Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS) Study

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Foreword

Lesley Saunders, Policy Adviser for Research, General Teaching Council for England

The Children Act 2004 legislated for a radical reform of services for children, and the government White Paper *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* highlighted five outcomes as measures of achievement and well-being in childhood and later life: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution to society, and achieving economic security. The strategy aims particularly to close the gap in these outcomes between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. Nowhere is this aim more critically important – in terms of equalising and optimising later life chances – than in the early years of children's learning and education.

Leaders in early years settings – which are very diverse in character as well as quality and effectiveness – are henceforward charged with managing the related areas of care, health and family support and integrating these with education; they will also need to continue effectively to manage, deploy and develop staff with different professional perspectives and associated qualifications, as well as with varying levels of experience and exposure to professional training.

We know from the earlier research undertaken by Professor Siraj-Blatchford and her colleagues how important the quality of leadership is in raising the standards of learning and achievement. It is now even more vital that leaders in early years settings feel well supported by accessible and high quality evidence that will help them to develop the appropriate kinds and levels of expertise, knowledge and skills for meeting these new challenges.

The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) was very pleased indeed to support the study, which provides exactly this kind of resource.

Introduction

Government spending on childcare and pre-school education has increased by over £1.6 billion since 1997 with the aims of increasing the 'accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare and early education', and encouraging mothers to return to work. Early Childhood education has undergone extensive changes through the Sure Start and Children's Centre programmes (10 Year Childcare Strategy). A greater emphasis has been placed on accountability and upon the achievement of excellence. A major policy thrust to develop 1,700 children's centres, has made the need for the training of additional early years practitioners and early years leaders particularly urgent. In the July 2004 spending review, the Chancellor announced that an extra £100m was being allocated to increase the number of children's centres by 2008 from 1,700 to 2,500 in the 30% most deprived communities, and this has now been extended to 3,500 children's centres by 2010 in the New Childcare Strategy. These centres and all other early years provision will need skilled leadership, but where is the firm evidence regarding the characteristics of effective leadership in early years settings? And where are the training opportunities and support required to help leaders from the diverse provisions to prepare for this?

It was within these challenging contexts that the *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector* (ELEYS) project was developed as an extension of the *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (REPEY) study (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002).

The ELEYS research was designed to explore the following questions:

- What does the extant literature and research tell us about effective educational leadership in the early years?
- What characteristics or patterns of leadership can be identified in the REPEY sample of effective settings?

The REPEY project had itself provided an extension to the large scale, and longitudinal, *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education* (EPPE) project (Sylva et al, 2004). EPPE assessed the attainment and development of 3000 children that were followed from the age of 3 until the end of Key Stage 1. The children were recruited to the study during 1997-1999 from a random sample of 141 pre-school settings (nursery schools, nursery classes, play groups, private day nurseries, local authority day nurseries and integrated centres). Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied in EPPE and REPEY to explore the effects of the pre-school experience on children's cognitive attainment and social/behavioural development at entry to school, and any continuing effects on such outcomes up to 7 years of age.

The REPEY study explored the pedagogical practices occurring in a sample of 12 early years settings identified as effective by EPPE (Siraj-Blatchford et al 2003). Two reception classes were also added to ensure that all the major institutional forms of Foundation Stage group care and educational settings were represented. The REPEY early years settings thus represented 'good' (slightly above average) to 'excellent' (well above average) settings based upon both cognitive and social/behavioural child outcomes. Data from the 14 settings were collected using an analytical framework to ensure comparable data would allow for across-case comparisons. The analysis of qualitative data also offered a basis for what Geertz (1973) has referred to as 'thick description' (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2003).

The key characteristics of caring and effective settings as established through the EPPE and REPEY studies

The EPPE and REPEY studies have shown that pre-school experience (compared to none) benefit children throughout Key Stage 1 (Sylva et al, 2004). EPPE found that good quality provision was found in *all* types of early years settings, and that there was greater variation within each type than between them. Higher overall quality was however found in settings that integrating care and education, and in nursery schools.

EPPE and REPEY also found that individual pre-schools varied in their 'effectiveness' for influencing a child's development, and that children made better all round progress in settings where:

- There was **strong leadership** and relatively **little staff turnover**;
- *The adults formed* **warm interactive relationships** *with children;*
- *Settings viewed* **educational** *and* **social development** *as* **complementary**;
- *The adults used* **open-ended questioning** *and encouraged* **'sustained shared thinking';**
- *A balance was achieved between adult* **supported** *freely chosen play, and adult* **led** *small group activities;*
- *The adults used* **formative assessment** *to differentiate the curriculum according to the needs of individual children;*
- *The adults supported children in being assertive while at the same time* **rationalising** *and* **talking through** *their conflicts;*
- *The adults had a good understanding of* **appropriate pedagogical content**;
- *A* **trained teacher** *acted as* **manager** *and a good proportion of the staff were (graduate, teacher) qualified.*

The EPPE study also found that the quality of the home learning environment (HLE) had a stronger effect on children's intellectual and social development than other important influences, including (notably) their parent's occupation, education or income. The EPPE study has therefore shown that what parents do to support their children's learning is more important than who the parents are.

Methodology of the Effective Leadership in the Early Years Study

While essentially qualitative in nature, the study has benefited from drawing upon a sample of settings that have been rigorously identified as 'effective' (by EPPE). A distinctive feature of the ELEYS analysis has also been to explore the issue of leadership within *effective* early years settings *from the bottom-up*. A significant advantage of this approach is that the study has focused upon concrete leadership behaviours rather than simply eliciting leadership beliefs. Semi-structured interviews had been conducted with the leaders from each of the REPEY case study settings but these questions were not explicitly about leadership; rather they prompted the managers to discuss their general practice with respect to the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS), staffing ratios, staff training and development, child development, pedagogy, policy development etc. The re-analysis of REPEY interviews with EY staff and parents has allowed for analysis across the settings, and within the settings it has provided a means of triangulation; where any contradictions or concurrence between theory and practice or between staff, parent and manager perceptions within a setting could be revealed.

In an effort to identify the contribution made by effective leadership to the success of the REPEY settings, the ELEYS study has drawn upon:

> demographic information about managers;
> semi-structured interviews with managers, teachers and other EY staff (e.g. nursery nurses) and parents;
> researcher observations and field notes;
> EY centre policies and documentation as well as
> child outcome data associated with cognitive and social/behavioural development.

The framework followed by REPEY was found to be especially beneficial in that it offered comparative information across each of the settings involved in the study with respect to many of the key domains identified as significant in the leadership literature (e.g. pedagogy, parental involvement etc. - see below).

In addition, an ELEYS focus group was formed from research 'users' to provide further construct validation, and to clarify the research findings. The focus group members included a range of representatives from relevant organisations, including the National Day Nurseries Association, QCA, TDA, Pre-School Learning Alliance and General Teaching Council. The focus group also included several heads of centres immersed in the day to day practice of leadership; four of whom were leaders of centres which appeared on David Bell's (2003) list of excellent centres. The first focus group session in particular played a major role in encouraging the researchers to modify the presentation of data. It was clear that the raw data raised problems as a result of its decontextualised nature. It became clear that the exemplars ultimately to be used (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, *forthcoming*) to demonstrate practices associated with effective leadership be immersed in context (e.g. type of provider, funding available). This would allow for an honest and realistic reading of the data presented.

The objective of the initial analysis was to identify the leadership approaches adopted within the effective REPEY early years settings. Both the initial 'orienting theories' and the subsequent more substantive analytic framework (outlined below), emerged in an iterative process that involved a progressive engagement with the data and relevant research literature on educational leadership, and in consultations with our specialist early years Focus Group.

