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Organización Mundial Para La Educación Preescolar
World Organisation For Early Childhood Education

OMEP

UK UPDATES

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Making a Difference: Transforming Early Years Practice Conference

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No. 145 Reflections on the day

By Janet Morris OMEP UK / Nicola Kemp CCCU

On Saturday, 10th November 2012, Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) in partnership with OMEP UK (The World Organisation for Early Childhood Education) hosted a one day conference 'Making a Difference: transforming early years practice'. Over one hundred delegates attended, including CCCU students and staff, members of OMEP and OMEP UK, along with representatives from local authorities, employers and early years practitioners. Thom Crabbe represented the Teaching Agency.

It was an opportunity to '*be with like minded people who are aware of the need for the child to be at the centre of the process...*' developing relationships, sharing the same values and establishing a common purpose; in effect '*...an early years community of practice.*' This was something which was noted by conference delegates. As one remarked, "*The co-operation between groups, universities and charities was overwhelming.*"

From the very outset, the conference was envisaged as a partnership event with a range of external partners. As well as Childhood Studies Department staff and OMEP Committee members, the conference working party contained representatives from Kent County Council and Medway Council as well as student representatives. Great effort was put into developing relationships and being as inclusive as possible throughout the process. Janet Morris, President of OMEP UK who are sponsors of New Leaders in Early Years and John Moss, Dean of CCCU Faculty of Education opened the conference and welcomed delegates to the event. Workshops were led by students from across the Childhood Studies programmes, as well as practitioners from a range of organisations including EarthCraftuk, OMEP, Boogie Mites UK, Manor House Day Nursery and Rose Petals Childcare.

The result of this was that delegates commented on how they felt the event had reaffirmed their professional identity and gave them a sense of '*belonging to an early years community*'. As one delegate said, "*I feel very proud being an Early Years Professional and re-inspired.*" Although 'networking' is a term often used to describe the connections made at a conference, the feedback from delegates suggested something deeper occurred during this event. This was expressed in a variety of ways but was to do with being surrounded by

Like-minded people who are aware of the need for the child to be at the centre of the process.” Another commented on how “the buzz of love and passion for children oozed throughout”

The event also provided a unique opportunity for the Childhood Studies Department. Students from across different programmes were able to come together and to showcase their practice and share experiences. For staff, it was also significant. “It was a pleasure to be there and witness the wonderful ‘early years community of practice’ that we have all played a part in developing. We had past and present students attending, those who started off on 20 credit awards, those from the FD, the BA (Hons), the MA and New Leaders in Early Years. I believe that it marked a significant milestone for the department...It just all goes to show how powerful education is and how it can turn lives around.”

The transformational power of narrative: sharing stories of practice to inspire and motivate

Whilst the broad theme of the day was ‘making a difference,’ narrative or ‘story-telling’ was the thread that wove the different elements of the programme together.



EUNICE LUMSDEN: ‘The Early Years Professional: the missing piece in the jigsaw for children?’

Eunice’s story was both personal and professional, “connecting one’s early years to what we are now...showing the importance of the early years and the early years professional.” She drew on her personal experience of being a mixed heritage child, her role as a social worker and her experience in a multi disciplinary nursery. “At the heart of what I do is the child and their early experiences”. This struck a chord with many – as one delegate stated, “I can relate to her story in so many ways!” The word most often used in feedback from her presentation was ‘*Inspirational!*’ Through video clips she compared the stories of two children and made reference to the term ‘emotional poverty’.

Eunice argued for a focus on the child not the institutions as what we do to children impacts on their lives. She stressed the importance of professional identity and considers the Early Years Professional role as the inter-disciplinary professional.

PROFESSOR LINDEN WEST: Narratives of Transformation: a psychosocial perspective.

Professor West spoke about ‘narratives of transformation’. Feedback showed that this session “opened up thinking and perspectives” and for at least one delegate “it was the highlight of my day”. He referred to his research which took place in marginalised communities focusing upon the stories of children, their parents and carers and the professionals in their lives. His findings led him to believe that once interest is shown in the ‘storyteller’ then s/he becomes interested in his or her own story. He explained narrative in two ways; firstly, a matter of relationships which are highly interactive even at the early stages and secondly, in the many ways it can be stifled by others. He feels strongly that allowing others to share their stories enables them to develop a sense of self, self-respect and self-esteem. He closed by posing a challenge – how much space do we give to early years children to tell their stories?



MICHAEL ROSEN: 'Enjoying Books is Serious'



Michael Rosen, the children's novelist and poet provided a "*brilliant end of the day*" with his talk. This was both '*thought provoking and humorous*' with '*amazing insights*'. He began by explaining the process of story writing and suggested that when we are working with children we are working with parents – he told us that we have a window for putting books into the hands of parents. He described "Kidnap Day" when parents are persuaded to come into a setting to read with their children – he referred to this process as creating the 'book triangle'. Michael quoted Mariah Evans from the University of Nevada whose research indicates that where there are books and printed materials in homes and where children read for pleasure is equivalent to an extra three years of schooling.

Most importantly his words inspired action. As one delegate reported, "*Following Michael's talk, I am going ahead with the 'Reading for*

Well-being programme' with parents". Perhaps the most memorable moment was when the whole conference joined in the actions to Michael's poem "Put your hands on the bridge; feel the rhythm of the train..."



The message from all speakers was that the narrative can be transformational. As one delegate noted, the event re-affirmed the '*importance of stories and narratives for all - children to children, adults to children and adults to adults*'.

Interspersed between the keynote speeches were three workshop sessions. These showcased a wide variety of excellent early years practice. Nineteen different workshops ran through the day and delegates were able to select three to attend. These focused on issues including school readiness and transitions, children's rights, dance and movement, forest school, multi-lingualism, reflective practice, speech, language and communication and counting skills. By sharing their stories and experiences, the workshop leaders were able to inspire and encourage others to develop their own practice.

Nature Nursery School



"I've gained a range of really good practical ideas that I can use straight away to improve my practice."

"Lots of inspiration and encouragement to explore, expand and develop"

Supporting sustained shared thinking



Supporting effective transitions in the early years



"It was so fantastic to share in the amazing work that individuals are doing in their settings"

Creating an appropriate environment for children under three



"I will take everything I have heard today and use it to inform my practice"

Overcoming the barriers to outside provision

"Brilliant workshops from different students - great idea!"



