

# Early Years' Matters

Winter 2001/2

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## Welcome To Early Years' Matters

I am pleased to welcome you to this first edition of *Early Years' Matters*, the early years newsletter. Since 1996 there has been a remarkable expansion of government-funded, early years education in Scotland. Learning and Teaching Scotland, with encouragement and support from the Scottish Executive, has published a substantial amount of guidance on the curriculum and assessment for early years and it is our intention to continue to devote attention and resources to this important stage of education.

This newsletter, the first in a continuing series, encourages readers to look critically and objectively at early years provision and practice. We all recognise the importance of giving children the best possible start in life and therefore it is incumbent on us to reflect on how best this can be done in partnership with parents and carers.

As a grandfather of two young children I admit to a very personal interest in early years education! I watch (with wonder) their remarkable development from week to week as they engage and interact with their surroundings. We all marvel at young children's capacity and capability for learning and their natural desire to explore and learn and assimilate new behaviours. Equally, we cannot fail to observe that each is an individual

in his or her own right with individual likes, dislikes and preferred methods of engaging with others and their environment.

The challenge for us as educators (and for parents and carers) is to harness the curiosity and love of learning displayed by young children and recognise that if we can help them maintain these dispositions then we provide the soundest of foundations for lifelong learning.

With this in mind, a great responsibility is placed upon early years practitioners, and upon those who support them. Learning and Teaching Scotland will therefore continue to give a particular priority to this aspect of our work.

**Mike Baughan**  
Chief Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland

Online at [www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears/earlyyearsmatters](http://www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears/earlyyearsmatters)



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# Citizenship and Early Education

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## Introduction

A vision of education has to be beyond the immediate political imperatives of our time, and be inspired by a vision that is 'in the common good'. We educate young children to have the capability of acting in the common good.

Education is not just concerned with the education of those who are about to become citizens, but with the education of

those who are already citizens. We work in schools and centres with children who are citizens, who have rights and responsibilities, and who are entitled to an education for the present and the future. They are not *just becoming* citizens; they *are* citizens. The challenge for those in early education is how to begin this process of education in a meaningful way and ensure its continuity. So much about citizenship is habit-forming. These habits have to be formed from the earliest stages and, as is true with so many aspects of education, early educators have to have a vision of what this means for the youngest and most vulnerable of our society. We need to develop habits of mind, habits of hand, and habits of heart.

## The nature of citizens and education

This needs to be begun from the earliest stages of education. Education is a conversation from generation to generation. It takes place with different people in different places. Education is about engaging people in communities of interest to transform their society and to make the world a better place.

So often the purposes of education are confused with the means. The purposes of education must surely include the formation of children who are loving, caring and compassionate, who serve others, and who appreciate beauty. It would seem logical therefore that they feature in the nature of early education – indeed in education at all levels.

*To encourage risks and know there is safety in the school  
To know that it is appropriate to take risks, and that there is safety in friendship and in the education settings which we offer. We need to be courageous and to promote courageous, prudent behaviour.*

The vision of citizenship is based on service and on the development of attitudes and ways of thinking concerned with peace, and the care of self and of others. It does not easily offer a body of knowledge to be learned, but is concerned with learning how to learn, and learning how to be at peace with oneself and one's community.

Teaching young citizens implies a capacity to build individuals and communities. This is sometimes referred to as 'active citizenship'. Since much of this is concerned with the values that people hold, and the contribution that they are able, or prepared, to make to society, it should be well understood that this is a form of education which is not only about the acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, the amount of knowledge required may be extremely limited. Education for formal citizens is centrally concerned with developing those attitudes and dispositions that promote service in society – helping each other and developing friendships. Forming active citizens therefore values each individual for the gifts and talents that each has, as well as providing a means of empowering each person to contribute to the benefit of all society.

*To remember children have memories  
These memories will be of school, and of teachers.  
They rely on the smiling eyes of the teacher.*

## Early education and lifelong learning

The tendency to describe education in terms of outcomes and targets, to turn each perspective into 'a problem', to use the language of the marketplace – is to fail to engage the hearts and souls of those who learn. Forming citizens is as much about restoring and maintaining a sense of passion, joy and motivation as it is about some 'performance'. We must therefore focus on the processes of education and not on outcomes and products.