An initial literature review included a trawl for landmark studies, relevant books and research journals concerned with educational leadership. Searches were also conducted via ERIC, BIDS, Google Scholar and government websites/publications. Due to the paucity of evidence based (i.e. non-

anecdotal) literature that is available related to the leadership and management of early years settings, the authors were forced to consult leadership and management literature associated with both primary and secondary schools. At all times these alternative sources have been treated with special caution and applied only where they are considered particularly relevant to the EY contexts. The following sections are drawn from our analysis of the REPEY case studies are supported by the extant literature on effective leadership.

***The challenge of developing leadership in early years***

Over 15 years ago, Beare (1989) stated that 'outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. This view of leadership continues to be supported by the research today, with the contribution of educational leadership clearly and 'unequivocally' indicating the importance of leadership for 'improving organisational performance and raising achievement.' (Muijs et al., 2004; see also Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Southworth, 1998; Evans & Teddlie, 1995; Cheung, 1994; Sammons et al.,1995). Following from Ofsted's (2003a) identification of the importance of leadership, the HMI report *Leadership and Management: managing the workforce,* highlighted; *"the importance of developing and managing the culture and ethos of the school, providing a good working environment, tackling excessive workloads, providing well-targeted staff development opportunities and introducing change with sensitivity"* as key tasks leaders face (Ofsted, 2003b). Parallel concerns have been expressed within the early years sector, where it is increasingly recognised that the quality of programmes and services for young children and their families has been related to effective leadership (Rodd, 1997; see also Jorde-Bloom, 1992; Clyde et al., 1994; Kagan, 1994; Clyde & Rodd, 1995). Particular challenges identified through the literature search and earlier studies that are connected with developing leadership in early years settings are outlined in this section.

1. Training of leaders and others related to the quality of provision

One of the key findings from the EPPE study which is particularly relevant to the current study and to the GTCE is the evidence that demonstrates that having a trained teacher as a leader/manager and a good proportion of trained teachers on staff are key indicators of quality. Looking particularly at the EPPE data regarding leaders, Taggart et al., (2000) found that the early years leaders with the highest childcare qualifications were found predominately in 'education' rather than the 'care' sector (i.e. in nursery schools and classes). They also found higher leader qualification levels in centres combining both care and education (integrated or combined centres). The least qualified managers were located in playgroups, with 50% with Childcare certificates (BTec) or lower; with one in ten having no childcare qualifications at all (25). The EPPE team went on to report that when quality environment profiles (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, 1998) were grouped according to the leader's 'childcare qualification level it was found that the quality of the environment increases with the' leaders childcare qualifications.

Figure 1 below shows the mean ECERS-R and ECERS-E scores grouped according to manager's childcare qualification level, where level 5 is graduate, teacher trained (under the new workforce discussions qualification levels are changing and graduates might well be described as levels 6 or 7) . It is important to note here that the ECERS have been shown to correlate with children's cognitive and social developmental outcomes and a clear trend is shown in which the quality of the environment increases with childcare qualification. Analysis of variance reveals that this trend is statistically significant on both ECERS measures (p<0.01).

FIGURE 1: ECERS-R AND ECERS-E MEANS BY MANAGER QUALIFICATION
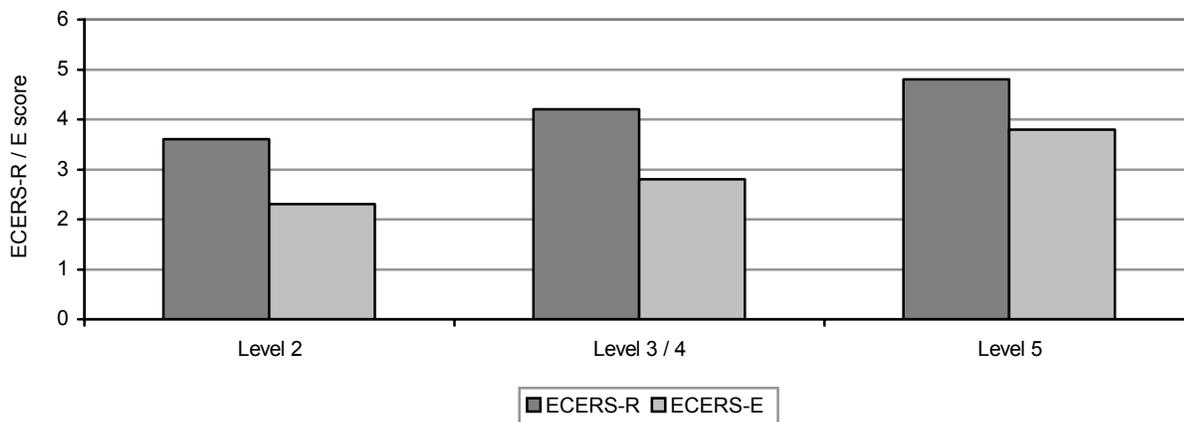
With the exception of *Personal care routines*, the same positive trend was seen throughout the ECERS-R subscales (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: ECERS-R SUBSCALE SCORES
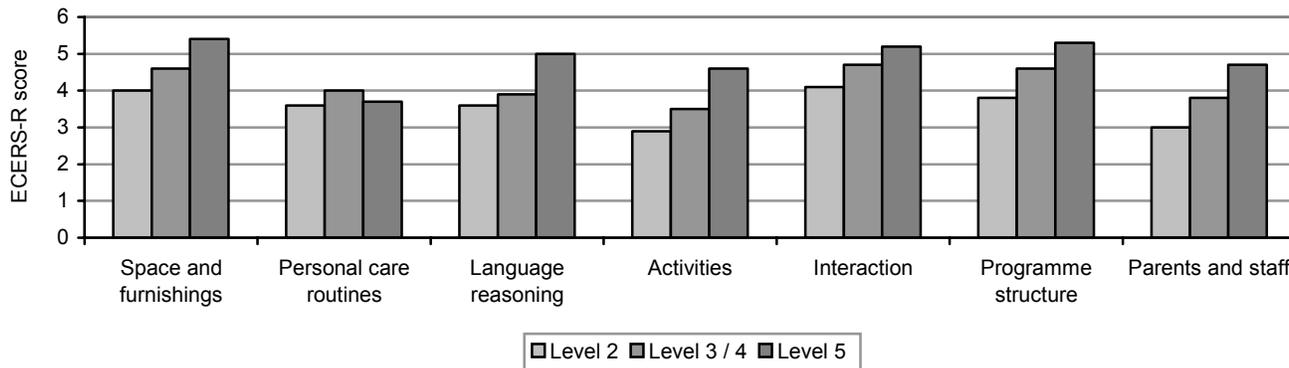
At present, '40% of the workforce in childcare and early years holds a qualification below or at NVQ level 2 and only 12% of the workforce is qualified to level 4/5. This compares to 80% of primary school teachers qualified to level 5 (Daycare Trust, April 2005[1]).

2. Types of training

Rodd (1997) found that although 91.7% of her sample of 76 early childhood professionals reported having taken some form of training to support their leadership roles, the majority of these were general in-service or short courses. Our research supports Rodd's finding. Analysis of the responses given by interviewees (managers, EY staff), and the exploration of policy and other documentation regarding approaches to professional development demonstrates a verbal and written commitment and conviction to the importance of ongoing professional development. However, upon further analysis of these data it is clear that a great deal of the professional development opportunities experienced by those both in management and staff positions tends to be, as Rodd describes, general in-service or short courses. In a minority of cases, there was evidence that the manager or another member of staff was pursuing more long-term courses (i.e. Diploma course in Management studies, degree courses in Early Years Education), however reports of this were infrequent. In some instances, respondents referred back to their original early years courses when asked either about their involvement in professional development or the training they are relying on to support them in their current work.