"Do it again!"

"This was a wonderful, magical day!"

"When is the next one?"

"I will be signing up for others"

No. 146

To meet, to learn, to think, to share.

By Eleni Alifieraki

Last November, I had the opportunity to participate actively at the conference, 'Making a difference: Transforming early years practice', organised by OMEP UK and the Canterbury Christ Church University, and I feel very lucky for having had this opportunity.

I am a member of the OMEP UK Committee. I am Greek. I have lived in London for the last six years and I work as a teacher in the Early Years Education. I have been a member of OMEP since 1997; I was a member of the OMEP Committee in Athens between 2001-2007. I have participated in a plethora of conferences and seminars organized by OMEP in Greece and also in many international ones around the world. I feel very proud of being a member of OMEP all these years. I feel very proud for offering volunteer work to an organization which defends and promotes the Rights of the Child worldwide.

Throughout all these years, OMEP has given me the opportunity to present papers in seminars in Greece, as well as publishing articles regarding the Early Years Education. Today I am writing to share my excitement for the opportunity OMEP UK gave me to present a paper in England, in the English language and to English speaking people, an experience that I couldn't even have imagined years ago, when I was presenting papers in my native language.

When it was suggested I participate at the presentation of a workshop on bilingualism I was thrilled with the idea. I have been working actively on this topic during the recent years, especially since the day I came in England and I have always been interested in it - both academically and in terms of daily practice in my classroom.

Back in Greece, I had attended seminars and had read articles about the bilingualism and had always tried to defend the home language of my bilingual pupils, and never stopped encouraging their parents to keep supporting their mother tongue. I have always found it a hard work, as the common mentality is to forget the native language and concentrate on the "foreigner" language, in that case the Greek.

Within my working experience in London I have often had bilingual children in my class who struggled in English and who would feel discouraged, disappointed and not motivated in their learning. I knew that the best way in approaching these children is to start from their home language and to move towards the learning of the English language at their own pace, inspiring confidence, self assurance, respect for their language of origin (which therefore means their origin in general), and a "you-can-make-it" attitude.

It has also happened many times that a child in my class does not speak any English at all. That is even harder, especially because children are very young and having no ways in communicating makes them feel isolated, feel a "like fish out of the water". In situations like those, in an atmosphere of complete desperation, in between of a lot of tears and "I want my mum" crying, I have considered it best to use the native language as a starting point, even if that was for just a couple of common words. The "technique" has always been successful: hearing just a word of the mother language, the tears disappear and a nice smile sets on the child's face, sometimes accompanied by laughter because the word has been pronounced in a "funny" way. Then the game begins: all children in the class are into it. They enjoy repeating the foreign language words, as well as teaching the newcomer English words, how to say this and that in English. Every time the newcomer says something in English they cheer and celebrate his / her language progress. Slowly s/he starts feeling at home. S/he has got the acceptance and the understanding of the people around and starts building confidence and, of course, knowledge of the new language

Young children pick up in an amazing way and very quickly overcome the difficulties. Many times I have felt very proud when seeing my pupils starting to communicate in English really quickly, their parents being awed of how unexpectedly quickly their children pick up the new language, or feeling the excitement of my class when, for example, while working with a group of children, hearing cheers from the other part of the classroom: another group of children playing together calls my attention to announce, 'Miss, he speaks English!!'

I also need to talk about my experience in working at a Greek community school in London, a school for

the bilingual Greek – English children who attend the English school during week days and the Greek one on Saturdays. For four years I was teaching the reception class there, one class each year. My four reception classes were consisted mainly of children who came to school with a little, or sometimes no knowledge of Greek, as their parents wished them to be in contact with the Greek language and culture here in London. Therefore, in that case I came across the opposite condition: pupils who struggle in the second language, Greek, even though that is the language of origin, as they themselves consider English their first language. Obviously - they are immersed in the English language; they speak English every day in school, and with friends, relatives and everyone around.

In the beginning of my first year in that school my spontaneous reaction was to speak to my pupils in my language: Greek. This is why I was there for, right? Soon I realized that for my pupils that was a disaster. The language I was speaking was foreign for them and most of the five years olds had no interest in learning Greek, especially if the family didn't have strong relations with Greece at the time when they joined the community school. Again, crying and "I don't want to go to school" reactions, etc. So I needed to readjust my planning. Even if it doesn't sound "politically correct" I started teaching the Greek language in English. That was the language of communication for the majority of my pupils. And the pupils who happened to have a stronger knowledge of Greek became my "helpers" in translating everything between the two languages: songs, stories, games, traditions, and customs of my country. Through the process of going back and forth between the two languages, the "stronger" pupils had the chance to practice their bilingualism to a more advanced level, a metalanguage one, the chance to reflect on not only the meaning of what we want to say, but the language itself. As for the "weaker" ones, it was now easier to attend the community school happily, build their knowledge at their pace, scaffold their understanding of the new culture in a more acceptable way. Furthermore they found it more exciting that many things were explained to them by their peers.

All these personal experiences and the sensitivity for the bilingualism I have got inside, being a bilingual myself and finding myself very often in situations struggling to express, to communicate, and to make myself clear, meant I got excited when it was suggested I participate in this workshop. I started studying in order to support the theory about encouraging and helping to develop the home language. I was also very excited because as a result of my studies I could prove what I always felt inside: that being bilingual is a good thing. During my presentation indeed I have focused on the theoretical part of the bilingualism, talking about the benefits of the being bilingual, especially nowadays, and the vital importance of the home language on the process of learning the second language.

I felt it as a wonderful coincidence that the revised Early Years Foundation Stage, which came into operation last September, just two months before the conference, dedicates a paragraph to children who learn English as an Additional Language, talking for first time about "opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning supporting their language development at home". (<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/AllPublicationsNoRsg/Page1/DFE-00023-2012> page 6, 1.8)

Being there, talking about bilingualism to English native speakers I was a real life example of bilingualism myself. I consider it a very positive experience and a positive contribution for OMEP and for Early Years. Most importantly because at this workshop was the result of a collaboration with important people who have dedicated their lives to the Early Years. I am grateful to Angela and Dorothy for their idea, help and support, and once again I repeat that it was an honor for me standing next to them at that presentation. What is more, it was a real luck to stand next to Dorothy, who, being bilingual (English / Welsh) and is still studying languages, gives us all an example for life.