There should be clarity about the essential core values that characterise citizens, and these should be revisited in new and challenging situations suitable for the age and stage of development of the learner. As with all effective education these contexts should be relevant, balanced and suitable

for discussion and consideration by the learners at whatever point these matters are raised in the lives of the learners.

## The relationships established by the educator

At the heart of education is the relationships created by the educator. The ways in which the educator models ways of behaving and establishing the appropriate kinds of relationships can have a profound impact on the learning of young people. In the establishment of a democratic society the foundations are often laid in the processes of learning.

This is not to imply an easy or unproblematic application of principles and values from one setting to another. The learning environment for young people is in many respects a secure, uncomplicated, managed community, and here the learner finds some safety in exploring relationships. The wider world is altogether more complex, more uncertain and more threatening. A successful education system should allow ease of transition and application from the classroom to wider society.

*To express our care for children  
Not only in what we say but in how we act with children.  
Education is a deeply human activity of love, of care, of values and of compassion.*

## What is to be learned and how this takes place ('context')

Central to any consideration about applying the ideas, values, principles or competencies of learning is the need to have a clear idea about the nature of what a person expects of education. This is not only a matter of content or of context, but requires an understanding that education is intended to make us more suited for life. This requires a capacity for problem solving, for effective communication, for personal and interpersonal relationships, and for all the 'core skills' required for participating as an autonomous person in local and global communities. A full education engages the heart and soul of the learner. A hierarchy of learning pays attention to:

- learning how to become
- learning how to be
- learning how to do
- learning how to learn
- learning how to repeat.

The 'content' of courses ought to address these, but there is more to education than the identification of skills, concepts and information – although these do play a part, and should not be ignored.

## The active participation of both learner and educator

It is the active participation of both learning and teaching that characterises an effective education. The educator is most effective as 'a witness' or 'role model' and this has a profound impact on the learner. In so many ways the educator is also a learner.

Ways of promoting and forming citizens should be concerned not only with the content and skills of education, but with the human dispositions of dignity, humility, liberty and freedom in a world that does not always promote these as vital to the human condition. This may mean putting dignity before price, and humanity before economy. These are some of the marks of global citizenship.

## Conclusion

Active citizenship is not just a way of life, it is a way of living. A full education engages the heart and soul of the learner. The challenges for citizenship are to free itself from these immediate pressures and imperatives so that the shining example of a good education as the right of each child is fully justified in our country.

*To encourage and feed dreams  
Children have to have dreams and we should make sure that these are worthy of us and all we do in education.*

*To rid society of the pain of the fearful heart  
So much of what we see in the rushed and fragmented world of today creates the fearful heart ... in the teacher, in the parent, in society generally.*

# Care and Learning for the Very Young

Linda Gregson

Early Education and Childcare Division, Scottish Executive

Over the past few years, there have been major changes in the way childcare services are delivered and in the expectations made of service providers. There has been a huge growth in the provision of government-funded pre-school education (often integrated with wraparound or extended childcare provision) for three- and four-year-olds and a key Executive initiative – Sure Start Scotland – funds integrated support services to vulnerable families with very young children. Public appreciation of the importance of early education and childcare has gained pace, as has the appetite for continuous professional development and the pursuit of best practice by practitioners.

## Care and learning are intertwined

Current policy recognises that care and learning are intertwined at the pre-school stage. These policies are reflected in recent materials published by the Executive and its partners, including *Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5*, the self-evaluation guide *Child at the Centre*, the recently published draft national standards for children's day-care and the report of the action team on integrated services.

By comparison, the development of a care and learning framework for children aged 0–3 has, until recently, been less of a priority. The first years of a child's life, however, are ones in which it is learning all the time, and which are important to its future development. Crucial to their development is the nature and quality of the interactions that both parents and carers have with children from birth onwards. These early experiences will affect their subsequent growth, their later attitude to learning and their resilience and self-worth in pre-school education and beyond.

## Developing a framework

The Scottish Executive, with the support of Learning and Teaching Scotland, hosted a brainstorming session in February of this year, during which academics, childcare specialists, professional advisers and childcare workers exchanged ideas about a possible care and learning framework for children aged 0–3. Questions raised by the session included whether there was a case for issuing national advice, what that advice might include, whether that advice should be aimed at professional childcare workers or also to parents and how any advice would tie in with that currently issued for 3–5s.

Before these questions can be answered we need to learn more about how parents and carers can contribute positively to the development of the very youngest children.