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[1] http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/article.php?op=Print&sid=248

3. Reluctance to accept the leadership role

While organisational and societal barriers may exist to prevent many women from realising their ambitions for leadership in the primary and secondary school sectors, this is not the case in early years settings, where the route to leadership is less constricting. Indeed as Rodd (1998) argues, several of those who apply for leadership positions do so reluctantly or are unconsciously ill-prepared. There also appears to be a misconception that one's success as an early years staff member will naturally translate into a successful leader. Sadek & Sadek (2004), for example, argue that early years staff have many of the skills that nursery leaders require; notably experience supporting and supervising other adults (e.g. parents, placement students). Yet Waniganayake et al., (2000) have found that many of those in positions of leadership identify the role of working with and managing adults difficult (see also Bright & Ware, 2003). Those making the transition need to consider how they are prepared to make the change from 'managing' children to 'managing' adults and to handle all of the other administrative tasks that accompany the role.

Rodd (1998/2005) has highlighted the reluctance amongst leaders in the early years to accept the label 'leader'. Leaders often express an aversion towards the management aspects of the job, which are seen to take them away from their preferred status as educators and child developers. These were concerns clearly shared by many leaders in the ELEYS sample: *'…I spend a lot more time in my office now than I ever did…the amount of paperwork you have to do is depressing and it keeps me away from the children and staff'* (Leader Private Day Nursery). In addition to the feared loss of time and input with supporting child development, there is also the feeling of a sense of 'incompetence', which may be magnified by the lack of training offered, in such tasks as budgeting and the management of adults.

4. National training for early years leaders

While dedicated training (National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership – NPQICL) is now becoming available, through the National College of School Leadership (NCSL), for current and aspiring leaders from Integrated Centres, there are still a majority of early years 'leaders', represented in around 30,000 pre-school settings (i.e. playgroups, nursery schools, private day nurseries etc), whose specific training needs are not currently being [collectively] met. Many of those leadership and management courses that are on offer to early years leaders also tend to be geared to the primary and secondary school sector. One of the early years leaders who participated in the ELEYS Focus Group gave an account of her experience on a general educational leadership training course where she was the only early years participant. She explained that she felt isolated, because the experiences shared by others on the course were so different from those she'd experienced in her own setting; and as these were often the foundation upon which discussions and activities were based, she struggled to get deeply involved. The structure of the NPQICL course promotes the importance of personal experience and the opportunity to reflect upon it within a leadership learning community, where in the process of identifying and articulating one's own experiences and by listening to the experiences of others, one is supported in their pedagogical development (NCSL, 2004).

5. Status and pay of early years practitioners

Added to this is the long standing low status and pay of EY practitioners. Laing and Buisson's report, *Children's Nurseries UK Market Report 2005,* (as cited in the National Day Nurseries Association media pack) confirmed that the average hourly wage for qualified nursery employees in day nurseries is currently £6.61, with nursery nurses earning an hourly rate of £5.67. This drops to £5.16 for unqualified staff. Nursery managers earn an average of £7.57 an hour.

- Average pay is less than £11,000 *(Daycare Trust)*

- *80% earning less than £13,000*
- *Supervisors in full day care & playgroup workers earn between £5.50-£6.50 per hour, other staff £4.80-£5.80*
- *Nursery nurses in maintained sector nurseries and primary schools earn £6.90-£7.50 per hour (other staff £5.90 - £6.30)*
- *Average annual gross pay for childcare workers £7,831 vs Nursery and primary teachers £22,662 (Daycare Trust: www.daycaretrust.org.uk)*

The EPPE study also identified pay ranges as reported by early years provider. Table One gives an indication of the overall career structure available in the six forms of provision and the table below indicates hours per week in relation to salary by pre-school.

TABLE ONE – SALARY DISTRIBUTION (BY PRE-SCHOOL TYPE)

	Nursery class %	Playgroup %	Private day	LA %	Nursery school %	Combined centre %
£0-3,999	8.7	71.6	8.4	3.5	4.8	7.6
£4,000-7,999	14.5	21.3	35.1	11.8	9.7	10.9
£8,000-11,999	30.4	5.7	34.0	40.8	19.4	6.5
£12,000-15,999	13.0	1.4	14.9	23.1	26.6	27.2
£16,000-19,999	4.3		5.3	12.9	4.0	21.7
£20,000-24,999	24.6		1.5	5.1	12.9	13.0
£25,000 +	4.3		0.8	2.7	22.6	13.0
n	69	141	262	255	124	92

Source: Taggart, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Melhuish, Sammons, Walker-Hall (2000: 28)

All of these disparities represent major obstacles to change. It is difficult to see how more qualified early years staff will be remunerated for their continued training or how retention can be improved in some sectors without improving pay. Referring to the reforms involved in remodelling the workforce in the school sector, Webb (2005) has highlighted the incentives for teachers which consist of 'increased pay through successful threshold assessments, enhanced status through promotion to senior management and/or becoming an advanced skills teacher and financial support for additional in-service training opportunities such as participation in a higher degree programme'. Each involves money, something that many early years settings simply do not have access to at the present time.

Defining *Leadership for Learning* in the Early Years

It is largely female.

One aspect that is unique to the early years context is that the workforce is almost exclusively female. The Daycare Trust reports that 97.5% of the childcare workforce is female. Yet much of the current literature on leadership and management has ignored issues of gender and much of the literature and research in the wider context of education education has inevitably (sic) been based upon men's experiences and male approaches. Cubillo (1999) argues that 'the modes on which the characteristics of effective leaders are based are therefore stereotypically androcentric'; often associated with 'masculine' attributes and behaviours such as competitiveness, dynamism, power and agressivity' (547). As Belenky (1986) has put it:

> *Until recently women have played only a minor role as theorists in the social sciences. The omission of women from scientific studies is almost universally ignored when scientists draw conclusions from their findings and generalise what they have learned from the study of men. If and when scientists turn to the study of women, they typically look for ways in which women conform or diverge from patterns found in the study of men (6).*

In her groundbreaking research involving 600 administrators in schools in the US, Shakeshaft (1987/89) identified five main features of the female world in school administration. The first three related to their tendency to focus upon the; 1) centrality of relationships with others; 2) teaching and learning; and the 3) importance of building a learning community. She found that women 'communicated more, motivated more, [and] spent more time with marginal teachers and students…' (Scrivens, 2002: 27). The other two distinguishing features identified by Shakeshaft were the feeling of marginality in the otherwise male dominated arena of education; and in the blurring of private and public spheres (where women's behaviour was not found to differ significantly between the two). Shakeshaft's work also suggests that women's leadership style tends to be more democratic and participatory, encouraging inclusiveness and a broader view of the curriculum (Scrivens, 2002). Although there is a paucity of specific studies of women as leaders in early years settings Acker (1999) has written about women teachers and leaders in primary schools. Valerie Hall's (1996) in-depth study of women head teachers focussed on six individuals, three from primary and three from secondary schools. Coleman's (2002) study of gender and head teachers covered women and men in secondary schools, but Coleman's (2005) report for NCSL relates to both primary and secondary heads.