The conference overall was very organized, and very successful. We had the chance to attend some excellent presentations, from important speakers, especially those from Dr Eunice Lumsden and Prof Linden West and many practitioners who shared with us some very good school practice,; we had the chance to think, to reflect on a variety of topics and to learn about recently completed research.

About Michael Rosen's presentation, what can I say? It was not only a strong experience because of the large amount of knowledge provided and a chance of reflecting on the power of reading, the power of

literacy on the academic and personal development of all people, younger and older. It was also (or mainly) a magnificent example of 'teaching ability', for all of us working directly with young children, he showed us in a very tangible way that a lesson (in that case his presentation, but we should expand the idea as a lesson in any case) can be interesting if transmitted in an interesting, exciting and creative way, if the person who presents / teaches uses a variety of transmitting styles and strategies, and acting out things is one of these, very important to keep the audience / class active. Rosen indeed had kept us seated without complaining literally for more than half an hour, when he finished we couldn't believe our eyes looking at the clock, how quickly the time passed without realising.

Finally, the overall experience of this conference (as in general with conferences and all kinds of academic meetings), is not only worth it for its academic value. I strongly believe it is also the social aspect of these. We meet; we get to know each other better; we talk; we exchange ideas, knowledge and information; we learn; we reflect; we share; we together enjoy the sense of belonging to an international team. It might be because I am Greek that I consider these important. My ancient ancestors would consider it vital, as they used to meet in the Agora and produce high quality thinking, still alive after all these centuries. My personal opinion is that they were right.

I am very confident that there are more things to do in the future, more academic meetings, more collaboration with universities, more work to do for the Early Years and the Child of the World.

No. 147 Becoming bilingual: this is what we hope to achieve

By Angela Nurse

The joint OMEP- Canterbury Christ Church University Conference in November 2012 was successful and enjoyable. For me, it was a return to the institution where I had worked for fourteen years and which had seen a great transformation during my time: expansion onto several sites throughout the southeast and development of new programmes and departments. This included our own Department of Childhood Studies. It was also especially satisfying to see former students presenting papers confidently, now working for the University and authors in their own right.

The aim of our workshop was to present bilingualism and multilingualism in a positive light. OMEP is an international organisation and we are used to presentations and publications not only in European languages but others from across the world. Members meet frequently and need to find a common language denominator – mostly, for UK members, it is English but we can draw on other resources. We hope, by being willing to try, we not only converse and share ideas but also receive a glimpse of others' cultures and ways of life. The three members of the workshop each had a different experience of learning to speak a variety of European languages: Dorothy is a true bilingual using English and Welsh from childhood; Eleni, who is Greek by birth, speaks a number learnt later and now works in the UK as a teacher, speaking English all the time. Dorothy and Eleni often talk together in Spanish – they are both fluent. As for me, I come from an essentially monolingual family – there is no-one I have discovered so far who originated from beyond the British Isles. Yet many successful people in our society have forebears who arrived here from elsewhere: these include politicians, performers in the arts, scientists, celebrities, many of whom have a mixed heritage that is not immediately apparent. My husband has a smattering of Welsh derived from his early childhood on the Welsh borders but remembers little, though I am sure that placed for a time in a Welsh-speaking environment he would retrieve more than he thinks. My interest in languages therefore has hidden origins, perhaps situated in an intense desire to understand the history of Europe during the 1930s, the Second World War and time just after, when I was born. I think I recognised very early on that to understand what had happened I needed access to the individual contenders' history and culture through their own languages. I went on to study French, German and Latin at secondary school and then the modern languages to university level but never, until the last fifteen years, felt confident to use my French in everyday conversation. My proficiency in French leapt forward because I worked on a French led project where I became the English interpreter! My French colleagues either could or would

not speak to me in English, though a retired French inspector was wont to correct my French from time to time. I knew my immersion in French was working when I stopped having to compose a response in English and translate before saying anything, by which time the conversation had moved on. I also began to dream in French whenever I was in a French environment. I had the confidence to persevere when at first I was not understood and find other ways to express my thoughts. Words that I had last used at school suddenly rose out of my deep memory. My colleagues gave me the time because they valued what I had to say from a UK perspective.

We wanted to present language in a positive light. So often, because we are primarily English speakers, and this is a major language across the world, we see young children whose first language is not English as a 'problem' when, I believe, they have potentially an incredible gift. If presented with two or more languages as an infant, most children, in my experience of working in East London and visiting nurseries across Europe, manage to develop them naturally. In my family we are about to see this happen: my new granddaughter's father is Polish and her parents have already started to introduce her to both languages. Polish is now the second most spoken language in the UK, which has a long history of accepting people of Polish origin into our society. A colleague once told me of her granddaughter whose mother was Swedish; by three, not only could she converse freely – for a three year old – in both languages but was able to decide within seconds which language to use when faced with a new adult.

Within a short workshop it was not possible to debate some of the major issues to do with language teaching and learning in the UK. To my way of thinking there is no clear consensus on supporting first languages nor when to introduce a second language (and which should this be?) to English speakers. Our intentions, however, were to raise the quality of debate and bring these aims into consideration (with my granddaughter in mind):

- To develop both her languages in parallel and to learn to value both
- To ensure that she feels at ease with both her British and Polish relatives and in either country
- To give her access to her Polish heritage, as well as her British one
- To view her bilingualism as a gift which will enhance her future and offer her choices.

This has been a very personal response to the day's proceedings, though hopefully guiding those readers who are interested in continuing their exploration further into this fascinating and important area of learning. Both Dorothy and Eleni added personal reflections as well as offering some specific information and guidance in the important task that parents and other relatives commence and practitioners continue. To support you there is one publishing company which concentrates on language:

Multilingual Matters: www.multilingual-matters.com

One of their recent publications includes not only information as children grow but also includes reflections from the children as they become adults. This is:-

Claire Thomas (2012) *Growing Up with Languages: Reflections on Multilingual Childhoods*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters

No. 148

Infinite Adventures Workshop

By Hannah Lefeuve



I work as an independent creative artist with various early years groups, including nursery, pre-school, children's centre and family groups. In this conference workshop, I aimed for early years practitioners to experience a session first-hand, putting themselves in place of the child.

