

**A STUDY OF POLICY, SERVICE DELIVERY AND  
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG  
CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES TRAPPED IN  
THE POVERTY CYCLE IN THE UNITED  
STATES OF AMERICA , CANADA, BELGIUM  
AND BRITAIN.**

**Report for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust**

**Lynn Christie**

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## INTRODUCTION

My background in early childhood education, as an early childhood teacher and policy development officer with the Education Department of Western Australia has highlighted for me issues related to how children and their families access the life chances offered to them in their pre-school and early school years. The access to services and the ability to make the most of these chances often seem linked to the socio-economic background and circumstances of families.

The early childhood phase of schooling within the Education Department addresses children from 3 to 8 years of age. The Fellowship allowed me to study early childhood education in the broader context of 0-8 years of age. This acknowledges learning and education begin before birth and the division of this phase of life into discrete categories can be unhelpful and not necessarily in the best interests of children and families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Many of the people I met at research and practice levels, came from disciplines and professions outside of Education. This spoke loudly and positively of the breaking down of the 'silo mentality' which is a challenge for all government agencies. The complexity of the early years of life and their future impact on individuals and nations demands that we integrate our knowledge to determine how we can best provide all children with the best possible chances in life.

The determination of poverty in absolute or relative terms and the issue of how and where poverty lines are drawn can have a profound effect on public policy and individual lives. Absolute poverty is the inability to purchase or consume a fixed minimum package of goods or services. Relative poverty is the falling behind, by more than a certain degree, from the average income and life style enjoyed by the rest of the society in which one lives.

*Once economic development has progressed beyond a certain minimum level, the rub of the poverty problem - from the point of view of both the poor individual and the societies in which they live - is not so much the effects of poverty in any absolute form but the effects of the contrast, daily perceived, between the lives of the poor and the lives of those around them. For practical purposes the problem of poverty in the industrialised nations today is a problem of relative poverty.*

(UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence Italy. *Innocenti Report Card*, No 1, June 2000. 'A league table of child poverty in rich nations.')

According to the UNICEF report, children living in relative poverty are defined as those in households with an income below 50% of the national median. In a league table of twenty three nations with the percentage of children living in relative poverty in these nations ranging from 2.6% to 26.2%, the United States of America has 22.4% of its children living in poverty, the United Kingdom 19.4%, Canada 15.5%, Australia 12.6%, and Belgium 4.4%.

The 2000 Family and Children's Churchill Fellowship allowed me to travel to the United States, Canada, Belgium and Britain to study policy, service delivery and

educational outcomes for young children and their families trapped in the poverty cycle. The Fellowship allowed me to meet with the researchers, policy makers and people working in a variety of early childhood education settings and to visit some of the innovative programs for young children and their families these nations have established.

Two factors underpinned my study. Firstly the advantage children from higher socio-economic backgrounds have over their peers from lower socio-economic backgrounds,

*.....They arrive at school better prepared for the sort of learning that is required there, both cognitively and affectively..... and they carry these advantages to adult life showing superior achievement, higher income, better social adjustment and greater resistance to disease.'* ( Socio- economic Gradients in Mathematics Ability and their responsiveness to intervention during early childhood; Case R, Griffin S and Kelly W M in *The Health and Wealth of Nations* ed Keating D and Hertschman C; Guildford Press 1999)

and secondly the persistence of child poverty.

*The persistence of child poverty in rich countries undermines both equality of opportunity and commonality of values. It therefore confronts the industrialised world with a test both of its ideals and its capacity to to resolve many of its most intractable social problems.*

(UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence Italy. *Innocenti Report Card*, No 1, June 2000. 'A league table of child poverty in rich nations.')

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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### **Project description**

The 2000 Family and Children's Services Churchill Fellowship allowed me to travel to the United States, Canada, Belgium and Britain to study policy, service delivery and educational outcomes for young children and their families trapped in the poverty cycle. My study focused on new ways to access and gain participation in education programs; the achievement of fair and holistic assessment and evaluation procedures of children and programs and the provision of culturally appropriate curriculum.

### **Highlights**

- Discussions with Dr Fraser Mustard chair and author of the Ontario Early Years Study. and member of the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research. Dr Mustard detailed research findings relevant to early development and its implications for policy development and implementation in order to ensure the long term health and wealth of nations.
- Discussions with Professor Ferre Laevers, Leuven Catholic University, Belgium. Professor Laevers shared his research into the assessment of children's well being and involvement and the development of tools to assess these aspects of children's development.
- Professor Christine Pascal, University of Worcester. Professor Pascal provided a comprehensive overview of British government policy and its implications at research and practice levels. She shared her research findings in relation to the assessment and evaluation of children and program, self evaluation by educators and the inter-agency collaboration and community involvement in Early Excellence Centres.

### **Lessons learned and their dissemination and implementation**

- The need for policy development and implementation to reflect the importance of inter-agency collaboration and family and community involvement in early years programs.
- The need to ensure all young children and families are supported by the provision of universal programs with programs targeted to children and families suffering disadvantage embedded within these programs.
- The need to ensure those employed in early years programs are appropriately qualified and skilled.
- The need to value and support those who work with young children and their families.
- The importance of appropriate assessment procedures that ensure children's social cognition and dispositions to learning are taken into account.

To date I have presented the findings of my study at an event to mark the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the Early Years in Education Conference, an inter-agency seminar and to members of the Early Childhood Alliance. In February 2001 I will present my findings to Family and Children's Services Western Australia.

I have also initiated a program that will link school and pre-school provision and involve government and non-government agencies, community members and private enterprise in a disadvantaged area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

All Western Australian children have access to two years of universal early childhood education prior to compulsory schooling. The Western Australian Curriculum Framework encompasses children from kindergarten to year 12. These two components place Western Australia in a strong position to be a leader in establishing high quality programs for children 0-8 years of age that link with the later years of schooling and develop positive dispositions to life long learning in children.

To ensure all our children are able to make the most of the chances offered to them we need to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated system of education and support for all children 0-8 years and their families is in place.

It is recommended that:

- policy development ensures agencies work collaboratively together with community members in the development and linking of services for children 0-8 years of age. Services need to be linked in a way that makes sense to families and professionals.
- public awareness about the importance of the early years as a foundation for life long learning, behaviour and health is raised through a publicity campaign.
- a comprehensive, coordinated inter-agency plan is developed to ensure all young children and their families are able to access high quality early years services.
- government and non-government agencies, communities and, when appropriate, private enterprise are involved in determining and developing local programs to meet local needs.
- a range of existing high quality early years services that support children and parenting are identified to be used as models for consideration by communities and agencies.
- that an additional, universal year of pre-school education be established by building upon existing high quality programs such as playgroups and child care centres.
- links between the pre-compulsory years of schooling, families, the community and the compulsory years of schooling are developed and strengthened. This will assist in the provision of continuity of education and family support.
- to assist with raising the quality of existing services early years workers are supported in self evaluation and evaluation of the programs in which they work. To strengthen continuity between programs this support could be offered to educators in early years programs in school, child care and play group settings.
- assessment of children is effective and efficient and includes information about children's social cognition and their dispositions to learning.

As a policy development officer in the Early Childhood Education Directorate of the Education Department of Western Australia, I have opportunity for input into assessment policy in relation to early childhood education within the government school system. My role may also provide opportunity for involvement in any development and implementation of policy involving inter-agency collaboration and community involvement.

The Effective Early Learning Program provides a framework against which educators can evaluate their own practice and the program they work in. I undertook the *Train the Trainer* course for this program which enables me to present this training in consultation with Worcester University, England.

I have instigated a program involving the principals of schools in a disadvantaged area. The program aims to forge links between schools and existing pre-school services for young children and their families and to provide continuity of education for young children. Funding from private enterprise will be sought to assist with program coordination, mapping of services and identifying gaps in service delivery.

## **FINDINGS**

The following key points emerged from my study.

- \* The focus on the early years of life as part of social welfare reform and as means of securing the health and wealth of nations.
- \* The focus on inter-agency collaboration.
- \* The focus on raising the quality of early childhood education programs through:
  - the assessment and evaluation of children and programs;
  - raising the qualifications of those employed in early childhood services; and
  - the development of culturally appropriate practice.

### **THE FOCUS ON THE EARLY YEARS OF LIFE AS PART OF SOCIAL WELFARE REFORM AND AS A MEANS OF SECURING THE HEALTH AND WEALTH OF NATIONS**

There is a growing body of international research evidence highlighting the importance of the early years in securing positive, long term outcomes for individuals and consequently for nations. The findings are focussing the attention of policy makers in the United States, Canada, Belgium and Britain on cost effective ways of ensuring children and families are supported in what amounts to an attempt to resolve many of the social and health problems of these nations and the consequent costs to governments.

The United States, Canada and Britain are giving serious consideration to the provision of early child development programs in the years prior to compulsory schooling, at 5 or 6 years of age. Belgium has a history of strong social policy that has supported families and children and acknowledged the importance of the early years of life.

#### ***Belgium***

In Belgium all children have access to schooling from two and a half years of age. In addition to this, child care is heavily subsidised and taxation relief is provided for families when one parent remains in the home to care for a child under three years of age. The Belgian Government provides a high level of support for child care and family day care providers and families accessing family day care.

While Belgium has a relatively low number of children living in poverty, the government is concerned about these children and about keeping the social welfare budget in check. The disadvantage of poverty is seen as out of the control of those in the poverty cycle with the responsibility for addressing poverty owned by society as a whole. Officers from the government agency Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) actively seek input on policy development from disadvantaged individuals and families. A proposal to increase the entry age to schooling was dismissed due to input claiming this would increase the stress on already disadvantaged families.

In the United States, Canada and Britain there is much debate about whether positive social and emotional outcomes of children are best achieved through targeted programs such as *Head Start* in the United States or through universal programs such as Western Australia's kindergarten and pre-primary programs.

Research findings are raising the question of whether programs targeted to families from low socio-economic backgrounds reach their targets and improve outcomes for the children in these families.

### ***United States of America***

Professor Carolee Howes at the University of California at Los Angeles is evaluating the *Early Head Start Program*. This program is an extension of the *Head Start Program*, a federally funded program introduced in 1965. *Head Start* and *Early Head Start* are targeted to families with more than four children and with an annual income of less than A\$19 000. *Early Head Start* is a home visiting program for families with children from 0-3 years of age. Professor Howes' initial findings are that the program is making little or no difference to the poorest families. This appears to be related to the training of the home visitors and possibly their personal reasons for seeking employment in this area.

A focus of Professor Howes' research is how or if illegal immigrants gain knowledge of child rearing practices when they are removed from their own culture and cannot access the support of the culture in which they live, and the consequences for children and ultimately for society. Professor Howes maintains that if the needs of these families are not met due to the families' illegal immigrant status, an 'under, under class' will develop in America.

