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'Working in Partnership'

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Inter-agency collaboration and co-operation

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Collaborating for Effective Early Childhood Education and Care: can policy translate to practice?

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A 'Box full of feelings': developing emotional intelligence in a nursery community.

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Education professionals have long recognised the potential and actual benefits of effective co-operation with parents, local community organisations and professionals in health, social care and so on. They have also recognised the required investment in time to build successful partnerships with parents and the community. When considering the inter-agency work it may be prudent to explore issues related to partnership and team work. Indeed, much has been written about the composition of teams and the characteristics that determine their health. The DfEE (2000, p2) remind us that a team is, 'A group that shares a common purpose and recognises that it needs the efforts of every one of its members in order to achieve it.'

Effective workforces are dependent upon the strength of the team ethos and the efficiency of their procedures and policies. Collaboration and co-operation are essential traits to successful team and inter-agency work and the government appears determined to promote this professional interaction. The National Assembly for Wales identified one of its key proposals was 'to make the planning and delivery of services for children and young people by local people more coherent and cross cutting through the collaborative production of a Children and Young People's Framework in each local authority area'. Its key aim was:

To develop strong, confident partnerships that can take on the challenge of developing innovative, effective and joined-up interventions to improve the life chances of all children and young people in Wales. (2000, p.15)

The Welsh Assembly's strategy for children makes clear its intention to increase the number of schools that act as a focal point for a range of family and community services such as childcare, health and social services, adult education and family learning and more general study support. Traditional organisational structures and roles will undoubtedly need to change to meet these new situations. However, before we engage in this journey to raise the profile of inter-agency collaboration it may be necessary to pause and reflect on the role of the individual within the team and partnership. The route to success is determined by the quality of the personnel within the system; their individual skills, knowledge and understanding. If practitioners are to continue to develop the support offered to children and their families, it is essential to continue to promote the professional expertise and well-being of staff. This brings with it major implications for those responsible for the management of teams and their individual players. Practitioners need time and resources in order to develop professionally but it is the quality of this provision which will determine the success of any future inter-agency work. Practitioners may be so pre-occupied with the need to be seen to be engaging with others that they dilute the quality of the individual contribution. Perhaps team and inter-agency collaborative exercises are only as strong as the opportunities their members have for professional and personal development.

One may question if there is a tension between the concept of a team and that of partnership. Teams are normally goal orientated and some may question whether this 'structured

drive' creates problems when engaging in inter-agency work. Such concern is allayed by Harrison *et al* (2003, p.3) who suggest that you

'Present partnership as the sharing of responsibility with a view to attempting to overcome the inflexibility of boundaries between organisations and across sectors.'

The issue of boundaries provides those involved in establishing placements for Early Childhood Studies students with obstacles to overcome. As the number of such courses increases so does the demand for institutions to establish and maintain partnerships with a range of different agencies (Henry, 2005). This inter-agency collaboration requires nurturing and a shared conviction that if students are to be provided with a high quality education and/or training they require in-put from an array of agencies. Settings which have previously been the province of a single professional discipline, for example, health, now need to consider widening their accessibility to those engaged in equally laudable study. Inter-agency collaboration and co-operation should be go beyond the 'established partners' and embrace new individuals who have chosen a career path that is likely to result in inter-agency work. It may well be a matter of communication for one has to question if reluctant prospective partners are aware of the significance of the academic degrees childcare workers are undertaking. These students are our future, they will shape the services on offer and impact on the quality of children's and family's lives. If inter-agency co-operation is to prosper then time and financial commitment must be given to the

development of a shared understanding of all aspects of a practitioner's world including the journey to professional status.

Harrison *et al* (2003, p.29) note that 'Effective partnership working demands knowledge and understanding by the people involved of how their partners work.'

As extended schools become more widespread it is appropriate to consider the implications for teachers and to ask how such changes are likely to impact upon the role and deployment of serving teachers. This, in turn prompts the question, what steps are training providers taking to assess the relevance and validity of current initial teacher education and the continuing professional development programmes designed to meet the needs of staff at every level? This involvement demands that those who contribute to the training and knowledge base should be working as one so that inter-agency work takes on another dimension; it exists not only out 'in the field' but at the source of training for it. A lack of clarity about aims, goals and outcomes could put at risk the potential of these schools to benefit all pupils.

Experienced practitioners need to offer care and support not only to their clients, but also to those entering the childcare area for the first time. We cannot work in isolation - our future staff demand that the spirit of co-operation, so very evident in many of local authorities, is seen to be touching the Childhood Studies/Education degree student. Perhaps the true nature of inter-agency work is to share our knowledge with one another.

