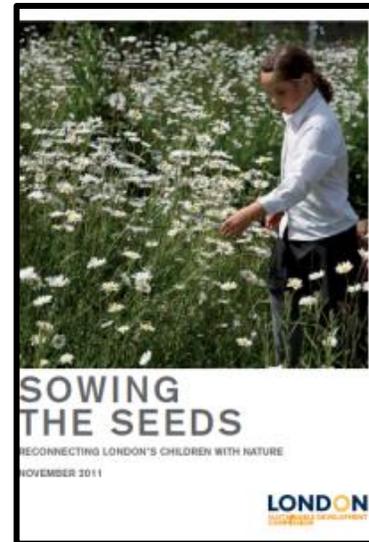


Reconnecting Children with Nature

By Polly Bolshaw

Think back to when you were a child. Where was your favourite place to play? And where were your nearest adults? Tim Gill began his expert lecture *Sowing the Seeds: why reconnecting children with nature matters, and what we should be doing about it* on Thursday 4th July at CCCU in Canterbury with these two questions. If you said that your favourite childhood location was somewhere outside, away from direct adult supervision, you would be in the majority of adults surveyed over four continents. Yet, with children spending an ever-decreasing amount of time in natural places (Gill's *Sowing the Seeds* report highlights research finding 1 in 7 children in London did not make a single trip to the natural world in a year), how will the children we work with today answer the questions posed above? When considering where their favourite place may be, Gill notes that "disconnection from nature" is not a new concept – within a letter from a WWII evacuee is the innocent statement, "*They call this 'spring', mum, and they have one down here every year*". He also draws attention to decrease in children's "right to roam" – highlighting Derbyshire's (2007) article showing that one eight year old boy in Sheffield is able to "roam" 300 yards to the end of his street – in contrast to his mother, who could walk half a mile unaccompanied at the same age, his grandfather, who could walk a mile, and his great-grandfather, who could walk six miles by himself.

Yet the benefits of nature are widespread – spending time outdoors helps to restore



Tim Gill's report was commissioned by the London Sustainable Development Commission.

emotional balance, leads to increased physical development outcomes and leads children to hold certain views of the environment in adulthood. Structured programmes around horticulture lead to certain academic outcomes too. With these in mind, Gill's report *Sowing the Seeds* outlines recommendations for increasing children's nature experiences, including suggestions for both policy and practice. It is clear that strategies must be implemented to boost the amount of time children spend in the natural world, as thinking back to our own childhood demonstrates how these experiences are treasured.

Bibliography

Derbyshire, D. (2007) *How children lost the right to roam in four generations*. [Online] (URL <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-462091/How-children-lost-right-roam-generations.html>). Daily Mail Online, 2007 June 15. (Accessed 4 July 2013)

Student Research: An Enquiry into Father's Involvement in Childcare

By Blanca Acerboni, ed. Eleanor Jones

As of 2011, women were still far more likely to be stay – at – home mums than men were to be stay – at – home dads. However, the number of male primary carers has increased steadily in the last couple of decades and does not show signs of stopping. As an early years' practitioner the issue interests me because I believe that in order for children to have equality of opportunity as adults, it is important for them to see men and women in a variety of roles as children. This means seeing more men in caring roles and more mothers working out of the home. Harrington *et al.* (2012: 31) state that the presence of a stay – at – home father has been found to have overwhelmingly positive effects on women's careers.

In order to research the issue I decided to interview two fathers about their experiences of fatherhood. Both men work full time. 'Alex' is in his twenties and a new father who has a one year old son. 'Peter' is in his fifties and a generation older. He has two daughters, aged twenty-seven and twenty-nine. 'Alex' and 'Peter' are pseudonyms used in order to maintain anonymity. Alex and Peter are of a similar social class and both live in the same town.