### ***Canada***

The Canadian National Longitudinal Children's Study (NLCS) showed that despite Ontario being the richest province in Canada, Ontario's children were doing less well than children in other provinces. In response to the findings of the NLCS, the Ontario Government commissioned an early years study. Dr Fraser Mustard, a member of the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research, chaired the working party of the study and wrote the final report.

*Reversing the Real Brain Drain: the Final Report of the Early Years Study* was presented to the Ontario Government in 1999. It draws on research evidence from many disciplines, including health, education and neuroscience, that points to the importance of the first three to six years of life in determining the future life chances for children and consequently the future health and wealth of Canada.

The report identifies the development of a universal, early childhood development system to support young children and their families as essential for Canada's future prosperity. It claims that unless attention is paid to ensuring **all** children are ready to learn on entry to compulsory schooling, the health and wealth of the nation will suffer. The report emphasises the need to harness the energy of local communities, assist them to identify their strengths and to determine local solutions for local issues.

Dr Dan Offord of the Centre for Children at Risk at McMaster University, Ontario makes a strong case for the provision of universal programs within which targeting of specific groups can occur. Gradients showing the relationship between socio-economic background and outcomes in health and education show no levelling out in relation to income. In terms of percentages, children from lower class households are less prepared for schooling than their more affluent peers. However, by virtue of the greater size of the middle class, there are more middle class students with problems. This shows that factors, other than or in addition to socio-economic status must be considered in improving outcomes for children.

The *Early Years Report* demands that findings from neuroscience should be considered in relation to ensuring that all children are ready to learn on entry to schooling. Research findings from this discipline show the first three to six years of life to be the most crucial period in brain development and that this development determines, to a large extent, an individual's long term outcomes in health, behaviour and learning. The report argues that on this basis, high quality early development programs must be available and accessible to all children.

Universal provision avoids the stigma that can be suffered by children and families in programs targeted to families from low socio-economic background. Additionally, the inclusion of the articulate middle classes, helps in ensuring the instigation, continuation and quality of service provision.

The research data relating to the need to provide universal early years (0-6 years of age) contained in *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: The Final Report of the Early Years Study* has had considerable impact both in Ontario and across Canada. The First Ministers' meeting recently announced the first ever collective agreement between the federal and provincial governments aimed at improving early years services. The agreement provides substantial funding over three years, for early years programs. The Federal Government will provide 300 million dollars in year one climbing to 500 million in the third year, with provincial expenditure around three times that amount.

### ***Britain***

In Britain a focus on the early years of life has been brought about by reports to Government highlighting the number of families and children living in poverty, the long term costs to the nation and the importance of the early years of life in improving long term outcomes in health and education. Social welfare reforms have been introduced that focus on:

- the health of young children and the education of their parents in order to address the growing incidence and cost of illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes;
- increasing the availability and affordability of child care and education programs as one way of providing adults with access to work;
- raising the skill and qualifications level of the adult population;
- reducing social exclusion and
- raising standards in schools.

There are four strands to policy relating to early childhood.

1. Expansion of early childhood programs to include all three year old children.
2. Development of and support for parenting programs.
3. Improvement of quality in early childhood programs and
4. Transformation from fragmented to integrated service delivery.

A mix of universal and targeted programs are being implemented to support children and families. An additional year of universal pre-school education through the Early Development and Childcare Partnerships, is being made available for three year old children. Prior to this expansion Britain has offered similar provision to Western Australia with two years of education available to children before 6 years of age.

In addition to the above, programs targeted to children from low socio-economic backgrounds are being provided for children 0-3 years of age.

- The *Sure Start* Program is targeted to areas of socio-economic deprivation but the programs offered are available to all children and families in that area. This considerably reduces the chance of families encountering the stigma attached to accessing a program targeted to families with certain socio-economic criteria.
- The *Early Excellence Centres* Project arose out of the Government White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (Department for Education and Employment 1997.) The Early Excellence Centres, target those families most in need of support and unemployed adults from 21-45 years of age who are, with support, most likely to find work. The services of this program are available to all within a community and are a multi faceted approach to reducing social welfare costs.

British policy and services are underpinned by the wealth of evidence from the disciplines of health and education emphasising the importance of the early years in addressing social issues. There is considerably less emphasis on research evidence from neuroscience than in Canada. However the outcomes for Britain and Canada are similar with both governments investing heavily in the development of early years services in order to ensure the future prosperity of their nation.

Comparable trends are emerging in the United States of America with children and families high on the agenda of the 2000 federal elections.

## **THE FOCUS ON INTER-AGENCY AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION.**

The focus on inter-agency collaboration stems from research evidence (Rutter, 1996 and Fthenkais 1998) showing that many families, at certain points, face multiple stress factors that can lead to family breakdown unless support is given. Use of models of successful, innovative, inter-agency services that could be transferred or modified by other communities is central to the expansion of early childhood services in both Britain and Canada.

Both nations are emphasising the importance of building social capital by involving community members and private enterprise, along with government and non- government agencies, in the development of local solutions to address local issues in relation to early years services.

In Britain government funding is only provided for new early years programs when inter-agency collaboration is demonstrated. Lead agencies are accountable for the facilitation of this collaboration and other agencies are accountable for participation in inter-agency programs.

In Canada and Britain I was able to meet with researchers and coordinators involved with the development and evaluation of early childhood services that are firmly entrenched in communities and supported by government and non-government agencies and private enterprise.

These services included:

- the ***Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program, Niagara District Health Region, Ontario.***

This program funded by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Through the program all babies born in Ontario are screened using a tool that assesses not only physical health but also social aspects relating to the baby including bonding and birth trauma.

If the baby is deemed at risk a Family Visitor, a lay person with some training provided through the program, makes bi-weekly visits to the baby's home that can last until the child is six and supports both the child and parent/s. Particular attention is paid to young, single, unemployed mothers in an attempt to reduce social welfare costs by re-introducing them to education programs or the work force and thereby breaking the poverty cycle. The service liaises closely with Justice and Social Services.

- ***Success by Six, Ottawa-Carleton District, Toronto***

The *Success By Six* program operates across North America. It is organised by the United Way, a fund raising charity organisation that raises and allocates funds to communities. Through a feasibility study in the Ottawa-Carleton District of Toronto, United Way determined that with the government focus on community projects the time was right economically to improve services for 0-6 year olds in the district.

United Way organised agencies, industry and commerce and presented the findings of the Early Years Study and feasibility study. The agencies and private enterprise groups ensured funding for *Success by Six* and gave their representatives in the program spending authorisation. This led to prompt action and enhanced cohesion within the project. The program links to local foundations and corporations interested in supporting children.

The Ontario Government established five early child development demonstration sites with seeding grants of \$300 000 per site. One site, Le Petit Prince, a French speaking Catholic school in a low socio-economic area is blending child care, kindergarten education and out of school care on school site. The *Success by Six* coordinator, the groups involved in the program and unions are working to determine ways in which differences in pay and conditions between the child care and education sectors can be overcome in order to ensure the success of the program. Parenting information, programs, and resources are also offered through *Success by Six* at Le Petit Prince.

- **1,2,3,Go, Montreal**

This program is based on research by Professor Camil Bouchard at the University of Montreal, showing that successful interventions to promote the well-being of children are:

- preventative rather than remedial
- best carried out early in the life of a child and
- involve parents and community.

The objective of the project is to mobilise the necessary material, intellectual, social and political resources to help communities to develop and sustain a culture that is concerned with the well-being and development of 0-3 year olds.

In 1995, six neighbourhoods in rural and urban areas were invited to join the project. All six had:

- a high rate of poverty;
- a high percentage of pre-schoolers
- active community life and a tradition of concerted action
- an ethnic composition reflecting Montreal's demographic profile

Professor Bouchard is currently seeking funding to implement a more rigorous evaluation of the project than has been possible to date.

***Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership, Leicester, England***

The *Early Years Development and Child Care Partnerships* are established under the lead of local education authorities. Partners are drawn from private enterprise, government and non government agencies. Their role is to support private and voluntary providers, including parent run playgroups, in the provision of an additional universal year of education for three year old children.

Providers gain government funding by:

- agreeing to work towards the Early Learning Goals developed by the Quality and Curriculum Authority and the Department of Education and Employment as the part of the Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum.
- providing places for children with special needs and
- agreeing to be inspected by the Office for Standards in Education.(OFSTED)

### ***Sure Start***

The *Sure Start* program aims to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children up to three years of age and their families by providing better coordinated support networks and ensuring that help reaches those families that need it most. The ultimate aim of the program is to address the needs of children at risk of becoming disaffected from schooling early in life. 452 million pounds over three years has been designated to set up 250 *Sure Start* programs across the country.

The *Sure Start* team identifies local authorities eligible for funding, invites them to make submissions and, if necessary, supports the authorities in submitting 'bottom up' proposals involving local communities and private enterprise, as well as government agencies. Programs are developed to meet local needs but must ensure that the core services of:

- outreach and home visiting,
  - support to families,
  - support for good quality learning through play,
  - support for children with special needs; and
  - primary and community health and social care
- are delivered in an integrated and coherent way.

The program is being implemented in three successive waves with each wave reflecting the learning of both the *Sure Start* team and the local authorities.

### ***Early Excellence Centres***

*Early Excellence Centres* are expected to offer:

- early education and child care,
- family support,
- training for early years practitioners
- adult education and
- the dissemination of good practice.

They offer *one stop shop* support to communities, linking education, health and social services.

The *Early Excellence Centres* pilot program is to have a rigorous and comprehensive National Evaluation in order to: documenting how different forms of integrated provision work in different environments; identify and disseminate good practice in the delivery of quality, integrated services; identify the impact and outcomes of integrated services for children and families; and demonstrate the cost effectiveness and value for money of the pilot program.

***Pen Green Centre for Under Fives and Their Families, Corby, Northamptonshire.***

The Pen Green Centre was established in 1983 by Northamptonshire County Council and jointly funded through the Education and Social Services Departments. Identified as an innovative, successful program it became part of the *Early Excellence Centre* project in 1997 and was part of the trailblazer component of the *Sure Start* Program.

Pen Green provides all of the services required of an *Early Excellence Centre* including training for practitioners that extends to doctorate level and training for parents and community members that can link with universities and colleges. In addition to the required services it has a research arm and publishes resource materials for parents and professionals. The Centre is jointly funded and managed by the Education, Social Services and Health Departments and doubles its funding through 'ethical entrepreneurship.' It is a vibrant, well coordinated and welcoming place where workers and community are valued and supported at all levels. It is an outstanding example of what can be achieved through collaboration and strong leadership.

## **THE FOCUS ON RAISING THE QUALITY OF EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS THROUGH:**

- **THE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF CHILDREN AND PROGRAMS.**
  - **RAISING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE EMPLOYED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS**
  - **THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE**
- 
- **THE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF CHILDREN AND PROGRAMS**  
The increased expenditure in the early years is increasing the demand for policy based on evidence not ideology.

