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Inside this edition :

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Introduction

By Maureen O'Hagan

The articles in this edition of the Update are all very different, however, running beneath them all is the idea of the child's Personal, Social and Emotional Development. Although this Update was intended to concentrate on just Physical Development it became difficult to extrapolate this from the child's Personal, Social and Emotional Development. For example, a child can physically run into a field of grass and wild flowers but it is unlikely they will just run through the field without stopping to smell the flowers, talk to other children or adults

about what they see and what they feel like being in a large open space. Neither, children or adults can just switch off other experiences in order to satisfy just one learning outcome!!!

The article by Angela Nurse reminds me of my own childhood and the freedom that I had to play in the street, walk to the local swings or fields and take my younger brother with me without the company of an adult. Sadly the world has changed and children no longer have the benefit of free roaming unaccompanied by an adult. Cities get more crowded with a variety of people and parents sense the dangers in these changes. This has led to children needing more physical activities in the nursery or school in order to enhance their physical development.

The second article by Stephanie Widdows reminds us about the emotional difficulties which a child can experience when they first go into the child care setting. There is an interesting idea put forward about using a photograph album with pictures of the child's home and family in order to make the child feel more secure. However, experience

has shown that these pictures may upset the child as they are a constant reminder of home therefore an alternative solution was found. This was to change the pictures in the album to ones which enabled the child's emotional responses to become positive rather than negative.

The article about the SPARKLE Project and how it transformed early years settings in Kent is a good example of what training and team work can achieve when everyone is working towards the same goal.
The very interesting story about 5 year old Sophie and how she wanted to help the children of East Timor is a good example of Personal Development. As the project progressed the broadening of Sophie's horizons also enhanced her Social and Emotional development.

The first of the final two articles by Edwina Mitchell is about Summerhill School which was set up by AS Neill. Neill believed that education should not be curriculum orientated but should follow the child's interests. In Summerhill the children are the driving participants in terms of what activities they choose to go to, how the school is run and what sanctions are placed on children who infringe the rules. Whilst this may sound like children's anarchy ruling, you will find when you read the article that this is not the case. Even left to their own devices children will exhibit maturity in their Personal, Social and Emotional Development.

N° 133 Physical Development in the Early Years

By Angela D Nurse

When I was little, I had the freedom to roam. Although I grew up in inner London, the area was safe with plenty of adults who knew me and were trusted to keep an eye on me. From the age of three, perhaps even earlier, I took off on my three-wheeler every day to explore my neighbourhood. I can remember the sense of excitement seeing a little newt, the smells and sounds of the laundry nearby and visiting the two churches with their heavy doors and different smells inside – old wood, polish, flowers and incense – and the wonderful sense of peace and quiet. This contrasted dramatically with the noise of the steam trains which had left Victoria Station on the way to continental Europe, passing by where I lived. These were the days when drivers were still able to wave to the children as they rushed past. By the time I was seven or eight I had two small brothers and we spent weekends and the holidays spreading our wings further and further, visiting parks, play-

grounds and streams. These adventures seemed to last all day. We would raid the cupboards for fruit and biscuits, take a bottle of squash and off we would go. Our mother gave us the usual talk about strangers and getting up to mischief but seemed to have no sense of danger and a belief that we were perfectly safe.

Many would view this picture of glorified street-raking with horror today but it taught me a lot about responsibility and being able to look after myself and take decisions, as well as learning about the physical world and what my body could do for me. Somehow we have as a society come to see the world as a very dangerous place for children, though statistically this is not proven. The dangers have changed but, without practice in measured and contained risk, how are children going to cope and take responsibility for themselves when they are older? There is recognition now and the beginnings of a debate about risk and challenge and manage risk and get themselves out of trouble. Coupled with this is, growing concern about health, especially obesity, and how the lives of children who live in a static 'virtual' world do not allow for many physical opportunities, particularly of the sort not organised and contained by adults.

Early years settings can counterbalance this, if they are prepared to be visionary. Physical development in the UK has fallen victim in the past two decades to the emphasis on more academic skills, such as English, maths, ICT and science. In an attempt to improve achievements in these subject areas – and so give British children a head start – traditional ways of ensuring a full and appropriate childhood have been whittled away, with children introduced early to formal skills and ways of working. Before being able to control the muscles of their hands, for example, many little children have been expected to write their names and copy words. Of course, this has depended on the skill of the practitioner in observing the child's level of development and readiness to undertake this; at a time, however, when competence in child development and observation was most needed, the emphasis in training for teachers in these areas has been, until recently, downgraded.