It is about leading people

It is through relationships that people develop an attachment and a feeling of responsibility, rather than an obligation, towards common goals and objectives (Lewin and Regine, 2000), Fullen, 2001). It is also important that relationships evolve as the organisation they exist within evolves, continually seeking and responding to dissension from inside and outside to ensure the same common goals and objectives are sought. The role of the formal leader in developing and maintaining these networks/relationships within their schools is essential. Kouzes and Posner (1998) go so far as to argue that the feature that separates effective from ineffective leaders is the degree to which they 'care about the people they lead' (149). Kouzes and Posner (1998) identify seven strategies that may be employed by leaders in establishing and promoting relationships: 1) setting clear standards, 2) expecting the best, 3) paying attention, 4) personalising recognition, 5) telling the story, 6) celebrating together and 7) setting the example (18). Having identified a list of strategies, it is all too easy to re-present them as characteristics of effective leaders. But the emphasis that has been placed on leadership 'traits' in the extant research and literature on school leadership has been criticised (Southworth, 2004: 1). Whenever researchers identify the key traits of an 'effective leader' they

inferred that these should be simply applied, like a recipe, by others in leadership positions. The greatest danger of this is of course, as highlighted by Southworth, the failure to consider the importance of context. As Spillane et al., (2004) have argued, while there is a generally accepted view that 'where there are good schools there are good leaders' there is very little evidence that illustrates the '*how'* of school leadership; that is knowledge of the ways in which school leaders develop and sustain those conditions and processes believed necessary for innovation' (authors' emphasis: 4).

It is dependent on context

Southworth (1998) presents the notion of s*ituational leadership*, describing a type of leadership that involves consideration of the situation in which the leader operates, as well as the people s/he is leading and encouraging to lead. In a more recent publication, Southworth (2004) spoke of the importance of leaders themselves being contextually literate. The leader who develops contextual literacy demonstrates an understanding that schools are dynamic organisms continually evolving, rather than static organisations. It also requires a recognition that education contexts differ at every level, they differ between individual children, families, local communities defined by socio-economic class, ethnicity etc. With fluctuating staff morale and energy levels, the arrival of new staff and students and the departure of others amongst numerous other factors, schools have to continually adjust and make room for new energies, ideas and conflicts.

The socio-economic and cultural context of settings was found to be particularly significant in the EPPE/REPEY studies. While the research provided evidence of a direct association between children's cognitive and social outcomes, and the pedagogic principles applied by the practitioners in effective settings, the evidence also showed that some settings appeared effective even where these pedagogic principles were not consistently applied. The REPEY evidence suggested that in some middle class settings (notably some of the private day nurseries), it was less the staff's interventions and more the parents' pro-active support of their children's learning in the home, that accounted for the children's greater development. The most effective settings provided effective pedagogic **and** parental support in the provision of an effective home learning environment (HLE). It was clear that in more disadvantaged areas, the staff had to be **proactive** in influencing and supporting the parents' role in developing a home education environment that supported children's learning.

Concepts such as *situational leadership* or *contextual literacy* (Southworth, 1998 & 2004; Spillane et al., 2004) describe the type of leadership practice which involves consideration of the dynamic nature of the 'organisation' in which one operates, as well as the contribution of stakeholders within the organisation. All of the leaders of the effective REPEY settings demonstrated a degree of 'contextual literacy'; some more than others. This was demonstrated by a capacity to speak fluently about their context (including staff, children and families), and the capacity to reflect upon the past and present when considering the future. For example, many of the REPEY leaders, when answering questions about implementing recent externally mandated changes (e.g. CGFS); explained how their approach to development was built upon existing practice and processes.

How do we define leadership?

A review conducted over a decade ago by Cuban (1988) identified; *'more than 350 definitions of leadership, but no clear and unequivocal understanding as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders'* (190). Today the number of definitions has increased and Ciulla (2003, as cited in MacNeill et al., 2003) has tracked the changes in definitions from the early 40s to the 90s and found a shift from the hierarchical vision of leader towards a more interdependent relationship between the leader and the led (3). This view of leadership, as collaborative and interdependent rather than hierarchical, is one that links well with the current view of leadership that is emerging from the early years sector (e.g. Rodd, 1998/2005). For the purposes of this report, the authors have adopted two definitions of leadership, one which emerges from the early years literature and another from the school sector

literature. Rodd (1998: 2) offers a fairly detailed workable definition of leadership, one which attempts to identify the complexity of the leader's role:

Leadership can be described as a process by which one person sets certain standards and expectations and influences the actions of others to behave in what is considered a desirable direction. Leaders are people who can influence the behaviour of others for the purpose of achieving a goal. Leaders possess a special set of somewhat elusive qualities and skills which are combined into an ability to get others to do what the leader wants because they want to do it. Leaders are able to balance the concern for work, task, quality and productivity with concern for people, relationships, satisfaction and morale. They combine an orientation towards innovation and change with an interest in continuity and stability for the present. They do this by using personal qualities which command respect and promote feelings of trust and security. They are also responsible for setting and clarifying goals, roles and responsibilities, collecting information and planning, making decisions and involving members of the group by communicating, encouraging and acknowledging commitment and contribution (Rodd, 1998: 2)

Whitaker (1993: 74) offers a more concise, but equally realistic definition of the complexity of a leaders' work:

Leadership is concerned with creating the conditions in which all members of the organisation can give of their best in a climate of commitment and challenge. Leadership helps an organisation to work well.

In both of these definitions the importance of *collaboration* and *organisational goals* are clear. In the first case we have an explicit reference to 'standards and expectations' and in the second to helping the organisation 'work well' which must clearly be to some specific ends. As the EPPE/REPEY research has shown, the educational efforts of pre-school settings can make a significant difference in supporting children's social and cognitive development. These efforts may be predominantly pedagogical in nature, or they may be in support of the home learning environment. Ideally they will be both. The primary goal of any early years setting should be to improve (social and intellectual) educational outcomes.

In this section we have argued that *contextual literacy*, a commitment to *collaboration*, and to the *improvement of children's learning outcomes* should be considered (by definition) to provide fundamental requirements for **Leadership for Learning**. Each of these leadership qualities were found to be strongly represented in the effective settings that we studied. The ELEYS project has also identified a range of 'categories of effective leadership practice' each of which will be elaborated upon below.

Effective leadership practices identified in the settings:

We have found in the REPEY case studies data that a key area of leadership practice in the early years involves the identification and co-construction (by children, parents and staff) of shared objectives. It also involves inspiring others with a vision of a better future. It relies on a level of dedication and passion about early childhood care and education, and also upon a capacity to reflect upon and engage with changing contexts (i.e. the children, families and community); and a willingness to embrace evidence based practice. The provision of direction is promoted by the leader's capacity to identify and articulate an ambitious collective vision; to ensure consistency amongst the staff (shared understanding of setting practices and processes); being a reflective practitioner and encouraging reflective practice in others.

Identifying and articulating a collective vision
In most of the effective settings better leadership was characterised by a clear vision, especially with regard to pedagogy and curriculum, which was shared by everyone working within the setting. These philosophies varied from being strongly educational to strongly social or a mixture of both, but all were very child-centred. The idea that the staff should develop or promote shared aims and objectives was consistently seen as crucial. All the most successful managers, in terms of child outcomes, demonstrated a strong educational focus. They valued the importance of adult-child interaction and they supported their staff in developing better ways of engaging children. Many of the settings were involved in projects such as the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project, and demonstrated interest in a variety of often promoted, international curricula models including Reggio Emilia (Italy), High Scope (America) and Te Whariki (New Zealand), as well as adopting a sound and positive stance towards Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS, 2000). Many of the examples that we found of collective vision were embedded within the various practices described by interviewees. For instance, one leader's explanation of her strategic decision to trade the possibility of two NNEB staff for a qualified teacher revealed her conviction that specialist staff, and the expected skills and knowledge that they brought with them, could promote better quality and child progress. This was supported by this leader's commitment to the on-going professional development of all the staff in her setting.

Ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals
The second key capacity of a leader, next to vision or 'direction setting' (Leithwood & Levin, 2005: 14), is the capacity to influence others into action. In order to ensure the achievement of set targets and desired outcomes, a clear vision must exist. Without it, those within an organisation will often be working towards different and at times conflicting goals. Individuals will be led by their own vision of what early years practice should look like, rather than by a vision that has been devised through consultation with the key stakeholders and in the critical consideration of contexts and current research. But how can a clear vision emerge? We found that staff members in the effective settings were encouraged to attend staff development sessions, although the nature of this varied greatly.