### *United States*

In the United States attempts to raise the quality of programs in the early years in pre-school and school programs focuses on performance standards. The performance standards for the Head Start program have recently been revised in conjunction with the National Association for the Early Years, to reflect and promote appropriate practice. There appears to be little focus on supporting educators, many of who have no or minimum qualifications, in implementing appropriate programs to enable children to meet the standards.

Children in state schools are all tested in Year 2 in Numeracy, Literacy, Social Studies and Science. There is evidence that this is leading to a restricted curriculum being offered in the early years and concern that teachers do not always possess the high level of skill required to implement high quality programs that support children's learning in all areas.

### *Canada*

In Canada the focus of government, whilst acknowledging the importance of high quality programs for young children, is on ensuring programs are available and accessible to all children and their families. However, the researchers who have been highly influential in determining policy development in this area are now focussing on the need to assess children and programs to ensure positive outcomes are achieved from the increased funding and provision.

Health Canada is providing funding to ensure:

- research and promotion of comprehensive, community based initiatives are meshed;
- producing and sharing of now knowledge among partners during the implementation, actualisation, evaluation and institutionalisation phases of the early years initiatives;
- the development of new research projects pertaining to the identification of the best strategies for evaluating community capacities regarding the well being of children;
- indexing, creating and popularising appropriate 'tools for change' to help communities in their efforts to provide children with optimal development contexts; and
- developing a model of knowledge sharing and partnership forging among groups such as sponsoring organisations, universities, government and non-government agencies and policy makers.

### *The Early Development Instrument*

Dr Offord and Dr Magdalena Janus at the Centre for Children at Risk at Mc Master University, Toronto have developed the Early Development Instrument; a population based measure for use by communities. This instrument measures children's readiness to learn on entry to senior kindergarten at age 5 and is based on teacher observation in a standardised format. Results are compiled on a class, not individual, basis and provide information that communities can use in determining early development programs that will best assist all children to be ready to learn when they enter school.

Trials during the development of the Early Development Instrument showed a strong correlation between communities that are able to access a range of high quality early child development programs and children's readiness to learn on entry to compulsory schooling.

Trends in Britain and Belgium show the growing need to define and develop high quality programs that meet the needs of all groups of children especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In these countries I was struck by the focus on ensuring that the assessment of children and programs is efficient, effective and appropriate and that the factors that lead to life long learning and well being are included in assessment processes in addition to the assessment of literacy and numeracy outcomes.

### ***Belgium***

The Experiential Education Centre at Leuven Catholic University in Belgium has developed instruments that assess children's well being and involvement. The assessment of children' well being and involvement is based on the belief that if the final goal of education is to ensure an individual's emotional health and authenticity; exploratory attitude; openness to their inner and outer world; a sense of linkedness and motivation to contribute to the quality of life then the emotional well-being and involvement of children must be attended to.

Involvement is seen as the key to deep level learning and the degree of well being shows how much the educational environment succeeds in helping the child to feel comfortable and have his /her emotional needs (attention, recognition and competence) met.

Instruments to assist the Belgian Inspectorate to assess well being and involvement and classroom climate and that include the *child's voice* are under development. The Belgian Government is committed to children's involvement in the assessment of both themselves and their schools.

### ***Britain***

In Britain new policy initiatives have a pilot phase of three to five years, with evaluation costed in at 10% of the total budget. Initiatives are only rolled out if found to be cost effective.

#### *The Early Excellence Centre Project Evaluation*

Professor Christine Pascal, University of Worcester is evaluating the Early Excellence Centres Project. Her early findings indicate that the Centres:

- sensitise adults to the education of themselves and their children;
- enhance the self esteem and aspirations of parents;
- improve parenting skills;
- enhance children's social, intellectual and physical development;
- improve inclusion rates in mainstream schools by early identification of special needs;
- improve mental and physical health in families;
- support the 'hard to reach' and vulnerable families and reduce social exclusion;
- improve the quality of early years services through training programs; and
- demonstrate cost effectiveness - for every pound invested in Early Excellence Centre services, 8 pounds are saved on alternative services.

#### *The Accounting Early For Learning Project*

The Accounting Early for Learning Project at Worcester University, England, is based on the significant evidence showing the relation of children's social competence and well being in relation to learning. The project is focussing on how dispositions to learning develop and can be recognised and assessed in children 3-6 years of age. Dr Tony Bertram one of the project leaders informed me that they are convinced they will meet the aim of the project which is to develop an efficient and effective assessment scale that will link the outcomes children achieve in social cognition to the National Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes.

The project is focussing on what is happening 'in' the child. Data is being collected through observation of children in a variety of settings. From this data a rating scale will be developed to assess children's dispositions to learning followed by further data analysis. A professional development program for educators and an action research phase of the research will be implemented using the observational structures and the rating scale in 2001. Once the tool is validated, professional development in its use will be offered on a broader basis to ensure dissemination of the knowledge gained and the assessment tool.

#### *Baseline Assessment*

Baseline Assessment was introduced to assess children on entry to the reception year, when children turn five years of age, with the purpose of directing teaching. Over time, Baseline Assessment has become a key tool for assessing the value schools add to children's learning. Local Education Authorities currently choose a Baseline Assessment scheme from one of more than ninety schemes accredited by the Quality and Curriculum Authority. Many Baseline Assessment schemes are criticised for their lack of reliability and validity and their unsuitability for the purposes for which they are used.

A new Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum has recently been introduced. This stage covers government programs up to the end of the reception year when

children are five years of age. Ms Lesley Staggs, Manager Quality and Curriculum Authority indicated that it is likely the introduction of this new stage will lead to the Quality and Curriculum Authority reviewing Baseline Assessment and that any review is likely to be heavily influenced by the results of the *Accounting Early for Learning* Project described above.

Government policy in Britain is also showing increased emphasis on self review and target setting by educators in relation to the processes employed and the outcomes achieved by children and programs.

*The Effective Early Learning (EEL) Program*

This is the largest national early childhood evaluation project ever conducted and goes across child care and early education programs. The program has proved a cost effective strategy to evaluate and improve the quality and effectiveness of early learning through a collaborative and rigorous process of self evaluation which is supported and validated externally. The EEL program emphasises practitioner and institutional development through training and practitioner led action research. It intends to strengthen and empower those who work with young children, to facilitate change and to inform decision makers at all levels.

I undertook the three day *Train the Trainer* course of this program and believe that it provides educators with a very workable framework that helps them to build upon their existing skills and expertise and gives them a good degree of control over the process.

## **RAISING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE EMPLOYED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS**

The growing recognition of the importance of the early years is increasing awareness of:

- the need to have highly skilled and qualified professionals employed in early childhood programs;
- the need for educators to use self reflection within reflection on the program in which they work; and
- the need for the quality of programs to be evaluated on more than the physical environment and child-adult ratios in early childhood settings.

Research conducted by the National Centre for the Early Childhood Work Force in the United States shows that workers with a degree qualification make better child care workers. In the countries I visited the minimum qualification for work in early childhood programs in schools is a three or four year graduate degree. In child care programs there is no minimum qualification with those recognised as qualified usually holding a two year diploma.

In Belgium early childhood educators in schools have a minimum of three years training and considerable support is offered to other workers in the early years. The provision of government support and advice to parents wishing to access family day care provides a level of government control over these services.

Ontario and California are developing career structures for those employed in the early years of education and care prior to schooling. These career enable workers to work towards a graduate qualification whilst employed in the field. However at this stage there is no government funding to assist with training costs or to ensure remuneration appropriate to the qualification of workers is in place. Consequently on gaining graduate status most child care workers move into the schooling system where remuneration is higher and conditions better.

The British Government has promised remuneration for workers in accordance with qualification with the long term goal of having a graduate employee in all early years settings. Training of child care and play group workers is supported by funding. With the implementation of a universal program for three year old children through child care centres and playgroups and the expectation they will implement the Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum and be inspected by OFSTED this is regarded as essential.

- **THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE.**

In Canada, Belgium and Britain the implementation of culturally appropriate practice is viewed as a component of high quality early childhood education. Researchers and educator trainers agree that whilst professional development aimed at assisting educators to develop and implement culturally appropriate practice may stand alone, it must be seen as integral to the overall quality of any early childhood education program.

### ***California***

In California seventy per cent of the population has Spanish as its first, and often only, language. Affirmative action legislation has required schools to employ a specified percentage of bi-lingual, usually Spanish and American, staff. Legislation, introduced after the last state election in 1999, removed this requirement on schools in an attempt to reinstate English as the first language of California. This is despite research evidence showing the best way for children to learn is to be taught initially in their first language. Federal legislation which governs universities and teacher training institutions is at odds with the state legislation and maintains affirmative action for minority groups. This opens the possibility for conflict between the two systems in relation to qualifications for training and for employment.

### ***Canada***

Thirty two per cent of Canada's total population of 27 million report a home language other than French or English. Researchers in Canada argue that many of these people face racial bias and cultural disparities. They also argue that linguistic mis-match between children from ethnic minority backgrounds and their educators is an important factor in academic achievement.

This is focusing attention on the collective and individual linguistic competencies of educators of teacher and child care workers, care givers and teachers. Researchers are also challenging the assumption of an underlying belief that children need to learn to speak English as quickly as possible and that transition can occur most effectively in an English only environment. This promotes the notion in children from ethnic minorities that their home language and their culture does not count in achieving personal and social worth in the mainstream society.

Whilst the research evidence regarding the employment of bi or multi lingual educators is convincing, the researchers appeared to have few direct or indirect links with policy makers. They appear to perceive themselves as powerless to change current practice in relation to the education of minority ethnic groups in the early years.

### ***The First Nations Quality Child Care Study***

The First Nations Quality Child Care Study is a national project that examines First Nation definitions of 'quality child care'. The study is examining the role of provincial legislation in the delivery of child care services and First Nations Authority in child care.

The study aims to support First Nations communities in defining quality child care as well as identifying options for assuming authority in child care.

The goals of the study are:

- Identify the social, political and historical influences on First nations child care services.
- Examine First Nations definitions of child care.
- Identify indicators of First Nations quality child care service.
- Create a framework for First Nations quality child care services Examine how legislation is a barrier or support for First Nations quality child care services
- Identify the source and scope of First nations authority in child care.

### ***Belgium***

Educators in Belgium refer to inter-culturalism rather than multi-culturalism. Multi-culturalism is viewed as the adding on of aspects of other cultures to the main culture and inter-culturalism as the acquisition of interaction competence to deal with diversity.

The Inter-cultural Organisation at the University of Ghent provides professional development for educators stressing a skills approach that moves beyond a knowledge of other cultures. The professional development focuses on:

- the skills educators need to assist children to develop inter-culturalism; and
- the need for educators to consider:
  - \* how children interact and their patterns of interaction;
  - \* how they can and will intervene to promote inter-culturalism;
  - \* how they can plan the curriculum with children to promote inter-culturalism; and
  - \* the importance of collaborative learning and peer interaction.

The approach builds on the current knowledge and skills of educators and often leads to educators identifying and questioning their own values.