Scotland and Wales have already worked to bring a focus on children's developmental needs back into their early years programmes, working towards guidance which recognises the centrality of learning through play. In England, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and Birth to Three Matters documents have been merged and updated and now have statutory force. The resulting Early Years Foundation Stage, introduced from September 2008, applies to children from birth to six years of age. Within this, Physical Development has a stronger profile than in earlier versions but it will rest with the knowledge and understanding of those implementing the EYFS to ensure that all its possibili-

area (though this is difficult for many private and voluntary settings and some schools so it cannot be mandatory). There are aspects which could have been explored further. Stress, for example, has been highlighted as a particular issue for the UK's children. In its concern with well-being, the EYFS could have given more explicit guidance in how to support children and parents whose stress levels have become unacceptable. The EYFS gives, however, numerous examples of how its expectations can be realised and a number of books are now being published which help practitioners to bring this to realisation. Alongside these, practitioners have options offered by the Internet, for example, to explore alternative systems, like the Forest Schools, and to find resources to make a real difference to the way physical development in the very young is supported.

An ability to interpret, *and then go beyond*, the EYFS is essential to its success. Training in the UK has improved substantially in the past few years. The are now first and higher degrees covering early childhood, foundation degrees that integrate theory with practice and a new early years professional status (EYPS) which aims to support and improve practice. More opportunities are needed for short courses open to all but as EYPS appointments are made these will hopefully increase.

Finally, we need to understand that the brain does not live independently from the body which houses it. Body and brain cannot be separated. The brain feeds on and develops from information it is supplied with from movement and the senses and this symbiotic relationship is important to ensuring that a child learns to use all to the fullest degree. We know from research and naturalistic observations that when there are difficulties in one aspect there can be problems in another. Restrictions in movement when very young, for example, can result in a particular difficulty in mathematics because the connection between an understanding of space and an ability to transfer this to more abstract mathematical concepts is restricted. Practitioners who understand child development fully will appreciate this and strive, in an exciting and challenging way, to give free rein to children's physicality.

Suggested reading:

Austin R (ed) (2007) *Letting the Outside in: developing teaching and learning beyond the early years classroom.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham
Bilton H (2002, 2nd ed) *Outdoor play in the Early Years.* London: David Fulton
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Nurse A D (2009) *Physical Development in the Early Years Foundation Stage.* London: Fulton/Routledge
Piek J P (2006) *Infant Motor Development.* Champaign IL: Human Kinetics
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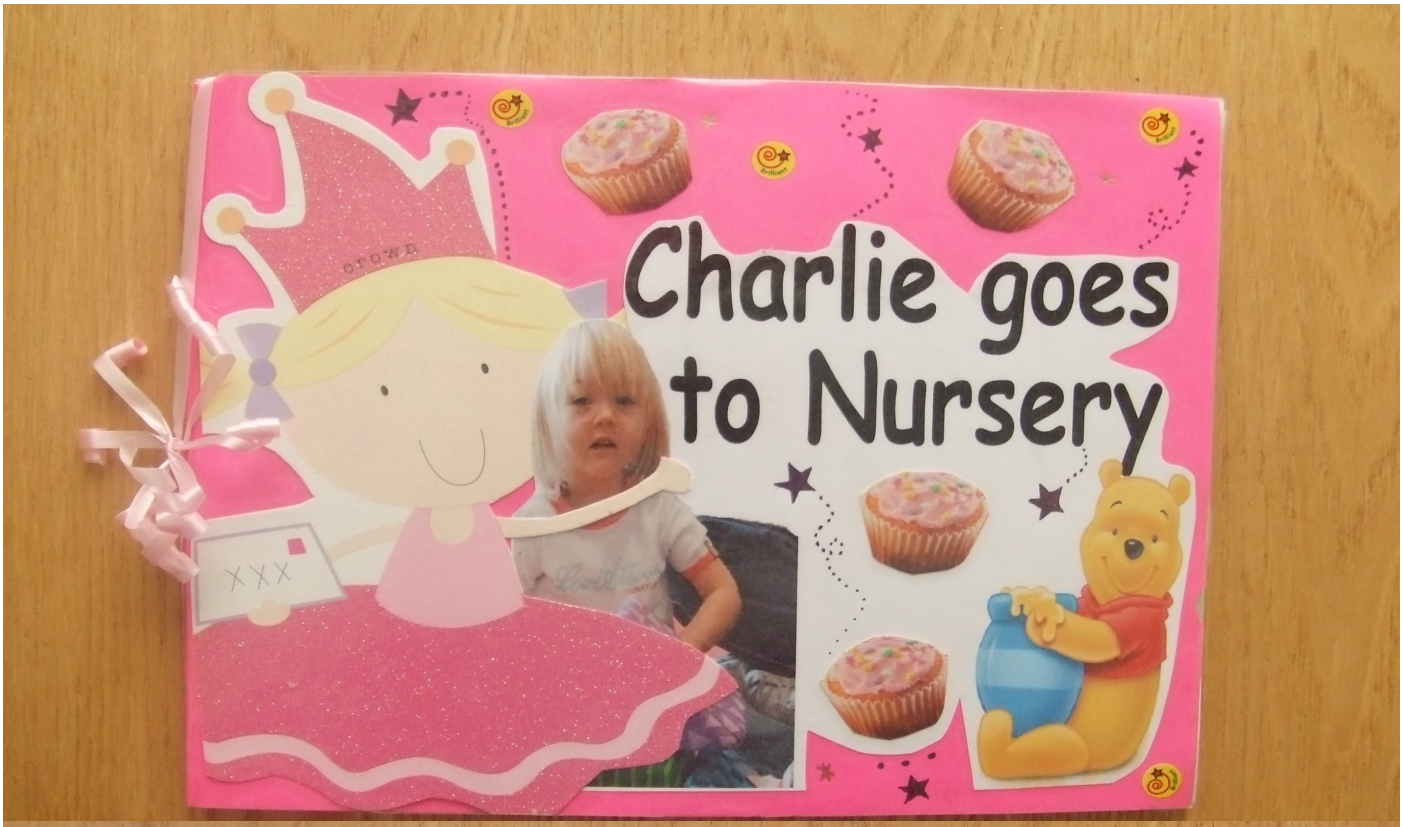
N° 134 Charlie Goes to Nursery