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**Collaborating for Effective Early Childhood
Education and Care: can policy translate to
practice?**

Jane Murray

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Introduction

This paper briefly discusses findings from the first of a two-stage research project examining the impact of a BA (Honours) Early Childhood Studies (ECS) degree curriculum in an English University College. It begins by setting the degree within a framework of policy and demonstrates how, through a mixed methodology, the research attempts to identify the success of the course in converting internationally and nationally desirable policy into effective practice. Since “there have been few specific attempts to measure the effects of staff training” (Fawcett and Calder, 1998:101), this small-scale study has made such an attempt.

The Degree in Policy Context

Against an international policy background claiming commitment to high quality integrated Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD, 2001; UNESCO, 2004; WHO, 1999; UNCF, 2003) and English policy claiming similar commitment (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2004; Her Majesty’s Treasury *et al* 2004; Her Majesty’s Government, 2004), the BA (Honours) ECS degree has the potential to offer unprecedented levels of knowledge, understanding and expertise to the 2.5 million paid early years workers in England (Horton, 2003:28).

Since the National Children’s Bureau early years training group began

discussing the widespread possibility of the ECS degree in 1993, the number of available courses has grown exponentially from 2 to 322 in 63 British Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the academic year 2004-2005 (UCAS, 2004). Additionally, many HEIs have begun to offer Early Years Foundation Degrees. It appears to be an expanding field, having the potential to bring higher status to a sector that has traditionally had “relatively high levels of low trained and poorly paid childcare workers” (Mooney *et al*, 2003:8-9).

Since 2000, the focus HEI in this study has offered an Early Childhood Studies Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree over three years full time and four years part time. It has always been well subscribed, although not well represented by students from ethnic minorities, nor by men - issues that the course and the institution as a whole seek to remedy.

The course operates within England’s Common Academic Framework and is constructed to include wide-ranging content that places the child at the centre (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), as follows:

Level 1 (120 credits) [with practicum]	credits
Childcare Provision and Legislation	20
Studying Children	20
Professional Development 1	40
Child Development and Health	40
Level 2 (120 credits) [with practicum]	
Early Childhood: Issues and Perspectives	20
Children and their Learning	20
Children and Society	40
Professional Development 2	40
Level 3 (120 credits) [with practicum]	
Dissertation	40
Professional and Management Studies	40
Creative Arts	20
Education, Health or Social Care Pathway option	20

The annual cohort for each level is between 55 and 70 students, of which approximately 75% are full-time. Two staff members teach full-time on the course, and 7 part-time, with varying expertise in early years education, social care and health care, although education backgrounds predominate.

Methodology

The methodology selected is principally ethnographic (Robson, 1993:148), having as its primary focus, students and staff working on the Early Childhood Studies degree in question and using multiple perspectives. However, whilst it maintains an interpretive quality (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001a:194) through the gathering and analysis of qualitative data, there is also some quantitative data, enhancing reliability (Robson, 1993:383). The methodology has a longitudinal quality,

and expands the number and content of methods used as it develops with information from previous data.

Two tranches of data comprise the first stage of the study. The first tranche of data (2002) was an analysis of students' first destinations following the course. In the second tranche of data (2004) the methods were semi-structured student surveys, semi-structured staff interviews (academic and administrative) and an analysis of students' first destinations. For the final (second) stage of the study in 2006 it is planned that methods will be the same as for 2002/4, but will be enhanced to include semi-structured student and staff interviews and an analysis of student reflections.

As an interim report on findings, this paper will discuss the first stage of the data, but for the study as a whole, it is

envisaged that a further paper will be produced that will consider all data. Research has thus far been planned and conducted according to BERA (2004) and it is planned that the remainder of the study will be conducted similarly.

Data Collection: 2002 and 2004

As is often the case in this type of research the participants were a convenience sample (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001b:156). In addition, lecturers on the degree course conducted the research and it could be argued that this might have skewed the research. However, within social science research there is, of course, precedent and Dahlberg *et al* (1999:142-3, 145) offer rationale for the model.

Student First Destinations – 2002 and 2004

38% of students completing the degree in 2002 – the first cohort – responded with their first destinations and 27% of the cohort finishing in 2004 responded. To complete the research, the cohort completing the degree in 2006 will be invited to contribute their first destinations in the final stage.