A significant development of the revised UK Early Years Foundation Stage Framework has been the introduction of three Characteristics of Effective Learning. In order to engender these characteristics in our children, we need to embody them ourselves, giving opportunity for practitioners to Play and Explore, engage in Active Learning and Creativity and Critical Thinking.

The Infinite Adventures workshop explored ways of creating movement journeys, using participants' ideas and developing them into a story. The workshop aimed to demonstrate the infinite possibilities for creating stories from just a few simple resources, some music, our own bodies and imagination. The following descriptive extract gives an idea of how our story began.

We gather on four yoga mats, set out in a square in the centre of a clear room. We settle down to sleep, on and around the mats. Resting, finding stillness and our own unique and comfortable sleeping shapes. Slowly we start to wake up the body, exploring stretches and creating a whole variety of shapes.

As the 'sun wakes up', we move to sitting, stretching our arms up as we breathe in, down on the out breath. We make ourselves tiny, then huge, stretching our limbs wide. Stretching our feet out in front, we bring our arms up to turn on the taps to take an imaginary shower. As the water comes on, our fingers patter down the body, the first blast is quite cold, so we shiver a little before the next blast which is lovely and warm. We rub our hands together to warm up the hands and open them to smell the soap. A wealth

of soap flavours emerge – “vanilla, strawberry, chocolate, coconut, lavender!” We breathe in all these wonderful aromas, then rub the soap all over our bodies before washing it clean. Then we shake off all the water, first our hands, then legs, arms and whole body. I have in my hands story soap. I ask the group what they would like to happen in the story. Somebody suggests a troll, a princess, a castle, some sandwiches...

Working physically in this way is not only engaging for children we work with and can extend concentration spans, but is also beneficial for ourselves. Whilst we are Playing and Exploring together, engaging in Active Learning and Creativity and Critical Thinking, we are also fostering Personal, Social, Emotional Development, Communication and Language and Physical Development.

Beginning on mats provides a still, calm meeting point and helps focus, settle and level a group before explorations. By using our imagination at the same time as movement, we often forget that we are moving and multiply the benefits to the muscles, whilst bringing about a whole variety of movement qualities and dynamics.

Back in the workshop, we begin on our journey, which lasts just under an hour. We become hot and invigorated, problem solving as a group. “How are we going to get there? It’s such a long way!” We rearrange the mats to create roads, bridges and runways as travel by camel, by car, on an overnight flight and finally arrive at a castle. We create a draw bridge to get into the castle, where a troll lives and a princess is stuck in the tower. Climbing down the stairs, following the leader, we hold onto a large piece of elastic, which stretches out to become a cauldron down in the dungeon where the troll lives. At the end of our adventure, we settle down to sleep in a relaxation under the stars.

In one hour we crawled, rolled, jumped, stretched, walked and stomped, building a story together, from beginning to middle to end. In an early years setting, from such a story, further role play and activities might occur as follow up activities. The workshop aimed to demonstrate a flexible template that could apply to a wide range of settings, spaces, themes, interests, time frames and groupings. As well as taking ideas from the children, a story book might provide the starting point, working through the book, exploring ideas physically before returning to the book to turn over pages to see what happens next.

Participants from the Infinite Adventures workshop commented: “What I remember is the permission to claim some space, and to work together, using our bodies, minds, hearts and imagination” . It was a dangerous journey, because of the trolls, and their terrible roar (which I happily provided). The roar was rather scary and some people wanted to hide. We had to work hard to keep the journey going, across some dangerous spaces. We sweated - or at least I did, which was good preparation for giving a keynote.



“We flew some of the way - soared in fact, with a glorious humming and roaring - but also needed to cross chasms and river gorges, by foot, all of us working together. And we could celebrate and sing at the end, as we reached journey’s end; an epiphany of playfulness, joy and collective endeavour. Yes, there was a car, and animals to help us on our way, but the journey required eclectic forms of transport, and not to be tied down by one mode. The trolls were too dangerous for that! I also remember there were giraffes involved, with long necks, that we struggled to represent: maybe they were there to help us reach up to a castle....?” (Professor Linden West, Director of Research Development, Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University)

“I really enjoyed every minute of the session and was pleasantly surprised by the simple ideas, which can transform a small space into a magical playground.” (Daniella, New Leaders in Early Years). Overall, we had great fun in this session. The group responded with enthusiasm and gusto to this and I hope that it will inspire many more stories and explorations in practitioners and children in the future.

No. 149

Supporting the multimodal child - A language arts approach

By Bianca Bailey

Supporting the multimodal child ©

Communication and language as: written language, oral language, drama, movement, art, and music. Language is seen as art, as a way of communicating and expressing feelings, thoughts, opinions, and emotions.

In today's fast moving and evolving world, children and young people need to be able to communicate using a variety of modes in their multimodal environments. **VEPP**™ a language arts approach allows children and young people to expand their 'communication potential' and develop a wide range of literacy skills. Influenced by the work of Jerome C. Harste, a renowned scholar in the realm of literacy development education, . . **VEPP**™ is designed to change the way we think about literacy and respond to the needs of children and young people today.

According to Harste (2000), language arts is focusing on developing literacy skills through the process of 'transmediation' (2000:3), where you take what you know in one sign system (language) and being able to 'recast' it in another system (art). This approach is based on the idea that as we explore the world around us, we share knowledge, thoughts, and emotions through a variety of modes of communication; verbal communication, expressive arts, visual arts, dance and movement. All of these are part of the basis of a language arts programme as children and young people need these to mediate their world and be 'literate' in it.

'The goal of a good language arts program is to expand communication potential' (Hartse 2000:4).

The goal of . **VEPP**™ is to allow children and young people to develop into highly literate individuals, ready to succeed in the 21st century. **VEPP**™ is primarily an early literacy approach, designed to support children aged 3-7 years, as its multifaceted approach allows children to develop a rich language arts vocabulary in the early years. However, . **VEPP**™ can also be used a guide for practitioners and educators supporting all children and young

Vocabulary

Children and young people:

- **Develop** language and an understanding of formation and structure.
- **Develop** an understanding of what the words they hear mean and how to appropriately use them.