The most striking response I found from both the interviews that I conducted was that both the men thought that there was a different type of bond between a mother and child and a father and child. Both men implied that this was something biological, and discussed it in terms of 'hormones' and 'motherly instinct'. It can be argued therefore that for my participants a 'good mother' and a 'good father' would therefore be different. This is not however true for all men, for example 'Alan', a father and teacher interviewed in Gatrell's 2005 study, states that all the characteristics he identifies with a good mother could apply to a father as well (Gatrell, 2005: 146). It is interesting to note that environmental stimuli can trigger hormonal changes (Anders and Watson in Fine, 2010: 87), meaning that our hormones respond to what is happening in our lives. What many people do not realise is that fathers' hormonal levels change too during the transition to parenthood (Fine, 2010: 87).

Of my two participants, Alex, who was considerably younger than Peter, had a more traditional view of male and female roles. He acknowledged that this was probably due to his Italian background. This highlights that people's identities are multi-faceted and that a range of factors will affect their views and opinions. Alex still saw his role as that of 'the provider', and argued that he needed to be the provider because he 'couldn't be mum'. Although he was fairly traditional in his views, Alex had a high respect for full time mothers – in contrast to the low social value that is arguably placed on stay – at – home mothers. Gatrell posits that there is higher social capital awarded to full time work as opposed to full time motherhood (Gatrell, 2005: 156). Not all men have the same respect for women who chose to stay at home. Gatrell (2005: 162) found that some fathers felt that women needed to maintain their career in order to maintain their status and respect within the relationship. Contrastingly, it can be argued that Alex sees being able to spend time with one's children as a privilege. When I asked him why he felt it would be unusual for a man to work part time while his partner was working full time he responded that he would rather sacrifice his time with his son than have his partner do that. Peter to a certain extent echoed Alex's views and worried that women working full time may feel that they are 'missing out'. He also stated that his daughter would love the opportunity to stay at home with her child but is not able to due to financial constraints.

An interesting point was raised by Alex. When explaining why he would be uncomfortable with taking on a stay-at-home parenting role, he explained that most other stay at home parents are mothers and he did not feel it would be appropriate to make close friendships with women who were not his partner, meaning that he worried about becoming lonely in a stay-at-home parent role. Alex is not alone in his concerns regarding the social aspects of stay-at – home fatherhood. In an interview as part of an *Observer* article on the issue, Andrew Holmes, a former stay- at – home dad stated that he valued his time at home with his children but would have tried to force himself into

social situations more if he were to do it again. In contrast to Alex, Andrew did not feel it would have been inappropriate to have friendships with women. He did, however, find that it was difficult for him to forge friendships with stay-at-home mothers because he could not join in with their conversations.

Conclusion

A common issue that was highlighted as a result of this research was regarding fathers' perceptions of masculinity. It can be argued that men are still less likely than women to stay at home to look after their children because either they feel it to be un-masculine, or they are worried that others do. It was striking that although all the men from *The Telegraph* and *Observer* articles had stated that

they enjoyed looking after the children, many of them had experienced others implying that it was not a masculine thing for them to do, and that this had affected them. With regards to why the numbers of stay-at-home fathers is increasing, it can be said to be a blend of financial and social reasons. As a result of societal changes, women are earning more than they were even one generation ago. Peter certainly thought that a large part of why there are more stay-at-home fathers than there were when his children were young is that now there are far more female higher earners. One must however be careful not to overstate these findings. Although the fathers I interviewed were very much 'average' or 'typical' men, there is debate over whether it is appropriate to make generalisations from case studies.

References

- Harrington, B., *et al.* (2012) The New Dad Right at Home Boston College Centre For Work and Family [Online] Available at: <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/pdf/The%20New%20Dad%20Right%20at%20Home%20BCCWF%202012.pdf> (Accessed 04 February 2013).
- Fine, C. (2010) *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science behind Sex Differences* London: Icon Books.
- Gatrell, C. (2005) *Hard Labour: The Sociology of Parenthood* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Keeping On Track with your Dissertation – Tying Up Your Research

Polly Bolshaw

Once your word count is getting close to completion, relief can start to set in, but it's really important to make sure that, when you have finished the bulk of the writing, you take the time to make sure it's polished. Do your sections link together? Have you looked at the marking criteria to ensure that you meet it all fully?

