

## What Does "School Ready" Really Mean?

By Eleanor Jones

On 28<sup>th</sup> September Penny Tassoni and David Whitebread participated in a live discussion hosted by PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years) at the Childcare Expo in Coventry. The discussion formed part of the launch of PACEY's research into school readiness and what this really means, with Tassoni and Whitebread initiating a discussion on the issue and responding to questions from a live studio audience.

Attention was drawn to the fact that school starting age is getting increasingly younger, as the assumption today is that all children start school at four, whereas most adults in the audience remember starting school at five. The question was therefore raised as to the extent to which schools are ready for increasingly younger children, and the importance of play was given great emphasis. The concern was raised that children are starting school too early, and Whitebread suggested that the school system as it currently stands is asking four year olds to learn in a way that does not work for them. The discussion also touched on the importance of getting parents, teachers and childminders working together to ensure high quality early education for young children. The question was asked as to whether there would be a checklist for school readiness, but both Tassoni and Whitebread agreed that this would not be appropriate as they suggested that children are already over-observed in settings.

PACEY's report, *What Does "School Ready" Really Mean?* (PACEY, 2013) found that childcare professionals, parents and teachers interpret the concept of 'school readiness' very differently to policy makers and regulators in England. They found that the majority of professionals, parents and teachers who responded to the research agreed that school readiness should refer to having strong social skills, the ability to cope emotionally with separation from



parents, relative independence in personal care, a curiosity about the world and a desire to learn. Much less importance was given by these respondents to children having reading and writing skills before starting school. In addition, respondents felt the need to give a greater emphasis to the importance of learning through play in England. This was contrasted with Wales, whose Foundation Phase for children aged 3-7 years places a greater emphasis on play. Another key finding of the report was that respondents felt that schools should be ready for children as much as children should be ready for school, creating a more holistic approach and smoother transitions.

As a result of these findings, the study by PACEY makes three recommendations:

- The government should do more to promote play in early education.
- The early years sector must commit to reducing the communication barriers that hinder children's transition from childcare to school.
- Parents need to be provided with the information and support they require to help children move from childcare to school.

### References

- PACEY, 2013, *What Does "School Ready" Really Mean? A research report from Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years*, Bromley: PACEY
- [http://www.pacey.org.uk/news/events/pacey\\_live\\_2013/pacey\\_live\\_video.aspx](http://www.pacey.org.uk/news/events/pacey_live_2013/pacey_live_video.aspx). Accessed 28/9/2013.

# Student Research: An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Integrated Working within a New Parent and Baby Group

By Jemima Murray, ed. Eleanor Jones

The aim of this research is to give an overall insight and evaluation of integrated working within the New Parent and Baby Group at a children's centre, looking at the successes and difficulties and potential reasons for this. The group incorporates different professionals to achieve integrated working. Focusing further by using questionnaires and observations from the group and document analysis of the "Core Purpose of Sure Start Children's Centre" document (Department for Education, 2011), the research attempts to look for commonalities in what each member wants from the group or similar groups. Findings are discussed in relation to integrated working, which lead to further insight into what can be done to move toward more effective integrated working in the future, particularly in terms of this New Parent and Baby Group. The children's centre involved is part of a large, urban local authority in an area where 19% of children are living below the poverty line (before housing costs), which is just under the national average of 21.3% (Hirsch and Beckhelling, 2011). Considering the non inner-city location, this is quite high.

Data collected via questionnaires, observations and document analysis was analysed to produce an evaluation of what various parties want from the sessions, as well as looking overall at the effectiveness of integrated working in this context. All parents that attended the group were invited to take part as well as the professionals I had access to. Overall, this included two parents and two professionals – the Community Liaison Officer and the Early Years Advisor. The data analysis involved looking for themes within the answers from the questionnaires, reading through the "Core Purpose of Sure Start Children's Centre" document (Department for Education, 2011) and the observations. In addition, general findings in the data regarding the effectiveness of integrated working were analysed. This was affected in this research by issues in sharing information, illness and absence of inter-agency representatives as well as a possible lack of cohesion of those involved in this specific integrated working project.

Despite the small number of participants for the questionnaires, clear themes could be drawn from the data because there were other data collection methods. Five over-arching themes were found across all three data sets: socialising, sharing knowledge, children's centres, parenting skills and integrated working.

