

Communication Friendly Spaces: Informing the Expansion of Appropriate Provision for 2 Year Olds

By Kerry Lawrence and Eleanor Jones

Elizabeth Jarman has been delivering training in Kent, which we both attended, regarding using Communication Friendly Spaces to support two year olds in Early Years settings. The Communication Friendly Spaces approach involves focusing on the role of the environment in supporting speaking and listening skills, emotional well-being and general engagement. In order to do this, practitioners must understand how the physical space is connected to the underpinning pedagogy of the setting. In other words, the way you set out your environment should reflect your pedagogy, not clash with it. For example, if you say that you value children's independence, does the layout of your resources reflect this? Or are they difficult for children to access independently, perhaps due to where they are positioned or how cluttered the setting is? It's essential to tune into the environment from the child's perspective. To do this, practitioners must observe and reflect on how children interact with the environment. What does their activity and behaviour tell you about how effectively the environment is laid out? Children's preferred contexts for learning can be determined using these observations, and if practitioners act on what they discover they can then create developmentally appropriate learning spaces that truly meet the needs of the individual children.

The training was really informative, useful, and interactive. We enjoyed chatting with like-minded people and got to make our own "friendly communication space" in which to chat and share ideas. These communication friendly spaces were small areas created using rugs, cushions and other props that reflected the interests and needs of individual children and became safe spaces that they could go into, and where they would be more comfortable communicating. We were then able to take this idea back to our settings to share what we

Key Points raised:

- Make sure that your setting has areas that are proportionally appropriate for younger children – for example a fenced off, sensory area in one corner of a large, open outdoor area.
- Provide small spaces and areas where children can feel contained – for example dens, baskets to sit in (dog baskets are great for this!), etc.
- Avoid sensory overload! A setting that is too colourful and cluttered can be overwhelming and inaccessible for young children. Declutter your space and use natural light, soft textures, and calming colours.
- Ensure that children have uninterrupted time to pursue their learning – don't have a routine that moves them from one thing to another too quickly.
- Make sure the parents are comfortable in your setting as well as the children – make them feel really welcome and at ease as any uneasiness the parents feel will transfer straight to their children.

had learnt. It was really simple things which triggered discussion, and subtle changes in the setting which really can make a massive difference. We have made some subtle changes as a result, such as using an empty table and covering it in khaki fabric to create a new den, whilst using the table top with our farm animals. The children have loved it! We are also now creating an igloo in the garden with milk bottles, as a result of discussion from the training.

One key piece of advice we picked up at the training is to get your two year olds to take photos of the setting, get down on their level and see what they see. What is it like to be that two year old? You will be surprised at what you discover! Perhaps it is too busy for them, and you may need to strip back to simple things and declutter the environment.

For more information see
www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk

Visit... The Museum of Childhood

By Polly Bolshaw

If you get the opportunity, while away a couple of hours at the (free) Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green. Here you will find a history of childhood portrayed, predominately, through toys ranging from centuries ago to the present day – Froebel’s original *Gifts* and traditional Montessori teaching aids sit alongside Moshi Monsters and My Little Pony in an attempt to illustrate how thinking around what are valuable resources for children have altered, and how, at the same time, children’s interests have transformed too. Seeing toys that have a personal relevance to you (and I almost guarantee that you will) amongst masses of toys and artifacts that perhaps you will not have seen before, serves an important function – you realise how quickly perceptions and perspectives of childhood change, and highlights how the experiences of children throughout the ages, including those that you are working with today, can be immeasurably different to yours.



Modern British Childhood Exhibition

There are elements that will frustrate you and leave you searching for more information – captions such as “one study found...” or allusions to theories but not the theorists will test your knowledge and leave you wanting a bibliography or reading list. Don’t go with the expectation of enhancing your academic foundations significantly, but instead to see tangible evidence of how childhoods have changed. The temporary exhibition *Modern British Childhood* (on until 14th April 2013) gives a fascinating overview of how things like political and economic factors, as well as media influence, have affected the transformation of childhood in Britain between 1948 and 2012 (the period between London’s hosting of the Olympic Games.)

