

Creating Constructions for Children

By Polly Bolshaw

On 9th May architect Mark Dudek gave an evening expert lecture on his experiences of constructing buildings with the child in mind. Mark is a specialist in architectural design for education and early years settings, as well as acting as Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield. He shared historic perspectives in which the spaces and environments that children and adults occupied were shared and indiscernible from one another, and how this has now altered so that children and adults now have their own, distinct, spaces. As well as creating a type of child-friendly, child-focused environment, this also raises the question - from a Vygotskian point of view, how can children learn from more-able adults if the spaces they inhabit are separate?

Mark shared some practical examples of designing and building early years settings and outdoor spaces, explaining some of the issues that can arise: such as creating an outdoor area with a man-made stream running through, which health and safety delegates were terrified to permit. This mimics the ever-present situations early years settings face every day – the option of providing a risk and inspiration adverse environment versus a space with dangers, but with stimulation too. Ultimately, Mark's water feature was allowed to remain, teaching us that



Cherry Lane – one of Mark's designs.

risks can be permitted, when managed, to produce areas that create challenge and excitement.

It may be thought that the similarities between early years and architecture are few and far between. Yet one quotation from the lecture proves that the disciplines do have something in common: "*As architects, we only ever create finished beginnings.*" As Early Years Professionals and practitioners, we strive to support children who, when they complete their time with us, are "finished beginnings" – ready to take on the challenges of school and life, hopefully secure and happy due to the foundations we've given them. Perhaps we have more in common with architects than it might at first appear.

Student Research: Benefits of and Attitudes Towards Breastfeeding: A Summary of the Literature

By Kathryn Hogarth, ed. Eleanor Jones

Benefits of Breast Milk

The re-current theme throughout the literature on breastfeeding is that children benefit developmentally from breast milk. It is argued that breastfeeding can benefit a child's cognitive and emotional development, as well as their overall health. As highlighted by Gokcay (2010), breast milk contains all essential nutrients, as well as bioactive elements that can reduce vulnerability to disease in both short and long term. Formula milk can never be individually tailored to the baby as breast milk is. Fletcher (2011) suggests that breastfeeding could be used as a way of being pro-active towards health. He talks about his own country and states that America has become re-active to health care, and there needs to be a shift towards early health care to prevent more serious conditions developing in later life. With more babies surviving because of advances in medicine, as well as having an ageing population in many areas of the world, there does appear to be a need for a shift towards prevention instead of cure. Without this, it is likely that both individuals and Governments around the world will face increasing medical costs.

Hamlyn et al (2002) found that mothers who left full time education at the age of 16 were less likely to breastfeed, while those who continue with education beyond 18 years old were most like to do so. This was evident across all of the UK. According to Hamlyn et al, knowledge about health benefits also increases with age, with 80% of mothers aged at least 30 claiming to be aware of the advantages of breast feeding, compared with 57% of teenage mothers (2002, p.94) One reason for this could be that some of the older women were having their second or more child.

The Power of the Media

Some people are more receptive to advertising and the subliminal messages than others, but could it affect the choice of women when they are deciding whether to breast or bottle feed their baby? Henderson, Kitzinger and Green (2000) looked at television programmes and newspaper articles that made reference to infant feeding in March 1999. They found that of 180 scenes shown on television, only one showed a baby being put to the breast, with a further nine showing an unused breast pump. The remaining 170 scenes showed the preparation of formula milk and bottle feeding. When breastfeeding was shown, spoken or written about it was usually made into a big issue, with the woman seen to be losing control of her body in an embarrassing fashion, or remarked upon in a sexual way. This highlights the potential problems with breastfeeding, while bottle feeding is portrayed as hassle free, as well as promoting male involvement. A woman who is less educated, and does not know the benefits of breast-feeding is likely to be swayed by these images, especially if her friends are also bottle feeding.

Conclusion

When it comes to deciding how to feed your infant, there are many things to take into consideration. To help with this decision, many soon-to-be parents turn to the health professionals. This means that health workers need to be trained to a high standard, not just in the UK, but all around the world. The correct information needs to be given to all pregnant women, and not just first time mothers. The health workers need to come across as friendly and approachable, not dominant and judging, so the mother may be more open to new ideas. The benefits found from this collection of literature have become accepted over the last few years in the medical world, however the less educated mothers from more socially deprived areas are still not getting to know. There needs to be a cultural change. It should not just be the health benefits that are stressed but the emotional and financial ones too. Palmer states that in most of the world, bottle feeding your baby costs more than half the household income (2009, p.7). While this may apply mainly to developing countries, there are many impoverished families in the United Kingdom that find the cost of having a baby greater than they expected. Breastfeeding is free, while the cost of the equipment needed to bottle feed your baby safely can be more than some can afford. Breastfeeding should be celebrated; it needs to be spoken about in the open, with less embarrassment, and the media, specifically popular television programmes could go a long way help this. If the information is given in a formal, educational manner, many women might be put off; it needs to be something they can relate to. There needs to be a focus on the community in socially deprived areas, increasing their knowledge and helping them to support one another from the inside, so that outside agencies can eventually take a back seat.