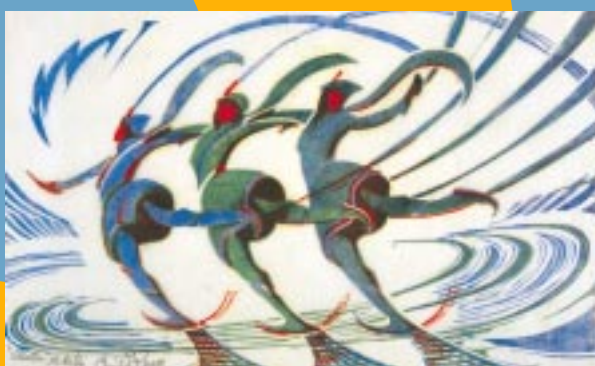
## Review of research

To this end the Executive has recently commissioned a review of the research findings available in the area of care and learning for children aged 0–3. This literature review will be undertaken by a team of academics, led by Professor Colwyn Trevarthen, the Professor of Child Psychology at the University of Edinburgh, and should be completed by the end of January 2002. The review will investigate many areas, but one of its main aims will be to help determine what makes a quality care and learning experience for children under 3.

This literature review will be complemented by two other studies. Learning and Teaching Scotland is currently reviewing existing local authority practice in 0–3 childcare. In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England and Wales has commissioned a literature review from a team of academics at Manchester Metropolitan University. The Manchester team will exchange information and experiences with Professor Trevarthen's team, so the two literature reviews should complement, rather than duplicate, each other.

## Looking ahead

By spring 2002, therefore, a considerable amount of groundwork will have been done in order to establish which factors contribute towards a positive learning and caring environment for children aged 0–3. This work should provide an important foundation for future discussions about care for very young children. Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Executive will continue to work together to maintain a dialogue with those in the field, in order to promote practices that provide very young children with the best possible learning and caring environment.



*Skaters* c 1932  
Cyril Edward Powers

Rachel (3 years 10 months) looked at the picture and matched the colours.

The adult encouraged her to look at the detail.



Many thanks to the children of Pollok Children's Centre, Glasgow who provided the 'Winter' artwork for this edition.

# All-Day Provision for 3- and 4-Year-Olds: The Experiences of Children, Parents, Providers and Practitioners

Christine Stephen, Sally Brown, Peter Cope and Steve Waterhouse

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We were commissioned by SEED to research the experiences of 3- and 4-year-olds receiving all-day provision in pre-school education and care settings. The emphasis in the project was on studying the experiences and perspectives of the adults and children (43 in total) involved in eight case study settings (two private nurseries, two local authority centres, a playgroup, wraparound provision and two nursery classes). Some of the children had all-day provision at one of the case study settings while others received all-day provision by a combination of sessions with the main provider and time with one or more additional providers (either another group care setting or a childminder or nanny).

## Satisfactory experiences for children

Our observations and conversations with children suggested that their experience of all-day provision was predominantly satisfactory, regardless of the type of provision they experienced. There were no significant differences between settings in the activities on offer or selected by children during free play. However, the degree of individual variation in children's choices suggested that a broad range of activities (in the playroom and outside) was necessary to ensure satisfaction for each child.

Each setting offered something different when a smaller number of children remained at the end of the day. At group settings children were involved in more adult-directed activities at the end of the day but childminders and wraparound care settings emphasised freedom to choose what to do at that time. Children were not noticeably more tired or less willing to be involved in adult-led activities later in the day. Some children did have a time when they were tired or sleepy during the day but they found ways of coping with this (for example taking a passive part in role play).

Most children indicated that they were happy at nursery and not sleepy, sad or cross (although they might be sad if hurt, or cross if not able to have what they wanted). While interactions with adults were important for the 3- and 4-year-olds they also talked about other children as a source of satisfaction and fun and, occasionally of dissatisfaction, annoyance and hurt.

## One model will not suit all families

Parents who were satisfied with the provision they used, far outnumbered those who mentioned any dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, it was clear that one model of provision would not suit all families. Some preferred one group setting for the whole day while others valued the change that moving between providers offered or the flexibility about 'collecting time' that a childminder could offer. Opening hours were more important than the location of the setting. Most parents felt that they were coping with the charges they paid but what was considered to be an acceptable cost varied according to family income.