In the DfES (2005) draft paper entitled *Championing Children: A shared set of skills, knowledge and behaviours for managers of integrated children's service*, one key aspect of leadership/management that is highlighted is the provision of *direction*. This is echoed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) who identified, from their summary of the findings from several leadership studies, *providing direction* as one of the overarching functions of leadership. The leader of an organisation is assigned overall responsibility for determining/developing and articulating the vision, in addition to playing an active role in making the vision a reality. The DfES document argues that in addition to having, and pursuing a vision, a manager should demonstrate collaborative, open and inclusive behaviour, towards building a common purpose. They go on to list a series of related aims linked to the pursuit of providing clear and purposeful direction. The original list, which is very much directed towards an integrated children's centre, has been adapted here (with additions and omissions) to meet the needs of a more diverse range of providers:

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1   Translate strategic vision into specific plans in collaboration with all stakeholders
2   Make use of the collective knowledge base – challenge status quo and do things differently to meet the specific needs of the children and families within the setting more effectively
3   Build a shared value base, promote collective knowledge and common purpose
4   Support others to talk knowledgably about issues concerning their work and area of expertise
5   Recognise that service performance and quality of provision can be improved via a responsive and flexible service that reflects the needs of the children, young people and families it serves
6   Working for equality
7   Develop a culture of, and systems to support a high level of responsiveness within the setting
8   Know the legislative frameworks for services to children and young people, and know where to go for detailed interpretation when required

According to the research literature one of the main obstacles impeding successful change is resistance/hesitation to change. The effective leader is therefore one who recognises the inevitability of change and is able to plan for and manage change in such a way that those she leads are a part of the process. *C*hange is best seen as a process rather than an event. While there may be a specific change that one is attempting to implement, it has been found that it is the management of the process itself which will largely effect the success (or conversely the failure) of the implemented change.

We found that one of the common features in the management of change by the effective settings was the explicit attempt made by leaders to make their changes according to the 'settings' current contexts (including children and families) and circumstances. Any resistance to change appeared to be overcome by the development of a climate and culture for change that was established through the routine collaborative review of current practice and policy. These routines of review validated the processes of change, promoting confidence and acceptance where there might have been fear and resistance. The staff had come to regard change as manageable because they could see that it often emerged out of needs, observed or experienced, rather than out of any obligation or for the sake of change.

Effective communication
Effective communication is multi-functional and multi-directional; it involves speaking, encouraging, listening, reflecting, translating, interpreting, consulting, debating, summarising, understanding, acknowledging and verifying. There are also pre-requisites to communicating clearly and effectively, as an educational leader that reach beyond elocution. These include the possession of general knowledge of early childhood development and education, as well as specific knowledge of the context within which one works. We found several examples which provided evidence of the features and related outcomes of effective communication. These features included leaders providing a level of *transparency* in regard to expectations, practices and processes; reciprocity (dialogue rather than monologue); *consultation*; and *reflection*. One of the most potent examples of effective communication emerged from the comparison of the responses provided by a leader, nursery teacher and nursery officer in one of the EY settings. The level of match in their responses about their practice was both striking and remarkable (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, *forthcoming*), the case demonstrated (supported with other evidence) the fact that this leader was an effective communicator and promoted effective communication amongst her staff. Leaders who delivered and encouraged effective communication amongst and between staff were found capable of ensuring that the vision of the setting, in regards to practice, policy and processes, infiltrated the whole ethos of a centre; promoting consistency amongst staff working with children and families.

Encouraging reflection
Summarising the literature on the critical importance of building teams, Bennett et al., (2003) highlight the importance of individual members of a team sharing a common understanding of the organisation

(school, early years setting) and possessing a common understanding of its aims and ways of working. A parallel concept linked within this literature concerned with the development of a team culture is the development of a 'community of learners'; with a common commitment to reflective, critical practice and professional development. The recently established, National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) programme is typical of many other short and long-term training programmes, in taking as a key aim to encourage reflective practice. When discussing their policy development a number of the effective early years settings reported on the collaborative reflective processes that were involved in the process. The active involvement in research, and the conscious/ articulate consideration of alternative models or methods, showed that the leaders of the effective settings were both reflective in their own practice and encouraged reflection in their staff.

The current aim to 'professionalise' the childcare workforce (Children's Workforce Strategy, DfES, 2006) promotes the importance of professional development in ensuring improving qualifications of staff which have been linked to increased quality (e.g. Sylva et al., 1999). Fullan (2001) argues that 'organisations can transform when they can establish mechanisms for learning in the dailyness of organisational life' (14). Rogoff et al., (1996) talk in a similar way about 'learning as a community process of transformation of participation in socio-cultural activities; viewing learning as collaboratively and socially constructed, rather than as individual possession' (Moore, 2004).

Sergiovanni (1998) and MacNeill et al. (2004) refer to 'Pedagogical leadership' as a role that involves developing 'human capital by helping schools become caring, focused and inquiring communities within which teachers work together as members of a 'community of practice' (37). Sergiovanni (1998) goes on to argue that:

> *Schools develop intellectual capital by becoming inquiring communities. Intellectual capital is the sum of what everyone in the school knows and shares that can help the school be more effective in enhancing the learning and development of students. As the amount of intellectual capital increases, the school's capacity to add value to the lives of students increases* (39).

A community of learners is one which continually endeavours for reflective and critical practice and ongoing professional development. It goes beyond straightforward reflection, which likened to a mirror, may simply produce 'an exact replica of what is in front of it' (Biggs, 1996: 6). Biggs goes on to argue that 'reflection in professional practice…gives back not what it is, but what it might be, an improvement on the original.' It is the vision of the improved version of practice which acts as an impetus for change and the motivation for on-going learning and development.

Monitoring and assessing practice
Reflective practice can be promoted within an early years setting via a routine and consistent system of monitoring and assessment and collaborative dialogue. In most of the early years settings involved in the ELEYS study, monitoring and assessment of staff was regarded as an important and critical feature of the running of the setting. The first and most important goal for the leaders of these effective settings was to support and improve the children's learning and development and their primary focus was therefore upon *teaching and learning*. It was recognised that the day-to-day practical interaction of the adults with the children had a direct effect upon child development. For this reason, it was considered important that this practice was monitored and assessed to continue to improve standards.

In an extended critical review of the field, Cohen & Manion cite Hopkins (1985) and Ebbutt, (1985) to define action research as an activity in which: 'a combination of action (practice) and research (reflection) renders that action a form of disciplined inquiry, in which a personal [or collaborative] attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practice'. Others define action research in

exclusively collaborative terms:

> *Action research is a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out…the approach is only action research when it is collaborative, through it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual members.* (Kemmis and McTaggart,1988)

Commitment to on-going, professional development

We have found that the managers of effective settings provide intellectual stimulation for their staff along with respectful individualised support. An example taken from the *Sunshine Private Day Nursery* provides an excellent example of one centre's commitment to the on-going assessment and development of their staff. This commitment to staff development begins upon entry to the nursery, where all staff members go through an induction programme which focuses on the care and safety of the children. This is followed by an expectation of on-going training. On-going training is provided according to the needs identified through a regular appraisal system that takes place for each individual member of staff every six to twelve months and through other regular reviews by senior staff. The appraisal system itself provides a model whereby both the appraiser and appraisee can develop techniques of assessment and identification of training needs.