By Stephanie Widdows

When faced with a child in a childcare setting who is having difficulties settling in a familiar settling strategy may be to allow the child to bring a comforter object from home. It could be a favourite blanket, toy or photograph books containing pictures of their family, favourite events and pass times that they enjoy from the comfort of their own home. Although for many children allowing them to bring a 'piece of home' as such into the setting may make the transition from home to a childcare setting less turbulent; for some children being reminded of home may in fact have an adverse affect. Being constantly reminded of home, rather than acting as a 'safety blanket' to help them feel safe and secure merely for them highlights the fact that they would rather be at home.

When faced with this situation myself, the idea occurred to me that it was not perhaps the home setting that the child needed to use as a comforter, but in fact the reverse. The concept therefore being that the childcare setting needed to have a more positive connotation to the child. To develop this I created a photograph book of the child carrying out the day to day routine in nursery; covering all aspects from her arrival, her favourite activities (such as playing in the push cars outside) in particular and even photographs of her sleeping at nap time and eating her lunch. This book was to be taken home so that in the days that she was absent from nursery, as she only attended Mondays and Tuesdays, her parents would read the book to her and enforce a more positive association with nursery, and bridge the gap between the time


Charlie goes to Nursery
CROWN
XXX


Hello Charlie!
Lets have a look at all the exciting things you get up to when you go to nursery!

'the childcare setting needed to have a more positive connotation to the child.'


If it gets too noisy you can go into the baby room for a while.


Good bye Charlie!
See you at nursery!

she spent at home, and when she was expected to return to nursery.
The book would also be brought to the childcare setting, so that practitioners could use it to show the child not only what was expected of her at certain points in the day, but also that she could in fact enjoy herself. As she was only 2 years old, and had spent all her life up to this point at home with her mother, the child had no concept of the pattern of a day in childcare, and this was perhaps why she found it so hard to settle, as not being familiar with the daily routine could be a reason as to why she felt so insecure.
When introduced with the book, the child became instantly attached to it, and it also became an object of comfort to her, not only in the way for which it was intended, but also as a comforter object to carry around with her and embrace like a child may do with a teddy bear at times when she was feeling anxious.
An unexpected but welcome outcome was that the parents felt reassured by 'seeing' that their daughter did have positive experiences during her time in the setting. This strategy certainly succeeded in developing the theme of Positive Relationships within the Early years Foundation Stage.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

By Linzy Shaw and Lisa Fryer

Personal, social and emotional development is the most important aspect of children's learning and development. If a children's Personal, Social and Emotional well-being is not met then children are less likely to reach their full potential in the other Areas of Learning and Development. For example, a child coming into an early years setting who does not feel secure, who is upset and has not formed a significant attachment with a practitioner in the setting, will struggle in the other Areas of Learning and Development such as Communication, Language and Literacy and Knowledge and Understanding of the World.