Surveys - 2004

Overall, almost 32% of student surveys were returned altogether. These were segregated into year bands: Year 1 returns were 42%, Year 2 were 20% and Year 3 (plus part-time students in their fourth year) were 33%. Staff surveyed were academic and administrative and returns were 40%. Returns were not high for either staff or student surveys. There is no obvious reason for this, but the final stage of the study will clearly be important in enhancing the early data.

Brief Data Findings and Analysis: 2002 And 2004

In attempting to “measure the effects of staff training” (Fawcett and Calder, 1998:101), data appeared to indicate

that ECS at the focus HEI is indeed moving aspects of policy into practice in terms of developing a higher qualified workforce that is likely to have higher earnings than they would have had without the ECS course, particularly as teachers, following a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The data also demonstrated that staff and students believe that these teachers are likely to have a deeper understanding of the child at the centre of his or her learning as opposed to curriculum being at the centre.

Data indicated a belief that early years workers with ECS degree status are also likely to have a good theoretical knowledge and understanding of the role of integrated children’s services as a result of learning about different children’s services from the different ECS staff with a range of backgrounds. By enabling these workers to demonstrate this, the degree may begin to improve the status of early years workers in society as a whole, although whether or not this status will be linked to higher pay for them all remains to be seen (Baldock, 2001:68; Chitty, 2004:159) and requires further research. The data indicate that staff teaching ECS believe that the course is beginning to convert policy into practice, but further research is required to establish the level of effectiveness of that conversion.

Data appear to indicate that 38% of the 2002 cohort and 27% of the 2004 cohort were either working or enrolled in post-graduate study following their ECS graduation. Although this is a very small-scale study and responses were nowhere near 100%, student outcome for ECS post-graduate first destinations in the study appears to be good when compared to Further Education early childhood students’ outcome of just 5% in full-time, permanent work in Penn’s study (2000:128). It can be argued that this in itself is evidence of the

effectiveness of the ECS course to convert policy into practice, although, of course, it is only one aspect.

Despite relatively high numbers of students appearing to move into the education field, health and social care destinations would seem to be in the minority for both the 2002 and 2004 cohorts. This may be because ECS staff predominantly have backgrounds in education work, but is not proven and is an indicator for further research. However, the data appeared to show that the wide range of the course, aligned with the integrated services model, seems to be an attractive feature for students. Certainly, this supports international and national policy promoting multi-disciplinary approaches.

The data showed that the staff consider a team ethos to be assimilated and embedded in their work, despite questions arising regarding inconsistencies among lecturers. However, some might say that the difficulty mirrors other ECEC experiences (Wigfall and Moss, 2001; Harrison *et al*, 2003) and that it is symptomatic of an emerging culture that is, nonetheless, moving in the right direction, according to policy.

The research also raised questions about staffing; data found that staff consider staffing levels to be too low for the course to work fully effectively and that Year 2 and 3 student experiences also suggest this to be true. Additionally, the data suggest that a greater number of staff from health and social care disciplines might be a positive feature of the course in the future, and might also help to provide a stronger emphasis on career preparation.

Conclusion

The measure for how successfully the ECS course is converting policy into effective practice, eventually providing a high quality service for young children and their families has not been completely assessed by the early stages of this research project. However, much information about directions in which it is moving has emerged and is generally positive, although under-funding and the emergent nature of the work are two issues that might be considered barriers to fully effective practice. The clearest message that has emerged thus far is the need for further research in order to address the study's aims completely. This small-scale project will continue to undertake that research.

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A 'Box full of feelings': developing emotional intelligence in a nursery community.

Polly Dyer

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To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life around you. Emotional Literacy improves relationships, creates loving possibilities between people, makes cooperative work possible, and facilitates the feeling of community. (Steiner and Perry, 1997 p 11)

Introduction

The *Box Full of Feelings* in the title of this chapter could describe our nursery, particularly on a wet day when tempers are high. It actually refers to an eponymous kit inspired by Professor Ferre Laevers (University of Belgium) and developed by Julia Moons and Marina Kog with the Centre for Experiential Education (EXE). Like the Effective Early Learning project based at the University of Worcester and latterly Birmingham University in the UK, EXE is concerned with the quality of education offered to young (nursery and primary) children and regards children's levels of involvement and well-being as a more valid measure of that quality than is perhaps possible with Baseline Assessments or SATS tests for example as currently used in the UK. The Box's manual explains:

Children are involved in their activities when they are deeply engaged in them, displaying energy and concentration.