Members of the *Sunshine* staff can also choose to attend one or two courses from the programme circulated by the principal from a training company to which the centre is affiliated. Some of the courses on offer from this source included; management, assessment and child protection courses. Other training is provided during regular in-house staff meetings and is conducted by the senior staff themselves. Also, a procedure is in place to ensure that members of staff who attend courses or workshops are given the time and opportunity to report back during staff meetings for the benefit of other staff. The centre manager also subscribes to relevant professional care and educational journals, which are circulated to all staff members, and staff also have access to an 'extensive' library of professional books.

The informal-formal model of monitoring and appraisal is one that was described by several managers within our sample of effective settings; though the frequency and procedures differ. Most informed us that they conducted on-going, informal observations or discussions in an effort to maintain a grasp on the day-to-day happenings in their settings (and maintain contact with the children and parents); but then supplement these observations with a more formal approach to identifying the strengths and limitations of the staff. A comment made by the manager of Blue Skies Local Authority Day Care (214) highlighted the role feedback could play in promoting more reflective practice. She explained:

> *'I am always surprised at the insight observers' comments and feedback offer. I think a lot of what we do is intuitive and for better or worse, access to an outside view can be very useful in promoting improved practice or verbalising existing good practice.'*

This was echoed by the headteacher of the Giving Tree Nursery School who explained that one of her main aims in delivering feedback about the practices observed was to ensure that her staff become more reflective in their practice, and able to recognise both their strengths and limitations. This seemed to be taken a step further by the manager of the Wind in the Willows Private Day Nursery. In addition to her formal monitoring and assessment procedures, she had also developed a system of peer observation. Here, staff were given non-contact time as an opportunity to observe their colleagues 'at work' with young children as a means of: 'facilitating discussion, increasing reflective practice and assessing how well plans have been realised in practice'.

The manager from 214 also referred to parents and staff sharing training, in this case related to behaviour management:

> *"Yes. When we have outings, they come with us. We have library books which the children take home. We've just had a training day with parents for the first time ever, a joint INSET day. We didn't do it in the centre. We haven't got the room. The parents joined us for a very successful training day. We did behaviour management. That was really interesting and very successful. That had never been done before. It was done by somebody from outside who we got in. We got about fifteen parents on that which is pretty good"* (manager, 214)

Distributed Leadership

One of the most detrimental implications of the low status experienced by early years staff in some settings has been its effect upon staff commitment; linked to high staff turnover. One important means of raising self esteem and morale is through directly involving staff in the leadership and management of their setting. Interestingly all the settings involved in the current study reported limited staff turnover. Most of the managers and the staff from the case study sample had been in their respective settings for over 3 years, in most settings, staff, especially at senior management level, had been in the post even longer. Ten to twenty years was not uncommon. Findings from the EPPE study which looked at a much larger sample of leaders, found that leaders and staff from the private sector suffered the highest degree of staff turnover. However, of the three private day nurseries included in the REPEY and now ELEYS study, all demonstrated a much greater stability and retention of staff, with many reporting 3 to 9 years of service in their respective settings. In each of the early years settings included in the case studies, all the leaders took on a lead role, most notably in regards to curriculum and planning, 'if staff have a really good sense of different curriculum areas then they can be so much more inspiring to the children. They can set tasks that are much harder and they set them on a more regular basis' (Local Authority Day Care Manager). In the DfES (May 2004) 2002-2003 Early Years Workforce Survey, it was reported that the average length of service amongst paid staff is 3 years and 5 months, with a turnover rate calculated at 18%.

A study conducted by Melhuish (2004) has recently suggested that high turnover in day nurseries and other pre-school settings is threatening the language and social skills of children. Melhuish argues that children learning to communicate often use idiosyncratic speech of gestures and that a caregiver who is familiar with a child learns these idiosyncrasies and are therefore able to respond, whereas a new caregiver is more likely to misunderstand them.

REPEY found that the heads of primary schools often distribute leadership, in terms of curriculum decisions, budget and other aspects regarding nursery settings, to their lead nursery teachers. To take a typical example, the lead teacher in nursery class 106 listed the following as her areas of responsibility.

> *Responsible for administration of the nursery and to plan and deliver the curriculum. Managing nursery budget, admissions, maintaining home school links, monitoring progress of children, keeping records, managing students and other staff and visitors, keeping abreast of current nursery ideas and practice and communicating ideas to the primary school staff* (Manager interview, 106).

'Distributed', 'participative', facilitative' or 'collaborative' models of leadership call for a shift away from the traditional vision of leader as one key individual towards a more collective vision, one where the responsibility for leadership rests within various formal and informal leaders. Harris' (2002) speaks of distributed leadership involving 'multiple sources of guidance and direction following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture' (see also Spillane et al, 2004).

Muijs et al., (2004) cites research by Osgood et al., (2000, 2002 & 2003), in support of distributed leadership. They concluded that 'while early years practitioners are committed to heightening professionalism, the most appropriate means of realising this is NOT through entrepreneurial approaches…but rather through collaborative, cooperative and community oriented lines'.

Discussing the Ofsted (June 2003) report regarding leadership and management, David Bell (then Chief HMI) also argued for this vision of distributive leadership:

> "It is no longer true that leadership and management are the sole responsibility of the headteacher… high-quality leadership and management must now be developed throughout a school's organisation if they are to meet the new challenges facing them in the drive to raise standards and promote social inclusion in all our schools2."

But as Harris and Lambert (2003) have argued, it has often been found easier to tell teachers what to do then it is to build leadership capacity amongst them. Hatcher (2005) cites Wallace (2001: 157) in arguing increased accountability may deter heads or managers from relinquishing control',

> Head teachers are confronted by a heightened dilemma: their greater dependence on colleagues disposed them towards sharing leadership. In a context of unprecedented accountability, however, they may be inhibited form sharing because it could backfire should empowered colleagues act in ways that generate poor standards of pupil achievement, alienate parents and governors, attract negative media attention or incur inspectors' criticism (Hatcher, 2005).

Distributed leadership should not be seen as a simple panacea, in the case of many early years settings, like Private Day Nursery 413 for instance, where staff are often young, under qualified and lacking experience (youngest; 18 years old, highest qualification; NNEB), it may be irresponsible for the manager to delegate too much responsibility; especially when funding for training and professional development is limited. Harris and Lambert (2003) usefully discuss leadership capacity building; the creation of opportunities for people, within a school or shared setting, to work together in new ways. The authors highlight the importance of certain conditions to be in place before such capacity building can authentically occur, including the 'internal capacity to manage change and sustain improvement' and the existence of 'collegial relations' between all potential participants. The capacity of the positional leader to manage change and sustain improvement is linked to ensuring that staff who are given leadership responsibilities are also provided with the support and development of skills required in order to meet their new demands. The managers of a number of the effective settings, showed a clear recognition that staff who had been given extra responsibility required ongoing support. For instance, the EEC 225 staff members who were given additional responsibilities were often asked to attend courses. That said, there was also evidence at times of staff members in some settings who were not given appropriate support.

At present, there are few concrete examples of distributive leadership in action within the current literature and indeed this difficulty is augmented by the current blurriness of the concept. A strong, charismatic leader is not necessarily at odds with the emergence of distributed leadership, and at some stages in some settings it may be necessary to achieve the required structural changes to support the emergence of distributed leadership. Harris and Lambert (2003p.?) see this as a paradox:

> "…it appears that the strength of will, vision and values-base required to transform schools as they are currently organised into contexts in which leadership is truly distributed requires strong head teacher leadership".

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2 Source: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.details&id=1460

Though the current data was not collected with a direct interest in identifying distributive leadership in early years settings, some examples did emerge. But from our review of the literature and our analysis of the RELEY data, while 'collaboration', and 'team work' appear to be crucial in terms of analysis and practical effectiveness, the use of the term 'distributed leadership' seems to do little to clarify these processes further.