Make sure every piece of literature (including policy documents and theory) you refer to within the main body of your text is dated, and ensure it also has a place in your bibliography. Use Cite-Them-Right to make sure your bibliography is in the correct style.

Chances are, as you are so immersed in your research, it can be hard to make sure you've got enough detail in it to make sure it's clear to other people. Get someone else to read through it, to ensure it all makes sense, and to give it a final proofread too.

It's important that your dissertation is formatted right. It needs to be Times New Roman, size 12. The left-hand margin should be 40mm (so that there is enough space for the binding), and the other three sides should be 15mm. Allow time to get it bound - heat binding can be done in the Drill Hall Library for about £2 – the librarians will help you do it (or if you're lucky, do it for you!) The process takes about 15 minutes, but you may have to queue, so allow time for that.

OMEP World Conference Shanghai 2013

By Hannah Kasprzok, Jemima Murray and Kerry Lawrence



Unknowingly eating jellyfish, visiting Chinese kindergartens and seventy-three countries coming together to discuss successes and issues surrounding the early years world were just part of the OMEP China experience.

Sustainable development and raising quality in the early years were they key focus topics of the conference. At the kindergartens we saw this sustainable development in practice with the children and practitioners using recycled materials to create high quality games, resources and art work.



Reflections on the seminars

Talks were varied and interesting, reflecting cultures and early years practice from across the globe.

Living with Tensions - Jane Zhou

I attended a talk by Jane Zhou who was undertaking her doctorate about early years teachers in China. She talked about the tensions between teaching within private, public and international pre-schools in China. The comparison highlighted differences in Western and Chinese early years approaches as well as the differences between the theoretical thought of teaching and the reality of actually doing it. This is something I am sure we can relate to! She also talked about how the pay and working conditions are better in public pre-schools (similar to us!) but how these jobs are harder to come across. In addition, how it is only if you know someone within the public system you can get your child into a public early years setting which is a lot cheaper in comparison.

OMEP World Conference Shanghai 2013

Working in Early Years in the Pacific regions - Wendy Rich-Orloff

I attended a presentation by Wendy Rich-Orloff, who is based in Fiji and works with 14 of the countries which make the Pacific Region Islands, consolidating and co-ordinating early years across the islands. Wendy told us about teaching and learning resources in this region, and some of the challenges which they face within their early years centres. It was a fascinating presentation with many photographs, showing how early years settings look in the region. We were all amazed at how simple they were; yet effective. Natural resources are definitely the way forward! There are many challenges which they face in this region - environmental risks being one of the biggest. We saw evidence of how destructive cyclones are to the region, and how the small countries work together to rebuild. She told us how difficult arranging training sessions can be, when teachers from across the region have to come together. Language barriers were also prevalent with each of the countries having its own native language! What was clear, though, was how each nation is working to improve and raise the awareness of the early years sector-much like we are in the UK.

The Effect of Organisational Culture on R-Learning Professionalism and Kindergarten Teachers -Yeon Sueng Lee, Min Jung Kang and Sun Mi Park.

I attended an interesting talk on R-Learning, a method of teaching used in South Korea to engage children in education. 'R-Learning' is a combination of the word 'robot' and 'learning' and it involves a robot taking the role of a teaching assistant to support children's learning.

A Dongbu Robot Genibo Dog



The robots come with their own educational content, have voice recognition technology and are touch sensitive.

The paper I listened to studied Kindergarten teachers professionalism when using robots in the pre-school. 422 teachers were studied and measured in terms of their professionalism towards R-Learning subcategorised into 'Knowledge' (of child development, and of how to use robots in school) 'Attitude' (positive recognition of R-Learning) and 'Skills' (manipulation of robots and teaching and class management). The results suggested that teachers need training courses to improve their knowledge of robots as they had a positive attitude

to using robots but a passive attitude to learning how to use them. Professionalism levels were related to the leadership of schools and levels of support within the organisational culture. The presentation revealed a very different attitude and emphasis to technology based learning than is used in England. The researchers then gave us a demonstration with a robot dog and it did look like a high level of skill and knowledge was needed to understand the controls!