Children who show involved activity are 'at their best'. They feel challenged and are functioning near their full potential...Children who feel they are worthless, who lack the courage to undertake things, or who are emotionally tense, hardly ever or maybe never become involved in an activity. In other words, 'feeling good' is an essential condition for becoming involved in an activity. (Moons and Kog, 1997 p7)

This chapter describes a piece of ethnographic research which I carried out as a participant observer to explore ways of developing emotional intelligence. I am a nursery teacher in two part-time state nursery classes in an average sized primary school in southern England. Using the Box Full of Feelings, we focused specifically on helping children to recognise certain emotions -anger, sadness, happiness, fear -in themselves and others and, by developing ideas already in use in the nursery, we sought to increase children's sense of well-being, agency and ability to involve themselves in the social curriculum and thus make better use of it generally. As a staff we aimed to help the children but there were possibilities for growth for parents and staff too.

Defining Emotional Literacy

To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life around you. Emotional Literacy

improves relationships, creates loving possibilities between people, makes cooperative work possible, and facilitates the feeling of community. (Steiner and Perry, 1997. p 11)

Part of being emotionally intelligent is having a well developed sense of morality and personal integrity. As Aristotle wrote in *The Nicomachean Ethics*:

Anyone can become angry - that is 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 is not easy.

There has been growing concern world wide about the damage caused to societies and individuals by people's lack of emotional intelligence (Robertson, 1999; Goleman, 1996). Others write about the complex challenges that face children growing up in the twenty first century (Claxton, 1999; Abbott and Ryan, 1999). There is concern even within Government that its utilitarian preoccupation with raising literacy and numeracy standards is distorting traditional early childhood educational values ('Post' Report, June 2000). Studies of children's neurobiological development (see Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999) and of 3-5 year olds' social understanding (see Gussin Paley, 1986, 1992) indicate that there is cause for concern about the development of children's emotional well-being.

The purpose of the research was not so much to mould useful future citizens as to empower individuals. The project focused on the children, but it quickly became evident that it should also include the emotional and ethical quality of relationships between children and staff, staff and parents, and among the staff. The research focus also made it easier to discuss curriculum values, aims and innovations, as we became clearer

about ethical and emotional implications. As an example, Gussin Paley in *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992) argues that it is unfair and morally untenable to expect children to deal unaided with social rejection and its consequences; that adults have a responsibility to change the order of things, however long it has been accepted as natural. It took much careful preparation and many illustrative and exploratory stories, but when we officially established the rule, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* the children were not only supportive but also relieved.

Methodology: tools for ethnography

Research is always a statement of a personal world view. (Clough, 2001)

The work discussed in this chapter was stimulated by the nationally established, action research-based Effective Early Learning project (Pascal and Bertram, 1997). In our school this work involved the Nursery, Reception and Year 1 classes and the role of the nursery in Effective Early Learning (EEL) was acknowledged to be successful. But I still felt concerned about the children's levels of well-being and whether all children (and possibly parents) really felt included in the nursery and able to make full use of all opportunities to learn.

I kept a journal, a 'slice of life' in the nursery, which became my field notes and the main record of the way the research into developing emotional intelligence progressed. This journal stands as a running commentary of thoughts; reflections on the relevant literature; on the observations I was also recording of children's actions, conversations, thoughts, perceived or explained feelings; and of the thoughts and comments that arose in conversations with staff and parents in the course of the research. In addition, there were interviews with colleagues and extended e-mail

conversations about aspects of emotional intelligence and its implementation. I sent out a questionnaire to find out more about what children thought of the two toy bears who played an important role in the research, and some similarly placed puppets. The bears' journals, written and illustrated by the children and their parents, provided evidence of the variety of ways in which each family used its emotional intelligence to tell their story of a bear's visit to their home. A number of sources generated a large quantity of data, not all of which feature in the discussion in this chapter - such is the nature of ethnography.

I do not intend to discuss in detail the methodological arguments needed to make the case properly for my use of ethnography, but the following account will give a brief outline of my reasoning.

Action research was the right methodological approach for the EEL project; its democratic values of full participation of practitioners coincided with our own, as did its traditionally ethical purpose (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) to effect improvement within the institution by a continuous cycle of systematic evaluation, analysis, hypothesis, action and re-evaluation. However, there were two main problems with using action research to investigate this particular issue. Firstly, the sensitive nature of research into emotional intelligence, such as relationships with colleagues, children and parents, means it can only work where there is a strong, cohesive, highly motivated team. We were not yet at that stage. Secondly, action research 'tests' practice, but this research issue needed to be explored and its ramifications better understood before it could be handled so systematically - before it could be put to the test.