Parents were universally confident that their child enjoyed the time he or she spent in the provision they used. Any dissatisfaction they noticed was considered to be fleeting. There was general agreement among parents that all-day provision should promote children's social and cognitive development, offer them a choice of activities and keep them safe and well cared for. Among those using more than one provider local authority provision was expected to be more 'educational' and formal.

It's snowing, we have got on gloves, scarfs and hats  
(Mayison 5 years)



## Practitioners hold varied views

Providers and practitioners were ambivalent in their evaluation of the child's experience of all-day provision (indeed some suggested that all-day provision had negative implications for children). Staff offering group care considered that meeting the requirements of the *Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5* was essential for satisfactory all-day provision. They suggested other conditions that also had to be met, for example offering an appropriate environment and resources, communicating with parents in a way that suited them. They considered that all-day provision had implications for the daily programme (for example making a change of pace necessary) and that caring for children throughout the day had considerable implications for staffing. Meeting the needs of all-day children and sessional children in one playroom presented particular challenges. Childminders and nannies did not feel bound by curricular guidelines. They aimed to respond to children's requests and to allow them to play freely during the part of the day that they spent together.

## Considerations for the future

The study raised issues to be addressed if there is to be further development of all-day provision. For example, opening hours should match the needs of working parents throughout the year and there is a need for a diversity of provision in each area. Children need different spaces to use across the day, including space for energetic play. Appropriate provision of activities and management of the children's day is necessary to ensure children's satisfaction but having enough staff in the playroom to meet children's needs at any one time is also essential. It was clear that changes in the contractual arrangements for staff are essential if the demand for all-day provision is to be met and the changes in the culture of pre-school practice are to be sustained.

Copies of the full report and a summary version for practitioners are available from Christine Stephen. The research is reported in *Interchange 68*, available from SEED or at [www.scotland.gov.uk/edru/edrpub.asp#preschool](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/edru/edrpub.asp#preschool)

# Early Intervention in Literacy and Numeracy

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'Early intervention' has been a phrase on everyone's lips in the past few years. Even if the thrust of the programme has been in the first two years of primary school, it is an initiative that has affected all sectors within early years. Most of those involved have been very enthusiastic about it, and several local authorities have made headline news with their reports of success. We have seen considerable changes in staffing ratios in the classrooms, and in aspects of practice. However, there have been some concerns and perhaps also worries that resources, and consequently some of the now well-established projects, might come to an end.

## A better start at school?

From the outset the funding was seen to be about 'intervening' to support certain groups of particularly vulnerable children – those most likely to make poor progress in literacy and numeracy. This group largely comprised those who lived in disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances and in neighbourhoods where such circumstances were prevalent. The overall policy strategy ensured that early interventions at local level were integrated with other initiatives and funding strands, for example classroom assistants,

family literacy and childcare, although local authorities have had a good deal of discretion in how they allocated funds. How effective the programme has been in giving such children a better start at school was therefore a major question, particularly when 'early intervention' became more widespread across the full range of pupils.

We were funded as a research team to answer this question, and other questions on the impact of the Early Intervention Programme – the 'EIP' as it is commonly called. In total a £60 m investment was made across Scotland and it was crucial to be clear about the outcomes and the lessons to be learned. Our evaluation was interested in local findings, but we also gathered a wealth of information ourselves as we investigated the impact on pupils' attainment and on classroom practice and sought the views of the various stakeholders involved.

## Impact has been considerable

We have found that the impact of the programme on many schools in Scotland has been considerable. Our findings suggest that attainment rose, particularly in literacy. Most pupils have indeed benefited, although it was disappointing to find that the gap between the socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged remains. However, this is less apparent in local authorities where the available resources were focused on fewer schools. In other words, the most disadvantaged pupils have made greater increases in reading attainment where more money has been spent on fewer pupils. Interestingly too, we found a positive relationship between attainment gains and home-link provision.

The overall picture then is encouraging. But future policy does need to find ways of using resources to counteract still further the effects of economic disadvantage. As to other potential inequalities attributable to age and gender, these were also evident in our attainment results. To take one of those, the younger pupils in the age-range are still, statistically speaking, performing less well by the end of Primary 3 than their older classmates. One of our recommendations is that policy at national and local levels should continue to explore strategies for greater flexibility on age at entry. Individual children differ, but we found that being younger is generally a disadvantage in achievement terms. It could be argued that delaying entry for more children may be expensive but makes sound economic sense in the long run if it reduces the extra support for pupils who will continue to struggle if they have made a poor start.

