

Early Years' Matters

Summer 2002

2



Rachel Stewart, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
Her representation of Claude Monet's *Le jardin de l'artiste a Giverny*

Our thanks to the children attending the Early Learning Centre in Hamilton, South Lanarkshire, for the artwork that illustrates this edition of *Early Years' Matters*.

Progress with Purpose – the Current Early Education Position in Scotland



Most of this issue of *Early Years' Matters* is devoted to reports from the 'Learning and Teaching National Conference on Early Years Care and Education' held on 18 March, 2002 at the Edinburgh Conference Centre, Heriot Watt University. Speaking at the conference, Education Minister Cathy Jamieson said:

Early years education provides invaluable long-term benefits to young children. It's part of giving children the best possible start in life and making sure they can realise their potential in future years.

We have now achieved our target of providing access to pre-school education to all 3- and 4-year-olds whose parents want it, and Childcare Partnerships are firmly established across Scotland.

But this investment in the future of children is dependent on the skills of early years staff.

That's why it is so important that everyone involved in early years education – whether teachers, nursery nurses, or playworkers – has access to material which can support their professional judgement about children's progress in learning.

By identifying children's individual needs and abilities early on, we can ensure effective support when it is needed. Our shared goal is to boost their self-esteem, improve attainment at school, and increase their opportunities in life.

She also drew attention to three areas of early years provision in which Learning and Teaching Scotland is closely involved with the Scottish Executive. These are:

- reviewing existing local authority practice in 0–3 childcare
- consulting about the development of a strategy for ICT in pre-school
- supporting continuity in learning through the development of the *Progress with Purpose* pack of staff development materials.



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



In this issue ...

'Progress with Purpose' Conference Key Speeches and Presentations

Chairman's Remarks	2
Early Years Education	2
How Good is Our Progress?	3
Inter-conneXions	3
Integrated Thinking – Integrated Early Childhood Services in Dundee	4
Continuity in Transitions	5
A Focus on ICT in Early Years	6
Team Talk – Teacher Involvement in Pre-School Education	7

Conference Reports

On 18 March a warm welcome was extended to over 200 delegates from all over Scotland to the first national conference on early years, planned and organised jointly by the Scottish Executive and Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Tom Wilson outlined the aims of the day, which were to inform about new developments and initiatives in early years, to challenge old ideas and ways of working, to provoke discussion and debate, and hopefully to inspire.

Chairman's Remarks

Professor Tom Wilson, Chairman, Learning and Teaching Scotland

Learning and Teaching Scotland is an organisation in the early stages of development, still finding its feet but with enormous potential, determined to succeed and a clear sense of purpose and direction. The conference takes it there from a substantial set of resources developed by Learning and Teaching Scotland, which are launched here today: *Progress with Purpose: Supporting Continuity in Children's Learning 3-8*.

The way in which these resources were developed clearly reflects Learning and Teaching Scotland's Mission Statement to work in partnership with others and to enhance learning and teaching.

Learning and Teaching Scotland is committed to listening to you, working with you and for you.

We are grateful for the trust you place in Learning and Teaching Scotland. It is not misplaced: we will continue to work closely with you and the Scottish Executive to provide the support, the resources and the guidance you need to give every child in Scotland the best possible start.

Today is about bringing together staff with a wide range of experience to inform, challenge, provoke and inspire.

Professor Tom Wilson,
Learning and Teaching Scotland

'Progress with Purpose' is a model for the Assessment Action Group. It has everything we need – framework, exemplification, flexibility – and will generate discussion, debate and ideas on the 3-14 agenda, starting from the foundations, the early years and building up ...

Carolyn Hutchinson,
Scottish Executive Education Department

Early Years Education: A Good Start to Lifelong Learning

Mike Baughan, Chief Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland

2

It is time to rediscover how young children engage with the world and to marvel at the pace of their development. It is not just the speed at which young children acquire and develop knowledge and skills but also their readiness to engage with a world they find fascinating, challenging and sometimes even frightening. Having two grandchildren of similar age lets me see how different they are and how different is their approach to learning. The 'one size fits all' model of learning does not apply at any stage of our development – something we need to keep in mind when designing learning experiences and curriculum structures.

Building on prior learning

I am also reminded of how important it is for us to build upon prior learning. 'Partnership with parents' is not an empty mantra. Many early years settings have developed a wide range of ways of communicating with, and listening to, parents.

If this is true for early years, is it any less valid to aspire to a similar commitment to the involvement of parents in later years? We might, for example, ask just what puts off some parents from participating more fully in the life of the primary and, in particular, the secondary school? I am sure that the progress of their children does not become less important to them. I am equally sure that among other reasons there are issues relating to lack of confidence or lack of understanding of the way information about progress is presented. I know schools do try to address these, and I am confident that we will take a significant step forward with the development of an integrated 3-14 assessment recording and reporting system.

With this in mind, it is pleasing that we launch *Progress with Purpose*, which addresses issues of continuity in children's learning, particularly at points of transition. The pack raises issues that are equally relevant at any point of transition in a child's educational experience.