The Childhood Cube



Go to be inspired – one caption in the museum states, “*the more things children know about, the more they can use them in creative thinking and play.*”. But this statement holds true for adults too – learning more about how practice and provision for children has changed will enable us expand upon what we provide for children and ensure that we can justify why. And if you get the chance, take children along with you too, so they can appreciate the differences and similarities between their lives and what children experienced in the past.

For more information and details, visit www.museumofchildhood.org.

Let’s Celebrate!

By Eleanor Jones

- April Fool’s Day: 1st April
- St George’s Day: 23rd April
- Anzac Day (Australia): 25th April
- Freedom Day (South Africa): 27th April

What could we be celebrating this month?



Making a difference

Transforming early years practice

Following on from the success of the joint OMEP and CCCU conference in November 2012, *Making a Difference: Transforming early years practice*, a series of **free** evening expert lectures and student showcases are taking place each month aimed at "showcasing quality practice in the early years sector", open to all early years students and practitioners. The expert lectures will be a chance to learn and develop a knowledge of good practice from recognized, experienced members of the field, whilst the student showcases will be an opportunity for students to meet and share research findings and practice in an informal setting.

Upcoming Events:

Expert Lectures, from 6pm-7pm:

Monday 15th April 2013: **Dr Kathy Gooch and Dr Sacha Powell** share research and findings on the Baby Room Project in advance of the 4th Baby Room Conference

Thursday 16th May 2013: TBC

Thursday 27th June 2013: TBC

Student Showcases, from 5pm-6:30pm:

Thursday 18th April 2013: An introduction by **Anita Cooper** on student research, followed by **Polly Bolshaw** on *An Exploration of the Concept of "School Readiness"*.

Thursday 9th May 2013: **Debbie Bell (BA Early Years Leadership)** on *Physical Development of Young Children* and **Anita Cooper** on *Great Expectations – what difference does a degree make in the early years sector?*

Thursday 13th June 2013: **Hilary Welland (BA Early Years Leadership)** on *Creative Transitions from Pre-School to Reception*.

Get Involved

The aim of the student showcase evening is to act as a platform for students wishing to share the findings of their research, however small, to other students, and to act as a stepping-board for those who may be wishing to develop their experiences in academic presentations. If you have a piece of research that you wish to share at a student showcase evening later this year, contact Nicola Kemp (nicola.kemp@canterbury.ac.uk).

March's Expert Evening Lecture – Gail Ryder Richardson from Outdoor Matters

The first of the series evening expert lectures, attended by over 40 early years practitioners and students, saw Gail Ryder Richardson from *Outdoor Matters* present on how to overcome some of the practical problems inhibiting a successful outdoor environment. The informative and engaging lecture focused on some of the common barriers in the outdoor environment (such as "mug huggers" – those members of staff that stand unwillingly, mug of tea in hand, overseeing, but not engaging with, children) and suggested some simply, practical solutions to overcoming these, for example, providing outdoor coats for staff members so that they don't fear getting their own clothes mucky. The lecture will certainly enhance the provision I provide, and I am sure future expert lectures will have a similar effect.



By Polly Bolshaw

In Practice...

Promoting the Home Learning Environment

By Polly Bolshaw

The EPPE report (2004) shows a positive correlation between a child's home learning environment (HLE) and their intellectual and social development, illustrating how important it is that practitioners create opportunities to support the HLE of the children in their care. This is also reflected in the Sure Start Children's Centre's Statutory Guidance (2010) in which "support for parents to develop a good early home learning environment" is suggested as a way in which centres may meet their aim of providing information and advice to parents.

With the aim to promote the HLE in mind, families engaging in *Narrowing the Gap* (a programme targeting reception-age children who are working below their expected level of development relative to their age) and *Family Fun* (family sessions aimed at disadvantaged two-year olds receiving free early years entitlement) have been given *Playdough Packs*, which contain the ingredients to make simple dough recipe, along with a measuring cup, wooden spoon, picture recipe card and related rhyme card (costing around £1.40 per pack). These packs are given out after parents and children have had a chance to play with or make playdough together in the setting, in which practitioners can model effective ways to support children's thinking. It is intended that by gifting these packs, children's experiences within the setting can be extended into the HLE and they can make connections between different parts of their life. The packs also include a "Top Tips" sheet for adults, which explains why malleable materials such as playdough are great for children's development and gives examples of good questions and conversations to be having with your child whilst playing with playdough. If you have children in your setting that love playdough, or you want to develop some of the skills that using playdough can foster, consider creating some similar packs for children to have or to borrow, to promote their HLE and work with parents as their children's first educators.