Ensing and Spencer (2000) identify the key elements of Personal, Social and Emotional development whereby young children grow into people who feel good about themselves, have positive relationships with others and can communicate feelings and behave in appropriate ways. This is reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage where a high importance is placed on Personal, Social and Emotional Development. The further five areas of learning are given equal importance.

The Early Years Foundation Stage requires us as early years practitioners to provide children with 'experiences and support which will help them to develop a positive sense of themselves and of others; respect for others; social skills; and a positive disposition to learn. Providers must ensure support for children's emotional well-being to help them to know themselves and what they can do' (DCSF, 2008: PiP Card Personal, Social and Emotional Development). Furthermore, Bowlby supported this view when he looked at young children and attachments to key people. Bowlby believed that an early attachment was an essential aspect of a child's development (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002). We agree with Bowlby, that a close relationship with a key person is necessary at all stages of a young child's development as this enables the child to build enough self-confidence to explore independently and be able to return to their key person whenever s/he feels intimidated and anxious about the choices s/he may be making.

We need to be aware at all times that each child is unique and has different Personal, Social and Emotional needs. Some children may need much more affection and attention than others, and they may be able to show you this in an outward way. Others may also need this affection and attention but are unable to express their needs at their stage of development. As a practitioner it is important to observe and be aware of these 'quiet' children. On the other hand you may get children who are confident and do not need such a strong attachment emotionally and their contact time with the key person is not needed as much. It is down to observation and understanding of each child's individual needs which will allow the practitioner to provide the amount of emotional support needed. Some examples of how to develop these relationships are during meal times, nappy changing times, through adult led and child initiated activities, where children can talk and interact with others. These examples not only show how relationships can be made with the key person but also with others, therefore developing aspects of social development.

As a child develops, they should be able to work independently and confidently away from their key worker. It is still important to form close relationships with others, as Vygotsky believes play with others helps learning (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002). Vygotsky believed that effective group play can increase children's understanding as they learn from each other; however, it is just as beneficial for children to engage in solitary or parallel play so that the children can experience things for themselves and develop as an independent individual.

A young baby has little physical independence and is largely dependent on people around it, as the child has limited control over what it can do. However, from a young age, a baby begins to understand that it is separate from others, and is an individual who is independent. To develop this knowledge further practitioners and parents could work together giving the baby similar experiences in both the setting and the home. An example of this could be recognising body parts. The practitioner and parent could simply point to different parts of their own body and then to the same parts on the baby's body, for example, the nose, an ear, a finger or a toe, making the baby aware of its own features and limbs, developing the child's sense of self.

In conclusion, as practitioners aiding children in developing their Personal, Social and Emotional Development, it is important for us to tune into a child's thinking and develop the ability to engage in sustained shared thinking with the child. This will

enable us to support every child according to their unique needs. This will all be possible if as adults we show, awareness, offer support, clarify thoughts and ask open questions (DCSF 2008).

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DCSF. (2008) *Early Years Foundation Stage*. Nottingham: DCSF Publications.
Ensing, J. & Spencer, B. (2002) *Children Learning. Personal, Social and Emotional Development*. Surrey: Spencer Publications.

'All learning together' – Transformative learning in early years settings in Kent: An evaluation of SPARKLE.

N° 136

By Dr Eve Hutton

The SPARKLE team have worked in partnership with early years settings in Mid-Kent since 2001. A recent small-scale evaluation of SPARKLE by Dr Eve Hutton of Canterbury Christ Church University has demonstrated how this unique multi-agency pre-school initiative has a positive impact on the quality of provision in the early years settings that the team activities into the planning of the nursery.

'The physiotherapist gets down to the children's level and we all get involved- she works with our planning and it works with the children's interests too' Early years manager.

'They come in regularly the children get to know them – some children are fine with new faces but some do feel a bit intimidated – but SPARKLE have got to know their names and their faces and they have got to trust them' Early years manager.

This sentiment was echoed by the EYPs who liked *" opportunities to try things out - it was interesting having a play yourself"*

When asked about what she felt they had learnt from the team the manager mentioned that

"We have learnt that we shouldn't expect children to hold a pencil before they go to school – writing will come in time – maybe we were expecting too much because of pressure from the school. The occupational therapist brought some lovely crayons the children could hold them and we have gone out and bought these – little things like this make a big difference" Early years manager.