OMEP World Conference Shanghai 2013

We were treated to a variety of excursions and performances which enabled us to see Shanghai at its best!



We had a great experience meeting academics and experts from all over the world including Margaret Carr, co-creator of the Te Whariki, Ingrid Samuelsson, OMEP world president and Jaqueline Jones, former deputy assistant secretary for policy and early learning in America under Barack Obama. Not forgetting our OMEP Irish contingency who warmly welcome everyone to the OMEP 2014 conference in Cork focusing on 'Children's world of Play'.

We hope to see you there!

<http://www.omepireland.ie/>

<http://www.omepuk.org.uk/>

If you go down to the woods today...: An Outdoor Event

By Polly Bolshaw

On Friday 5th July 2013 around fifty conference delegates, - comprising of students, academics, practitioners and teachers - descended upon EarthCraftuk's forest school site near Faversham for a day of outdoor workshops and experiences, and the chance to share practical ideas with other members of the early years world. The weather was lovely, and the day provided lots of opportunities for appreciating the outdoors; above all what shone through was the natural world as a place for calm and providing a tranquil location for reflection. From the day it was clear how some of the benefits Tim Gill has highlighted of spending time with nature can come into play – especially when considering the positive effects on emotional balance – I certainly came away calm and collected.

Some practical ideas inspired by the conference to implement in your own setting:

Tortilla pizzas cooking on the fire pit.



Make individual pizzas by using a tortilla wrap and spreading it with tomato paste, sprinkling on grated cheese and adding your own toppings, such as mushrooms, sweetcorn, spinach, ham or basil. To cook, fold it into an envelope and place on an oiled pan on your fire pit (or your stove as an indoor substitute!) To increase your children's understanding of the natural world, herb plants can be easily grown and potted for children to pick to add to their tortilla pizzas.

Want to get children's imagination working and also give them a chance to work together? Stuart Welby from Manor House Nursery and Forest School demonstrated a woodland activity aimed at doing just that. Use puppets or soft toys of woodland creatures as props for talking about where animals live in the forest, as well as what they might eat. Then give one soft toy each to pairs or small groups of children and encourage them to make homes for the toys in the wood. Encourage them to reflect back on your conversation about where the animal may live and what they eat as a starting point for making their home – would their home be on the ground, in a tree, under a bush, in a pile of leaves? What would happen if other animals saw them – do they need to be hidden? Stuart also stated that the animals were allowed one "luxury item" made from natural materials within their home too – creating further opportunities for creative thinking!

A natural home for a Gruffalo!



If you are in an area with clay soil, take advantage of it by using the clay to make natural models and sculptures. Kathryn Barton from Kent Wildlife Trust demonstrated how to tightly compact natural clay by squeezing it in your hands, then placing it onto a tree branch or stump and moulding it from there into a unique sculpture. These can be decorated using twigs, leaves, seeds and anything else the children can find – a great way to encourage children to look closely at the natural world around them.

In Practice... *By Eleanor Jones*

There are many different ways in which we can introduce children to scientific concepts in the Early Years. Here are a few suggestions.

How to explore forces:

- Explore clay or playdough – pushing, pulling, squeezing, squashing, rolling.
- Play with a ball and discuss the fact that it always falls down, never up.
- Find different ways to make balls move - pushing, rolling, kicking, throwing, bouncing and hitting.

How to explore change:

- Playing with ice allows children to explore changing state
- Baking allows children to explore changes that are not reversible.

Investigating light:

- Use a lightbox, different leaves from a range of plants, paint colour charts, and coloured acetate sheets. Get children to look at the different shades of green on the leaves and match them to the paint colours. Then get children to look at the leaves through the acetate sheets and discuss how the colours change.
- On a sunny day, encourage children to make a range of different shadow shapes with their bodies. Discuss what happens and how they can change their shadow. Talk about where your shadow meets your body and how / if you can make it disappear. Repeat this at a different time of day and discuss what is different.