In the revised 5-14 guidelines and the secondary curriculum guidelines we read about the importance of the big organising principles of curriculum breadth, balance, continuity, coherence and progression. If we start to 'unpack' these in terms of lessons to be learned from early years education we see children are engaged in tasks that know no boundaries of subject demarcation. They make sense of the world; they develop language and

number skills, their creative talents, their physical skills and their problem-solving skills and they learn how to work with others in contexts that engage and captivate them and are seen to be relevant to them.

This vision presents a challenge for us in the context of the later stages of education. How to develop and maintain a love of learning in young people, to cultivate our disposition to learn, is one of the challenges implicit in the forthcoming National Debate.

Importance of inclusion

The need for all children to feel included is of paramount importance. Participating actively from the earliest years has an important part to play in ensuring that children feel secure, are valued and have a sense of belonging. Again, we need to ask ourselves what we are doing in the later stages of education to build upon earlier good practice. There are, of course, very positive developments, for example in the emphasis that is being given to developing school ethos, to the core skill of working with others, to the development of positive values and dispositions, and to education for citizenship.

Highly motivated contextualised learning

Explicit reference is made within the *Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5* to the need to understand the ways in which children learn – recognising that learning is a complex business. We have all been influenced by the recognition that has been given in recent years to the concept of multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence and to research that has emerged from our ability to map how the brain works and makes connections. Such understandings confirm the importance of acknowledging that we have individual preferred learning styles.

Let us recognise play for what it is: a form of contextualised learning that is highly motivating. It has the potential to allow us to retain the predispositions and self-esteem we have as young children that we need in adult life to face challenges without fear of failure.

I welcome the readiness of pre-school practitioners to embrace innovation, perhaps learning this from the children themselves and I believe that early years education is a jewel in the crown of Scottish education.

How Good is Our Progress?

Standards and Quality in Scottish Pre-school Education 1997–2001

Kate Cherry

Lead Officer for Pre-school, HM Inspectorate of Education

The Government initiative to expand pre-school educational provision in Scotland now includes free pre-school education for 3- and 4-year-olds across a wide diversity of provision. *High quality educational experience for children has been a key priority throughout.*

A number of important changes affecting pre-school education will take place from April 2002. Funding for pre-school education will be re-integrated to local authorities. They will be under a duty to secure a free, part-time pre-school education place for all eligible children, where their parents wish one. The new Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care has responsibility for registering and inspecting all childcare and pre-school education. HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) will work together with the Care Commission to inspect pre-school education. Inspections will be against a new set of national care standards for childcare and early education.

Standards and Quality report

The first Standards and Quality report on pre-school education was published in April 2002 by HMIE. It offers an evaluation from 1400 inspections of provision *across all sectors* – local authority, independent, private and voluntary – for the four years 1997–2001.

The report offers benchmark information and a base to measure future improvements at a pivotal point between different inspection regimes. The report highlights:

- key strengths common to all sectors
- examples of good practice found
- development needs that require to be addressed across the sectors.

Standards

From 1995 until August 2000 the evaluations made by HMI during the inspections were based on the *Performance Indicators for nursery schools, classes and pre-school centres* published in 1995. From August 2000 the new indicators in *The Child at the Centre*, published in February 2000 (www.scotland.gov.uk/library2/doc11/cac.asp) were used in inspections. Both documents support self-evaluation and share common standards of good practice. Both sets of performance indicators have been made available to all centres being inspected.

The new standards for Early Education and Childcare up to the age of 16 will be used by the Care Commission from April 2002. The standards have close links with the quality indicators in the *Child at the Centre* and this document (www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/health/ncseec-00.asp) will continue to provide further detail and support in the process of self-evaluation.

Key findings

The Standards and Quality report shows that there is high quality in pre-school centres across all the sectors inspected by HM Inspectors between 1997 and 2001. The overall quality of provision in voluntary and private centres improved or was maintained in the further expansion of provision for 3-year-olds.

Common strengths across all sectors of provision

- **The high importance attached to developing a positive ethos**
Pre-school centres emphasised the importance of creating a caring and friendly ethos and providing supportive and welcoming environments for children and their families.
- **The high quality of programmes in emotional, personal and social development**
Staff established regular routines to develop social skills in sharing, taking responsibility and making choices. Good attention was given to developing self-esteem, respect and consideration for others.
- **Consistently good or very good staff teamwork**
Staff worked well together. They shared responsibilities effectively to support children's development and learning, and to help in the day-to-day running of the centres.
- **Positive relationships with parents and carers**
Across the sectors there was positive support for developing good relationships with parents and carers.

Development needs across the sectors

- Improvements were needed in the programmes for physical development and movement. More opportunities were required for regular physical exercise and access to outdoor play.
- Planning and assessment of children's development and learning required more attention to clarify what staff expected children to learn and help identify the next steps in their learning.
- Shared understanding and expectations of progress were required between pre-school and primary staff, as well as trust in assessment judgements and the knowledge that someone will make effective use of the information shared.
- Self-evaluation needed to be more effective in involving all staff in evaluating strengths and weaknesses of their provision and identifying the priorities for improvement.
- Procedures for staff development and review needed to be developed and improved to match training to the needs of staff and centres.
- Leadership was weak in a number of centres. In particular, leaders who were not in day-to-day charge of the centre needed to retain accountability for the quality, and maintain a principal role in managing and monitoring the provision.