References

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In Practice... Creating a Suitable Learning Environment for Two Year Olds

By Eleanor Jones

When providing for two year olds it is important to remember that younger children value small spaces where they can feel contained, as this enables them to feel safe, giving them the confidence they need to explore independently (Bradford, 2012). Children will use these spaces in many different ways. For example, they may treat them as spaces that they can go to for a boost of safety and reassurance before going back out to explore the wider environment. Alternatively, they may take items that they wish to investigate into these small spaces in order to explore them from a place of safety and security. However they use the smaller spaces, it is clear that such opportunities for containment play a significant role in the learning and development of younger children. There are many ways in which you can easily provide for your two year olds by creating a variety of such spaces in your setting. Tents and tunnels can easily be moved around and put out as needed. Playhouses are a great option for a more permanent structure, as are climbing frames that have an upper level as children love hiding in the space under there. Even dog baskets can be used in this way, as when made more appealing with cushions and blankets, they can be a great space for children to sit where they feel more contained but can still interact with everything around them. Large cardboard boxes are a great temporary resource whenever they become available, as children love to climb in and out of them and hide in them.

Reference: Bradford, H. (2012), *Appropriate Environments for Children under Three*, Abingdon: Routledge



Let's Celebrate! *What could we be celebrating this month?*

- 4th: Queen's 60th coronation celebrations
- 15th: Trooping the Colour (Queen's Official Birthday)
- 16th: Father's Day
- 21st: Summer Solstice
- 24th: Wimbledon (until 7th July)



Action Research: Spaces for Enjoying Books

By Polly Bolshaw

The importance of a book area has been recognized throughout early years policy - the EYFS recommends that to demonstrate good practice in Literacy practitioners "create an attractive book area where children and adults can enjoy books together", whilst the ECERS-Scale (Sylva et al, 2006) evaluates the effectiveness of book areas, with excellent book areas being "comfortable", "filled with a wide range of books of varied style, content and complexity", "easily accessible" and "used independently", amongst other criteria. With this in mind, what can practitioners do to encourage children to spend time in book areas and enjoy accessing books?

Within a childminder's setting, I carried out action research to develop an effective book corner. To begin, trips to other settings took place – a technique suggested by Bromley (2009) as a method of exchanging ideas and strategies. This proved successful to see first-hand what book areas engaged children successfully – including in one where the book area formed the middle of the room, surrounded by low-level book shelves and seating – in contrast to Makin and Whitehead's (2004:63) belief that the book area should be screened off from "messy or boisterous play."

Following these trips to other settings, academic reading took place to begin to create the area. Under Makin and Whitehead's (2004:63) recommendation, the book corner space displayed books on low shelves and carpet tiles were laid to make the area more comfortable. Dolls were placed to look as if they were reading the books, so that the children know what to do when they arrive in the book corner. Photos of children with the books were used following research from Makin and Whitehead (2004), who advocate photos of children enjoying books and reading in the book corner. Meanwhile, Chambers (1991:74) realises the importance of peer recommendations when choosing a book, so it was hoped that the children would see photos of their friends with a particular book, and want to read that story as well.

With this all in place, and an attractive and (in my opinion) stimulating book corner, I had high hopes for engaging the children. However, during the next three days of observations, children did not go in. Thus, to promote the book corner space to the children, three further action steps were decided upon. Firstly, it was thought that if the researcher spent time in the book corner without the children, it might show them what the space was used for, and model wanted behaviour - Chapman (2004:12) believes that "children will naturally mimic the reading behaviour of adults". If adults spend time in the book corner, it also gives the space "status" (Bromley, 2009). It was also thought that the book corner might be more appealing if story sacks were also used, as this would be a novelty to the children and make the space more exciting for them. Makin and Whitehead suggest that as pre-school children tend to have a "hands-on" approach, story props and story sacks can help demonstrate the "excitement of reading" (2004:58). They also suggest that story sacks help children "become the authors of their own books", developing language, storytelling skills and imagination.

Through implementing these steps (and reading several stories in the book corner aloud by myself) gradually the children began to come in and engage in the book corner – using the area to look at picture books, play with story sacks together and also request stories be read to them. The book corner was now in use, and adults and children began spending time reading in the area together. How long should stories be read to children for? Chambers (1991:37) advocates, "for as long as a child can sustain concentration and interest, plus a little longer."

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What to Read... Surviving the First Day: State of the World's Mothers 2013

By Eleanor Jones



Save the Children's 14th annual State of the World's Mothers report was published in May. This report draws on the annual Mothers' Index, which uses the most recent data on women's health, children's health, educational attainment, economic well-being and female political participation. It looks at 176 countries around the world to see how well mothers and children are faring there, and in particular at how these countries are succeeding in saving the lives of mothers and their newborn babies. This year's report ranks the UK at no. 23, below other European countries including Spain (no.7), France (no.16) and Greece (no.19). Finland, Norway and Iceland are in the top five, while the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia come last. In addition, for the first time, this year's report also uses a Birth Day Risk Index to compare first-day death rates for babies in 186 countries. The statistics show a higher death rate for the under-fives in the UK than in 21 other European countries, as well as a higher chance of women dying during pregnancy or childbirth in the UK than in less wealthy European countries. It is suggested that this could be due to a number of factors, including the higher proportion of younger and older mothers in the UK, as well as the poor health of some pregnant women in the UK.