Visual

Children and young people:

- **Develop** an understanding of the visual images that they see around them, on-line, on the television, and through the media.
- **We support** children and young people to become 'digitally literate' as well as competent sign readers, able to interpret and use the signs that they see in their internal (home) and external (community) environments.

Enjoyment

Children and young people:

- **Enjoy books, stories, and narrative:** as a mode of communication and expression and are motivated to read.
- **Enjoy talking and sharing thoughts with others:** as a mode of communication and expression and are motivated to speak.
- **Enjoy music and rhyme:** as a mode of communication and expression and are motivated to sing and

explore

- **Enjoy drama and storytelling:** as a mode of communication and expression and are motivated to act.
- **Enjoying dance and movement:** as a mode of communication and expression and are motivated to move.

Phonological Awareness

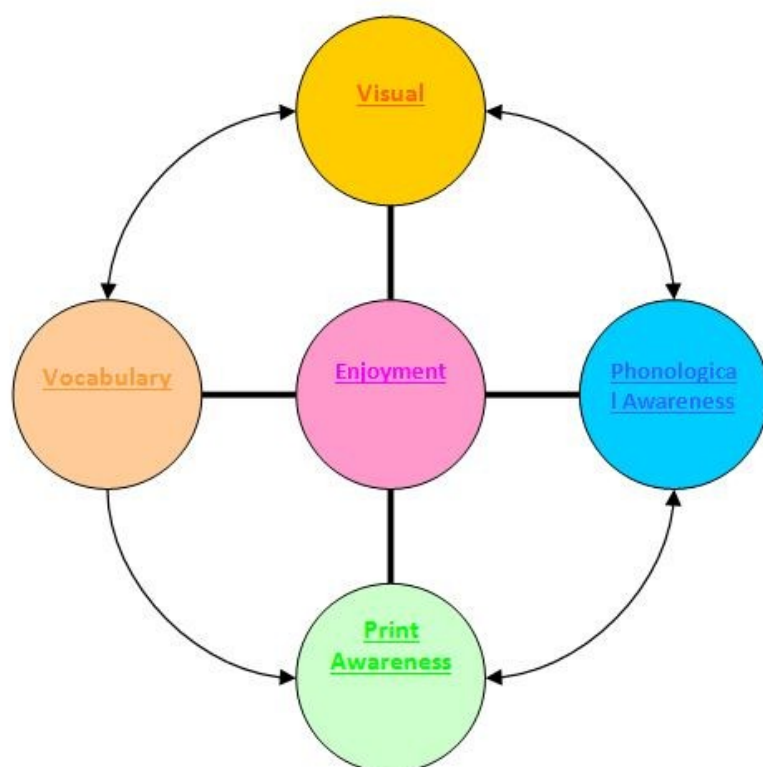
Children and young people:

- **Develop** an awareness of individual sound segments (phonemes) and are able to recognise them.
- **Develop** the ability to break up words into smaller sound segments in order to aid their reading of print.
- **Possess** an awareness of the sound patterns of English, through their awareness of rhyme.

Print Awareness

Children and young people:

- **Possess** knowledge of the alphabet and are able to recognise and distinguish between letters and corresponding sounds.
- **Develop** an understanding of the rules of print and what is required to record oral language in order to develop print.
- **Develop** an understanding of the purpose and function of print; to tell stories, transfer information, and give directions.



VEPP™ is a holistic approach to learning, based on a circular learning model. This model recognises that children do not learn linearly but that learning is connected and continuous. However, at the heart of this model is enjoyment, based on the idea that children and young people need to enjoy learning, enjoy books, enjoy conversations, enjoy art, dance and movement, and more in order to learn and develop in the other areas of **VEPP**™ as well as other areas of learning and development.

Enjoyment needs to be at the heart of what you do so that children can express themselves, learn and grow.

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Websites:

Child Learning Institute – University of Texas: www.childlearninginstitute.org

No. 150

What is understood by the concept of 'school readiness'?

By Polly Bolshaw

School readiness is a concept that has come to the forefront of early years education. With Sarah Teather asking that part of Dame Tickell's review of the EYFS focussed on “‘what is needed to give [children] the best start at school’” (DfE, 2011) and the subsequent introduction of a revised EYFS which aims to promote “teaching and learning to ensure children’s ‘school readiness’” (2012a:2), it is clear that the notion is of growing importance. This is also reflected in trials taking place of “payment by results” in Sure Start Children’s Centres, in which one measure of centres is the progress they make towards school readiness – defined in this case as the extent to which they “narrow the gap” in Foundation Stage Profile scores, increase uptake in the number of disadvantaged two-year-olds receiving 15-hours of free early education, and also increase uptake of early education amongst disadvantaged three-year-olds (DfE, 2012b). With these many references to “school readiness” within new policy, I decided to conduct research within a Sure Start Children’s Centre to investigate, in part, what practitioners, parents and, crucially, children understand by being ready for school

Nine participants, composed of parents of reception-age children, teachers, early years practitioners and reception-age children were asked in semi-structured interviews what they understood by the idea of being ready for school. Opinions differed greatly – with reception-age children primarily identifying academic skills and the ability to listen to instructions as crucial, for instance, to “write the right thing that the teacher asks you to”, and be “sitting down at the desk and sitting nicely”. This was in complete contrast to teacher’s expectations, who required children to be ready, “not necessarily to write but to mark make” and stating, “I can’t sit down in a chair all day, so why would we think it’s acceptable for a five-year old?” Teachers placed a much higher importance in personal and social skills, such as being independent and emotionally secure, which was echoed by parents, with one parent stating, “confidence plays a big part, because if the child is confident then and emotionally secure, then again you can build upon, teachers can build upon the rest”. However, practitioners tended to believe that parents would understand being ready for school as being able to complete academic exercises: “the parents always panic that their child can’t write their name or doesn’t know all their numbers”, and did not imagine that parents would put such a great importance on personal and emotional development as necessary traits for starting school. Practitioners also expressed concerns about the dangers of teaching children before they are ready. ‘If you try to teach it to them too soon, then they are just completely lost’. The notion that it may be detrimental to try to teach children before they are ready was echoed at a TACTYC meeting I attended at the House of Commons in October 2012, in which Whitebread and Bingham (2012) gave evidence to suggest that starting formal education too young may be ill-advised – drawing attention to research from

Suggate et al (2007) which showed that a group of Australian children who were taught to read from the age of seven were reading at the same level as another group who had begun reading at five – and the former group had a better level of comprehension.