Conclusion

The report findings will be of interest to nursery schools and classes, pre-school centres and local authorities in evaluating their own provision and in supporting their work towards continuous quality improvement. *The challenge is to continue to raise quality further to achieve consistently high standards for all pre-school children.*

Inter-conneXions

Dr Hilary Fabian and Aline-Wendy Dunlop

The way children are supported by adults sets the foundations for them to feel emotionally secure, ready to meet new challenges and learn from the start of school. This session highlighted the connections between socio-emotional wellbeing and learning. It identified some of the social and learning challenges for children at the start of school. It also asked how children could be helped to develop social and emotional resilience and how they could be best supported to succeed in learning at the next stage. It demonstrated that success at school is more likely when children are confident, get along with others and have acquired social skills such as waiting their turn, sharing, expressing their needs and being able to ask for help. Success is also more likely when they have acquired cognitive skills such as being able to anticipate change, 'read' the teacher, adapt their learning styles and attend and understand in less familiar situations. A virtuous circle develops with those children that are socially skilled, as they are more likely to have a succession of positive experiences with other children and adults, and consequently develop cognitively.

Starting school means having to face a number of social challenges such as getting to know new adults and children, new social rules and values. On entering this wider social world there is the possibility of making new friends, but it also means entering the world of social comparison, reading group situations, coping with playground stresses and eating in unfamiliar surroundings. In order to become a social member these require a social understanding. Children's social experiences and interactions with adults and peers are important to cognitive development, as learning is framed within a context that is socially created.

The 'seriousness' of life starts with school as children undergo a change in identity and become 'schoolchildren'. Certain rites of passage, such as wearing a school uniform, can help with this but more is needed to bridge the gaps and ensure socio-emotional wellbeing. Individual transitional links between home and school, for example a toy or photograph, can support 'transitioners'. Parental confidence from having knowledge and understanding about school can also boost children's confidence. The first teacher has a role to play in building social relationships, teaching social skills and helping children gain social understanding. Empowering children by teaching them social competence and problem-solving skills gives them some sense of control over their lives and enables them to maximise their potential learning power.

Children come to school well able to think and reason about the world, about events, about people and about number in ways that make 'human sense'. School demands that children learn to think and reason in 'disembedded contexts'. Often, instead of dealing directly with the world in situations that do make human sense, children have to use symbol systems and deal with representations of the world (in words and numbers, pictures and diagrams). Success in school depends on this ability to work with disembedded concepts. The key to being able to do so is to have an awareness of the mind's activity. Deliberately using talk about thought, about taking another's perspective and about imagining how someone will think or what they should do in a given situation helps people to develop this reflective awareness. The consequences of this discovery of the mind have cognitive, social and emotional importance.

There are substantial changes in the development of representational skills between the ages of 3 and 5, but not all children entering school will have an emerging capacity to read minds, to read the teacher's intentions, to understand the requests made, and to pay attention and respond appropriately. The growing understanding of mind that children acquire in the pre-school years underlies their social interactions with family and friends and provides the foundation for their cognitive activities in school. Relating to teacher expectations demands an increasingly sophisticated grasp of others' desires, motivations, ideas and capacities.

Children that are emotionally and socially ready for school may be better placed to accommodate changes in their status as learners so that they move readily into the changed demands on their capacities to learn. We cannot ignore the mutual influences of social and cognitive change.

The main conclusions are:

- to become effective learners children need to have developed some social understanding
- teachers and others can give individualised support to empower children's socio-emotional development
- children meet new cognitive challenges of reading the teacher, adapting their learning styles, and developing their conceptions of themselves as learners in the school situation
- children can be best supported in a purposeful start to primary education through shared views of children as learners and joint planning for a transition curriculum that bridges the 3–5 and 5–14 guidelines and increases the agency of the child.

Correspondence to: hilary.fabian@ed.ac.uk and a.w.a.dunlop@strath.ac.uk

Conference Report

Integrated Thinking Integrated Early Childhood Services in Dundee

Christine Riach
Early Years and Childcare Officer
Early Years and Childcare Team
Dundee City Council

Dundee is a city with a strong history of public services for young children. Meeting the government targets to provide pre-school places has not challenged us greatly – we had a very strong service foundation on which to build. Our challenges are perhaps even more complex and arise from a commitment to offer a wider range of services to match a growing diversity of need. The publication 'For Scotland's Children' paints a bleak picture of the lives of many of Scotland's children today. Dundee is familiar with the impact on children's lives of adult drug dependence, poverty and unemployment, depression and mental health problems, family breakdown, social isolation, poor health and all the other commonly quoted indicators of socio-economic disadvantage. Dundee City Council has placed children at the centre of its economic, social and educational agenda and has set in place a range of strategies to improve the outcomes for children. We acknowledge a major challenge in breaking the cycles of disadvantage affecting generations of families. Progress has been made – and this is particularly evident in the early years services.