Socialising is clearly key in such groups; socialising with other parents and with 'professionals' to build relationships. In the Cox and Docherty (2008) study it was found that parent's psychological well-being was enhanced after attending a new parents and baby group, as the isolation that can be experienced by new parents adversely affects well-being and coming together is crucial for new parents. This socialising can encourage sharing knowledge, which further builds relationships and enhances parenting skills.

The group was held within the children's centre and the aim was to get parents through the door initially with a view to them returning; thus accessing other groups or services available in the centre, which from the observations were taken up by one of the parents (signing up for 'cooking on a budget' and baby massage') as a direct consequence of this New Parent and Baby Group. Attending these groups shows that mums want to improve outcomes for their children. In addition the document outlines what a children's centre's purpose is, which largely involves improving outcomes. This will be achieved through coming to the centre and groups like these to improve parenting skills.

Integrated working underpinned this New Parent and Baby Group as it involved different professionals collaborating to provide a range of sessions for new parents. The start of a baby's life is an ideal place for integrated working to occur, offering parental support and signposting if necessary. The observations saw signposting in action; but the lack of effective integrated working in this group was also noted. The core purposes document highlights the need for integrated working and the questionnaires found that both parents and professionals were mentioning integrated working.

Overall, the research has shown that there are similarities between what the government, parents and professionals want from groups like the new parent and baby group. In addition, all parties involved see integrated working as central to groups such as the new parent and baby group. This suggests that it is championed as a strong intervention method.

In terms of the effectiveness of integrated working within this group, more needs to be done, as clearly barriers such as illness are difficult to overcome with all the cuts to staffing. But tackling leadership issues to create strategies to improve the integrated working within this centre are feasible – meetings fortnightly would be an effective way to begin to build links with the services to provide a more cohesive integrated working team. This would in turn reduce the physical location barrier as professionals would all be in one space discussing issues and ideas and as relationships form between professionals it may reduce this barrier further.

## References

- Cox, P., Docherty, K. (2008). Assessing the Impact of a First-time Parenting Group. *Nursing Times*; 104, (21), pp. 32-33
- Department for Education (2011). The "Core Purpose" of Sure Start Children's Centres. Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/a00191780/core-purpose-of-sure-start-childrens-centres>. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2012
- Hirsch, D. and Beckhelling, J. (2011) *End Child Poverty – Child Poverty Map of UK, Part 1: England*. Available at: <http://endchildpoverty.org.uk/files/child-poverty-map-of-the-uk-part-one.pdf>. Accessed 10th February 2012

## What to Read... *By Polly Bolshaw*

### The Cost of a Child in 2013

Child Poverty Action Group and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have jointly funded a piece of research investigating how much it costs to raise a child in 2013. Whilst wages have hardly risen in the last five years (by 5% since 2008), prices - including for energy, food and childcare costs - have increased by 17%, meaning that the minimum cost of living has increased by 25%. As an example, within five years, childcare costs have increased on average by 37%. This report breaks down the costs associated with having a child, as well as the financial benefits, to show that the number of children living in poverty is rising as the costs are increasing much more than income. It also gives a stark prediction that with current economic forecasts and policy "families are likely to struggle even more to make ends meet" (Hirsch, 2013:18).

See: Hirsch, D. (2013) *The Cost of a Child in 2013*. London: Child Poverty Action Group. [Online] Available at: (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> September 2013).

### Greater Expectations: Raising Aspirations for our Children

In 1969 the National Children's Bureau published *Born to Fail?* which examined the effects of children growing up in poverty, including negative consequences in terms of health, educational attainment and realising their potential. Now, 46 years later, the NCB has conducted research to whether the situation has changed for children in the UK. The findings are surprising – almost fifty years later and an additional 1.5 million children are living in poverty, with disadvantaged children more likely to suffer accidental injury in the home and be much less likely to do well in their GCSEs. The report sets out interesting comparisons between children's experiences in 1969 and 2013, for instance, that 14% of disadvantaged children accessed some form of pre-school or early years provision in 1969, compared to 96% now. However, whilst 64% of four-year-olds achieve a "good level of development" in the Early Years Foundation Stage, only 48% of children receiving free school meals attain this. As well as offering comparisons and data, the report also offers recommendations for supporting children living in poverty, lest the UK ends up "sleepwalking into a world where inequality and disadvantage are so deeply entrenched that our children grow up in a state of social apartheid" (NCB, 2013:1).