Having completed this research, I applied to present at the joint conference organised between OMEP and Canterbury Christ Church University, “Making a Difference: Transforming Early Years Practice”. I thought it would be a valuable opportunity to draw attention to the disparities in what different parties believe by the notion of school readiness, as well as have the opportunity to talk to other members of the early years sector on their views and opinions on necessary skills for being ready for school. The responses were thought-provoking, with several practitioners recognising that the focus should not be on labelling children as “school-ready” – and thus already failing if they were not competent in certain skills or attributes – but on ensuring that schools offered an appropriate environment for the children and that the family were prepared too – echoing UNICEF’s (2012) multi-faceted approach to school readiness – encompassing the ready children, ready school and ready families. Staff in children’s centres also raised concerns about the prospect of an introduction of a “payment-by-results” scheme, identifying that, with the most disadvantaged children beginning free early years education in nursery and preschool at two, this was limiting the time that children’s centres were able to spend with the families and children themselves, and thus felt they had less opportunities and time to see and directly influence the learning and development of children and “narrow the gap” in terms of the children’s development when they reach the end of the Foundation Stage. However, of course, centres are judged in Ofsted inspections by their ability to work in partnership with early years providers, thus as part of this centres should be building up links and relationships with settings within the reach area to impact on learning and development and influence FSP scores in this way.

With the findings of this research, as well as points raised at the Making a Difference conference, recommendations can be made in how this children’s centre could increase its efforts to promote school readiness. Practitioners and parents need to ensure that they share their expectations of attributes needed for starting school with children, so that children are aware of the importance of doing things for themselves, and are not worried if, for example, they can’t “write nicely”, when that is a skill not viewed as a priority by the teachers. Feedback during the conference also recognised the need for centres to identify that, with disadvantaged two-year-olds now receiving 15-hours of early years entitlement, they are going to need to ensure they do not “lose” these families that previously would have accessed the centre. Practitioners and parents need to be aware that they, too, have a role in being “ready”, as it only through participation from all three parties that “school readiness” can exist. And above all, practitioners and parents need to remember, as a Year One Teacher noted, “We just need them to be little people. Little people that are going to grow into big people.”

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No. 151

Early Years Effective Transitions - From Pre-school to Reception Class By Hilary Welland

As Deputy Manager and SENCo of a Pre-School in Tunbridge Wells with a diverse social and cultural mix, I have been keen to ensure both my personal professional development, as well as enhancing the quality of provision for children and their families. Embarking on a degree leading to post graduate recognition with the EYPS, I am now in my final stages at Canterbury Christ Church, Medway campus.

A familiar story within the Early Years Sector, balancing commitments of home, work and professional study, meant the daunting prospect of my first action research project would need to suitably dovetail into practice, and offer practical solutions to effectively enhance provision and both optimise and justify the time spent on research.

So where to start? With a broad objective to look at the efficacy of an area of provision, and taking impetus from reflection of personal experiences, (both from my own childhood and those of my children), my attention focused on transitions to the Reception class, and the levels of excitement and anxiety for children and their families during this period of potential '*discontinuity*', (Margetts, 2002), and how this can be effectively supported.

As a novice researcher, I had little ambition that my research would be in any way '*transformative*', nevertheless discussions with a range of professional educators, children and families, married with research unveiling interesting and innovative practice and ideas, both nationally and internationally, (Lincolnshire County Council 2011 and Dockett and Perry 2001), led to amalgamation, partial replication and adaption to develop my own 'Transitions to Reception Programme and practical resources.

The positive effects of an inclusive social approach, involving all stakeholders, resulted in development of a collaborative community project, any reluctant participants becoming engaged through presentations to clarify the vision, outlining ultimate benefits and empowering individuals through involvement in the process and implementation of practical activities.

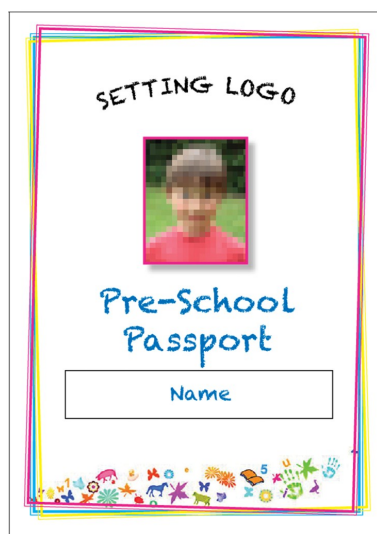


In response to some of the transition concerns raised by Pre-School children and their families, our Pre-School mascot, '*Barna-Bear*' became an 'Ambassador Bear', visiting and involving the local schools. The significant involvement of the Reception class children, taking photographs of '*Barna-Bear*' wearing their school uniform, helped develop photographic books about life in the Reception class, in turn supporting their own forthcoming transition into Year 1.

These photographic books have become a popular resource for new children and families to look at together, offering a visual taste of life in each school's Reception class, through familiarity with areas of the school environment and faces of significant adults, for instance the Reception Teacher, classroom and lunchtime assistants.

Significantly for the Pre-School children, these photographs also offer answers to some of their specific questions, such as, "what do the toilets look like and where will I play and eat lunch?".