A high level of service to children and families is offered by the education department through its nursery schools and classes, by the social work department through its child and family centres and through a wide network of services offered by the voluntary and private sectors.

The Early Years and Childcare Plan set out to create improved collaboration across all of these services. The plan also identified the need for service planning structures to be integrated. As a result, Dundee now has a multi-disciplinary early years and childcare team, which has responsibility for delivering pre-school education, services for children aged 0-3 and their families, as part of the Sure Start Dundee programme. Childcare services for children up to the age of 14, including out-of-school care, family and parent services, workforce development and training, quality development, childcare information services and partnership. This has provided a clear strategic framework within which early years services can be planned holistically. It is now not possible even to think about developing a new provision without taking account of all service aspects.

The establishment of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership and eight local childcare networks has meant that a wide range of service providers and local service users are able to collaborate in service planning and development.

A series of recent initiatives has supported improved integration of services. The three outlined below are identified because of their significance in challenging professional boundaries and supporting multidisciplinary approaches to improve outcomes for children and their families.

• The Pre-school Panel

This multidisciplinary panel was established to make placement recommendations based on shared assessment of young children with special educational needs. The operation of this panel has provided significant opportunities for sharing information, professional perspectives, ideas and common approaches.

• The Pre-school Home Visiting Service

This service supports young children at home and within early years settings and works to build links between settings. Young children with complex needs are able to maintain mainstream placements. Importantly, the service acts as a link between a range of health, education and social work service providers.

• The Sure Start Early Intervention Projects

These currently provide support to more than 50 children and families within mainstream nursery schools and child and family centres. These projects have harnessed available resources and coordinated approaches to strengthen the wellbeing, development and learning of young children identified as vulnerable. A key success has been their capacity to make connections between services, between children's home and early years experiences and within planning and service delivery frameworks.



Sophie Mair, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
Lowri by Sophie



Andrew Gilmour, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
Jack by Andrew



Lowri Shearer, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
Sophie by Lowri

The successful planning and delivery of these projects and others has engendered a strong base of support for integrated services. A key challenge has been to integrate nursery services and child and family centre services within a traditional council committee structure. We now have four new early years provisions developed to:

- offer comprehensive education, care and family services
- build on existing strong provision
- reflect the local context
- promote an inclusive, flexible, accessible and responsive approach to service delivery
- acknowledge and build on the skills and expertise of staff and promote effective collaboration and partnership.

Each new service is unique. We have no blueprint for further development. Although we would see the creation of additional integrated services as essential, we remain convinced that one size does not fit all. Several important challenges remain. These include:

- the urgency to meet the diverse and growing needs of children and families
- the differing contractual arrangements of staff
- the fast-paced change and development process
- the current context of uncertain future funding
- training and workforce development issues.

It is important in a context like Dundee's that expansion of childcare provision is not the only measure of success but that a high value is also placed on the capacity of services to be better tailored and responsive to the needs of children and families.

The last words go to the integrated services.

When a family enters the centre, we have a wide range of services available to meet their needs. When necessary we can tailor-make a package to suit individual circumstances.

The centre has been a lifeline to my family. I have lots of help for me and for my kids.

The range of knowledge and expertise available within this centre allows us to support a family and to provide a comprehensive service.

CONTINUITY IN TRANSITIONS

Aline-Wendy Dunlop
Lecturer
Department of Primary Education
University of Strathclyde



Callum Murphy, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
His representation of Claude Monet's *Nymphéas*

Transitions are important in all of our lives: the first transitions into early years settings and on into primary education are amongst the most felt of educational transitions.

The 1997/98 piloting of a pre-school place for every 4-year-old in four Scottish local authorities and the related development of draft guidance on pre-school curriculum was just the beginning of a surge of policy development and consequent change in early education in Scotland. The subsequent policy decision to develop a pre-school place for every child by the year 2000 and for every 3-year-old by the end of 2002, and the change in duties on local authorities to provide these places through child care partnerships, was to have a profound effect on all young children, their early educators and their families.

Early intervention into literacy and numeracy in the early years of education, the lively and continuing debate about assessment and its purposes, and the development of transitions records all testify to the importance placed on the early years of education. Alongside these changes, new policies on social inclusion, an assumption of mainstream education for all and the initiative, Sure Start Scotland, aimed at very young children and their families, give further evidence of the hopes that government has placed on its investment in the early years.

Do we narrow the gap or bridge it?

Each of these initiatives will have an effect on the early experiences of young children, their families and their educators throughout Scotland. In a climate of rapid change the number of transitions children experience is on the increase. Little was known about how such radical policy change and an increase in transitions would affect children's development and learning. Whilst official documentation drew attention to the need for continuity it seemed to the author that research projects emphasised the need to prepare children for such change and help them bridge the resulting gaps, rather than advocating attempts to narrow them, as they moved between educational settings.

If school learning is to be effective for children it may be a reasonable proposition to suggest that there are ways in which early educators and their primary school colleagues can take account of children and better promote their learning at transition between the sectors of our education system. Curricular and pastoral continuities and discontinuities in transition may be critical for children's capacity to learn effectively as they enter new stages of their education. Repeated attempts to explore patterns of continuity and discontinuity and to try to create change have occurred over the last 30 years, but at no time have transitions been so topical as they are today.