Investigating sound:

- Make a musical washing line by hanging a range of different kitchen utensils from a washing line. Discuss the different sounds different utensils make.
- Look at books about animals with big ears. Talk about what we can hear and how these animals use their ears to hear quiet sounds. Join two funnels together with tubing. Get one child to hold one of the funnels to their ear and another child to whisper into the other funnel. Talk about what it sounds like.

References:

- Brunton and Thornton, 2006: 'Early Years Science: Forces', in *Nursery World*, 16.3.06
Brunton and Thornton, 2006: 'Early Years Science: Sound', in *Nursery World*, 17.8.06
Brunton and Thornton, 2006: 'Early Years Science: Light', in *Nursery World*, 19.10.06
Brunton and Thornton, 2006: 'Early Years Science: Change', in *Nursery World*, 21.12.06



Let's Celebrate!

What could we be celebrating this month?

- 2nd-26th: Edinburgh Festival
- 25th-26th: Notting Hill Carnival
- 26th: Bank holiday



What to Read... *By Eleanor Jones*

The government has published a range of documents concerning Early Years in the past month. Here is a quick summary of what to look at:

- A consultation on childcare regulation has been launched and can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childcare-regulation>. This closes on 30th September.
- *More Affordable Childcare*, published on 16th July, is a new report setting out the steps the government is taking to address the challenges in providing affordable childcare for parents, which builds on the report *More Great Childcare* published in January: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/more-affordable-childcare>
- The results of the consultation on proposed changes to the role of the local authority in early education and childcare have now been published and can be accessed at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=conResults&consultationId=1889&external=no&menu=3>
- In addition, a consultation on primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum has also been launched. This has relevance to the Early Years as it includes points on the EYFS and the Foundation Stage Profile. The consultation can be accessed at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1920&external=no&menu=1>. It will close on 11th October.
- Elizabeth Truss wrote to local authorities on the 8th July about early learning for two-year-olds. She outlines the role local authorities are expected to play in delivering the offer of places for two-year-olds and how it should be communicated to parents. She also sets out the support that the Department for Education is offering to local authorities. You can view the letter in full at: <http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/2013/07/letter-from-elizabeth-truss-to-local-authorities-about-early-learning-for-2-year-olds/>
- *Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England: January 2013*: the DfE has released their annual Statistical First Release containing data from January 2013 regarding provision for children under 5 in England. This data shows that since 2009 124,740 more 3 and 4 year olds are benefitting from funded early education. The report can be viewed here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209044/Main_Text_SFR23-2013.pdf

Ofsted have also released two new publications regarding the Early Years:

- *Getting it right first time: achieving and maintaining high-quality early years provision*. This report describes features of strong leadership and how they have been developed in ways that support high-quality provision in the Early Years. In addition, the report also provides examples of good practice to help settings. The report can be read here: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/getting-it-right-first-time-achieving-and-maintaining-high-quality-early-years-provision>
- *Unseen Children: access and achievement 20 years on*. This report presents the main evidence informing the review conducted by Ofsted over the past year that seeks to understand the current pattern of disadvantage and educational success across England. They state their aim as being to learn the lessons of recent policy initiatives and come forward with proposals that would truly make a difference. This report builds upon the report *Access and achievement in urban education* published twenty years ago, which looked at seven urban areas with high levels of deprivation, and the update published ten years later. The new report can be accessed here: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-access-and-achievement-20-years>

Meet... Joanne Brown

Joanne Brown has been employed at Canterbury Christ Church University as a Research Intern on the *New Leaders in Early Years* programme since the beginning of June. The programme runs for 10 weeks, during which she will conduct interviews and create case studies, carry out a literature review and analyse both the qualitative data and quantitative data available in order to assess the effectiveness of the coaching scheme for New Leaders in Early Years Students. Joanne has recently finished her final year as a Psychology Undergraduate and hopes to continue in research as a career.