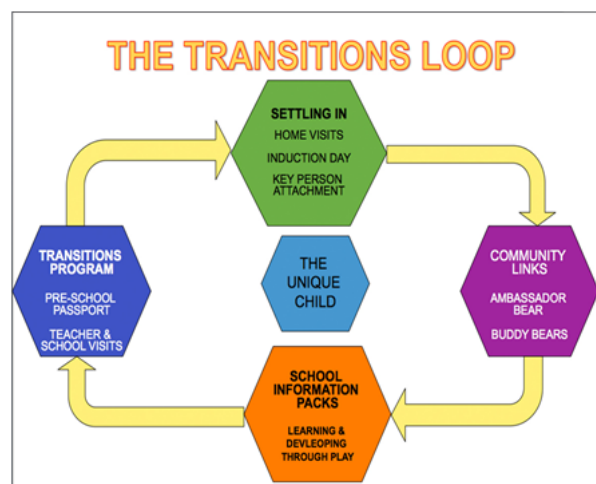
In parallel, the development of the '*Pre-School Passport*', included suggestions raised by all research participants. Offering the new school a contemporary and holistic view about each child's unique character, the '*Pre-School Passport*', is developed during the last term at Pre-School, being the child's perspective all about themselves, including their likes and dislikes, and presented through their drawings, photographs, writing or adult scribing. Each child's individualised '*Pre-School Passport*' being supported in its' development by the child's family and Key Person at Pre-School and shared with the new Reception teacher prior to starting school.



The opportunity to present my research at the conference led to an interesting discussion with other practitioners and I was able to share the materials I have developed to support children's transitions.

Resulting from the creation of these resources and in collaboration with the local primary schools, 'School Information Packs' have been developed for families to look through to gain an insight into different schools.

Inclusion of a sample of school uniform, the school's prospectus and of course the photographic book of '*Barna-Bear's Ambassador Adventures*', all contributing to introduce the schools to prospective new families or to familiarise those who have already chosen their new school.



Significantly, the knock-on effect of this programme, has cascaded to impact on other areas of practice, offering supportive practice to children and their families, from before they start Pre-school right through to when they leave to go to the Reception class. As a natural extension to the project, enhancement of our 'Settling In' process completes a '*Transitions Loop*' as a continuum of resources and activities, with information leaflets, meeting events, home visits, and book loans all contributing to smooth and happy transitions.

The particular success of the adventures to school of '*Barna-Bear*', as our mascot ambassador, expanding into help from his friends the '*Buddy Bears*', to support children and families to become connected to the Pre-

School 'family'. The '*Buddy Bears*', knitted by a team of dedicated volunteers, are loaned to children to take home, their families being encouraged to support children to make up a booklet of '*Buddy Bear's*' adventures with their child, using drawings and photographs, (camera loans also being made available), adventures ranging from a trip to the park or shops to holidays or helping celebrate a festival. These booklets are then brought into Pre-School to share with their Key Person, (and of course '*Barna-Bear*'), linking the home learning environment and their Pre-School 'family'.

The positive feedback from early years providers, reception class teams, parents and their children, indicates how this transitions programme has contributed to create positive attitudes towards transitory times, helping remove to barriers or worries and broaden the perspectives of educators, families,



and importantly children. Through a collaborative community approach the development of this cyclical continuum of resources, offers supportive practice to children and their families to achieve effective and happy transitions, both *into*, and *out of*, Pre-School.

Subsequent interest, at first somewhat surprising, has spread from families, schools and early years providers, to wider fields of professional pedagogues. Spearheaded by the opportunity to share my experiences by presentation of a workshop at the '*Making a Difference: Transforming Early Years Practice*' Conference last November, (held jointly by OMEP and Canterbury Christ Church University), has engendered further inquiry and interest, particularly with the imminent allocation of primary school admissions, once again raising the profile of requirements to effectively support the transitions process.

Sharing effective practice, however small, not only contributes to support young children and their families, but offers opportunities for professional recognition, reciprocity and further development.

As professional pedagogues, we are perfectly placed to help nurture and establish a positive benchmark for children's future happy attitudes towards their play, learning experiences and onward education, a happy and smooth transition may therefore be a very good place to start.

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No. 152 Forest School from Different Perspectives My experience as a Research Intern in a Forest School Programme By Wen Shao

Forest Schools

The Scandinavian 'forest school' approach started to be translated to the UK in the 1990s. Since then, serial evaluation of forest schools has been carried out in England, Wales and Scotland (O' Brien and Murray, 2003; 2005; 2006; 2007; Borradaile, 2006; Maynard, 2007; Kenny, 2010). Those evaluations found that children gain social and physical skills as well as confidence and self-esteem through the forest school experience. In addition to offering a lot of learning opportunities in the fresh air and open space, forest school could help tackle problems of obesity and behavioural problems (Knight, 2009).

Internship to Conference

In the summer of 2012, I worked as a research intern evaluating a ten-week forest school programme involving 30 Reception year children. The aim was to explore the impacts of the forest school on the children, their parents, the school staff and the forest school staff. This research provided the focus for the workshop I delivered at the conference. I felt that sharing my experiences and research in this way was a good opportunity to contribute to the debate on forest schools in the UK. I hoped that feedback from the participants in the programme would contribute to people's understanding of the potential impacts of forest schools and to the benefit of research. I also hoped that my experience as a research intern

would encourage my fellow students in their research.

Collecting Voices

Different methods were used in order to collect opinions from different participants. Questionnaires were sent to the children's parents, school teaching staff and forest school staff to bring together their observations on the children. Informal interviews and discussions with forest school staff and school teachers were conducted at their convenience. At the same time, I worked alongside the forest school staff and children during the last three sessions so that I could observe and talk to them. I also paid a visit to the school after the forest school programme finished to talk to children and teachers about their experiences.

Adults' Perspectives

The results from the questionnaires to adults are illustrated in Figure 1 (see below). The intersection between the three sets represents the observations shared by the different adult groups.

