

IMPROVING PROVISION FOR TWO-YEAR-OLDS THROUGH RESEARCH LED DEVELOPMENT

KATHY GOOUCH AND SACHA POWELL



LANDSCAPE FOR THE PROJECT

International interest / concern with ECEC provision for birth to threeⁱ
 Flagship policy: free early education for disadvantaged two-year-olds
 Policy supported by evidence linking good quality early education to better outcomesⁱⁱ
 Early education for school readinessⁱⁱⁱ
 Traditional split in education and care systems; staff roles, knowledge & qualifications vary^{iv}
 Need for professional development^v
 Early intervention = savings to public purse^{vi}
 Women & employment^{vii}
 Local Authority role in developing free early education provision

"The space to think, share, reflect & learn is so valuable."

PARTICIPANTS' CASE STUDIES REVEALED THAT...

How children were constructed mattered whether they were thought of:

- as small 3 year olds – therefore in need of diluted educational pedagogy
- as a funded, disadvantaged group – therefore separated from other 2 year-old groups
- as in need of behaviour management interventions - large group 'holding' activities, 'crowd control'
- as in need of 'transitioning' – 2 year old children (and their families) learning what is 'allowed'

Policies did not always translate into practice, for example:

- Inside and outside practice differed in terms of children's activities and adults' roles (more supervisory outside)
- Range of interpretations/some lack of understanding of key person's role
- Environments were not always completely suitable ('his rucksack and coat were too high up for him to reach himself')
- Statements about well-being were made but 'simplistically – a mark of children's well-being would be if they're not crying, are busy and have enough space'

DESIGN FOR THE PROJECT

February 2013 to July 2014

41 participants from West Sussex, Surrey & Hampshire County Councils
 Modelled on The Baby Room Project work with Medway Local Authority
 Professional development days to facilitate & support case study work
 Encouraging 'radical looking and listening'^{viii}
 Deconstructing concepts of childhood & 'twoness', unchallenged wisdom & taken for granted aspects of practice^{ix}
 Case studies in 41 settings (e.g. nurseries, childminder homes) - observations, interviews, discussion
 Presenting findings, co-constructing interpretations

"I've begun to think more critically, ask questions of the data"

PARTICIPANTS LEARNED, FOR EXAMPLE:

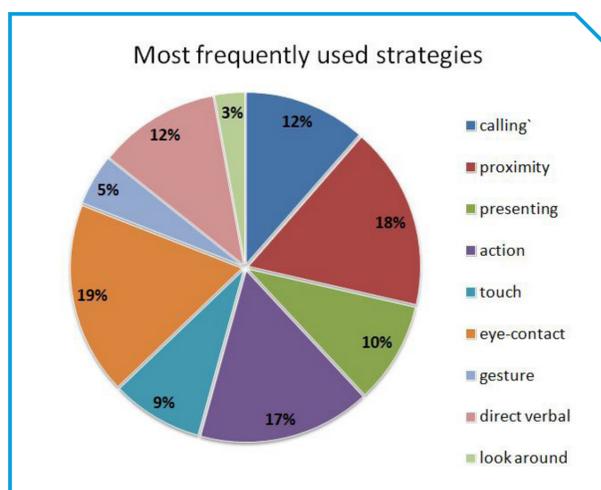
- The importance of warmth and responsiveness as consistent behaviours
- How much children relied on touch and closeness as communicative strategies and how unreliable verbal/compliant actions could be
- Voice, tone and adults' non-verbal communications matter to young children
- The significance of an 'interaction scribble stage' when children explore possibilities in safe relationships, as they explore a range of strategies for communication and to develop relationships
- Very young children are capable of empathy
- The importance of close interactions for children's mirroring of actions and verbalisations
- The need for a sensitively constructed appropriate environment
- The potential for young children to be in 'family groups', recognising the importance of siblings; or in community groups of friends and peer groups, regardless of age
- How much more professional development is needed to support those working with this age group.

AN EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPANTS' DATA ANALYSIS

"Have I 'judged' settings when perhaps I should look more closely?"

"My knowledge of 2 year olds' development, the visible + 'hidden' politics, power balance, physical & emotional environments grew beyond expectation"

"It's nice to have time to watch without the pressure to give answers at the end of each visit"



PARTICIPANTS' DEVELOPMENTS AND PROJECT CONSEQUENCES

Frequent mention was made of the way in which the project work had led them towards further and deeper enquiries, both in relation to their chosen focus and in pursuing systematic research and enquiry more generally. For example:

- *"[T]his research opportunity has given me a flavour to question and opened my mind and eyes to the challenge of transition...."*
- *"We discussed ongoing work with the community to promote a more positive view of young children and ensuring their visible presence within their community. This will be an on-going piece of work which I think is very important and I would like to be able to support staff with this."*
- *"I felt rewarded with the way the research had some ongoing impact on practice for 2 yr olds, both through regular discussion during the observations and through the INSET session at the end."*
- *"It would be interesting to collect another data set or undertake research on a larger scale to see if similar conclusions could be drawn from another set of data."*
- *"I still have a lot of data to work through, and many more connections to make in my analysis, so I'll keep going until I have formulated a theory that can shed some light on when and why these interactions occur and what impact, if any, the environment plays."*
- *"In order to use my findings in a productive way, I have since commissioned a programme of training courses on Communication Friendly spaces for two year olds which will be accessible to the early year's workforce during the spring 2014."*

OUR INTERPRETATIONS AND LEARNING

The process of analysing all the project data generated three broad categories: 'scripts', 'strategies' and 'systems'. But we now ask whether 'scripts' encompass all of these? Practitioners and their managers and advisors engage in a range of scripted pedagogies in their interpretations of policy at national and local levels, and thus produce strategies and systems of engagement. The ways in which project participants questioned, for example, interpretations of key person policies challenge ideas about whose scripts count in moment by moment practice.

Through dialogic research and sensitive and informed development opportunities, consideration of how 'intuitive scripts' may be allowed to permeate practice with young children could be a way forward to understanding how relationships can become centre stage of this work through personal investment in professional practice, rather than the alternative which may be, as one participant suggested 'just going through the daycare motions'.

ⁱTaguma M, Litjens I and Makowiecki K (2012) *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris: OECD; Cooke G and Henehan K (2012) *Double Dutch: the case against deregulation and demand-led funding in childcare*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research
ⁱⁱSmith R., Purdon S., Schneider V., La Valle I., Woolny I., Owen R., Bryson C., Mathers S., Sylva K., Lloyd E. (2009) *Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children Evaluation*. London: DCSF
ⁱⁱⁱDFE (2011) *Trialling New Approaches to Free Early Education: Guidance for Local Authorities Bidding for Funding*, February 2011.
^{iv}Nutbrown, C (2012) *Foundations of Quality. Final Report of the Review of Childcare and Early Education Qualifications*. London: DfE

^vGeorgeson, J et al (2014) *TWO-YEAR-OLDS in England: an exploratory study. Stage One Report*. www.tactyc.org.uk
^{vi}Allen, G (2011a) *Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive savings*. London: HM Government
^{vii}EHRc (2011) *Childcare Matters: improving choices and chances for parents and children*. London: EHRc
^{viii}Clough, P and Nutbrown, C (2012) *A Students' Guide to Methodology*. London: Sage
^{ix}Sachs J, and Logan, L (1997) *Musing on the future of primary schooling in Meeting The Challenges of Primary Schooling*, London: Routledge.



Canterbury
 Christ Church
 University