(Government response to Deferrals Working Group Report is on [www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears/latestnews/newsdetails.asp?idnum=14](http://www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears/latestnews/newsdetails.asp?idnum=14))

## Developing team work

Another broad measure of success was the impact on teachers and on practice. Teachers involved in early intervention enjoyed renewed confidence, increased enthusiasm, and remained broadly convinced of the efficacy of the programme. Teachers were more aware than previously of the research background to their teaching, and they derived great satisfaction from the achievements and enjoyment of their pupils. A collegial spirit of teacher involvement seemed to develop in the atmosphere of devolved responsibility to local level. Maintaining this ethos, this sense of being actively involved, should, we believe, be a priority.

There was a clear consensus that having a nursery nurse or classroom assistant was enormously beneficial. However, the cost of such additional staff is significant, and we advocate that staff development should now focus on exploring good practice in teamwork and capitalising on the full potential of all team members. There is a long history of teamwork in other areas of early education, but in primary classrooms it has yet to 'bed down' and find an optimum way of working in this new context.

## One approach or a mixture of approaches?

As to teaching approaches, our data reflect undoubted changes. There was evidence of more phonics-based teaching of reading, and at the same time a more

learner-centred approach to writing, with the emphasis on 'emergent writing'. More interactive mental mathematics featured frequently in local authority and school data. 'Whole-class teaching' and 'more direct teaching' were recurring refrains. It is difficult at a national level to be certain of the particular effects of these changes. Some local authorities attributed attainment success to a specific approach – the role of synthetic phonics is one example. Others were convinced that it was the mixture of provision that worked – the staff development, the extra classroom staff, home-link, the research-based curriculum and the more focused methods of teaching.



*The Trees in Winter* by Kayleigh (2 years 11 months)

## What about the whole child?

Early years practitioners might well ask in the context of this apparent ferment of literacy and numeracy activity: 'What about the "whole child"?' Although teachers were, on the whole, confident that pupils were enjoying their learning and benefiting from the programme, there was indeed widespread concern that there was now too little play and opportunity for self-directed learning in the early stages of the primary school. The time seems right in our view to build on the very positive culture that the early intervention programme has generated and develop a strong debate about the learning process.

We have learned a great deal about early attainment in literacy and numeracy that should indeed change classroom practice, but there is also an indisputable wealth of other equally well established evidence about young children's learning. We can, and should, find ways to use new knowledge wisely in the best interests of the children we teach. In Margaret Donaldson's words in *Children's Minds*:

*The question that must be asked, and considered seriously, and reconsidered as knowledge and circumstances change, is whether the school experience really is good for our children – as good as we can make it.*

## Reports

Fraser, H., MacDougall, A., Pirrie, A. and Croxford, L., *National Evaluation of the Early Intervention Programme: Final Report*, Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh, 2001, ISBN 1 899795 227

Fraser, H., MacDougall, A., Pirrie, A. and Croxford, L., *Early Intervention in Literacy and Numeracy: Key Issues from the National Evaluation of the Programme*, (Interchange; 70), Edinburgh: SEED, 2001, ISSN 0969-613X. Also available at [www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ic71-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ic71-00.asp)

# ICT and Early Education

Stuart Robertson

New Educational Developments Division, Scottish Executive

The key message of this article is that the ICT needs of the pre-school sector have not been forgotten. That is by way of being a trailer. But, before turning to the main feature, let me digress with a short documentary to bring up to date (well, at least up to Christmas 2000) all those whose professional preoccupation with pre-school might understandably have caused them to take less interest in the National Grid for Learning than otherwise.

## The National Grid for Learning

The National Grid for Learning (NGfL) was launched in autumn 1998 with the aim of bringing the benefits of advanced networked information technologies to education and lifelong learning. The NGfL project set out to ensure a number of key things. These were that:

- all schools, colleges, many community centres and public libraries are connected to the internet
- e-mail addresses are provided to teachers, pupils, lecturers and students
- teachers and pupils have a good understanding of ICT
- excellence is attained in the development of software content.

Since the NGfL launch there have been rapid changes in access to ICT and the internet and the availability of training and web material supporting the Scottish curriculum.