The success of a setting is largely dependent upon the level of dedication, commitment and effort made by the people within it. This commitment and effort will be endorsed and promoted by the positional leader who has high expectations and is able to recognise the current, as well as the potential strengths of all of those staff and children working within their setting. Effective leaders are therefore reflective practitioners who influence and develop people by setting an example, and providing a model, both morally and purposefully.

Building a learning community and team culture

Bennett *et al.*, (2003) argue that 'teams operate best in an open climate, with both intra-group and inter-group relations based on mutual trust and open communication in a supportive organisational climate' (9). They go on to report that this literature stresses the importance of collaboration and the recognition of strengths and expertise amongst a staff. But Jackson (2003) highlights an essential point about the challenges that arise in the attempt to encourage collaboration between adults with different roles and status levels. While Jackson was referring to school sectors it may be argued that the early years sector is currently troubled with far more diversity with regard to the qualifications, ages and levels of experience in its workforce.

In the report of their study of the Coram Community Campus (a multi-agency setting), Wigfall and Moss (2001) identified several factors that appeared to be impeding the integration of the variety of services (health, social services, education etc) on offer. They found that there were external forces – government policy and agendas – that appeared to be hampering coordinated work. They argued that these agendas and policies can: "… 'work against effective networks …[when] introducing too many initiatives, projects, targets, funding schemes and other mechanisms specific to particular services' simultaneously". They also highlighted the lack of attention paid, by funding bodies, to the provision of non-contact time; time required for professional development, as well as that necessary to establish collaborative links with and between working groups/individuals. Another constraint was the idea of 'individual agendas of busy-ness'.

Time and effort clearly needs to be spent in creating the conditions necessary for a collaborative team culture to emerge. There is a need to develop partnerships amongst members of staff, which in turn requires the breaking down of rigid boundaries, the establishment of trust and respect between all those involved (in spite of differing qualifications and experience), and the potential of staff to work flexibly and share expertise. The manager of the *Blue Skies Local Authority Day Care* (214) had thus institutionalised non-contact time as a routine part of day-to-day interaction at the centre. All the staff teams meet for an hour, between 8:30 and 9:30 each morning, to debrief and prepare activities. Evidence of staff collaboration also emerged from the analysis of the *Blue Skies* planning sheets, which demonstrated that learning intentions were made explicit (in writing) and responsibilities for each session delegated to specific members of the staff.

Effective leader's play a key role in the process of establishing a community of learners and team culture amongst staff. The task is not an easy one. DuFour (2004), in his paper, *Leading edge: Culture shift doesn't occur overnight – or without conflict,* argues that success depends upon the level of unrelenting commitment by the leader to promote a collaborative environment; despite the inevitable resistance s/he should anticipate encountering.

In Early Excellence Centre 426, the manager highlights the importance of empowerment in this process, referring to it as a spiral one:

"I think the senior management team's attitude to staff is absolutely crucial. I think all three aspects are interwoven, the staff, the children and the parents. The whole thing is a spiral in our terms. They're all feeding into one another's confidence and self-esteem. If the senior management team haven't got a really clear vision of enabling and empowering staff then the atmosphere and the environment won't be right because people won't be committed working and happy. They won't want to be there. They'll be bombing off on the dot [end of day] and when they're here they're dreaming of all those things. The thing that often gets missed out is the constant need to support that. That's not a one-off...It's the sustainability and maintenance of the environment and the approaches and attitudes is really the whole key" (manager interview, 426).

Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships
As previously noted the EPPE/REPEY research evidence demonstrates that home educational provisions and consistency across home and early years setting (and between parents and early years staff) promotes achievement for young children (e.g. Sylva et al., 2004). Many other studies highlight family and parent involvement in children's learning as having an influence on their happiness, achievement and learning in schools (see for example: Arvizu, 1996; Coleman, 1991; Epstein, 1989; Epstein and Dauber, 1991).There is also evidence which demonstrates that this partnership can improve student motivation, behaviour and self-esteem. Sylva et al's (2004) research found that *'work with parents as first educators is an effective strategy'* and goes on to argue that *'intervening with parents in early childhood has powerful effects on language, cognition and self-esteem – at least for three and four year olds'* (see also Evangelou et al., 2005).

Despite all of this evidence, the relationship between home and many early years settings remains unilateral, with the direction of information about children moving from the early years setting and staff to the parents, and rarely in the opposite direction. One of the main objectives of the Every Child Matters (2003) initiative has been to ensure the improvement of the level and degree of support offered to parents and carers. With the increased integration of services revolving around children and their families, such as health services, social care and education, there is a growing need (and expectation) for the development of partnerships with parents and families.

Home-school initiatives in the last two decades have been many and varied and have changed from being largely compensatory in nature to participatory and inclusive of parents, schools and children (Bastiani, 1988). Parent involvement has been interpreted in a number of ways such as: parents in school, teachers at home and parents as governors (Wolfendale, 1992; Siraj-Blatchford & Brooker, 1998). But what is meant by this term 'parental partnership'? Foot et al., (2002) argue that 'partnership goes beyond involvement: it is not just including parents in support and activities of pre-school education. Partnership implies equality and a division of power which inevitably draws parents into decision making and policy issues, not merely helping and information sharing.' It moves towards an empowerment of parents (Ball, 1994) and towards increasing their self-efficacy. Foot et al., (2002) go on to argue that the types of involvement on offer to parents should not be limited to activities which *directly* promote the children or the 'school', but should also move towards making parents the direct recipients of their involvement. Such active participation in attending, for instance, courses offered, planned or advertised by an early years setting (i.e. Nursery School), can promote parents' self-efficacy, which, in turn, can make parents conscious of their influential role over their child's development and therefore improve the quality of both their own interactions with their children and the learning activities that they provide (Bandura, 1997).

Parents are not a homogeneous group and therefore can hold different culturally conceived ideas (social class and ethnic differences) about the role of education, professional educators, and their own role as educators. In some cultures the role of the 'teacher' is seen as quite distinct and separate to the role of parenting. In our study there appeared to be a greater difference between middle class

parents' perceptions (regardless of ethnic background) of their role in educating their child than those from working class backgrounds. Many middle class parents were tuned into the discourse of education and provided on-going educational activities for their children to engage in at home. Centres such as 219 Private Day Nursery, which have highly effective cognitive and social outcomes, also appear to provide especially regular, detailed information to parents, and engage with them about their child's academic and social progress:

> *The weekly report has a section on what activities the group has been doing we have talked about squirrels this week and things like that. Then 'S' has mostly played this week with this type of material and she's learned the letter P and R she now knows numbers 1 to 4 for example. And the last bit is what she has enjoyed most. The end of report is like 3 or 4 pages, much more detailed and goes to cognitive development and social development of the child. What she has learned in terms of letters, drawing and ballet and French. '219 PDN parent 04'*

Other centres with good and successful outcomes such as 214 DC and 426 EEC provided regular information through records of achievement and monthly meetings with key workers. In the case of 219 PDN and 421 NS, weekly feedback is provided. What is distinctive about all of these centres is that they focus on what they are teaching the children and report regularly on the children's achievements, offering the opportunity for consistency of learning opportunities between home and school. These centres engage in more regular on-going assessment of children's learning, and this supports the parents from these centres in engaging more in complementary educational activities in the home:

> *We had an induction thing for parents and they went through everything with us I know they are assessing as they go in and it's continual assessment. They were going to let us know how our child performed in that. Not a standard test but they're watching them. They were going to let us know what stage they're at but I'm not quite sure what form that's going to take whether it's a meeting or written. '501 RC parent 5'*

Parents from these centres are pro-active in initiating learning activities at home. Where this was combined with staff encouraging positive dispositions, such as independence, the children often led and initiated the learning activities at home themselves. One nursery class in particular really emphasised peer sociability and had a strong consistent policy of engaging children in discussions:

> *"Before when he first came we had just started to get him to write his name. A lot of letters were around the wrong way and he was missing out a letter. I don't know if what we do at home is supported by the nursery, I think it is initiated by the nursery. As soon as he came here he changed in that he wanted to be able to achieve, they are very independent and meant to be independent and saw the need when he came home for me to teach him how to do things. So that when he was here it was not a problem."*
> '106 NC parent 4'

The strategies the leaders applied in the development of their parental partnerships varied:

> *"… when our parents are first introduced to the nursery we see them half a term before their children start. And during that time we explain our philosophy and we try to demonstrate some of the ethos of the nursery by inviting them in for visits so that they can see the children working. And we say to them 'look the children are doing science and it looks like this', 'the children here are doing maths, but it looks like this"*
> (manager, 106)

In these effective settings parents were often offered genuine support and encouragement; in setting 017 there was evidence of this in the nursery staff's provision of crèche services for parents attending meetings that were led by counsellors from a nearby health centre. A large parent's room is also available for groups and meetings and a parenting group meets weekly. Also, on open evenings, when parents are invited into the nursery class, the staff put out appropriate toys for the younger siblings of centre children who usually attend.

Leading and Managing: Striking the Balance

Webb (2005) refers to the two dimensions of head teachers as 'leading professional and chief executive manager' (69). The balancing of administrative tasks and tasks associated with teaching and learning is a key responsibility for the formal leaders of organisations (schools and early years settings). However, with the ever increasing demands for accountability, these two roles are often viewed in conflict by those in positions of leadership, with the mastery of management tasks appearing the clear route to meeting the ever changing expectations and increasing accountability. This is not helped by the fact that the two terms are often treated as separate concepts within the literature, rather than parallel. Jeffery and Troman (2004) refer to several research projects (Troman, 1997; Woods et al., 1997; Jeffery & Woods, 1998) which report 'a growth of constraint, intensification of work and increasing managerialism resulting from school restructuring and Ofsted inspection (537). The difficulty of balancing these seemingly disparate tasks has often seen one, the administrative role, taking precedence over the other; leading teaching and learning.

There is a definite tension between the leader's commitment to managerial and leadership tasks, when asked 'what gave them the greatest pleasure in their leadership role' the 76 early childhood professionals interviewed by Rodd (1997) responded with the following,

- Contact with the children, parents and staff (40.8%)
- Achievements of the children, parents and staff (28.9%)
- Influencing and guiding the team (15.8%)
- 'Pride in the centre' (7.9%)

The large majority, almost 88.5%, spoke of their involvement and experience with human beings. When asked about those features they found least satisfying, administrative burdens topped the list, in addition to dealing difficult and demanding aspects of interpersonal relations, external influences and lack of status. Interesting Rodd found that most of these 'least rewarding' features were also the aspects of the job the respondents found most difficult.

The owner manager of one of the private day nurseries articulates the same feeling of being pulled in two directions,

> *I've always felt that our relationship with our parents has been quite good but I have to say I'm pulled further and further away from the situation by the increasing amounts of paperwork...it's depressing… We had a grant of about £2000 and we built our new room, new computer and so we said oh now we've got loads of money and its fantastic which was lovely…but I have signed my soul away. The amount of stuff that now keeps plopping on my desk 'how many of this have you got, how many of that have you got, what's the age of this child, ethnic minorities, how many staff have you got'. Honestly, it's all the time and this is a business and a cash flow (Manager Interview, 413).*

The feeling of added pressure brought on by the external award of a grant, is one shared by the manager of Nursery Class 324. The manager, whose setting had been awarded Beacon status,

highlighted her awareness of the potential problems that might arise from attempting to reconcile the demands of the Beacon status on the school, in terms of the number of visitors and training commitments expected, with the maintenance of current provision

> *'Somehow or other I will have to decide which I am doing for what purpose. And that won't be easy.'*

Several of the leaders of our effective settings highlighted their dissatisfaction with the increase in bureaucratic tasks which have emerged as a result of increased pressure, both external and internal, for change and accountability. The following extracts help to highlight the difficulty some leaders face in reconciling the change in focus from direct care and education of young children to the tasks of management and leadership:

> *The playgroup (401) lead co-manager believes her role has changed in that she is not as directly involved with the children as she would like to be. She made it clear in both both formal and informal conversations with the researcher that she regards the paperwork as problematic and claims to get more satisfaction from being with the children rather than 'having to do this and that and planning' (Manager interview). This is supported by the observations made during playgroup sessions when the co-managers are regularly involved with administrative duties* (Playgroup, 401).

> *The nursery teacher, from Nursery Class 017, feels that curriculum changes have affected her role in the amount of paperwork she has to manage and also the rate of changes, 'you just get your head around one thing then you've got to change it a bit more'. This observation/complaint seems to resonate throughout educational sectors in regards to top-down strategies and expectations. That said, she does believe that the developments have improved her practice; which is supported by the fact that she takes ownership of the strategies implemented or passed down, rather than attempting to take them on fully and without reflection for her current setting and practice.*

Summary and Conclusions

Southworth (2002) argues that much of the existing literature on leadership has been overly prescriptive, disregarding the variation existing between schools, and lacking examples of effective practices. He goes on to argue that the development of taxonomies or lists of what leadership involves, tend to dissect the leaders work, therefore overlooking the myriad of other tasks that they perform. HMI (2003), with others, have argued that the difficulty in identifying what the characteristics of effective leadership are is because different circumstances appear to require different skills and attributes.

We have argued that **contextual literacy**, a commitment to **collaboration,** and to the **improvement of children's learning outcomes** should be considered (by definition) to provide fundamental requirements for *Leadership for Learning.* Each of these leadership qualities was found to be strongly represented in the effective settings that we studied. We also identified a range of 'categories of effective leadership practice' in the effective settings that might be considered valuable in the development of leadership training:

- ▪ ***Identifying and articulating a collective vision;*** especially with regard to pedagogy and curriculum.

- ▪ ***Ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals***: building common purposes.

- **Effective communication:** providing a level of *transparency* in regard to expectations, practices and processes.

- **Encouraging reflection:** which acts as an impetus for change and the motivation for on-going learning and development.

- **Commitment to on-going, professional development**: supporting staff to become more critically reflective in their practice.

- **Monitoring and assessing practice**: through collaborative dialogue and action research.

- **Building a learning community and team culture**: establishing a community of learners.

- **Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships**: promoting achievement for all young children.

 We also discussed **Distributed Leadership** and argued (perhaps paradoxically) that strong leadership may be necessary in the development of the high levels of collaboration and team work that are required.   It is also necessary for those responsible to reconcile the sometimes competing demands of leadership and management.

The early years sector is experiencing massive change so that it isn't at all surprising that leaders are currently concerned to achieve a better balance of administrative tasks with tasks associated with teaching and learning. It is increasingly recognised that the quality of programs and services for young children and their families are related to effective leadership. One of the targets set by the childcare workforce strategy is to have one member of staff trained to graduate level by 2015, a target which the Daycare Trust argues 'falls short of the vision of having one of the best childcare services in the world' (Daycare Trust, April 2005). Referring to New Zealand's target of 100% graduate, teacher trained, early years' workforce by 2012, the Daycare Trust claim that a similar target is achievable in the UK.

The question of the amount of funding needed to raise the salaries of staff as they raise their qualifications also remains problematic.

However, there is no doubt that effective leadership and appropriate training for the leadership role is an increasingly important element in providing high quality provision for the early years, especially as we move to larger and sometimes more complex, multi-professional teams of staff (see Siraj-Blatchford, Clarke and Needham, forthcoming 2007) across the early years sector.

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