### ***Britain***

The above approach was affirmed by Dr Iram Siraj-Blatchford at the Institute of Education in London. Dr Siraj-Blatchford also stressed the need for all early childhood programs to reflect an inter-cultural approach regardless of their location or the backgrounds of the children attending.

In Britain there is an increasing focus on educators working with parents, taking account of what parents want for their children and to understand the cultural and linguistic values and goals parents have for their children. This approach challenges programs based on developmentally appropriate practice often determined on North American norms.

In 2000, the Department for Education and Employment and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport jointly published *All Our Futures. Creativity, Culture and Education*.

This report highlights the importance of a well balanced curriculum across the years of education, that focuses on literacy and numeracy but not at the expense of other learning in the early years. The writers of the report deem that through a well balanced curriculum children will be able to recognise, explore and understand their own cultural values and assumptions and learn to appreciate the culture of others.

The report is receiving much attention as Britain struggles to hold together a multi-cultural society and to build social capital within that society. Many of the people I spoke to perceived this as a landmark report refocussing education on the need for a balanced curriculum for children of all ages to ensure personal and social development that will enable the development of a truly multi-cultural society. The report supports using the Arts and Sport as mediums for children's personal and social development.

This report in conjunction with *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: The Final Report of the Early Years Study* to the Government of Ontario that gives the critical period for the development of a child's peer social skills as three to seven years of age underlines the importance of the early years and the need for high quality educational programs to be accessible and available to all children.

## Conclusion

The countries I visited during my Churchill Fellowship are all looking to the early years of life as the most influential phase of the life cycle. The United States of America, Canada, Belgium and Britain all, to varying degrees, see the need to support young children and their families if the future health and wealth of the nation is to be secured.

In Canada the evidence from many disciplines but particularly neuroscience is focusing the attention of government at both federal and provincial levels on the need to support **all** young children to ensure they are ready to learn on entry to compulsory schooling. This acknowledges that socio-economic circumstance is one of a number of determinants of high level outcomes in health, learning and behaviour

Similarly Britain is making huge investments in programs to ensure young children are able to access the benefits that schooling has to offer. Inter-agency, early years programs are being implemented as part of wider socio-economic reforms that are aimed at reducing the social welfare budget, reducing the high level of children living in poverty and reducing social exclusion. Programs that offer support and education for parents are also a part of these wider socio-economic reforms..

In Belgium the traditions of supporting children and families and reducing socio-economic inequity are being maintained within an increasing focus of working with disadvantaged groups, rather than imposing pre-determined, targeted programs. There is an increasing emphasis on human rights including the rights of the child.

Children and families are high on the agenda of the 2000 federal election in the United States. How this appears in future federal public policy and its impact on state policy making remains to be seen. Given the trends in Canada and Britain it is likely that the impact will be considerable.

There is wide acknowledgment of the need to involve parents and communities in the development and implementation of early years programs acknowledging that without their involvement programs will only meet with limited success. It also recognises that ensuring positive outcomes for young children is not purely a matter for parents or for government, but requires commitment from the many layers of society.

The increasing focus on the early years of life as the most influential in the life cycle is leading to increased expenditure in programs aimed at supporting young children and their families. This in turn is leading to an increased demand for assessment and evaluation of children and programs that is meaningful and efficient. It is also leading to demands for evidence based policy, cost effective services and transparent processes. Early childhood education is being moved into the spotlight. This is demanding increased professionalism of those who work in this area and requires greater recognition of the work they do. Just as many young children and families need support, so too will those charged with providing this support.

In Western Australia:

- we have programs operating through Health, Family and Children's Services and Education that support children and families, especially the disadvantaged;
- we have universal kindergarten and pre-primary programs prior to compulsory schooling with purpose built facilities and appropriate staffing ratios. These programs have a graduate work force that has time allowed to develop strong links with parents and community and the compulsory years of schooling,
- we have a Curriculum Framework that includes the two pre-compulsory school years, allowing for continuity of education and providing educators with the scope to develop programs to meet the needs of local communities and that identifies and matches children's learning needs across all learning areas; and
- our agencies are beginning to seek out ways of working collaboratively

Western Australia has a foundation upon which to build upon to improve outcomes for all children, but especially for children and families trapped in the poverty cycle. We are well placed to move forward. However historical barriers between agencies at all levels must be removed. This will require change in the way agencies operate and in the way government support through agencies is organised. We need to ensure that strong and genuine links are made across agencies, with communities and between the pre-school and compulsory years of schooling

My Churchill Fellowship study showed the need for policy and programs to be based firmly in research evidence. This demands that researchers and policy makers link effectively if we are to ensure positive outcomes for **all** children.

Ongoing and increased support and recognition of educators working with young children and families is equally as necessary if positive short and long term outcomes for children, families and wider society are to be achieved. The links between research, policy and practice must be made stronger and more transparent to all involved in the lives of young children.

My role as policy officer in the Education Department of Western Australia provides me with some opportunity to influence policy in the early years of schooling particularly in relation to the assessment of children.

To date I have disseminated the findings of my Churchill Fellowship:

- at an event to mark the International day for the Eradication of Poverty. The audience at this event represented government and non-government agencies and organisations concerned with ensuring all Western Australian children achieve positive short and long term outcomes;
- at the Early Years in Education Conference;
- at an inter-agency seminar where Dr Fraser Mustard, author of *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: the Final Report of the Early Years Study to the Government of Ontario* was the key speaker; and.
- to members of the Early Childhood Alliance.

In February 2001 I will give a detailed presentation to officers of Family and Children's Services, Western Australia.

I have initiated a program with principals of schools in a disadvantaged area. The program aims to forge links between schools and existing pre-school services for young children and their families and to provide continuity of education for young children and support for parents. Funding will be sought from private enterprise. Initially this funding will be used to assist with coordination of the program, mapping of services and identifying gaps in service delivery.

## POLICY AND PROVISION

### **California, United States of America**

- Compulsory education commences in the year children turn six years of age.
- Senior kindergarten is offered to all children in the year prior to compulsory schooling.
- A limited number of junior kindergarten places are available to children two years prior to compulsory schooling through private providers. Children in poverty are targeted through federally funded Head Start programs and state funded pre-schools.
- 95 Early Head Start programs for children 0-3 years have been in operation since 1995 in California. Research into their effectiveness is underway.
- Attempts are being made to draw together federal and state funded programs through the development of 'Program standards for centre based programs' and 'Desirable results for children and families.' (Copy available.)
- Children in the state education system are tested annually in Mathematics, Literacy, Social Studies and Science. The grade retention or promotion of children is based on the results of this testing. Schools are ranked and rankings are published. Schools are having difficulty coping with the number of children needing to repeat years of schooling.
- Child care is under the aegis of the state. Some subsidies are provided for low income families.
- Seventy percent of the population of California is either non English speaking or has English as a second language. Spanish is the first language for the majority of these people. Until 1999 state law required schools and colleges to take affirmative action in relation to the Spanish speaking population and minority groups. Following the last state election, affirmative action is no longer required.
- Children and families are high on the agenda for the forthcoming federal election. Federal funding is available for ongoing and new research in issues pertinent to care and education in the early years.
- The state government has instigated the development a career matrix for child care workers. The matrix is under development but no funding for recognition of qualifications is available.

### **Ontario, Canada**

- A ten year plan to eradicate poverty established in 1998 has not achieved its goal. *Campaign 2000: How's Canada Doing?* is keeping the eradication of poverty on the social agenda.
- In 1996/97 the National Children's Agenda, through which federal and provincial ministers meet, was established.
- Child care and education fall under the aegis of the provincial government. In 1998 the Ontario Government commissioned the Early Years Study. The Study was to provide options and recommendations with respect to the best ways of preparing all Ontario's children for scholastic, career and social success. It was also asked to consider collaborative partnership models of service provision that would actively engage federal, provincial and municipal governments, school boards and the private sector.

- In recent years the Federal Government has influenced provincial policy by providing funding for health, post secondary education and social services.
- The Social Union Framework Agreement 1999 prevents federal government arbitrarily withdrawing funding from provincial government and allows for joint social policy to be developed.
- The theme of the federal budget brought down in February 2000 is *Families* and sees spending of surplus funds under two headings, tax cuts for families and service provision for young children. Included in the above is the increase of paid parental leave for the birth of a child, from six to twelve months.
- Under Ontario's *Healthy Babies, Healthy Children* program all babies are screened at birth. The screening includes social aspects of development such as bonding. All families of new born babies are offered a home visit within 48 hours of a child's birth. Children at risk are visited bi-weekly by a lay person for whom some training has been provided. The visitor liaises with Health and Social Services personnel and introduces the family to support that is available in the community.
- The Infant Education and Parent Teaching Program is province wide and provides services to families of children 0-2 years with developmental delay or genetic disorders.
- Junior and senior kindergarten are offered through schools with compulsory schooling commencing at 6 years of age. All teachers hold a four year Bachelor qualification and a years teacher training;
- Qualified child care workers have 2 years community college training.
- Federal policy allows for immigrants with qualifications or experience in the care of the young or elderly to enter Canada as carers and to apply for permanent status after two years.

## **Quebec, Canada**

### **Policy and provision**

- A focus on the first six years of life is part of wider social welfare reforms aimed at reducing welfare costs and encouraging investment in social capital.
- By 2003 all children up to 6 years of age will be able to access child care at a maximum cost of \$5.00 per day.
- Parents choosing private child care are eligible for taxation rebates.
- Children commence compulsory schooling at six years of age. All children have access to two years non-compulsory education prior to this.

## **Belgium**

- Public schooling is available for all children from 2 years 6 months of age with compulsory schooling commencing at six years of age.
- The Flemish Government subsidises family care and child care. Kind en Gezin (Child and Family), a government department, oversees government and private child care systems. Family care operates under Family Care Services, within Kind en Gezin. A professional, with a social work or social health work degree qualification, works with 14 families at any one time providing assistance in the choice of carer. The professional also provides workshops for families and carers.

- Child care fees in government settings are set on a sliding scale with a maximum cost to parents of 625 Belgian Francs (approx \$20.00) and a minimum cost of 65 Belgian Francs (\$2.50) a day.
- Taxation allowances may be claimed by parents of children attending centres that meet minimum requirements set by Kind en Gezin; and when one parent cares for a child under three years of age at home.
- Government funding supports any person to take up to five years leave within their working life for family reasons. This is administered through a central leave register.
- A non-governmental Education Council oversees all education policy decisions.

### **Britain**

- Policies impacting upon early childhood link to government strategies aimed at reducing child poverty developed after the 1997 into poverty. This review that determined that 1 in 3 children in England live in poverty. The strategies focus on the health of the nation and includes:
  - Increasing the availability and affordability of care and education programs is one way of providing adults with access to work;
  - Raising the skill and qualification level of the adult population in new trades and technologies;
  - The raising of standards in schools which aims to tackle the under-achievement of specific groups such as boys and ethnic minorities;
  - The reduction of social exclusion; and
  - Focussing on the health of young children and the education of their parents in order to address the growing incidence of illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes.

