind them

facilitated a remarkably quick agreement on the following:

“Inclusion is a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging”

ECF Inclusion Leaflet

This definition is not just the product of the Forum's partnership, it also acts as a useful description of it – an on-going process rather than a single event, in which we gradually find out more about our situation and work towards ensuring the best possible experiences for everyone involved, adults and children.

Perhaps most importantly, for us in early years, this is an approach which we can pass on to children – we always want them to work together and to share, so we really need to be giving them a living example of how we do this ourselves. Listening to our staff and the others that we work with should be as much a part of our practice as listening to the children.

Sue Owen
Independent consultant
Formerly Director of Programmes at the National Children's Bureau

The Great Children's Centre Leadership Bake-off / Bee

Sue Webster

Wedding bells have been ringing in my ears for the past few weeks. Planning and more domesticity have been good distraction from my immense sadness about the conclusion of NPQICL in July 2014.

Perhaps with more time to think because there is no planning and recruitment for next year and inspiration from the new genre of competitive baking and sewing on TV. I have found myself musing about leadership while reacquainting myself with a Kenwood Chef and sewing machine. This new focus has afforded me some brain capacity to day dream about a TV show about leadership where children's centre leaders could compete to save children's centres across the country and influence the general

population to become engaged in the debate about whether children's services make a difference? More sophisticated than *The Apprentice* this programme will prompt thinking about:



Are young children an important part of our society?



What would life be like without support for families with young children?

Very few of us reach the dizzy heights where we can make or even seriously influence strategic decisions about our society. Programmes like *The Royal Family* parodied the power of shared TV viewing and interaction but *Gogglebox* reveals the hidden debating space of the family sofa - the space where families chat and argue a great deal about what is important as

they sit watching TV. Rather than being perceived as couch potatoes, there is often argument, analysis and often some deep philosophical emotional dialogue too. Perhaps it is time for the *X-Factor* generation to widen their influence and contribute to a key decision about the future of services for children and families.

By mirroring the other shows in the Bake-off genre the new Leadership Bee would need to offer opportunities for others to learn, widen participation in a love of leadership and children's centres, to motivate new leaders and encourage viewers to re-engage with tools they have previously moth-balled or stored "at the back of the shed".

Perhaps this type of show could have a role in supporting leadership development until a suitable alternative to NPQICL is introduced and with participation widened to include all people who lead in Early Years settings?

We could start with a seven-week series where one leader wins the role as National Children's Centre Leader and initiates a coherent focus of universal support for all children from conception to their first day in reception class.



WEEK & FOCUS

APPLY A THEORY
peer assessment

THE RECYCLE
CHALLENGE
expert assessment

THE
SHOWSTOPPER
viewer vote

Me as a leader

Back to the floor: Spend a day as a play/family worker in another children's centre

Sit on the front row at a conference and ask the speaker a question? Ask a supplementary question if you don't understand the response given

Be able to explain to someone you admire in this field your strengths without demeaning yourself or apologizing for being immodest. Viewer vote.

The reflective leader

Make a video where you implement a change that you have identified from reflecting on an incident or impasse.

Lead a reflective session with your team to find out more about one another. Make a learning journey about your work as a team

Reflect in the successes in your centre and produce an article to send to your local politicians and leaders in statutory agencies about what your centre contributes to the local community.

Leading teams

Create a mobile that demonstrates the qualities of your team.

Initiate a team project, provide instructions, and then watch the team implement the project without interfering. Provide constructive feedback to members of the team about their contribution.

Produce a team working policy document that demonstrates shared values, vision and principles for collaborative working. Present your findings and answer questions from an audience of senior managers and policy-makers and academics.

Leading in partnership

Visit each of your partners and ask them what they really think about your children's centre's performance? You must listen without offering any excuses or being defensive

Devise and run a team training day that aims to reach the most disadvantage families in your locality.

Devise a way of attracting all professional stakeholders involved in children's services to come to an open day at your centre? children's centres and compete for the National Role to implement it over three years.

PRACTICE

WEEK & FOCUS

APPLY A THEORY peer assessment

THE RECYCLE CHALLENGE expert assessment

THE SHOWSTOPPER viewer vote

Leading up

Initiate a local learning network?

Invite your line manager to shadow you for a day and then you shadow them for a day. Which team learns the most?