To present the research as a 'case' study would have involved me in similar difficulties: this was not an investigation, however illuminating it proved to be, into topics such as micro politics and patterns of influence. It needed to be an open ended exploration - in a sense, a 'felt' story woven out of my observations as I constructed the possible meanings and implications of what we were all learning. Ethnographic methodology proposes that the researcher is the research tool' (Pring, 2000; Pahl, 1999; Pollard, 1996). As Woods points out, ethnographers:

are not trying to write fiction, of course - that is where the science comes in, in validating procedures and analysis. However in seeking to represent cultural forms as they are lived by their owners, they have a common purpose with some novelists. How these are identified, comprehended and processed is more a matter of style, perception, interpretative processes, "feel" sensitivities, an ability that is difficult to pin down but that involves empathising with others, an ability to 'understand' - essentially artistic properties - than a product of scientific method. (Woods, 1986. p6)

This was precisely what I needed; the ethnographic approach provided the flexible, open-ended 'medium' to carry my research 'message'.

Questions of generalisability, subjectivity and validity were all inter-related. For example, ethnographers recognise that subjectivity is both necessary and inescapable but acknowledging this allows researchers to use that subjectivity to help address issues of validity and generalisability in the process. Their work

...is based on the premise that social reality cannot be understood except through the rules which structure the relations between members of the group and which make it possible to interpret the

actions, gestures and words of the others. (Pring, 2000. p104)

And as Denzin writes:

Ethnographers can only produce messy texts that have some degree of verisimilitude; that is, texts that allow the readers to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences that are being described by the author. (1997, p12)

So the truth of an account - the extent to which it is recognisable and so corroborated and useful to others - must also indicate how generalisable it is.

To give another example of a practical way to check material: when parents talked about their children, I immediately took notes in a way that would invite them to check my account. I would say things like: 'Have I got that right?' 'Is that what you meant?', 'That reminds me of the time he did. . . .' And there would follow a discussion implicitly based on the agreed 'truth' of my opening observation.

Choosing to research emotional intelligence meant there were many ethical issues to consider: again I give two examples. First I was challenged by fellow research colleagues to think about whether it might be *unethical* to teach children about their emotions; had I the right to do this to them? Could I deal with possible repercussions? Everything I had researched about the importance of emotional intelligence made it, I believed, *unethical not* to attempt it; the ethical concerns centred then round the *moral quality* of the teaching - the morality embedded within each teaching interaction. Suppose the 'pursuit of truth' conflicted with another research principle, the 'respect for the dignity and confidentiality' of the people in the study (see Pring, 2000, p

143) as it would if an adult behaved badly towards a child - this would be an important piece of evidence in *this* research context, so I would preserve the emotional truth of the incident, but by telling a parallel narrative which would protect the identity of the person concerned. My argument is that the need to address how adults behave towards children outweighs the need to respect their possible wish to go unrecorded. (I was of course free to use examples of my own bad behaviour!)

Children's moral awareness: some findings

The material generated by the research was considerable and fell into four main areas:

- the need for emotionally intelligent adults
- the importance of friendship and play
- storytelling and emotional intelligence
- children's moral awareness.

The rest of this chapter focuses on children's moral awareness. This includes children's developing emotional intelligence: their moral courage, kindness and generosity; their often sophisticated understanding of their own and others' feelings and their need to feel good about themselves.

Children and adults need to learn together about emotional intelligence. Children are not passive recipients - they have much to teach adults - and their attitudes to each other continually challenge adults to reassess their own views. Matthews (1994) and Nutbrown (1996) both write about how taking the perspectives of children into serious account might radically alter our accepted values and codes of behaviour.

Sophie's treatment of the other children was something we all wrestled with, but it also illustrates all the points above and the necessity for dialogue - children with children, and children with adults - as we work through things together, not always getting it right, but needing to trust people's good intentions. The following extracts are taken from my research journal:

Reading *The Moral Intelligence of Children* (Coles, 1997) - was struck again by Kizzie's observation that Sophie was angry (hitting people) 'cos they wouldn't be her friend, so be her friend and she won't hit you. She doesn't hit me.' Later (month later) Sophie bit her hard. Too much, Kizzie distressed, rejecting Sophie (as Sophie had her in a way). My solution later (after Sophie had resumed hitting) was to address the whole group again - we all love her but this hitting has to stop. All started saying what she'd done to them, I dismayed, not what I'd intended, Sophie didn't want to listen. Her mum said Sophie wouldn't hit unless other children were being mean to her, and Sophie had been worried all over the w/e about Kizzie, and hadn't wanted to come to school, was scared.