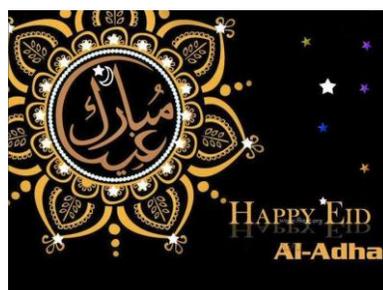
See: National Children's Bureau (2013) *Greater Expectations: Raising Aspirations for our Children*. London: NCB. [Online] Available at: (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> September 2013).

## Let's Celebrate!

*What could we be celebrating this month?*

*By Eleanor Jones*

- 4<sup>th</sup>: Feast of St Francis of Assisi
- 15<sup>th</sup>: Eid-al-Adha
- 27<sup>th</sup>: Daylight Saving Time ends
- 31<sup>st</sup>: Halloween



# Realising the Dream: Little Linguists Nursery

By Polly Bolshaw

Daniella Goodman, a Cohort One NLEY, has fulfilled an ambition she voiced on her first ever day on the New Leaders in Early Years course - setting up her own nursery, called *Little Linguists*. The nursery, which was officially opened by the Mayor of Wandsworth on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September, aims to provide quality care and education in a bilingual, stable, caring environment, with both English and French speaking staff to develop both languages with children. The nursery employs the *One Person, One Language (OPOL)* approach – with educators consistently speaking only in either French or English to the children and each other to make sure that the children have regular exposure to both languages to support bilingual development.



*The Mayor of Wandsworth, Angela Graham, greeting staff members.*

As well as providing early years care and education for children from birth to five, Little Linguists also offers courses and classes for parents to attend with their children. Entitled *Bilingual Beginners*, the courses, including in Baby Yoga, Active Movement, Sensorial Beginners and Cookery, take place in French, Spanish or English, and aim to support children and adults in learning another language whilst also taking part in fun, high-quality developmental experiences. The nursery also runs sessions for preschoolers to attend unaccompanied, including Creative Beginners in French and Music, Dance and Drama in English.

The nursery aims to offer families living or working near Tooting and Streatham childcare that is not only high-quality and bilingual, but also reliable and flexible too. *Little Linguists* opens from 7:30am to 6:30pm for 51 weeks of the year, providing both full-time and part-time places. Plus, as well as providing an environment fostering both French and English language development, the setting is also rich in Montessori resources, aiming to prepare children well for the next stage of their development.



*An exterior shot.*



*The main preschool room.*

Often parents can be nervous or anxious about leaving their children in daycare settings, but Little Linguists intends to reassure parents that their children are safe and content in the setting – and have the opportunity to see the high-quality experiences the children are engaging in - by using parental webcams that can be accessed securely online throughout the day

Daniella recognized there was a gap in the market when choosing an early years setting for her own son, being disappointed with the current lack of flexibility and affordability on offer. Plus, as part of the NLEY course she completed a placement in a bilingual school, where she was able to see young children's heightened ability to learn second and third languages, and realised a nursery could become an excellent opportunity to empower the next generation.



*The baby room.*

## Little Linguists are recruiting!

If you would like to be part of the Little Linguists team, they would love to hear from you. They provide competitive pay, bonuses and discounts on childcare for all staff with ongoing support and career development. There are excellent transport links via bus, train or tube.



Current vacancies include (but not limited to) a French-English bilingual position as Room Leader, as well as English-speaking Early Years Educator and Nursery Assistant positions too. You can find out more information about current vacancies by emailing [cvs@littlelinguistsnursery.co.uk](mailto:cvs@littlelinguistsnursery.co.uk) for a full job description and person specification.

If, on the other hand, you are interested in running a class or workshop, email [bb@littlelinguistsnursery.co.uk](mailto:bb@littlelinguistsnursery.co.uk).

# Completing a Research and Enterprise Development Internship

By Victoria Stirrup, ed. Polly Bolshaw

As part of the Research and Enterprise Development scheme I took part in a 10 week research internship. The scheme is designed to offer current undergraduate and postgraduate students at Canterbury Christ Church University the opportunity to take part in paid research with tangible outcomes under the supervision of an academic lead within the university.

I had become interested in research through the MA aspect of the New Leaders programme, and applied for the RED Research Internship because I wanted to gain experience of undertaking research outside of my academic studies.

*"This experience helped me understand the challenges in the research process, but it also made me more committed to becoming a better researcher."*

My research project explored the motivators and barriers to local support towards a community development project within Canterbury called the Abbots Mill Project. The aim of this research was to use narrative and biographical methodologies to explore the lived experiences of local residents, project sponsors, and local supporters and opponents of the project; with a view to gaining insight into the complexity of opposition and support.