There are four strands to policy relating to early childhood:

1. Expansion of early childhood programs to provide accessible and affordable part-time education for all three and four year old children;
2. Development of and support for parenting programs;
3. Transformation from fragmented to integrated service delivery.
4. Improvement of quality in early childhood services through:
  - The establishment of an inspection framework attending to both service provision and outcomes for children.
  - The development and implementation of a Foundation Stage Curriculum with Early Learning Goals and guidance on how these can be best achieved.
  - The development and implementation of training programs and a 'climbing frame' career structure for workers in early childhood programs aimed at raising the qualifications of workers in early years programs. The long term aim is to have a university graduate worker in every early years centre.
  - Improvement strategies based on program and self review by workers and target setting.

- The policies are underpinned by considerable government expenditure in the early years. Funding for programs has been made available and is linked to an inspection process. Further funding is being sought through the current Government Spending Review. Funding for the support of access to career paths in the early childhood field has also been sought.
- Improving outcomes for young children and families trapped in the poverty cycle are being addressed through the provision of high quality programs for young children and their families. Projects aimed at ensuring the development of high quality early years programs include the establishment of Early Excellence Centres, the Sure Start Project and the Early Years Development and Child Partnerships.
- Compulsory schooling commences at five years of age. All four year old children and 60% of three year old children have access to a nursery program.
- All children are assessed within seven weeks of entering compulsory schooling using one of a number of baseline assessment schemes accredited by the Quality and Curriculum Authority. There is no national baseline assessment scheme. The first national testing occurs at the end of Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum when children are 7 years of age.
- Nursery educators' qualifications range from untrained to three and four year trained teachers

## DISCUSSIONS AND VISITS

### Los Angeles, United States of America

#### *Pacific Oaks College and School*

*Jennie Green, Dean; Renatta Cooper, Director Jones:Prescott/Institute;  
Jan Brown, Project Director; Jane Rosenberg Director Children's School;  
Elizabeth Jones Education Faculty Member.*

Pacific Oaks College and School is a private, fully fee paying institution for graduate students and children 0- 8 years. Scholarships are available for children and adult students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Discussions with the Dean of the College, the Director of the School and the Director of the Jones/Prescott Research Institute at the College revealed that they felt the school and college were not providing leadership and influencing policy makers to the extent they had in the past. This has led to the school and the college becoming involved in a process of re-invention.

The school has always focused on and will continue to focus on the education of families and children. As part of its re-invention the school has implemented the following programs:

- a Saturday morning program to allow working parents to spend time with their child in the pre-school environment;
- a fathers' program where, every six weeks, fathers are encouraged to organise their work schedules to enable them to spend time in the school environment and program with their child.
- moving the focus of support in the child care program from mothers to nannies as cheap labour costs enable more middle class families to use nanny services. Many of the nannies suffer problems associated with English as a second language, isolation from their own families and occasionally abuse.

#### *Judy Cashell, Education Coordinitor, Community Housing Services Inc. Headstart Program at Escalon*

Children's eligibility for Head Start programs is based on parental income of less than nineteen thousand dollars per year and four or more children in the family. Ten per cent of places offered in Head Start programs must be allocated to children with special needs for whom the eligibility criteria may be waived.

Since 1998 to gain re-authorisation to operate, Head Start Programs have to ensure all children meet specific literacy and language standards. In some cases this has led to inappropriate practice in programs;

Ms Cashell raised the issues of initial and ongoing training for Head Start workers and parental understanding of appropriate practice. Parental involvement is a key underpinning of Head Start programs both in operational and curriculum matters.

***Professor Carollee Howes, University of California at Los Angeles.***

Professor Howes has recently completed research that followed children from their next but last year in care (3years of age) through to the end of their second year of school and traced the impact of the quality of care on children as they moved into the school system. This has been published in *The Children of the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study go to School*, October 1999 (Copy available.)

Findings from this study include:

- high quality care is an important element in achieving America's national goal of ensuring children are ready to learn when they come to school and continues to be positively related to children's performance well into their school years.
- the quality of child care practices is related to children's cognitive development and the closeness of the teacher –child relationship influences children's social development.
- if America wants all of its children to be ready for school it must improve child care experiences. This will require the attention of Education, Health and Human Services, related agencies and the private sector.

The report makes recommendations of working towards improving child care services under the three broad categories of fiscal arrangements, professional preparation and compensation and system and infrastructure change strategies.

Professor Howes is currently involved in two research projects.

1. Early Head Start research that is focussing on how illegal immigrants find out about raising families when they are not able to access programs targeted at members of low socio-economic groups. Early indications are that the program is not reaching the targeted group.
2. Best Practice research focussing on the quality of care and education at four years of age as a strong indicator of positive outcomes in the early years of primary school.

***Seeds University Elementary School. Principal: Margaret Heritage.***

The school is the laboratory school for UCLA and the demonstration school for state elementary schools. It caters for children from 4 to 12 years of age. Pre-kindergarten for children four years of age, operates on a half time basis in a straight year group. The other early childhood groups are mixed –age with Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 children . One class is bi-lingual with a teacher fluent in Spanish and English. The other is conducted in English only. This organisation supports Spanish children in the development of basic competencies in their first language and provides bi-lingual or Spanish speaking parents with a choice about the language their child will be educated in.

A tour of the Junior Kindergarten room and Kindergarten, Year 1 and 2 rooms demonstrated high quality practice in the following ways.

- Children were highly motivated, involved in the learning experiences, using analytical skills, self regulated and involved in self assessment.
- The use of the outdoor area as an integral part of the learning program

- Teachers were providing choice for children, assessing children in context and using their evaluations to assess their teaching and to plan future programs and experiences for children.
- Teachers were articulate about their work.

The principal discussed the ongoing work to achieve high quality in all aspects of the school. The school voluntarily engages in the national testing of children in order to ensure its methods retain credibility in the state education sector.

## **Canada**

***Dr Fraser Mustard, Co-author of Reversing the Real Brain Drain, the Early Years Study Final Report (copy available, Chair of the Founders Network and member of the Canadian Institute for Advanced research.***

Dr Mustard discussed the background to, content of and recommendations of Early Years Report at length emphasising that future directions include community mobilisation in the establishment of early development programs.

Dr Mustard is actively promoting the Report and its recommendations by being available to all interested groups and individuals and identifying receptive people at all levels in government and the community.

***Jane Bertrand, on secondment from George Brown College to assist the Founders Network with the implementation of the Early Years Report.***

Ms Brown provided information on.

- Programs for children 0-6 years of age across Canada;
- The increasing incidence of live-in care in Canada and implications for carers and families;
- The two major issues in early childhood care and education these being the improvement of child care through increased training of workers and associated pay equity with teachers; and the bridging of the gap between school and care.

### ***Richmond Street Child Care Centre***

The centre provides care in mixed age groups for the children of employers and employees in the Richmond Street office and workshop complex. Special dispensation had to be sought for the provision of care in mixed-age groups as current regulations prevent this.

***Mary Gordon, Administrator for Parenting Programs in the Toronto District School Board and Founder of the Roots of Empathy Program. Visits to these programs at Parkdale and Given Shawes Elementary Schools (Literature available.)***

Ms Gordon explained that through a Roots of Empathy Program an instructor working with the classroom teacher, introduces an infant, often with disability, and parent/s to a classroom. The children are encouraged to empathise with the child and family through visits, discussions and activities over a nine month period. The

program is receiving international attention as a way of impacting positively on the social outcomes of children.

***Parent Resource Centres (Literature available.)***

Established in low socio-economic areas the centres provide programs for children who attend with a family member or carer. Adults are introduced to ways of working with children and using cheaply made resources. Children's books are translated into relevant languages for families to borrow.

Both these programs appear to have a positive impact on children's educational outcomes and would be transferable to the Western Australian context.

***Dr David (Dan) Offord; Dr Magdalena Janus: Centre for Children at Risk, McMaster University, Toronto***

The mission of the centre is to find ways of reducing the burden of suffering due to emotional behaviour problems of children and operates under the following four initiatives.

1. Good scientific research
2. Large scale epidemiological studies
3. Intervention studies
4. Dissemination of information

Dr Offord provided a great deal of information particularly in relation to research on poverty, universal, targeted and individual programs for children at risk and community involvement. (Papers available.)

Dr Janus discussed the Early Development Instrument developed at the Centre. This is a population level instrument that measures the readiness to learn of children entering kindergarten (5 years of age.) The instrument, in conjunction with community mapping of services, gives information that enables a community's efforts to be focused on improving the provision of resources impacting on early childhood. (Copy of instrument available)

***Dr Robin Williams, Medical Officer of Health, Niagara Region***

I experienced the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program in action through a home visit with a Public Health Nurse and discussed government policies and programs and community mobilisation with Dr Williams.

***Dr Dan Keating, Director Canadian Institute of Advanced Research (CIAR) Human Development Program and Director of the Centre for Applied Cognitive Science at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education;***

Dr Keating discussed:

- CIAR's involvement in fundamental and applied research that is related to policy development but is not policy research;
- The condensation and reforming of in-depth science research contained in *Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations*, Keating and Hetzrman in the Early Years Report and the overwhelming evidence of the importance of the early years of life in the life cycle of humans.

- The need to ensure the implications of the Early Years Report remain on the public and political agendas and the concerns of some of the working party members in relation to this.
- The provision of funding from the federal government for new and ongoing research into the early years.
- The need to ensure that the education sector is included in the debate. Education is viewed as the least developed area theoretically or in applied policy.
- The wariness of other sectors in relation to education fearing a 'take over' or domination of the discussion about the early years.
- The strong economic argument for investment in the early years.
- The inappropriateness of ignoring society's responsibility to the early years of life at this point in history.

***David Thomson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Children's Secretariat, Government of Ontario***

Mr Thomson discussed:

- The need for careful handling of the Early Development Instrument and the possible unintended negative impacts.
- The need to keep the early years on the political and public agendas.
- The need for public policy to be developed to support the establishment of early development centres and for it to be written in such a way as to encourage inter-agency collaboration.
- The establishment of the Office of Integrated Services within provincial government.

***Dr Judith Bernhard, Ryerson, Politechnic University***

Dr Bernhard provided information and papers on research into:

- Multi-age child care
- Multi-cultural care and education

***John Godfrey, Federal Member of Parliament, Chair of the Children's Agenda***

Mr Godfrey provided a concise background to the current position in relation to the young children in Canada and discussed some possible directions arising, in part from the Ontario Early years Report such as the establishment of an Early Child Development Fund with links to the provincial education funding for junior and senior kindergarten.

He highlighted questions to be answered in relation to what unit of organisation would be able to access funds and the needs for units to be big enough to control a system eg a district school board could be broken into clusters of schools with each cluster allowing for community involvement. Mr Godfrey was adamant that this should not be a top down initiative and that efforts 'on the ground' must be co-opted.