'The training the team did was useful I learnt that I was teaching the children how to hold scissors incorrectly and all about activities to help get their hands ready for writing" Early years practitioner

'The teacher advisor suggested that we have more choice for children at our craft table – we had got a bit stagnant and she gave us ideas about how the children could self select activities we got hold of a trolley with drawers and filled these with lots of different things and changing items and the children have loved that" Early years manager.

One practitioner mentioned that the team visits had helped her become more observant and to provide more detailed observations of a child's abilities.

"it has helped because before I might not have noticed that one [child] was good at threading I write more detailed observations now" Early years practitioner.

When asked about how the approach of the team possibly differed to other types of training available to the early years setting the manager mentioned.

"There is nothing better than someone coming into your setting and doing things with you. Because then the children see it first hand and its new for them and its new for us at the same time, and we

are all learning together." Early years manager

The early years practitioners valued both the more formal training the team provided and the team's visits where they worked with the staff and children.

" Its nice to have a variety of different ways of learning, its nice to have them come in but its good to go off site also, on the courses you meet with people in other nurseries and share ides." Early years practitioner

The SPARKLE team brought about transformational change in the physical resources available to children and the attitudes and skills of the EYPS in the early years setting. For example the purchase of suitable mark making resources and the variety of items available on the craft trolley for children to self select. The team also increased the EYPs knowledge and understanding about how to promote fine motor development particularly writing skills. There was a noticeable shift in the emphasis of activities they provided in the setting. Instead of asking children to write their names and 'join dots' they encouraged a wide range of fun pre-writing activities which the children could select. Through observing how a therapist allowed less confident children to watch an activity prior to actively encouraging their attempts to jump and skip, the early years practitioner learnt how to include all children, whereas formerly the quieter less confident children may have missed out on more challenging movement opportunities. Finally the practitioners suggested that their observation skills had improved and they were able to make more detailed and accurate descriptions of the children's abilities and progress. The success of the team's intervention in this setting was based on good working relationships between the team and the early years setting, the readiness of the EYP to engage with the team and their openness to change and motivation to learn.

This small-scale evaluation has identified that the SPARKLE multi-agency approach to delivering training and situated support for learning in EYS is effective particularly where there is willingness to engage and motivation to learn. The combined specialist health professional and educational input into the settings provides a unique resource for EYPs to draw inspiration from in their practice. By working flexibly to meet the individual needs of settings and by differentiating their approach depending on the skills of the setting staff, the team provide an essential part of a range of training opportunities available to the practitioners such as early years in-service training run by consultants, advisory teachers and SENCOs. Case study evidence supports actual changes in the physical environment of the early years setting, the type and variety of resources available to children and the attitudes of the staff following the SPARKLE teams visit.

Part of the purpose of service evaluation is to find out not only what works well but also how services can improve. The evaluation brought to light aspects of the team's work which includes the need to set more explicit goals around learning and reflection in the EYS. The evaluation has highlighted where additional resources could promote SPARKLE more effectively reflecting the quality of provision and ensuring good practice is disseminated.

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A Case Study: One child helping children in another country

By Dr Catherine Meehan

Nº 137

Press

This case study focuses on one young child's growing awareness of the world around her and her being an active participant in trying to make a difference for others. The child in question is my daughter Sophie and I wrote this case study as an example of how we can all change the world and make it a better place for others.

The beginning of the idea

Sophie (aged 5 years) regularly watched the evening news with her family. On her way to school one morning, she wanted to know more about the political situation in East Timor. At that time, the Australian troops had just gone to help and a colleague of the mother was in East Timor working on a project for the UN. Images of homeless children and those children sent to Australia for safety have moved her most. We received regular email updates from my colleague about her work and Sophie asked everyday if there was any more news. On my colleague's return to Australia, she brought home photos of schools, early childhood settings and families she had visited. She also brought a teacher back to raise awareness and co-present at a conference.

An opportunity arose for Sophie to meet Sr Aurora, a Canossan nun who ran a small rural school in East Timor. Sophie came to a presentation made by Sr Aurora at her mother's workplace and was so moved by the pictures and stories of children; those her own age and whose lives were so different from her own.

Sophie came home from that session and started to make a list of all the things she thought would make the lives of children better in East Timor.