Host an unaccompanied joint visit with lunch at your centre for David Cameron, Michael Gove, Ed Milliband, Tristram Hunt and Sir Michael Wilshaw

Demonstrating an impact

Peer review of the last SEF you completed. To be assessed on style, content and impact

Demonstrate that you have all the relevant health data for your SEF and provide reasons if some data is missing?

Value for money challenge: Pitch your children's centre on Dragons Den

Keeping it all together

Explain to a group of parents why services are being contracted and why this is good for the community

Devise a strategy for achieving more with less-resources. Pitch the potential changes at your team meeting

Agree the one key initiative that should be the focus of all work children's centres and compete for the National Role to implement it over three years.





Perhaps I really have had too much sugar from all that baking or it's those bells? But reality is sometimes stranger than fiction, as the plots of successful shows like *W1A*, the *Thick of it* and *Yes Minister* have demonstrated.

What tasks would you like to see on our Leadership Bee? Who would be the presenters and experts?

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Sue Webster
early childhood studies, lecturer,
university of warwick

National survey of the injury prevention activities of children's centres

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THIS TOPIC

Unintentional injury is the major public health challenge facing preschool children in England today.

Children's centres have important roles to play in relation to the prevention of unintentional injuries.

WHAT THIS PAPER ADDS

This is the first study analysing the unintentional injury prevention activities of children's centres.

There is a wide variation in the priority accorded to child unintentional injuries and the prevention activities undertaken by different children's centres.

Children's centres may need support if they are to fulfil their child unintentional injury prevention roles.



the institute
for early years

Two year old offer goes from strength to strength

James Hempsall

Whilst there is a lively debate and interest in the two year old offer, there is much to celebrate and look forward to.

First of all, I would like to congratulate those providers, childminders and schools who have already embraced the two year old offer. Without providers getting involved, thousands of two year olds, who need the head start for an equal chance, would miss out. The A2YO programme, funded by DfE, has been working with providers and local authorities for 20 months now, offering information exchange, training, events, roadshows and one-to-one

support where needed. So far, in this early stage of the programme A2YO estimates around 110,000 of the 130,000 eligible two year olds are accessing their places. Progress is reported to be good overall and is growing every term. And what is also encouraging, is local authorities are reporting almost an equal amount of places yet to be used for this purpose. The programme believes this places us all in a good position for September 2014 when the criteria doubles the number of eligible children to 260,000. The overwhelming majority of children enjoying their provision now are in good and outstanding settings.

Local authorities have been busy, putting funding in place, building systems and processes ready for the growing numbers this September, and offering training and support for providers.

This initiative allows settings to work with 40% of their three year olds early, whilst they are

110,000 of the 130,000 eligible two year olds are accessing their places



two, to make an even earlier start; the programme is finding lots of examples of how this is supporting better outcomes for children and relieving some of the pressure that settings experience when children arrive at three years old. Early years practitioners tell me they see improvements in children's social and learning skills straight away. But it is vital we meet the needs of two year olds in new and high quality ways.

The A2YO programme believes there is a vital, valuable and essential role for everyone in the early years and childcare sector for two year olds. And we want to see many more childminders, group settings, and schools getting involved. There are so many great examples of where it is happening, and making a difference. There is a terrific energy and interest as demonstrated in the busy FREE A2YO provider roadshows across the country. Many hundreds of providers have come along to find out what is happening, solutions to common concerns, and easy to follow next-step actions.



it is vital we meet the needs of two year olds in new and high quality ways

If you want to know more or get involved, please visit:

hemsallconsultancies.com/a2yo

to book onto a provider roadshow, watch our DVD films about providers, schools, childminders and local authorities working together to meet the challenge.

Follow us on twitter [@jhemsall](https://twitter.com/jhemsall) or sign up for FREE our termly 'PS' newsletter. Contact your local authority or ask providers in your area who are already delivering for two year olds.

James Hemsall
Director, National Support Director and
Central Region Lead - Achieving Two Year Olds

Early Years - Topic of the Month!

Sue Egersdorff

It has been an interesting time for early years. The 3rd April saw the arrival of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, **Sir Michael Wilshaw's first Early Years Report** published alongside the outcomes from **Ofsted's School Readiness Survey**. This was followed up with a speech by Liz Truss to the Policy Exchange confirming the Government commitment to placing the needs of young families centre stage and taking the early years of childhood very seriously.

It is encouraging to have such high level interest but there is a need to be absolutely clear about what outcomes are being sought. Policy objectives still remain disjointed – is policy about education or economics? Are we primarily seeking to improve the educational offer to our youngest children or are we to be consumed with the task of extending the reach

and affordability of childcare to enable parents to work and meet increasingly complex 24/7 working patterns?