Upcoming Events

Student Showcases

Making a difference

Transforming early years practice

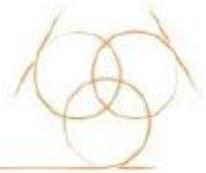
Thursday 13th June 2013

5:00 – 6:30

Rowan Williams Court

Hilary Welland (BA Early Years Leadership) on *Creative Transitions from Pre-School to Reception.*

Hilary will share her innovative and creative practice to ensure a smooth transition from Pre-School to Reception. This will include examples of effective practice and raise the importance of positive relationships for all involved during this very sensitive time in a young child's life.



Connecting Children and Nature

Expert Lecture by Tim Gill "Sowing the Seeds: why reconnecting children with nature matters, and what we should be doing about it."

Thursday 4th July | 6pm - 7pm | Canterbury Campus, Old Sessions House
7pm - 8pm Refreshments and discussion led by Dr Jonathan Barnes

Tim Gill is one of the UK's leading thinkers on childhood. For over 15 years his research, writing and consultancy work has focused on children's play and free time, and has had a real, positive impact on children's everyday lives. His influential book *No Fear: Growing up in a risk-averse society* was published in 2007, and subsequently led to the award of an honorary doctorate from Edge Hill University. He has written for the Guardian, Independent and trade and academic publications, and appears regularly on radio and television.

Tim has advised political parties and think tanks across the political spectrum. He is also a Patron of the Forest School Association - the new national governing body for Forest School. Tim blogs at his website: www.rethinkingchildhood.com



"If you go down to the woods today..." One day outdoor event

Friday 5 July | 9.30am – 3.30pm | Hosted by EarthCraftuk at their ancient woodland forest school site near Faversham

A one day outdoor event to experience and explore the opportunities the natural environment provides for learning. You will be able to choose to attend two practical workshop sessions led by expert practitioners. There will also be plenty of time to share knowledge and ideas informally.



Whilst the events are free of charge to attend, places are limited and booking is essential. For more information and to book your place, email: maria.hamilton@canterbury.ac.uk

Keeping On Track with your Dissertation – Writing Up Your Findings

Polly Bolshaw

Writing up your findings sounds like a difficult task as this is where all the hard work you have put into gathering data, be it through interviews, questionnaires, observations or other methods will be reflected. To help you work out how you are going to write your findings up, here are some things to consider:

- Depending on the type of data, you may want to include diagrams, charts or graphs – especially in the case of quantitative data. I personally had qualitative data and just included one table, which indicated how many instances of each of the themes I had identified through coding my interviews.
- When analyzing my data in the form of interview transcripts, I coded the data into key themes, which then became ten subheadings in the Findings and Analysis section of my dissertation. I found doing it this way broke the task of writing the findings up into more manageable chunks.
- When writing up your findings, you need to outline what you found and then – crucially – analyse this to give your thoughts and opinions as to why this was the case. In doing this, you should refer to relevant literature from your literature review and also at this point (depending on your findings) link in new literature that is now relevant.
- I put off looking at my data for ages, worried that I wouldn't have found any significant. Whatever you have found, you do need to write this up and analyse it (even if what you found isn't what you predicted), as this is the most important section of your dissertation.

How much?

Some Cohort 2 students asked how long my dissertation sections were. With some slight rounding, my dissertation was broken down as follows:

	Word count
Introduction	650
Literature review	5600
Methodology	3600
Findings and analysis	5600
Discussion	1800
Conclusion	750
Total	18000

What's Your Long-Term Plan?

By Polly Bolshaw

Now that some of the New Leaders have graduated and those that haven't are on the home stretch, chances are you are beginning to think beyond the job you've got to keep you going through university to the more distant future. Job interviews often ask "where do you see yourself in five years?" – do you have a clear idea? Here are some tips to get your thinking about your long-term career goal, based on support from Penny de Valk from *Fairplace*:

- What do you like about your current role – what are the best things you have done and your biggest achievements? Your long-term career needs to excite you in a similar way.
- What skills do you have and what skills do you think you might need to develop in the future? Using a NLEY facilitated coach may help you with this this. Knowing this information will help you work out what kind of short-term opportunities you need to be seeking out to get the experience you need.
- What organisations and part of the sector are you most passionate about? Thinking about this may also give you something to aim for in the future.

Bibliography: De Valk, P. (2012) How to build a long-term career plan. *The Guardian* [Online] (URL <http://careers.guardian.co.uk/how-to-build-long-term-career-plan>) (Accessed 31st May 2013).