What do children experience?

Who and what we are and how we function is determined by many factors, external and internal. As a person moves through different experiences, the sense they make of them may be determined by a number of elements: themselves as an individual, the culture in which they exist and the biological/developmental factors that influence them. It is this triad of individual, culture and development that the author's own studies of continuity and progression in early education seek to unravel by looking at the experience of children in pre-school and early primary settings. To understand whether an improvement in continuity of practice between settings can make a difference to children's learning in the current language of education, and whether attention to such detail can change their 'achievements', it is essential to look at children's experiences of the transition from pre-school to primary education.



Rachael Stewart, Early Learning Unit,
Hamilton. Her representation of
Claude Monet's *Nymphéas*

Key elements of continuity in transition are: the degree of structural continuity provided by the system, the degree of continuity in the teaching process, the degree of continuity in curriculum, and the degree of involvement of parents in supporting their child's transitions. Each of these elements will support the child's sense of wellbeing and the confidence with which they approach the transition and the new learning promised at the next stage of their education.

Taking account of prior learning

A key element of both curricular and pastoral continuity will be the account that each setting is able to take of children's previous learning and of their experience. These concerns are as pertinent to pre-school practitioners, as they settle new children into the nursery setting from home or prior pre-school experience, as they are for the primary staff receiving new pupils into school – and indeed for the secondary school

bringing children in from primary. At every transition there are concerns that children's previous learning should be recognised and built upon.

We need to ask how well early education settings at the nursery and primary stages attend to what it is like for children in transition. Some important questions might be as follows.

- Do children have enough opportunities to find out what the new nursery or school will be like?
- Do they have a chance to welcome the adults that will be responsible for them in their future schooling into their present setting?
- Do they have a chance to experience the new primary classroom when primary children are busy in it and can show them round and tell them what it will be like?
- Do they have a chance to go to the playground with present Primary 1 children, or to have lunch with them and with their parents before this becomes a regular feature of their day?
- Is the new class set up in such a way that the children make use of their present competence to make choice and organise their time?
- Will they be able to discuss the contents of their nursery portfolio with their new teacher in their early days in primary school?

Equally adults in pre-school and early primary settings may want to plan together, pass on records and discuss them, and meet together several weeks after the children's transfer to share the children's experiences. For parents getting used to having a primary rather than a nursery child, their child's transition is also a family transition as they take on their child's new identity as a school child, and learn about the new roles that implies for them as parents.

Growing body of research

Discussion of, and research into, continuity and transition in early education is not new and research reviews in early education have highlighted continuity and progression. Any good textbook on early education has the terms 'continuity', 'progression' and 'transition' in its index. There are new studies of these areas being undertaken in the UK, Europe and beyond, studies that take psychological perspectives, educational perspectives and sociological perspectives.

It is accepted, and supported by the work of such icons as Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky, that new learning does and should build on what has gone before. A shared conceptual framework of learning and of the child as a learner that is about to enter school is badly needed in early education – shared between parents and teachers at different stages, but also between educators at pre-school and primary stages. By sharing what we know, children will be offered the continuity and progression that is in their best interests in transition.



Yves Agnew, Early Learning
Unit, Hamilton
Her representation of Henri
Matisse's *Geraniums*

ICT and Children's Media Environments

Lydia Plowman and Christine Stephen
 Institute of Education, University of Stirling

What does research have to tell us about the value of information and communications technology (ICT) in pre-school settings, how it is used and its role in a pre-school curriculum? These are the questions we tried to answer by examining reports of research from several different countries. We found little hard evidence and quite a lot of speculation and anecdote, although the review was valuable in pointing to key areas for future research. Here, we focus on what ICT means in this context and how using ICT in pre-school can be viewed as part of a child's wider media experience.

What do we mean by 'ICT'?

Many of the concerns about children's use of ICT are based on a concept of technology that is now out of date. ICT is seen as detrimental to children's development due to its fixed, screen-based nature and it is assumed that young children cannot use ICT for creative and collaborative play. But ICT is not just desktop computers. It can encompass a range of familiar appliances, such as microwave cookers and mobile telephones, as well as products that do not necessarily have a screen or a keypad. These can include programmable construction bricks, talking books and robotic pets. There is also an expanding market for increasingly interactive toys, including dolls that 'learn' to walk and exhibit a range of emotions. This is ICT that can be hugged, dropped and moved around.

Such toys can give rise to concerns that play becomes too structured or they limit children's imagination but they may also present an opportunity for the child's active learning to take place through and with ICT. Many young children are likely to have been exposed to a range of technologies in the home and it can be useful to think in terms of their media environment both at home and in the pre-school setting.

The media environment

Media convergence means that the technology of computers and traditional forms of the media are moving closer together: you can watch DVD films on a computer, shop interactively and send e-mail through your television. Children appear to be relaxed about seamless transitions between media. Saturday morning television shows, for instance, feature their own websites and children are asked to e-mail, text message or telephone the presenters. Television, films and video games promote a range of spin-offs, such as clothing, confectionery, lunch boxes, toys and magazines.