Simple dough recipe:

1 cup of salt
2 cups of flour
1 cup of water

Add the flour to the salt, gradually pour in water whilst stirring.

Keeping On Track with your Dissertation – Starting Your Research

Feedback from the last newsletter indicated that some general pointers for your dissertation may be useful. With this in mind, here are some things I realised along the way with regard to collecting data and the methodology that might be beneficial to know nearer the start than the end of your dissertation process!

- Before carrying out any research, read a book on how to carry it out. I found Cresswell's (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* to be really useful, in particular with explaining the different paradigms you may be considering. Also this book is good in helping you decide what type of methodology would be most suitable for your research question, and to help you make sure you can justify why you have chosen your methodology and paradigm.
- Within your methodology, as well as making sure you have identified a paradigm and a research method, ensure you draw attention to the ethical issues involved in your study, and make sure that all of your decisions on these are supported by literature.
- Ensure you carry out a pilot of your data gathering method (i.e. questionnaire, interview, case study etc.) so that you can iron out any problems in your methodology. Don't be afraid, after you have carried out your research, to highlight any weaknesses you found in your methodology – this shows that you are able to critically reflect.
- When carrying out your research, don't worry about **what** you are finding, especially if it is not what you expected, but instead accept that it is what you found, and this is what you have to write up. Even if it's not what you expected, this is still noteworthy. I put off writing up my findings for ages because I worried whether it was "the right thing" – just write it up!

Career consultant becomes available to all New Leaders in Early Years!

By Sophie Hryniewicz

My name is Sophie, and I am the newly assigned New Leaders in Early Years recruitment consultant. As part of the Canterbury Christchurch employer engagement programme, the university is working in partnership with Capita Permanent Education Consultancy to ensure you have the best market knowledge and opportunities to get the career in Early Years you want. I am very excited to begin working with you!

With the upcoming changes in government policy enabling EYPS professionals to be recognised as Early Years Teachers, it is an exciting time to find new opportunities in the Early Years field. I would love to speak to you to help you plan your next career move, recognising that the aim of the New Leaders in Early Years programme is to recruit top graduates to work in early years in areas of social disadvantage.

Capita have links to schools and nurseries in Kent, London and all over the UK. We proactively recruit for vacancies all year round, and are always looking for highly qualified and experienced Early Years

Professionals/Teachers. I currently have vacancies in private, voluntary and independent nurseries, maintained schools and Academies.

It is never too early to begin your job search. I will create a tailored profile for you, match you to the vacancies that you desire, and work with you from application to placement in work and beyond.

Please send me your CV or give me a call if you would like to discuss opportunities available, know more about the service, or have a general discussion about your career aspirations and how to achieve them. I look forward to hearing from you!

Contact:

Sophie Hryniewicz

Capita Permanent Recruitment Consultant

specialising in Early Years Education

Tel: 020 7202 0031

Mobile: 07584 408142

Email: Sophie.Hryniewicz@capita.co.uk

Getting Your Job Application Noticed

By Eleanor Jones

We asked an Early Years leader what makes candidates stand out in job applications...

What I really look for in someone applying for a job is passion for the job - I remember interviewing someone who wanted to work at my setting because it was closer to home and better hours... not exactly the best reason to apply for a job!

Working in the Early Years is about having a passion for improving the lives of children and it's really important that you show this in both what you say and what you do - especially with the increasing number of job interviews that include an observation of your practice! So showing you care for children and their well-being is vital.

Also, job applications should include information that shows you have researched the setting - don't just copy and paste! It should relate to what you have found out about the setting and why is it you want to work there? At my setting we have "values" and I was impressed that someone talked about these in an interview as it showed they had researched the setting beyond Google Maps!

It's also important that you get across what you can offer the setting - not just what you like about it, but what can you do to enhance it? What are your passions? What are you really good at? How do you get the best out of children?