**Quebec**

***Professor Camil Bouchard  
University of Quebec at Montreal,***

***Director, 123 Go! Program,***

Main points discussed:

- Quebec's traditional leadership role in Canada in relation to policies affecting families.
- child care provision in the government sector not meeting the demand.
- the degree to which families in poverty access registered child care.
- the implementation of low cost child care as part of social welfare reforms aimed at encouraging parents, particularly young single mothers to return to work or study and reducing pressure on the welfare system.
- issues relating to the differences in staff qualifications and conditions and adult-child ratios in child care and education programs for young children.
- the different models of community based early development programs including: programs where community leaders identify objectives to create better environments without the involvement of families in poverty; advocacy groups where community leaders aim to influence policy with or without the involvement of families in poverty; and
- participative groups involving representatives of all community groups working together to improve outcomes for children through a range of initiatives.
- the need for ongoing research to: garner, share and transfer knowledge to demonstrate that a community based, comprehensive approach can actually improve children's life chances: identify approaches and conditions that attain pre-determined goals; and assist communities to implement programs that promote the well-being of children through programs that are preventative rather than remedial, comprehensive rather than purely academic and that are carried out early in life.
- ***123 Go! (Papers available)***  
Implementation of this privately funded, community based early development program commenced in 1995. The program focuses on improving the life chances of underprivileged children.
- Recently announced Federal Government research funding through Health Canada for early years development programs. The funding focuses on the development of a solid strategy to ensure regular input in the decision making process from relevant government officials and researchers. Professor Bouchard provided a copy of a submission he has coordinated to access this funding.

***Professor Richard Tremblay***

***University of Montreal***

Main points discussed:

- the increasing doubt that the most underprivileged families access available services for young children.
- the need to define quality of early years services in relation to children's cognitive, social and cultural needs.
- the importance of low ratios of children to adults in all early child development programs but especially for children in poverty.
- the differences in training and qualifications for workers in care and education and the pressing need to address these issues if high quality services are to be provided.

- the need for longitudinal research studies over at least ten years to determine the best ways of providing for young children. At this point the evidence shows the need to invest but how to best invest is not clear.
- the need to support young, single mothers and young, single pregnant women to enable them to make lifestyle choices for themselves and their children.
- a submission recently made to Health Canada by Professor Tremblay seeking funding for a program where specially trained nurses will work with young pregnant women prior to the birth of their child and until the child reaches six years of age. The program will link with child care programs and the nurses will work with child care providers. The program has been costed at £70 million over six years. The anticipated long term outcomes for children and their families are expected to impact positively upon the provision of programs for delinquent adolescents currently costing \$800 million a year.

## **Belgium**

*Professor Ferdinand Laevers*

*The Catholic University, Leuven*

*Director of the Experiential Education Learning Centre*

Main points discussed:

- The Experiential Education Project (Papers available)
  - how experiential theory and practice bears on the fundamental competence of researchers, developers and teachers to get in touch with what goes on in the minds of others. It has developed from the belief that the final goal of education is to ensure a person's:
    - emotional health and authenticity;
    - strong exploratory attitude;
    - openness to their inner and outer world; and
    - sense of linkedness. Linkedness is the sense of connectedness that is of key importance in the prevention of criminal behaviour or actions that cause damage to people and objects. it offers a reference point for the whole of value education; and
  - motivation to contribute to the quality of life

The above determine that the emotional well-being of children must be assessed and attended to. The degree of well being shows how much the educational environment succeeds in helping the child to feel comfortable, be his/herself, have his/her emotional needs such as attention, recognition and competence met.

Involvement is characterised by concentration, intense experience, intrinsic motivation, a flow of energy and a high level of satisfaction. It allows for deep level learning as opposed to a collation of discrete elements of knowledge or aptitudes.

- the relevance of the Experiential Education Project's theoretical framework for early childhood, primary, secondary and special education and teacher training.
- the alienation of children from schooling and the need to support schools to help children to explore their feelings and cope with them. The

implications of this for all systems and schools but in particular for schools with multi-ethnic populations.

- Assessment and evaluation
  - The tools developed through the Experiential Education Project assess the involvement and well being of children and support teachers in identifying and providing an appropriate learning environment.
  - A screening tool provides keys to the recognition of children's level of well being and involvement. A further procedure assists in the gathering of new information, making interpretations and developing a synoptic view of the child. For children identified with special needs a strategy with nine types of interventions and ways of promoting language and communication skills are provided.
  - The Experiential Education approach views assessment as a combination of the treatment approach that focuses on what teachers do, and the effect approach that focuses on the measurement of what education brings about. In this combination approach the focus is on what goes on in the child as a result of education.
- The need to move away from superficial learning in early childhood education and how focussing on academic success may mean some other competencies may not be assessed. Tools to assess social cognition, social competence, creativity, communication, exploratory drive and self organisation in children need to be developed.
- At the request of the Belgian Government, Professor Laevers is involved in the development of a tool to assist the Belgian School Inspectorate to assess schools. The tool will include classroom scanning to assess children's well being and involvement. He is also developing a tool to support children's own assessment of their well being school .

***Professor Lieve Van de Meulebroecke***  
***Catholic University of Leuven***

Main points discussed:

- the lack of status attached to family day care as a job and the move to try and improve this position with the introduction of health care insurance for carers.
- the high percentage of young mothers involved in paid work (75%) and the high number of children between 0 and 3 years of age (50%) in child care in Flanders.
- raining for work in early years programs. A four year general training to work in care programs is available through secondary schooling. A one year specialisation course is completed at the end of schooling. Teachers in non-compulsory programs in schools are three year trained but are not eligible to teach in primary schools.
- the strength of the 300,000 member Family Movement in lobbying government to provide 'real' choice for families.
- the possibility of the raising of the school entry age to three. The proposal is not popular with the public and the Minister for Education has commissioned Leuven University to study the impacts of such a move. Professor Van de Meulebroecke is overseeing the study which indicates concerns that raising the entry age would discriminate against families in poverty who favour the provision of free education programs for children from 2 years 6 months. She anticipates that her

recommendations will be for a flexible entry policy and the provision of more flexible and integrated early years programs across the care and education sectors.

**Mark Verlot**

**Coordinator, Inter-Cultural Organisation, University of Gent**

Main points discussed:

- The difference in meaning of multiculturalism, viewed as the adding on of aspects of other cultures to the culture of the majority, and inter-culturalism that demands the acquisition of interaction competence to deal with diversity.
- The program under development by the Inter-cultural Organisation. This program focuses on the process required to assist children to achieve positive outcomes in relation to inter-culturalism. It moves beyond ensuring children gain knowledge of other cultures and emphasises the development of collaboration between children of different cultures within any learning and teaching setting. It demands that educators are willing to intervene and be pro-active in promoting inter-culturalism. It emphasises collaborative learning and teaching strategies to achieve positive outcomes for all children.

The program takes a pragmatic approach in the provision of support and professional development of educators and focuses on what teachers are already doing in relation to inter-cultural interaction and assists them in determining how value can be added to their programs.

- The implications of an inter-cultural approach for educators in any learning and teaching program including the need for them to consider:
  - How children interact and the patterns of interaction,
  - How to intervene
  - How to approach and plan the curriculum
  - The importance of collaborative learning and peer interaction
  - The need for children to develop 'switching' competencies, including code switching.

**Jan Laurijssen**

**Research Coordinator, Evaluation of Schools and Programs, Catholic University, Leuven**

Main points discussed

- Assessment of schools
  - Schools in all systems, government, Catholic and independent, are assessed once every six years with government inspectors using an instrument that evaluates the quality of programs based on schools' efforts to meet Department of Education goals. The evaluation process focuses on the integration of learning within the program, the stimulation of complete personality development in all children and the realisation of optimum care and education to ensure that all children have the maximum chances in life.

Consideration is given to the number of children, the migrant population and the location of the school. The inspection takes into consideration:

- a school's context;

- inputs in terms of teachers, pupils and parents;
  - process in terms of school organisation, children's well being and involvement and teacher effort to assist children in achieving desired outcomes; and
  - outcomes in terms of what the children have learned including social and emotional, cognitive, physical and aesthetic learning.
- Research in relation to the development and implementation of programs in schools.
 

The Minister of Education has identified four areas to be researched in relation to the development and implementation of education programs. The areas to be researched over a four year period are:

    - child participation in the evaluation of schools;
    - school ethos and culture;
    - teacher well being; and
    - renewal and revaluing of the teaching profession.

In response to the above the University is developing an 'Observation Strategy' for inspectors. This will include instruments for use by inspectors to:

- assess children's involvement
- assess classroom climate including the nature and quality of interaction between teachers and children and between children.
- involve children in the school evaluation process.

***Rudy De Cock,***

***Program Co-ordinator, Kind en Gezin (Child and Family)***

Main points discussed:

- the move towards more intensive partnerships with private, municipal and religious organisations. Co-ordination at a local level is encouraged with managers having considerable budgetary control.
- the increasing government focus on the rights of the child and how they can be realised, including the need to give children a voice in school organisation.
- the role of Kind en Gezin in relation to children and families living in poverty. Kind en Gezin define underprivileged as a condition in which people are unable to participate in high ranked social levels for example health, education and labour, in more than one area at a time. It is viewed as a lasting condition in which those involved are unable to move out of without assistance. Kind en Gezin believes that parents are usually well intentioned and believes that:
  - many programs designed to assist are well intentioned but generate exclusion;
  - The participation of underprivileged families in the redevelopment of existing services is essential for services to be successful; and
  - Parents must be supported in their efforts to give their children a better future and these supports may need to be personalised.

The main focus of Kind en Gezin is the development of children through:

- Reaching all families identified with children at risk as soon as possible; and
- Altering the dependency relationship with Family and Social Services through the empowerment of families and the development of a sense of community
- Home visiting that is ongoing and reliable is seen as crucial in breaking the poverty cycle for families. Visitors are drawn from families in poverty, past or current, and are provided with nine months training. Kind en Gezin accepts that this involves a therapeutic approach to training and provides appropriate support for trainees. Other services include:
  - \* Pre-natal groups
  - \* Inter-cultural mediators
  - \* Special day care centres
  - \* Working sessions for groups of parents that recognise the participants, define and resolve issues and create a shared understanding of common issues.
  - \* Specific projects for example, improving the language development of pre-schoolers.

### ***Moelbeck Primary School, Brussels***

Moelbeck Catholic School is a Dutch speaking school, in the centre of French speaking Brussels, with 140 students. The children are from immigrant families with 80% of the school population from Morocco, 15% from Turkey and the remaining 5% from Pakistan, Albania, Italy, Spain and South America. There are no children of Flemish origin.

Main points discussed:

- the school's aim of increasing the number of chances for children believing that these chances enhance children's lives. The school aims to achieve this through the development of trust and the achievement of positive classroom climates and a sense of community within the school through:
- the establishment of a stable parent committee with members who are influential within the wider community and who are willing to invest time and energy into the school and their children.
- the informal work with parents that includes ensuring parents are welcome in the school at all times.
- the operation of a playgroup for pre-schoolers and parents/carers.
- home visiting by parents as required and when appropriate and the need for appropriately skilled teachers.
- the selection of teachers able to work within and develop the ethos of the school.
- the development of self regulation, social competence and analytical thinking as the focus of the learning and teaching process. The school has implemented this approach for four years during which time standards in literacy and numeracy have risen.