## Early education and ICT

You may well be wondering why, in the foregoing, I made no mention of early education at the pre-school stage. The answer is that, while there is some web-based pre-school support (see [www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears](http://www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears)), and training for some pre-school practitioners who happen to work in primary schools, the role of ICT in early childhood education – across all sectors – has not yet been fully explored or exploited. We need to build a comprehensive rationale for ICT in pre-school education and, arising from that, a view of what the practitioner training needs are and how they might be met.

## Computers in early years: panacea or pestilence?

On the face of it, there would seem to be some valuable applications of ICT in early years provision. So far as practitioners are concerned, ICT could offer access to professional development tools and a whole range of information about early years practice issues. The Learning and Teaching Scotland Early Years website shows one valuable way of applying ICT – and there is scope to develop this much further. ICT can also have valuable applications in the playroom – provided it is used sensitively and not as a substitute for all other forms of play-based learning. The downside of inappropriate use of ICT has been made all too clear in *Fool's Gold: A Critical Look at Computers in Childhood* ([www.allianceforchildhood.net/projects/computers/computers\\_reports\\_fools\\_gold\\_contents.htm](http://www.allianceforchildhood.net/projects/computers/computers_reports_fools_gold_contents.htm)) edited by Colleen Cordes and Edward Miller. This brings out clearly the risks to children when ICT is badly used. But these are not inevitable: we need to develop a strategy for the application of ICT and for supporting practitioners in its use. That strategy needs to be based on our understanding of child development, research and a careful consideration of best practice. Our goal is clear – to ensure that ICT in early education enhances the quality of children's experience – whether they are accessing services in the private, voluntary or public sectors.

## The way ahead

Ministers would like to see a more detailed exploration of the role of ICT in early education. With this in view, the Scottish Executive has written to Learning and Teaching Scotland, inviting it to carry out just such a review. Learning and Teaching Scotland has accepted the commission and is currently working on the production of a strategy document, which is due early in the new year. This document will survey current research in the field and will set out a rationale for the use of ICT in pre-school. The Scottish Executive has expressed particular interest in exploring our present understanding of the role of ICT in pedagogy and in how ICT might be used for the professional development of pre-school practitioners. In addition the document will consider the ICT training needs of the pre-school sector.

## Conclusion

This is a most exciting and valuable new field for ICT. We need to ensure that our investments in ICT in early education are geared to the sector's distinctive needs: there is no question of simply 'cascading' approaches used in primary school. In future newsletters, we will report back on the outcomes of the Learning and Teaching Scotland review.

Between May 1998 and September 2000 we have seen the ratios of pupils to modern computers in schools drop from 34:1 and 12:1 to 18:1 and 7:1 in primary and secondary respectively. In the same time the number of primary schools connected to the internet rose from 22 per cent to 64 per cent while secondary school connections rose from 73 per cent to 97 per cent. The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training has begun and at the time of writing around half of all teachers have signed up for it. In addition a significant amount of money is being invested in producing curriculum-related content for teachers to access on the Scottish Virtual Teachers Centre ([www.svtc.org.uk](http://www.svtc.org.uk)) and other sites on NGfL Scotland.

However, this article is not the place to expound at length on the many successes of the NGfL to date. Interested readers can judge for themselves by looking at the progress report at [www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ngfl-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ngfl-00.asp)



Me and my mum in the snow (Katie, 4 years)

# ASSESSMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL AND 5-14

Carolyn Hutchinson

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## Guidelines for pre-school and 5-14

*Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: A Policy for the '90s*, by the Scottish Education Department published in November 1987, set out three aims for 5-14. The initiative was to ensure clear guidance on what pupils should be learning in primary schools and in the first two year groups of secondary schools, improved assessment of pupils' progress and better information for parents about the curriculum and about their children's performance. The curriculum guidelines published between 1990 and 1993 set out attainment outcomes, strands, attainment targets and programmes of study for the various areas of the curriculum and advice on assessment and recording was included in each set of curriculum guidelines. In addition, separate documents giving advice about assessment and reporting were amongst the earliest 5-14 guidelines to be published.

By 1998 it was clear that various steps being taken to improve early education and raise standards were making new demands on the 5-14 system of assessment that were not envisaged in 1987. In particular, the expansion of pre-school education from 1996 and that of early intervention schemes from 1997 had focused increased attention on the role of assessment at the pre-school and early primary stages. It identified and addressed as early as possible children's strengths and any difficulties that they might be experiencing. The increased focus on national standards of attainment, and on public accountability, had led to a demand for more consistent and reliable information about pupils' performance, particularly at points of transfer, so that the effectiveness of steps taken to improve provision and attainment could be properly monitored and evaluated.