Wilshaw's messaging was direct enough and presented real challenge to the sector around the need for more rigour and rapid improvements in teaching and learning, particularly in areas serving the most disadvantaged communities where the gaps in achievement emerge and become entrenched from the earliest age. Truss shares this view, demanding that high quality care is accessible to all families, increasingly from the age of two so that every child, whatever their background or circumstance is supported to be 'school ready'.

What does this mean for early years leaders and practitioners? Certainly, a time for careful reflection about how to keep the diverse needs of babies and very young children at the heart of action whilst also responding to the ever increasing range of childcare accessibility, affordability and equity issues.





So some points to ponder:

WHERE ARE THE QUICK WINS?

Wilshaw referred to the fragmented nature of the childcare sector and the confusion this causes for parents. How can we work together in more authentic partnerships to streamline local offers, ensuring parents understand what is available to them and how services work together to support their child's learning and care?

CONNECT AND CASCADE

The early years workforce is deeply committed yet there remains huge variance in the quality of provision both within and across settings. Even when everyone has the best of intentions, mediocrity and low aspirations sometimes lead to a failure to link practitioners to the best pedagogy and practice information at the right time. The most successful settings know how to consistently seek out best practice and connect with it. When all goes well, a chain reaction occurs with expertise cascading across the system. Acting as an isolate has little merit going forwards and what constitutes effective system leadership requires further thought

ROOT CAUSES - VULNERABLE EARLY LEARNERS

Children's centres have done so much to reach out, identify and work alongside the most vulnerable children and families. As their services are increasingly constrained what will help children's centres to adapt and flex to local need, developing solutions that can demonstrate how they tackle the root causes of vulnerability rather than the presenting symptoms. Early intervention earlier on remains the challenge.

INFORMATION, INFORMATION, INFORMATION!

A recommendation in The HMCI Report refers to holding providers to account more robustly and recognising the need for more effective information gathering and intelligence sharing. This has been a quest for several years and now feels the moment to return to this complex issue and work with increased vigour to find realistic, manageable processes and solutions that work for all local stakeholders. If successful, this should increase the levels of co-ordinated activity against clearer evidence-based improvement priorities making it easier to articulate a strong narrative around impact

OWN THE SPACE - LEADERSHIP

Having ownership of the improvement agenda for early years is critical for practitioners at every level as it entitles and encourages everyone to push individually and collectively to achieve outstanding performance. Securing accountability is central to consistently high quality provision. Unfortunately, the pressure to conform and perform has become intense through Ofsted regulation and compliance processes leading practitioners to sometimes feel they are doing things for Ofsted rather than for children. A challenge is to redress this balance by having more pedagogical conversations about the things that matter most to children's learning, development and care. By doing the right things for children consistently well the right outcomes will happen satisfying Ofsted and achieving the appropriate prize. Win – win!

Sue Egersdorff
Director, National Support Director and
Central Region Lead - Achieving Two Year Olds

PRODUCTIVITY



University of
Northampton
WED 25 JUNE

Everton
Nursery
School and
Family Centre
Liverpool
TUES 8 JULY



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for early years

The Institute for Early Years
EY Connect Summit Conference 2014
The Frame Expanding ...

THE EVENTS WILL EXPLORE

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing – what matters most to our youngest children – working with Ofsted to secure effective pedagogy for all children

International perspectives from beyond Europe – expanding the frame!

Networks that don't think in straight lines – a step change in collaboration

'When I grow up I will be an astronaut' – thinking big when you are little!

Leadership at speed – building powerful teams that accelerate learning

Montage of world practice – the frame expanded

Summer Conferences

1030 - 1600

The newly formed Institute for Early Years with its sponsors has brought together a number of national and international influencers to think about what and who matters most to children and how we might work together to shape a different pedagogical conversation.

contact siobhan.ohagan@angelsolutions.co.uk to reserve a place

Curious?
then
JOINUS

Keynote speakers will include:



sue webster

Pam MUNDY – International EY Consultant with a range of high profile school groups operating across continents

June O'SULLIVAN – Chief Executive of London Early Years Foundation

Philip CARVIL – Micro-Gravity Body Development Specialist

Lesley CURTIS – National Leader of Education and National Lead for Early Years Teaching Schools

Susan SPEED – Headteacher of outstanding Infant and Nursery School



vicki lant

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Leading
Practice