Working on the Abbot's Mill Project (AMP) was a challenging but exciting experience. The scope of the project was very broad and my academic lead Dr Alan Bainbridge encouraged me to be involved in all elements of the research process from responding to feedback from the University Ethics Committee to writing the final article. One of the requirements of the project was to embed myself within the Abbot's Mill organisation. I found the AMP team very encouraging and keen to involve me, but I had to also be aware of my position as a researcher and not allow the good working relationship with the team that had developed

prevent me from acknowledging that there were oppositions to the development of the Abbot's Mill. This experience helped me understand the challenges in the research process, but it also made me more committed to becoming a better researcher.

*"I developed my time management skills and assertiveness as a result of managing the project."*

Overall I felt working on the project was a fantastic way for me to learn more about the practical skills of research outside of my studies. As I was involved in so many aspects of the project I felt that I developed skills in lots of the key areas associated with qualitative research and narrative inquiry. Although I had used narrative inquiry within my MA dissertation the internship gave me another opportunity to study this methodology so that I had a full and thorough grasp of the approach before beginning the interviews. This experience certainly improved my knowledge of this area and had a positive impact on finishing my MA dissertation. Within my internship I was responsible for managing the interview schedule; this gave me experience of managing a research project outside of the experience I gained studying. As I was studying and working within a Children's Centre alongside the internship I felt that I developed my time management skills and assertiveness as a result of managing the project. In addition to research and inquiry skills I felt this internship helped me develop as a researcher. Writing the final summary helped me evaluate and develop my writing style. As a result of this internship I feel that my confidence in writing has grown.

*I feel that being part of the RED internship scheme will give me the skills and knowledge to begin my new post with the confidence and skills I need to succeed.*

As part of the internship I was required to produce a 5,000-6,000 word written report on the project, an academic poster presentation and a summary of the project. The poster and summary will be presented at the RED Internship event in October.

The internship confirmed for me that I would like to undertake further research and make this a core element of my future career. As a result of this internship I went on to apply for the Knowledge Transfer Partnership Associate post within Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and Canterbury Christ Church University and was successful in my

application. In the short term I feel that being part of the RED internship scheme will give me the skills and knowledge to begin my new post with the confidence and skills I need to succeed. I am also hoping to use the skills I learnt on this internship to help publish an article based on some research I undertook. I am also currently applying for an MPhil/PhD; the experience of undertaking a research project as part of this internship has helped me understand the research process better. In the long term I hope that this internship will form the beginning of a career undertaking social research.

Has Victoria's story inspired you to complete your own internship within the university?

## Academic Business Partnership Internship: Sustainability Plan for a Third Sector Organisation

An internship position has become available in conjunction with OMEP UK (<http://www.omepuk.org.uk/>) and a cross-faculty partnership between the Department of Childhood Studies and the Business School. As you are aware, OMEP UK is a Non-Governmental Organisation concerned for the welfare and education of all children from birth to age eight. The UK Executive Committee is responsible for directing the activities of the organisation and is part of the European Region. Whilst OMEP UK is part of a worldwide organisation and is linked to major intergovernmental agencies (UNICEF and UNESCO), it is a voluntary organisation and has no fixed premises. It relies upon the voluntary support of its Executive Committee and wider membership. OMEP are heavily reliant upon individual member commitment and resourcing. As an organisation OMEP UK is facing the question of how it can move forward and become sustainable.



The main focus for the academic input would be developing an outline Business Plan for OMEP UK to help them to identify the key steps they need to take to make the organisation future fit. The intern would focus on data gathering of existing members to identify why they joined and what they would like to gain from their membership. A second study would be conducted by the intern with staff and students of selected Childhood Studies departments (and the wider community of early years practice) to find out what would make them join and what they would want OMEP UK to offer them through membership. A review of the website will identify opportunities to engage and recruit members. This research would then be used to inform the updating and maintenance of the organisation's membership database and website through a review of the systems for application and membership.

The intern would be based with and managed by Antonio Sama within CCCU's Business School and would report to Liz Hryniewicz (institutional lead) at project mid-point and end.

For more information, including the person specification and frequently asked questions about Academic Business Partnership internships, see ClicLearn for a student application form. The closing date for applications is 6<sup>th</sup> October 2013.