In response to these concerns, in the late 1990s, Learning and Teaching Scotland published a substantial amount of guidance on curriculum and assessment for the early years. At the same time, a team of researchers and development officers piloted a scheme for baseline assessment, based on observation of children in pre-school settings. The scheme subsequently became the basis for a pilot pre-school-to-Primary 1 transition record, and work to produce a CD-ROM of exemplification to support the record is now nearing completion (see information about *Progress with Purpose*, p. 8).

## The Review of Assessment in Pre-school and 5-14

HM inspectors of schools undertook a review of assessment in pre-school, primary schools and S1/S2 starting in November 1998. The *Review of Assessment in Pre-school and 5-14* was published in December 1999 ([www.scotland.gov.uk/3-14assessment/rapc-00.htm](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/3-14assessment/rapc-00.htm)). The report concluded that there were two important purposes for assessment. First, to support learning, provide feedback to children, parents and other practitioners, and identify next steps in learning; second, to provide information as a basis for monitoring and evaluating provision and attainment at school/centre, education authority and national levels. The report also concluded that improvements were needed in order to create a 'joined up' system of assessment for Scotland that would fulfil both of these purposes properly. The system would need to provide:

- accurate, continuous information about young people's progress and achievements, particularly at points of transfer or choice
- provide assessment procedures for pre-school, primary schools and the early secondary years that are well linked
- make realistic demands on staff and young people.

## Responses to the consultation on assessment

Responses to consultation were published in *Improving Assessment in Scotland*, in December 2000 ([www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/5-14-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/5-14-00.asp)). Those who responded supported changes to the assessment system in Scotland, but preferred to build on existing practice rather than introduce radical changes. The main message from the consultation was that assessment to support learning and teaching, relying principally on practitioners' professional judgements, was most important. Assessment for statistical and monitoring purposes should not be allowed to dominate the system.

Those who responded felt that a common national format for record keeping and reporting should be developed to improve tracking of and communication about children's progress, especially at points of transfer and choice. They emphasised that

assessment would need to be manageable, and that changes and the necessary professional development for staff would need to be properly resourced. Those assessing children's progress would need guidance on gathering and interpreting evidence of learning, good examples of children's work, and opportunities to talk about their assessments and observations with others, so that they could 'share the standard' across Scotland.

## The Minister's announcement on 20 September 2001

On 20 September there was a debate on assessment in the Scottish Parliament, *Effective Assessment for Scotland's Schools*. Opening the debate, the Minister (Jack McConnell) set out his response to the consultation on *Review of Assessment in Pre-school and 5-14*. The main points he made were as follows.

- Assessment is important for all involved in education. It should be designed to improve learning and achievement. Scotland needs a coherent and effective system of assessment that is clearly focused on promoting progress and learning. A new system should build on existing good practice rather than impose radical change.
- Effective assessment is at the heart of good learning and teaching and best professional practice. Teachers are best placed to take responsibility for assessment of pupils' progress and achievements and we will continue to rely on their professionalism to deliver effective assessment.
- Information about assessment needs to be used effectively and promptly to inform action. It should be available to parents and others. The Scottish Executive will continue to publish information about performance, analyse it, and use the results in partnership with stakeholders.
- There are currently many different approaches to recording assessment information and reporting to parents. These approaches need to be brought together into a single system that makes information clear and easy to understand.
- Accurate assessment information is needed if those responsible are to monitor provision and attainment effectively and achieve improvements. At the moment, information for monitoring purposes is collected in several different ways. These approaches need to be streamlined into a single, integrated system.
- Ways of making the best use of ICT to support all aspects of assessment will be explored.
- An Action Group was to be established to take proposals forward.

## The Assessment Action Group

The Assessment Action Group chaired by the Deputy Minister for Education, Nicol Stephen, met for the first time on 14 November to consider proposals for an action plan and development programme for assessment. They agreed that personal learning plans (PLPs), promised by the Executive for all young people by 2003, would sit at the heart of a new system. Separate projects in the development programme would consider:

- the content and design of PLPs
- support for teachers, children and parents about how to complete and use them to support learning
- advice about how to make sure the information recorded in the plans is accurate
- advice for centres and schools about the use of information from PLPs to monitor and evaluate the quality of their work.