The most astonishing thing Sophie discovered about children's lives in East Timor, was that there were many children who could not access schools; schools were over crowded and under-resourced. There were 60,000 children between the ages of 4 and 6 in East Timor. Only 3000 went to preschool or school at this age. That meant that 57,000 were not able to go to school and were unlikely to receive an education and be disadvantaged.

Sophie thought about this and all the children she knew in Australia could go to school, schools were everywhere and they all had many things for children to do. She came to me with her plan. If there were children not able to go to school in East Timor, Australia was a rich country and we could help. There were factories and warehouses we had driven past that had bricks and building materials stacked as high as she could see. We had builders who could go, architects with plans and even we had spare bricks in our garage from when we built our house.

Sophie with the help of her parents and family collected information on the internet about organisations that might be able to help children in East Timor. One of the solutions that Sophie came up with was to contact the Australian Prime Minister.

Sophie decided that one thing we could do as a family was to clean out her old toys and clothes and send them to East Timor. She then suggested we ask her school friends and children in her class. With the permission of her school Principal, we put a notice in the school newsletter. A collection box was put in the classroom and within a week, we had two car loads of unwanted toys, books and clothes to send to East Timor children.

Sophie also identified that there are important people in our society have the power to make things happen. She was thinking beyond her family and school. She named the Australian Prime Minister Mr Howard as being the person with the most power in this situation. She asked me to type her

words into a letter. She dictated her ideas and then we re-read it. Once she was happy we found the email address for the Prime Minister's office and sent it.

Sophie was very keen to tell other people what life in East Timor was like for children. The final proposal Sophie has was to ask the Army to take the boxes of toys to East Timor in one of their helicopters. This was not to be.

It was not possible for the local Army corps to help and fortunately, we found out about a group of high school students who could help. These Year 10 students were busy fundraising for a trip to East Timor to go and work in a village as part of the Religious Education studies. This group of students agreed to transport the collected toys, books and clothes and take them to the village they were going to work in, it was Sr Aurora's village.

The toys were packaged and taken to the students who kindly took them to East Timor. The solution to Sophie's problem was solved with help from her family, friends and people she had never met before. It was a team effort. The children in East Timor got their packages!

Sophie continued to receive feedback about her project. She received emails from Sr Aurora in East Timor thanking her for the packages that had arrived safely. The teacher accompanying the school group contacted us on their return to share photos and stories of the children and the boxes of toys, books and clothing. Finally, Sophie received a letter from the Prime Minster. He thanked her for her concern about others and congratulated her on trying to make a difference. Sophie was so proud of the letter received from the Prime Minister thanking her for the time she took to write the letter and encouraging her to continue to think about others.

These were all external 'rewards' for Sophie, but she also said at the time, that she was very happy to have helped in a small way. Sophie continues to watch for news and information about East Timor and the children and their lives. Maybe one day when she is older, she will get a chance to do more good and make a difference for others.

A Visit to Summerhill School

By Edwina Mitchell **N° 138**

For A. S. Neill (1944, p49) " Education should follow child interests all the time, yet the Plans for future education that are so prominent today, are thinking in terms of subjects and classes: they might have been drawn up in 1890". It is now 2008 yet these sentiments could apply equally well today.

Summerhill is founded on A S Neill's principles. He believed that "Freedom is necessary to a child because only under freedom can he grow in his natural way" (Neill 1962, p110). Neill wanted children to grow up to be happy in whatever path they chose. Children were not to grow up having to meet the future demands of some distant adult. Education should allow children the freedom to construct their own identities, aims and goals in life. He stated that his aim for children was to have "a sincerity that stands out bravely, an attitude to life that is independent and fluid, an interest in people and things..." (Neill 1944, p103).

The school looks like a child's paradise, everywhere looks informal, welcoming and well used by children; a far cry from today's often immaculate environments. There were roller blades in the doorway, bikes and tree houses in the garden and animals wandering around. In the hall a graffiti board sits alongside the timetables. Lessons are timetabled like normal schools. The children sign up for them at the beginning of each term but attendance is not compulsory. Classrooms are small but meet the needs of the children as teaching is usually in small groups (Neill Readhead, 2006). All the normal resources are in evidence but the striking factor is the amazing art work displayed everywhere. There is a fantastic workshop for woodwork, a sound recording studio and musical instruments that many schools would envy plus a good science laboratory. All the facilities are available to any child although some of the woodwork equipment has to be used when an adult is present.