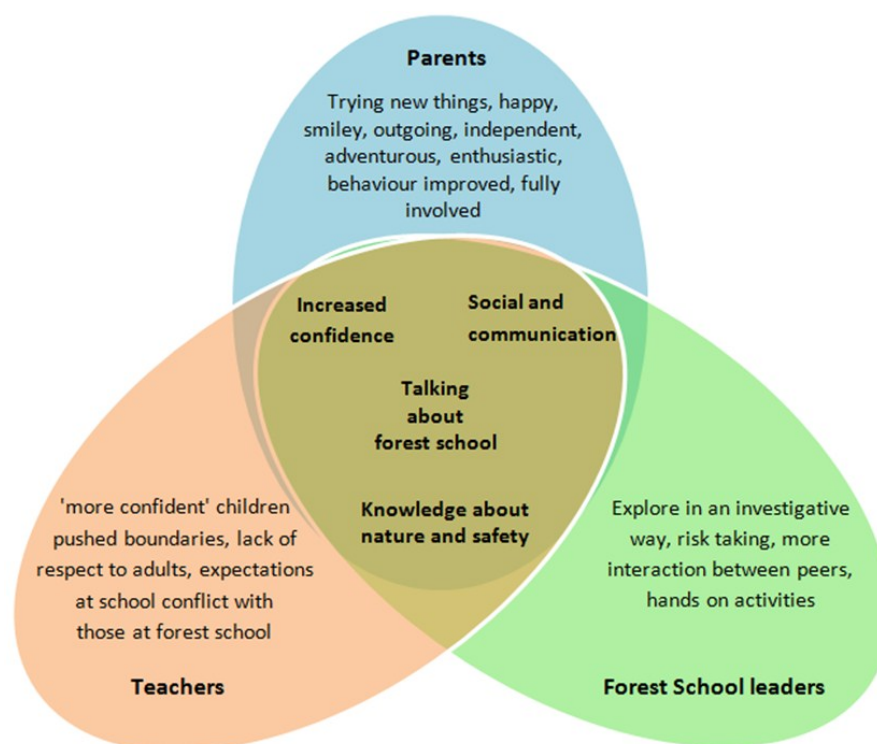


Figure 1 - Summary of adults' feedback concerning forest school's impact on children

The three groups of adults I consulted were in agreement about the following four impacts of the forest school:

- Increased confidence - children developed their independence by having the freedom, time and space to explore and become more confident in natural surroundings.

"Pupils feel free to roam and explore, a freedom that is not as great at school. Quiet pupils relax and come out of themselves. – teaching assistant, Kent"

- Communication skills—working in groups and participating in fun activities encouraged children to communicate with their peers and adults in a more relaxed environment.

"My daughter has tried things she would normally not, being around friends has encouraged her. Her confidence has grown. Has been good to hear my daughter talk of adult male role models. Has been great to collect a smiley, happy, enthusiastic mud covered little girl. –parent A"

- Social skills - interacting with peers and adults made children more aware of the consequences of their actions upon other people.

"He has settled down at school and his behaviour has improved dramatically, and I believe this is due to him being outside and able to get fully involved in what is happening. I believe freedom from classroom restrictions is a necessity in today's education. - parent B"

- Knowledge and understanding – children learned about health and safety and also how to appreciate the environment and the wildlife.

"Talked vividly about everything she did. Thoroughly enjoyed getting muddy and covered in paint. Talked about trees and now more inclined to climb a tree. Has learnt a lot about fires and is more aware of dangers and how to be sensible around them. – parent C"

These positive impacts have also been recognised in other forest school evaluation projects (O' Brien and Murray, 2003; 2005; 2006; 2007; Borradaile, 2006; Maynard, 2007; Kenny, 2010).

Difference in Voices

Comparing the difference in adults' description of children, it could suggest that the parents were more focused on their children's wellbeing and personal, social and emotional development while forest school staff were more focused on the quality of the learning experience in terms of enabling children to learn naturally in a more relaxed environment. The teachers were more concerned with clashes with school expectations and evidence for the EYFS outcomes. School teaching staff have also expressed concerns about the children's behaviour and manner towards adults in the woods.

"The behaviour expectation at forest school at times conflicted with school expectations. This manifested itself in children not listening to adults and at times showing a lack of respect. ... The more confident children have tested boundaries and at time behaved rudely or inappropriately – reception year leader"

Children's Voices

From the children's point of view, what they liked about the forest school are activities they would not normally have experienced at school, for example: roasting marshmallows, climbing trees and getting muddy. These activities represent fun, freedom and relaxation that also contribute to children's wellbeing alongside other development areas. Furthermore, children enjoy the power balanced, relaxed and close relationships with the forest school staff. It is recognised by the Department of Health (2000) that safeguarding and promoting children's welfare covers many aspects. Social relationships, emotional warmth and identity are among all other needs. What children like about the forest school staff demonstrates that children need positive relationships, that they want recognition and that they enjoy emotional warmth from adults. It has also been indicated in the Leuven Scale of wellbeing (Laevens et al, 2005).

Bridging the Gap

By analysing adults' and children's perspectives, this forest school programme showed positive impacts on children's development which encouraged both the children and adults to explore more outside the classroom. It was a positive and effective programme. However, the themes which emerged from the findings are deeper than the approach itself. Behind the challenges of meeting curriculum outcomes and conflicting behavioural expectations, there is a gap between who children are and what adults understand children to be. Research suggests that the Forest School can bridge this gap (Borradaile, 2006; Maynard, 2007; Knight, 2009; Kenny, 2010). However, when we look at the four principles of the EYFS (2008, 2012), namely a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environment and that children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates, we may realise that the appeal of the Forest School approach is a call for reflection on views on children and childhood, and hence practice, in the early years.

The opportunity to present the results of this small research project to an audience of experienced forest school and early years practitioners was extremely valuable. We had discussions about the development of forest schools in the UK and the ethos behind this approach. Leading this workshop has made me more confident in furthering this short term evaluation into my dissertation project. It was also very inspiring to hear advice and encouragement from people who are passionate about early years education.

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Warm Invitation to Participate in the 65th OMEP World Congress 11 – 13 July, 2013 in Shanghai, China

OME – Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire – would like to invite you to take part in the World Congress – 'Enhancing the Development of Early Childhood Education: Opportunities and Quality', held in Shanghai, China, 11 – 13 July 2013. We kindly ask you to visit the congress website: <http://omep2013.age06.com/> where you can read all about the congress.

Keynote Speakers

Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

Professor and coordinator for early childhood education at the Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. World president of OMEP.

Margaret Carr

Professor of Education and Director of the Early Years Research Center at the University of Waikato in New Zealand.

Jacqueline Jones

Dr. Jacqueline Jones is a policy maker, researcher, and educator. She has served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning in the US Department of Education.

Tove Mogstad Slinde

A Senior Advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, Department of Early Childhood Education and Care. Since 2012 she is the Chair of the Network on Early Childhood Education and Care in OECD.

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