The books children read at home are frequently based on television programmes or Disney films (not usually part of the range of tried-and-tested picture books offered in pre-school settings). As they get a bit older, the computer and video games they play with are often based on books and

films. Children are thus exposed to a complex media mix and the different forms of technology may be less important than the content and the types of interactivity that are promoted.

Where do we go from here?

There are concerns about the role of marketing in promoting the blurring of distinctions between media and it is true to say that the role of this media mix in children's development is not yet fully understood. However, we need to acknowledge the entirety of children's experiences of their media environment rather than focus on discrete elements so that, for instance, we encourage children to think about genre or how stories could be presented in a range of media. While ICT is so closely associated in our minds with computers, it could even be helpful to think more in terms of the media and expand our definitions of literacy. Pre-school curricular guidelines tend to associate literacy with print – the reading and writing of text on paper. However, this has not kept up to date with the recent shift of emphasis implied in the expansion of 'IT' to 'ICT'.

Communication is now seen as a central component of ICT capability and clearly depends on both 'traditional' and 'new' literacies – the processes by which we create and share meanings with and through ICT.

Although a great deal is known about how children learn to read and write with paper and pencil, little is known about whether or how they transfer competences from one medium to another. Some aspects of the new literacies, such as learning to use a mouse, are specific to computers, but is there any difference between reading text on paper and from a television cartoon or on a website? Research does not yet provide any answers but pre-school practitioners could observe and record children's developing ICT literacy in the same way as they monitor emerging print literacy.

The range of technologies available now and in the near future provides opportunities for a radical transformation of teaching and learning relationships and activities. Practitioners who are sensitive to children's media environments and who know where children are in their learning will be able to tailor the opportunities they offer, provide inclusive activities and help children to gain confidence from the richness of their media experiences.

Visit this seminar at SETT on Wednesday 25 September, seminar code 102.

ICT – There are varying views: it's a good thing, it's a bad thing, it's there and has to be acknowledged. The current ICT and pre-school consultation will help shape the development of strategy

Stuart Robertson, SEED

6

Multi-lingual Introduction to the Nursery

A project in Killermont Primary nursery class involves the creation of a computer program designed to help support new children as they make the transition from home to nursery, particularly those for whom English is not their first language. A digital camera was used to take photographs of children following the nursery routines. Clicker software was used to present these, together with a written and spoken commentary in English and voice recordings in other home languages. The voice recordings were made with the help of parents, children and staff.

The children have expressed delight at seeing and hearing themselves and familiar adults on the computer. Several children have demonstrated great pleasure at hearing their first language featured on the program. All who have used the program have shown an interest in hearing other languages spoken, including Japanese, Urdu, Punjabi, French and Dutch. Plans are underway to add Gaelic, Welsh, Cantonese, German and Malay. Further languages may be added as the range of languages spoken by nursery children widens.

It was encouraging that the in-house program proved almost as popular as the commercially produced one (140 and 176 recorded uses respectively in the first three weeks). However new children made comparatively little use of both programs. Early observations suggest that this may be because new children tend to choose more familiar activities, which relate to their home experiences, or to remain in the areas monitored by their own key workers. This is under review at present.

Visit this seminar at SETT on Wednesday 25 September, seminar code 101 or Thursday 26 September seminar code 109.

Beryl and Barney

Home-linking Aboyne Nursery has Beryl and Barney, home-link teddy bears, which accompany a different child home each night. Their prize-winning Innovations project was to develop the children's creative and artistic expression through using digital camera technology to record the bears' adventures. Staff members report:

Both children and parents are enjoying the project and using the camera at home. The children come into the nursery with a wide range of photos of Beryl and Barney: the home-link bears. Usually these reflect the child's activities, such as food shopping or playing games with their siblings. Most of the parents have been very happy to be involved in downloading and printing the photos.

The level of conversation between the children and between staff and children has increased regarding their adventures with the bears and is revisited regularly over the course of a nursery session.

The use of the cameras has been particularly good for the children with special needs.

We have received a lot of positive comments about the equipment and the satisfaction the children get from using it.

Visit this seminar at SETT on Wednesday 25 September, seminar code 104 or Thursday 26 September seminar code 108.

NGfL Scotland Innovation Awards Winner

Sandra Nesbitt, Acting Depute Head of Cauldeen Primary School nursery, was delighted when she heard the news that the nursery had won an award from NGfL Scotland to develop a project to explore the ways in which very young children use a whiteboard to engage with online activities.

Sandra reports:

At the time of the Innovation Awards application we were in the process of producing our nursery website and discovered lots of fantastic websites with activities suitable for 4-year-olds that could be carried out online. It occurred to us, however, that not only would the online painting activities and many of the games benefit from the large screen of a Smartboard, but also children who did not have the fine motor control skills and hand-eye coordination necessary to manipulate an onscreen cursor would be able to complete the activities using touch. There was also the obvious motivational factor of interacting directly with the screen.

Children would also be able to carry out activities such as matching games and jigsaws without the necessary manipulative skills needed to do these with the genuine article.