Summerhill is a school where democracy rules supreme. Health and safety rules are adult made and imposed but rules about the ways individuals and the community should act are made through whole school meetings in which teachers and students have equal status. Meetings are run and managed by the children. Attendance is optional but I was impressed by how many children were there at the meeting we were privileged to attend. School rules and their infringement were discussed. A child who had been

that lying was not part of the school ethos. Sanctions were discussed, ranging from fines to work duties and not being allowed to use anything with wheels for a period of time. The decisions were voted on with every one present having an equal vote and the sanction delivered. The child did not seem upset or intimidated by the proceedings and gracefully accepted his lot. Permission was gained for leaving the school for weekends or trips. Various committees that help the day to day running of the community were also discussed and voted upon. There is no constraint on children's use of language but the only swearing that I heard in the whole day occurred at the meeting and was very limited. This was not what I had been led to expect, having been told that the children swear profusely.

Freedom to dress as you please is integral to the philosophy and the children looked like those seen anywhere else. But there was something about these children that is hard to explain. There is a physical calmness about them; in fact the whole school seemed an oasis of calm. We had a meeting with Zoë Neill Readhead that lasted nearly an hour and was attended by the visitors and several children. Younger children, aged eight or nine years of age, rather than fidgeting after five of ten minutes sat calmly crossed legged on a table for the whole time. They were completely at peace with themselves and their surroundings. The older children who took us around the school were contained, confident and articulate but were obviously children. Our seventeen year old guide had no inhibitions about swinging on the rope hanging from an ancient oak tree, with total abandon.

Today, Summerhill students, as always, are given the opportunities to make their own choices, follow their own interests and develop at their own speed; living their own lives not one their parents might think they should live. In this school children are free to play as much and for how long they choose. Success is not measured in terms of academic achievement in the normally accepted sense of the word but as the child defines it for themselves. A booklet given out that day contains photographs of ex students who are following a wide range of artistic and academic careers. Zoë Neill Readhead (2006, p99), Neills' daughter and current head, writes, "It is certainly the case that at Summerhill we do not see 'higher' levels or results as being the indicators of success." Yet children do achieve and sometimes early than expected, like the 13 year old who passed GCSE Maths. The OFSTED reports criticised the academic achievement of junior children and Zoe acknowledges this criticism as the place of play is given greater importance. However she pointed out that when children have lived out their need to play and want to follow an academic curriculum they take it up with great dedication and accomplish more in a shorter time span. I would argue this could also be the effect of small group teaching. Personal commitment to learning was evidenced by meeting some ex-Summerhill students now at college. They commented on the irritation they felt when fellow students were disruptive in lessons.

Visiting the school was one of the most impressive days I have ever spent. Yet, it left so many questions. To be brave enough to send a child there, 100% commitment to Neill's philosophy would be needed. You are not going to get any progress reports on how they are doing; such things do not exist. Boundless faith that your child will do what is right for them is essential. The courage not to measure success in terms of academic achievement is crucial. Some of Neill's ideals must be transferable to our normal education system so that our children have the chance to enjoy their childhoods. We are robbing children of their childhood today and expecting them to be future saviours of problems that we as adults have made and continue to make.

Angela Nurse adds: The ideas generated by O'Neill and put into practice at Summerhill are still being continued today. While researching physical development and the place of risk and challenge in the lives of young children today, I came across information about the Lumiar School in San Paulo in Brazil, which opened in 2003. Established by Richard Semler, the head of the Semco Company and Foundation, this school has given learning back to its students. As David Gribble writes in his article:

The School is open from early morning to late afternoon and students attend for as long as they want. Regardless of age, they are entirely responsible for their own education; there is no coercion or constraint. This at first seems astonishing, particularly in view of the fact that that some of the students are as young as two. However, on reflection, it becomes clear that even conventional educators often allow children to learn independently and to choose what they will do when they are two years old. It is only when they get older that adults start deciding for them.

This is based on the premise that young people must be responsible for their own lives and learning as it is impossible in such a complex world to be exposed to all that there is to learn. Teachers, and governments, cannot possibly know what children today will need to know and be able to do in twenty years time, so interest, commitment, flexibility and confidence in learning independently are compe-

tences that young people need to acquire. There is a strong ethical basis to Semler's ideas. He sees personal responsibility as fundamental to the development of the democratic ideal which he finds lacking in many conventional schools, where pupils learn to hate learning. More about the philosophy which underpins the Lumiar School can be found on the web links below:

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/main.jhtml?xml=/education/2004/02/10/tefguru09.xml
htttp://lumiarschool.spaces.live.com/Blog/cns!B1F3ADC219AC66F!255.entryDavid Gribble
http://www.libed.org.uk/march05/365dayschoolholiday.html

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Neill. A.S. (1962) *Summerhill, A Radical Approach to Education*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.
Neill Readhead, Z. (2006) Summerhill Today in M. Vaughan Ed. Summerhill & A.S. Neill. Maidenhead: O.U. Press.