We have to let this play out, don't we? Sophie needs that reaction, absolute moral rules - you *break* faith, people *lose* faith. But Coles (*ibid*, p195) reiterates what I understood before, simply 'be kind', rather than thinking in terms of what's the best thing to do. Coles says he pushed for answers, as 'a worried, literal-minded father, teacher'. But what he got was 'I told you... you have to be kind, that's what we have to be, to *do*: show by how we behave that we're interested in others and want the best for them.' And isn't that what Kizzie wanted for

Sophie? Isn't it a question of our keeping faith with Sophie?

Sophie pinched May and Bella because 'dey darfed at me when I dell over.' I was saying it was worse to pinch, but is it (colleague W) asked? She's right.

Sophie knocked down Susie and Destiny's brick house. Both cross with her. Destiny came to me to complain. We talked to Sophie - 'are people allowed to knock down other's models?' Uncomfortable. She came to say sorry and kissed Susie. Susie won over, pretended to fall over with goofy look, Sophie delighted, Susie kissed *her*. Sophie now the centre, both Destiny and Susie saying - 'you *can* come in our house, you can come in our car'. Very friendly, inviting, welcoming. Sophie entranced.

Sophie walking round nursery all morning with Tom bear in her arms, tender, solicitous, making sure he has the right clothes, asking me to help her put them on, full of love for Tom. Every now and then came to say, with conscious expression, as she bit him or hit him on the head, 'I diting Tom bear/I durtin 'im.' And I would say, 'but he knows you love him?' and she'd smile and hug him tightly.

Sophie stood up on the mermaid chair (a place to make announcements) red splodge painting held up - and announced 'It's de dursery. It's Happy!' (What a testimonial!) Everyone clapped.

It was clear to me that children needed to feel good about themselves, not only in the sense of knowing they were capable of great bravery, or that they could take care of another child ('Josh:

'Give me Aran ' (anew child), I'll look after him, I'll take care of him.') but in the sense of being found lovable, no matter what, and this was something that children sometimes seemed to have little control over. This extract from my research journal illustrates the point:

I was talking with Ruby and she suddenly said, with an embarrassed smile, 'I hate myself.' I was shocked and asked her why? She thought and said 'When I'm naughty.' I said I didn't like myself when I'd done something I was ashamed about, but if I tried to make things better, I didn't feel so bad. She nodded but still looked unhappy. At storytime, I told a story about Faerybelle (I use these little puppet characters to tell stories about classroom situations) who was horribly mean to poor Squeak and, when reproached by the others, felt so bad that she went away and hid in a corner, saying 'I hate myself.' Ruby, sitting next to me, said delightedly, 'that's me!' and moved onto my knee. Squeak and the others coaxed Faerybelle out of hiding, and when I asked the children what the puppets should do to make Faerybelle feel better, they all said, 'give her a hug'. Ruby got one too.

Learning to be emotionally intelligent: reaching conclusions

This final section briefly summarises the many conclusions to be drawn from this study.

Learning to be emotionally intelligent is a life-long process, and cannot be done in social isolation: parents, staff and children learn most effectively when they learn from each other in relationships characterised by openness, trust and warmth. Children have much to teach adults about morality, generosity, intuitive kindness,

moral courage and an ability to play with emotional ideas in a way that adults may find harder to access.

All learning is complex, interactive and social: one's state of mind and individual character - whether child or adult - affects what one learns. Specifically: children showed higher levels of well-being, using criteria developed as part of the Box Full of Feelings kit, and were more involved, possibly as a result of the closer relationships between parents and staff, brought about by the nature of my research and its ongoing dialogue.

As a practitioner researcher the personal and professional rewards are considerable, but the discipline and critical reflection required also benefited the children and ensured real parental involvement. Furthermore, it is important for educational research in general that practising teachers are more fully involved. Carr (1995) writes:

...educational practice is morally committed action; it is an essentially ethical activity guided by basic educational values rather than narrow instrumental or utilitarian concerns. But although educational practice always involves moral purposes and intentions, these are construed not as 'ends' to which practice is the technical means, but as educational commitments that can only be realised in and through practice. (ibid, p49)

It is not simply that teachers can contribute an insider's perspective but also, as Carr cogently argues, a dialectical alliance between theorists and practitioners can help safeguard, even reinstate, educational aims and values, to better meet the concerns addressed in this chapter as they affect all our children.

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