The children loved using their 'magic fingers' on the board and were mesmerised watching other children use it. Initially we used the online painting activities on the BBC website and the children were delighted with the pictures of Bob the Builder, The Tweenies, etc., that they were able to produce.

The main drawback has been that when working in pairs or groups they cast shadows on the screen. A rear projection system would solve this but it is very expensive.

(Visit www.ngflscotland.gov.uk/innovationawards for information on the NGfL Scotland Innovation Awards)

Team Talk – Teacher Involvement in Pre-school Education

Ger Harley
Branch Head
Early Education and Childcare Division
Scottish Executive

As I grow older, I look back with differing degrees of fondness to my youth: the situations I found myself in, the happy and sad times and the people that I met. They have all had an influence on how I have turned out, a perfectly normal and balanced individual with perhaps just a little too much modesty. Key people that I respected influenced the lessons I learnt over the years and the attitude I developed to deal with what life brings my way. My list of such influential people would have to include those who were charged with setting me on the right road to lifelong learning.

While not really taking into account the hierarchy involved in providing an education for my contemporaries and me at the time, I now realise that each component of the educational structure played an important role in my development.

The recently published *Guidance on Involvement of Teachers in Pre-School Education* also highlights the point that the staff involved in this important first step along the educational path are all components of the whole. Each element of the pre-school team is dependent on every other to enable the best to be brought out of the individual, the team and the children they are charged

with developing and taking to the slightly more formalised structure of primary school.

Everybody has a role to play and can influence the development of young individuals. The guidance document recognises that all staff, if appropriately tuned, can be part of an impressive machine that allows these individuals space to grow and develop within consistent boundaries. The different qualifications achieved by staff members involved in pre-school education all contribute to what they offer to children in much the same way as their different personalities. All staff members have a role to play and it has been an evolving process in recent years to reach the flexible structure in which the most successful educational teams operate.

There is a need for team members to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of all involved, as there is always room for improvement and one person's weakness can be balanced by another's strength. The most successful teams in business or sport point to their willingness to

work together as the main reason for their success. It is the same when providing a sound start to the education of young children. The vulnerability of children requires stability to enable the best to be brought out of them. This stability can be best achieved when the staff is fully committed to, and is involved in developing, the best way forward.

It is not only children who will benefit from the process of staff working as a team. The staff members involved also get something out of team working – the recognition of their value and contribution to the team. The influence on what makes me 'me', which I mentioned at the start of this piece, did not stop once I left formal education. Most of us have worked

with someone we admire and aspire to match up to. It does not have to be someone of influence or power – just someone who knows their value to the group and is willing to be flexible and free with their influence. I also mentioned lifelong learning earlier and we are all doing that all the time. We learn from good and bad experiences and hope to have more of the former than the latter. However, the process of having the bad experiences teaches us, we hope, how to avoid them in the future.

The best teams ensure that all members are clear on what the team's targets are and strive to achieve them as a unit. The

individualist approach can work for a while but ensuring that everybody has an

opportunity to gain out of the process will enable the team approach to be more successful over a longer period. There is a need to be clear over what is expected from each member, which allows each individual to develop and contribute at the same time. There will always need to be some structure to the team but that does not have to be one set in stone. Many skills are brought by many people to the task in hand – be it pre-school education or building a house. There will always be a need for flexibility to enable the skills to be harnessed to their best advantage for the common aim. The guidance on the involvement of teachers in pre-school education strives to avoid being considered as some devious plot to marginalise teachers. The guidance does try to offer a sensible recognition of a situation that is evident more and more, and is one in which we would all like to work: one of mutual respect and understanding. The days of the benign dictator in a teaching situation are gone. Long live the revolution! Or rather, long live the recognition that we all have something to offer and something to gain from working as a team.



Hannah Baird, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
Her representation of Claude Monet's *Les barques, regates a Argenteuil*

Teaching, Learning and Managing with ICT

For the first time, SETT, organised by Learning and Teaching Scotland, will include seminars and activities specifically for early years educators. Seminars will include an overview of the research into ICT in early years, software resources and nursery schools demonstrating good practice in using ICT in the pre-school environment. All practitioners will be able to attend one keynote presentation plus two seminars, making this a quality staff development opportunity for your establishment. The event has something for everyone in education, with sessions suitable for headteachers, ICT coordinators, teachers, practitioners and classroom assistants at pre-school, primary and secondary levels.

Entrance to SETT is FREE and you will be able to send all or some of your staff. Late night opening until 7.00 p.m. on Wednesday 25 September will allow staff to visit after school hours.

For a full seminar programme or to register online, visit www.settshow.com or call the ticket hotline on 0870 429 4490.

Early Years Online

What really interests you as an early years practitioner?

Is it Latest News ... Recent Research ... Resources ... Discussion and Debate ... all of these or ... none of these?

Early Years Online www.ltscotland.com/earlyyears is being redesigned, along with other online sites provided by Learning and Teaching Scotland, and we want to know what changes you think are required.

Early Years Online aims to support practitioners working with children 0–8 years. Does it work for you? Go online and have another look at the site. Tell us what you think needs to be added, removed, re-arranged, shortened, extended.