What is happening to our children and childhood? (3 books which highlight some of the issues) N° 139

By Edwina Mitchell

About 18 months ago I was sent three books from the USA to put out to colleagues to review. Each was based on a selection of chapters written by different academics and professionals and edited by Sharna Olfman. Sharna is Associate Professor of Psychology at Point Park College and a partner in the National Alliance for Childhood. All three books were highlighting the different situations, which the USA, as a society, was inflicting upon their children and childhood and were harmful to their development. Whilst I found many of the arguments and the scenarios they raised rather depressing, it was obvious that the Editor and the contributors were doing their best to bring these situations to the attention of a wider audience.

The first book, published in 2003, is titled '*All Work and No Play…. How Educational Reforms are Harming our Preschoolers'*. The reforms referred to are the emphasis placed upon the school system to introduce children to computers and other technology from an early age. The book begins with chapters which highlight the importance of play in the early years, including an article relating to play in Europe.
The second section looks at the impact of modern technology, such as computers, on young children. It includes a description of a four and a half year old whose parents encouraged her to use computers from an early age and who has no problem spending up to four hours a day on the computer whereas she is only allowed to watch television for half an hour per day!! I certainly found this example very depressing. The author goes on to explore the areas of development which cannot be learned via a computer such as language development, emotional development, learning to use their senses and social skills etc. Another author puts forward a thesis that the increase in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) could be a possible consequence of the rise in technologies and the demise of play.
This area has also been researched by Sue Palmer (2006), who looks at this theme of modern technology in reference to the UK and Europe and refers to research carried out in Munich, which concluded that '…computers for learning improved school performance, but using them for games and gossip had the opposite effect…' (page 210).

The second book, '*Childhood Lost. How American Culture is Failing Our Kids'* was published in 2005. It looks at the influences of media violence, commercialisation and the impact of fast foods and the sexualization of childhood. Each chapter is written by academics and specialists in the field. The beginning of the book looks at the importance of the early years environment being conducive to a child's natural development and their needs, including why parenting matters. The second part looks at the different ways in which the American culture is failing children, beginning with a long chapter highlightig the way in which the needs of parents and parenting are being sidelined, particularly in poor families and families where both parents are working. The next chapter explores the impact of media violence on young minds and the increasing aggression in some children and fear in others. Further chapters go on to highlight a number of aspects of commercialisation which have taken over childhood. These include advertisements for 'must have' products, fast food, soft drinks and the obesity epidemic which has resulted. Another aspect of

commercialisation are the messages put out in the media encouraging children to be come more sexually aware and to look more sexy at a younger age. Sue Palmer (2006) also makes the case for commercialisation leading to adult fashion being sold to 5 & 6 year old girls (page 235). The final chapter asks the question 'Where do the Children Play?' and explores the reason why 'creative, open-ended play is rapidly vanishing from our homes, outdoor spaces, and schools.' A good case is made for the importance of play with references to major theorists such as Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky etc. The trend of parents to prevent their children playing outside the home refers to the high level of media pointing out the dangers of children playing outside alongside the promotion of indoor play using computers and television programmes. Olfman refers to this as the 'Screen Nation' which undermines the children's ability to play.

The final book, *'No Child Left Different',* published in 2006, explores the way in which children's behaviour is labelled and controlled by drugs and other methods. The way 'normal' behaviour is defined differs depending upon the background of the definer. For example, the medical model is one way of defining and dealing with children's so called 'abnormal' behaviour. There is an interesting chapter which explores the way the environment may have damaging effects upon children's minds. High levels of lead and toxins from industry along with pesticides and food additives are all likely to have an effect upon children's neurological development and mental health. Violence in TV programmes and films also affects children's attitudes, values and behaviour and can lead to aggression and fear. There is also reference to the media's effect upon the body image of girls leading to bulimia and anorexia at an early age. Finally, the rise in the use of drugs such as Ritalin to control children's behaviour is now a common part of the medical model.

Yes, these books are depressing, yes, we can see how the points that each highlights have an effect on children and childhood. However, on the positive side, it is better that we are aware of these issues so that children can be protected from them and reclaim their freedom from the media and their right to play.

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