***Trees Van Houte,  
Professional Development Presenter, Experiential Learning Project, the Catholic University, Leuven***

Main points discussed:

- the Government's focus on quality in education, including a focus on children in poverty that commenced in 1994. The Centre for Experiential Education holds the contract for supporting teachers.
- the development of strategies to support teachers based on teachers' experiences of dealing with children in poverty. The underpinnings of the strategies are:
  - poverty leads to specific inner feelings from which emotions arise; and
  - people living in poverty do not necessarily all experience the same emotions.
  - the singling out of children in poverty for support stigmatises families. This demands the universal provision of programs within which the individual needs of children are met;
  - in order to support children in poverty educators require openness and an ability to empathise with children and families. This leads to linkedness and supports children in linking with their peers, parents, the environment etc. Where educators do not relate closely to the child, any change brought about by education is superficial and does not last.
  - assessing the involvement and well being of children and addressing the results of the assessment enables the school to provide the child with chances in the school, regardless of other environments of the child. Focusing on the academic achievement of the child may lead to feelings of anger, inadequacy, concerns that cannot be addressed, powerlessness and feelings of not being understood by teachers and principals.

## **Britain**

### ***Val McCarthy***

***Early Years Development Officer, Leicester Education Authority.***

Main points discussed:

- the unequal provision of nursery education across England and the policies and strategies in place to address this as part of a bigger political agenda.
- the establishment of Early Years Development and Child Partnership in Leicester with members from the child care, private nurseries, education and training sectors, policy makers and planners. The National Government has provided one third of a million pounds to be distributed through grants to support partnership development and early years programs. Local Authorities are required to match government funding. The partnerships aim to provide services and ensure that they are of high quality. A key issue arising from partnership program development is the sustainability and affordability of programs.
- the need for long development and establishment timelines for partnerships.
- the funding of private providers to ensure provision of nursery education for all three and four year old children. All child care providers are registered with Social Services. If providers wish to provide nursery education and access government funding they are required to:
  - register with the Education Department;

- agree to work towards the Early Learning Goals. The Goals will be introduced in September 2000 and will replace the existing Desirable Learning Outcomes;
  - provide places and programs for children with special needs;
  - be inspected by OFSTED.
- provision of nursery education in care settings enables parents to access full day educare.
  - playgroups are also able to access nursery education funding which can help to ensure their viability in low socio-economic areas.
  - the issues arising from differences in child care and education regulations, and salary scales and qualifications of staff.
  - the likelihood of Social Services in Leicester being merged with the Education Department in an attempt to change the public perception of Social Services.
  - the move of Child and Family Centres that were established in Leicester in the 1970s from providing full-time to part-time child care and developing parenting programs.
  - issues surrounding the low level of provision and the management of Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) programs. Schools are managed by school boards and Out of School Hours Care programs by parent committees. Schools are resistant to OSHC programs using their facilities and consequently limit the most cost effective way of establishing these programs.
  - the attempt by government to increase the registration of child minders by increasing the amount people can earn before welfare benefits are affected. Increased child minder registration has the long-term aim of improving the quality of care.
  - the government demand for all local education authorities to ensure parents are able to access information about child care and other programs. This has led Leicester Local Authority to establish a Child Care Information Centre that will also act as a brokering service for child minders.

#### Publications

Tomorrow's Children: the review of pre-school and playgroups and the Government's response. (DfEE 1999)

The role of development workers (DfEE 1999)

Developing and sustaining high quality, sustainable childcare (DfEE 1999)

Conducting childcare audits (DfEE 1999)

Building links with employers - a guide for providers (DfEE 1999)

Recruitment strategies for childcare workers (DfEE 1999)

Providing a wrap around service in early years and childcare (DfEE 1999\_

Requirements of Nursery Education Grant 2000-20001 (DfEE 1999)

#### ***Dr Peter Moss***

***Thomas Coram Research Institute, London***

Main points discussed:

- the government agenda behind the funding of early childhood research and programs.
- the lack of discussion within the current focus on the early years of life, on who the child might be. The adult orientation of current policies and strategies has led to

- interventionist strategies such as Sure Start that convey with the right technologies, disciplines and professions all that is wrong with society can be rectified.
- the increasing emphasis on surveillance and control in the UK and USA and the differing approach of some European and Nordic countries.
  - the government focus on standards and the speed at which they can be improved with an emerging interest in rethinking and restructuring early childhood programs running alongside this.
  - the demand for a new kind of early childhood worker who is viewed more as a pedagogue than a teacher or carer.
  - the need for long-term planning to avoid ad hoc provision for young children.
  - the need for research of broader and long-term research into the early years of life as well as research that underpins and evaluates new initiatives.

***Dr Iram Siraj-Blatchford***  
***Education Studies***  
***Institute of Education, London***

Main points discussed

- Culturally appropriate curriculum
  - The importance of encouraging bi-lingualism as of important benefit to all for social, economic and family reasons.
  - The need to employ more bi-lingual workers.
  - Integrated and holistic curriculum development that emphasises the development of inter-cultural skills.
  - The use of scaffolding as a teaching strategy to ensure that the curriculum for English as a second language learners assists children to move from contextualised language to decontextualised language.
  - The need for educators to examine their own attitudes and prejudices and to deal with them in a positive way.
  - The need for all programs to reflect inter-cultural and equity issues regardless of the school's population.
  - Educators must determine whether their programs support the language development of all children and they value the language of every child as this is crucial to the development of self esteem and identity of all children.
  - Attention must be paid to the 4 conditions that need to be satisfied for learning to take place.
    - \* The child needs to be secure and in a state of emotional well being.
    - \* The child needs a positive self identity and self esteem.
    - \* The curriculum must be social, interactive and instructive.
    - \* The child needs to be actively engaged.
  - Attention must be paid to relationships with parents. Parents under stress need acceptance, support and encouragement. They are not likely to become positively involved in their child's education until trust is established.
  - Educators need to ask how people from other cultures perceived their service. They need to take account of what parents want for their children and to develop ways of working with parents.

***Pat Kelly***

***Baseline Assessment Coordinator***

***Department of Education and Employment***

Main points discussed.

Baseline assessment:

- takes place seven weeks after a child's entry to schooling in their fourth or fifth year. It is a teacher assessment using one of 91 schemes accredited by the Qualifications and Assessment Authority.
- is a useful tool to assist teachers' planning. It does not provide information for a national picture in relation to the Desirable Outcomes (to be superseded by the Early Learning Goals) or the Foundation Stage curriculum. This recognises that the assessment of young children does not give reliable hard data.
- is not linked to assessment at Key Stage One.
- is likely to be reviewed in relation to the Early Learning Goals and Foundation Stage Curriculum. A rethinking of Baseline Assessment may lead to a core set of assessments within diverse schemes that could be used to provide information in relation to the outcomes children achieve in nursery education, assessing the value schools add to children's outcomes and possibly, link to teacher performance assessment and pay.

***Michael Collins***

***Early Years Team***

***Department of Education and Employment***

Main points discussed

- The Foundation Stage Curriculum Early Learning Goals and Guidance developed in response to the demands of early years professionals. They will be implemented from September 2000. The Goals and Guidance apply to the nursery and reception years (Children from 3 – 5 years). Unlike the outcomes of the National Curriculum, the goals must be worked towards, but not necessarily achieved.
- Reception class teachers have been required to fully implement the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies. With the introduction of the Early Learning Goals and Guidance in September 2000, reception class teachers will be required to bring elements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy into their programs by the end of a child's reception year.
- The Department of Education and Employment will provide training on the Foundation Stage Curriculum for OFSTED inspectors.
- The establishment of Early Years Partnerships to support settings not formerly involved with education such as playgroups in implementing the Early Years Curriculum.
- The provision of £9million in government funding for the Department of Education and Employment to provide training and development for early years educators working with four year old children. A further £4.5 million has been provided for educators working with three year old children.

***The Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project,***

### ***3 day Train the Trainer Course Hereford Education Centre***

The Effective Early Learning Project led by professor Christine Pascal and Dr Tony Bertram of University College, Worcester, evolved out of the recent re-focusing on the early years due to the neuroscience research, recognition of the importance of children's well being and to the expansion of the early years provision which is inclusionary and increasingly integrated. The project responded to a series of major national reports in Britain that stressed the importance of early childhood care and education and the importance of ensuring high quality programs within the expansion. The reports highlighted the need for a national system of quality review and assurance and for a coordinated strategy of evaluation and development in early childhood settings.

EEL is the largest early years evaluation and improvement strategy in Britain and is also being implemented in Portugal and Spain. It emphasises practitioner and institutional development through training and practitioner led action research. It facilitates change.

The project aims:

- to develop a cost effective strategy to evaluate and improve the quality and effectiveness of early learning available to young children in a range of education and care settings.
- to achieve the above through a collaborative systematic and rigorous process of self evaluation that is supported and validated externally.

The training is available for all working in settings providing care and education services for young children provided participants with the background and research underpinnings of the project and with an opportunity to use the evaluation tools and discuss ways of implementing the project at a school or centre level.

The EEL project uses largely qualitative with certain quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. It provides tools that are integrated into high quality practice and focuses on the quality of provision that enables children to achieve positive outcomes. The evaluation and development cycle takes twelve to eighteen months and has four stages:

1. evaluation
2. action planning
3. development and
4. reflection

This method of self evaluation offers a rigorous framework for staff to develop their practice.

Two key observation techniques that measure the effectiveness of the learning and teaching processes are used:

1. the Child Involvement Scale that measures the deep level learning of children; and
2. the Adult Engagement Scale that measures the qualities of effective teaching demonstrated by the adult.

Practitioners and external advisers may submit their work with the project to University College, Worcester, for accreditation at graduate level

***Professor Christine Pascal and Dr T Bertram,  
Early Childhood Research Unit, University College, Worcester***

Main points discussed:

- Policy development  
A review of all early childhood programs in the United Kingdom conducted in 1997 found little evidence of costs or rigorous evaluation of outcomes. This resulted in a move from policy based on ideology to evidence based policy. All new initiatives have robust evaluation costed in at a rate of 10% of the total cost. New initiatives have a pilot phase of 3 to 5 years and if found to be effective are then ‘rolled out.’ The cost effectiveness approach demands process and context have to be considered to the same degree as outcomes.
- Assessment  
A literature search for The Accounting Early for Learning (AcE) Project has found significant research evidence to show the importance of social cognition and emotional intelligence to the achievement of positive outcomes in students. The ensuing phases of the project will focus on how to recognise social cognition, the development of an effective and efficient assessment of social cognition and ways of ensuring practice addresses the research findings. Assessment will be linked to national literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- Early Excellence Centres (EECs)  
A pilot project of 29 settings was established to offer ‘one stop shop’ support for families within communities linking education, health and social services. The EECs provide training to early years practitioners from both the private and public sector, community education aimed at increasing skills, self confidence and employability.