The group agreed that the system should include all children from the time they started pre-school right through their school years. The work already done in the pre-school setting on assessment and transition records will be important for the development programme, and in many respects can act as a model for later stages in the primary school.

The group also agreed that pre-school centres, schools, teachers and parents should be involved in the various projects from the start of the programme so that their views and professionalism are at the centre of the work to be done.

# Change Coming to Care Services

Jacquie Roberts,  
Chief Executive

The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care

The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care was set up by the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, which received Royal Assent in July 2001. The Commission has been established as a new independent body with the responsibility to regulate all care services currently being regulated by local authorities and by health boards. This means that the Commission will take over all the early years regulation work that is currently being done by local authority staff using the 1989 legislation. The staff doing this work will be transferring to the Commission next year. This is different from England where the early years regulatory staff will be transferring to OFSTED.

The Commission will therefore have a very wide-ranging remit, from childminders to playgroups; from after school services to day nurseries; from care homes for children and adults to accommodation for offenders and housing support services. Eventually the Commission will be responsible for regulating day-care services for children of all ages, not just the under-8s. It will also be responsible for regulating care in boarding schools and nursery schools. It is also agreed that the Commission will regulate nanny agencies and sitter services. Commission staff will be expected to work in an integrated way with HMIE staff.

I am very pleased that the Scottish Commission will regulate this wide range of services because it means that the staff group will include early years experts, childcare experts, nursing staff and experts in the delivery of care to older adults. It is the intention to have multi-disciplinary teams in which staff will be able to specialise but work alongside people with different expertise.

The Commission will be registering and inspecting according to the new national standards set by the Scottish Executive. The first set of standards has been issued. We are eagerly awaiting the publication of the standards for children's services. There is now a Commission working group that will be setting out how Commission staff will register and inspect services in a consistent way across Scotland. We hope to have this work finished in time for the formal start of the new body on 1 April 2002.

There is a huge amount of work to do before April. One of the priorities is to help staff transfer and work out where they will be located and who their manager will be. We also have an enormous challenge in transferring data from over 88 locations to 15 new offices. The current arrangements for early years staff in the 32 authorities are very different across Scotland. This has added to the challenges!

What is important is that Commission staff maintain good relationships with the childcare partnerships and the childcare information systems that have developed across Scotland. It is vital that development of good quality childcare is not stifled by a new regulatory system. It is also vital that members of the public can access information about services – what they are and whether they are meeting the standards. One of the principles behind the Act is that the Commission should promote diversity in the provision of care services so that people can be afforded more choice. I believe that early years staff have developed considerable expertise in encouraging imaginative provision and I hope this practice will continue once the Commission is up and running next year.

**The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 set up the Scottish Social Services Council and the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care. The Commission's role is to register and regulate prescribed care services in Scotland and the Council is charged with regulating the social services workforce, including the registration of staff.**

**Like *Early Years' Matters*, the Commission and Council are in their own early stages and this newsletter will carry regular updates on progress as training standards and quality indicators are developed.**

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## Early Years Online

This online resource ([www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears](http://www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears)) is designed to support the continuing development of those working with children in the early years. It contains information about staff development opportunities, forthcoming conferences and events, current research, links to other relevant sites, information about the latest Scottish Executive publications and consultation papers. There is also a forum to encourage discussion about current interests and concerns and to enable practitioners to share good practice.

## Progress with Purpose: Supporting Continuity in Children's Learning 3-8

This new multimedia resource in the Early Education Support Series will be published in spring, 2002. It will contain a CD-ROM, video and print pack of staff development materials. The pack aims to support continuity in learning at a time of transition and is designed to be of interest to all those working with children aged 3-7.

From 1998 to 2000 Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) funded the Early Years Best Practice Initiative, with conferences and seminars around Scotland in which practitioners from many backgrounds met to share information about good practice. Information about many of these projects is now online on [www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears/resources/bestpractice](http://www.LTScotland.com/earlyyears/resources/bestpractice)



A Christmas tree in the garden,  
it's snowing on the grass  
(Dionne, 4 years 6 months)

## We're Listening

This is your newsletter and we want to hear what you think. We've highlighted some recent early years' matters to keep you up to date with developments. Now tell us ... what do YOU want to know more about? We're listening.

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