This is your chance to influence the future development of Early Years Online. Give us your views – online, by e-mail or by 'snail' mail.

Contact Liz Paterson at:
Learning and Teaching Scotland
74 Victoria Crescent Road
Glasgow, G12 9JN
Tel: 0141 337 5000
Fax: 0141 337 5050
E-mail: L.Paterson@LTScotland.com

Progress with Purpose Supporting continuity in children's learning 3–8

This pack, published as part of Learning and Teaching Scotland's Early Education Support Series, has been developed to help all those working with children in the early stages of their development and learning. It consists of a video, a CD-ROM and a print pack of staff development materials.

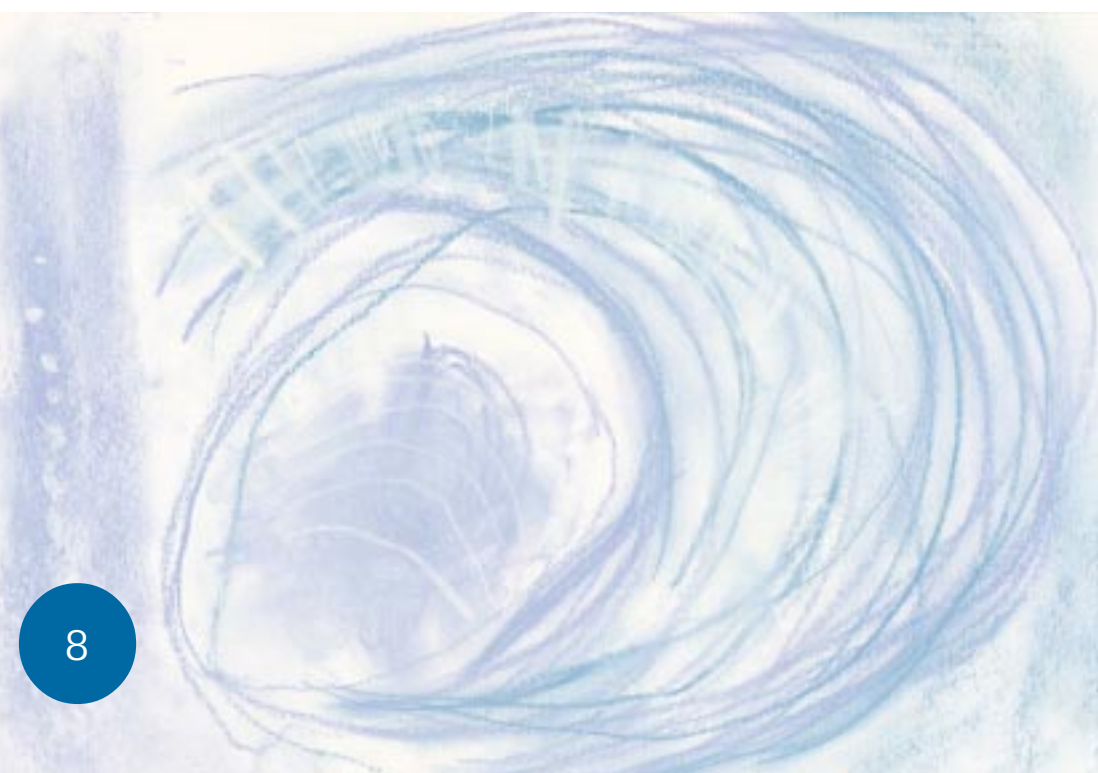
The materials are designed to provide support, guidance and contexts for discussion. These will enable staff to work independently and together, reflecting and sharing information about effective assessment and documentation of children's learning experiences, particularly at the point of transition between the early years and primary sector.

The sequences featured in the video and snapshots in the CD-ROM are taken both from early years and primary settings. The accompanying staff development booklet includes leader's notes, notes on preparation, activity sheets and handouts, and suggestions for additional activities.

The pack is designed for staff working in both early years centres and the early stages of primary school.

Progress with Purpose is available from:

Customer Services
Learning and Teaching Scotland
Tel: 08700 100 297
Price: **£22.50** & VAT



Anna McCubbin, Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
Her representation of Natalie Harthog's *Blue Wave*

Appreciating Art

Children attending the Early Learning Centre in Hamilton, South Lanarkshire, provided the illustrations for this edition of *Early Years' Matters*.

Nursery Teacher, Colette Hodgkinson, described her recent work with the children:

The children have been encouraged to look in detail at a selection of paintings reproduced in books, on posters, cards, etc., and talk about the colours and forms used by the artists. They really enjoyed seeing the Monet reproductions and looking at photographs of him and of his garden at Giverny. One little boy told his granny, correctly and to her great surprise, that the 'picture on her wall was of Waterlilies and was painted by Claude Monet, an old man with a beard and a pipe'.

The children talked about the colours Monet had used, blending and contrasting to give different effects. We also looked at work using colour and form in very different ways: to represent texture and colours of flowers, to show the heat and emptiness of the desert, the motion in a tidal wave and representation of figures. Later many children painted portraits of each other. Our visit to the art galleries was really popular and the children made very perceptive comments.