Professor Pascal and Dr Bertram have been appointed evaluators of this project. The First Findings Report, May 2000 (Copy available) shows that EECs provide:

- Excellence in integrated education and care services;
- Access to extended day and holiday care for children from birth
- Support for families
- Accessible and affordable adult training programs;
- Outreach through local partnerships to improve the quality of early years services through training and practical example; and
- Are cost effective.

The current government Funding Review will determine the expansion of the program.

EEC models are being established through British Council funding in South Australia and Queensland. Professor Pascal and Dr Bertram will provide support for the development of these centres and will visit Australia in November 2000.

- the Early Learning Goals

The Early Learning Goals and Guidance have been well received by the early childhood community. Practitioners and researchers are pleased with the acknowledgment of the importance of dispositions and well being within the Personal and Social Goals.

There Working Party advising the Department of Education and Employment is concerned over the way the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies may be introduced and implemented at the end of the reception year. The group will monitor the implementation of the goals under the inspection of OFSTED.

***Gellideg Infants School, South Wales***  
***Head Teacher Branwen Howells Jones***

Gellideg is an isolated community established in the late 1960s when areas of Merthyr Tydfil were demolished and communities relocated to outlying areas. The steel mill that opened at the same as the relocation has been closed for a considerable time. The town has no locally situated sources of employment. The school is situated in the poorest area of the European Economic Community

Main points discussed/observed:

- the difficulties associated with the achievement levels of national testing for children from underprivileged backgrounds.
- the use of a baseline assessment scheme on entry to the nursery class and again on entry to the reception classes to demonstrate the value the school adds to the outcomes children achieve and to vindicate the play based curriculum implemented in these classes.
- the interpretation and implementation of the National Curriculum, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and target setting.
- the pressure of Ofsted inspection possible leading to inappropriate practice with both the pushing down and dumbing down of curriculum.
- the need to establish positive and meaningful relationships with parents/caregivers.
- the need for educators and carers working with underprivileged children:
  - to have a deep understanding of what it can mean to live in poverty and
  - to be well trained and well supported in the implementation of appropriate curriculum and working with parents.

***Clare Cummings***  
***Family Policy Unit, Home Office***

Main points discussed:

- the Unit's role in the coordination of policy and the promotion of families.
- the indication of the importance government places on policy coordination by the chairing of a group by the Home Secretary aimed at coordinating policy at ministerial level.
- the Family Support Grant that is administered by the Unit. This provides for the granting of £7million over three years to project aimed at supporting families. In the first years funding focused on programs aimed at supporting the development and achievement of boys and in the second year programs to support parents of

teenagers were funded. There is increasing awareness of the importance of supporting young children.

***Anne Robinson***

***Early Years Coordinator, National Children's Bureau.***

Main points discussed:

- the implications of research into brain development for government expenditure and provision of early years programs.
- the focus on the first six years of life leading to a changing view of education with the possibility of entry age to schooling being raised to six years of age .
- the Care Standards Bill that will remove the inspection of child care settings from local authorities to OFSTED and thus remove the double inspection that care settings offering early learning programs (nursery) currently undergo.

***Early years Trainers Anti-Racist Network (EYTARN)***

***Jane Lane Coordinator***

Main points discussed:

- the shift of EYTARN's focus from training to influencing policy development due to the current government focus on the early years.
- the recent failure of EYTARN to win funding to implement a national training scheme on the basic principles of equality for early years workers. The failure is attributed to a reluctance to recognise and raise the profile of racial inequality. However attempts to address inequality due to poverty are being well funded through programs such as Sure Start.
- the reality of institutional racism.
- the influence of EYTARN in policy development related to Early Years Development Partnerships. A framework for equality is contained in the Planning for excellence documents developed to assist Partnerships. Partnerships are required to address racial inequality in all policy statements. EYTARN is hopeful that individual settings will be required to do the same in the near future.
- the training of educators as the critical mechanism in at least reducing racism. Curriculum statements alone will not reduce racism.
- the need for work to reduce racism to commence with very young children. Very young children may have negative attitudes they need to unlearn.

***Jackie Doughty***

***Sure Start Project***

The Sure Start Project:

- is one of a number of initiatives related to addressing issues of many underprivileged children and families. These initiatives include the national Child Care Strategy, the Early Years Development and Child Care Partnerships, the family support Unit and the teen pregnancy and Young Mothers' Unit.
- aims to address the needs of those at risk of becoming disaffected from education early in life. It aims to improve the life chances for these children by focusing on their well being between the ages of 0-4 years. Strategies employed include family support, health, nurturing and early learning.

- is an area based initiative targeted to areas of disadvantage. It represents the move away from department based initiatives to joined up initiatives. Their development has involved cross cutting reviews around crime, health and education. These reviews highlighted the unequal distribution of services across local authorities and lack of coordination between departments.
- has a budget of £425million over three years. Of this amount £265 million is targeted to services and £187 to capital works.
- is being implemented in waves. Local Authorities are identified as eligible for Sure Start funding and invited to make a submission for funding. Sure Start officers support local authorities where necessary to develop submissions for 'bottom up' programs involving local communities and possible private enterprise. Statutory bodies are heavily involved in establishing programs.
- each successive wave of implementation will reflect the learning of both the Sure Start unit and local authorities.

Documents provided:

**Sure Start Planing Pack** including:

- An overview booklet
- Working with the media
- Guidance on involving minority ethnic families
- A guide to evidence based programs
- Working with family diversity
- A guide for second wave programs.

*Pen Green Centre for Under Fives and Their Families*

*Director of Research and Training, Margy Whalley*

*Head of Centre, Trevor Chandler*

*Deputy Head of Centre, Katey Mairs*

*Head of School, Cath Arnold*

*Pedagogue, Professor Tina Bruce, University of North London*

Pen Green Centre is an Early Excellence Centre and a lead partner of a trailblazer Sure Start program.

The centre was established in 1985 and is located in what was a derelict secondary school. It works with over 500 families. It employs 35 staff including teachers, social workers, nursery nurses and support staff. It receives £450,000 base funding from Northamptonshire County Council and double this through 'ethical entrepreneurship.' It is jointly managed by the Education Department, Social Services Department and the Health Authority.

The centre has four major strands of activity.

1. High quality early years education and care
2. Adult community education
3. Community health and family support services
4. Training and research

The visit included a tour of the Centre and opportunity to observe programs in operation including educare for children 0-2 years of age), creche for children of parents involved in adult education and nursery for 3 and 4 year old children.

Main points discussed:

- the operations of the centre including the care and education of children under five, adult community education and adult education to post graduate level.
- the nursery curriculum and operations including staff planning times, staff training, building relationships with parents and assessment of children through observation and attention to their current schemas and the focus on children's well being and involvement in learning.
- the assessment and evaluation of programs including the involvement of practitioners in action research.

*Documents and materials provided:*

Principles of operation

Groups for parents, carers and their children

Functions of the Centre

Key issues

A curriculum document for parents and children

A schema booklet for parents and children

Parental involvement in education

Training at Pen Green Centre

Involving Parents in their Children's learning at the Pen Green Centre (book and video)

Working with Parents, The Pen Green Team

***National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) London***

Main points discussed:

- The structure and purpose of NFPI. NFPI was established by the government in early 1999 to research the needs of families, provide policy advice to government and develop support materials for families. It also has a role in cross department policy coordination. It is a registered charity and receives some funding through the Departments of Health and Education. Current activities include:
  - A mapping of services for parents in England and Wales. This covers all services from those provided through statutory agencies to small voluntary organisations. Results will be published on a website. Following the mapping of services an analysis will be carried out to determine what and where further services are needed or modifications required to existing services. Expansion or modification will be on the basis of evidence based research.
  - Organising a series of seminars including:
    - Legalities of divorce
    - How the machinery of government can be made more family friendly
    - Balancing work and home.
    - Positive parenting
    - Financial support for parents of young children

***Leslie Stagg***

***Manager, Quality and Curriculum Authority (QCA)***

Main points discussed:

- the replacement of the School Assessment Authority by QCA. Ultimately QCA will act as a central resource for disseminating good practice.
- the Early Learning Goals and Guidance for the Foundation Stage (children for 3-6 years.) (Copies available)
  - These documents break new ground in England recognising that national bodies and government should not determine how children learn. They also recognise the need to respond to parents' wishes in relation to their children's education.
  - The development of the documents was partly based to reflect sound early years' philosophy with input from highly respected early years professionals and was partly pragmatic with the need to encompass the wide range of providers of programs especially for three year old children.
  - The documents attempt to reflect the reality of a children from 3-5 years of age and contain strong messages regarding active and interactive learning and play.
  - Concerns had been raised over the possible impact on curriculum of OFSTED inspection of early years programs and the need to support educators in developing and implementing high quality curriculum.
  - The documents are not prescriptive and therefore demand a reflective workforce. They have pushed the boundaries of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and it is anticipated these boundaries will be pushed further overtime and the Foundation stage extended to incorporate Years 1 and 2.
  - Whilst OFSTED may have preferred to retain the reception year within Key Stage One of the National Curriculum, DfEE is very supportive of the documents and is providing training for practitioners and OFSTED inspectors.
- Qualifications of early years workers.
  - It is anticipated that the spending review will approve funding for training early years workers with the ultimate aim of having a graduate work-force in all early years programs.
- The Parliamentary Select Committee into the Early Years will report in the near future. It has responded positively for the early years to be changed from 3-8 years of age to 0-8 years of age. The Committee has also indicated that the early years work-force needs to include many and diverse skills.
- Baseline Assessment
  - There are 91 QCA accredited baseline assessment schemes assessing of literacy, numeracy and personal development.
  - Baseline assessment was implemented with the aim of emphasising the different ways and rates children develop. However overtime it has become used for measuring children's progress and the value schools add to children's progress. This is problematic due to the unreliability of very

young test takers and that there is no evidence on the child against which judgements can be made.

- Used within a school it can raise issues about the curriculum. Problems arise when it is used to make comparisons between schools by local authorities and OFSTED and places unwarranted and unnecessary pressure on teachers and schools.
  - Ideally baseline assessment should occur when a child enters compulsory or non-compulsory schooling.
  - Teachers in reception classes approved of baseline assessment original intent believing that it valued their work and that it stimulated worthwhile discussion regarding target setting for groups and individual children.
  - It is likely that with the introduction of the *Foundation Stage Curriculum* a review will take place and a national baseline assessment scheme will be developed. If this occurs early years researchers and other professionals will be involved and projects such as the *Accounting Early for Learning* project will have great influence with the likely result of positive impact on curriculum development and delivery.
- National Curriculum, Key Stage 1 testing  
There is some evidence that this assessment is driving and limiting the curriculum.

***Professor Chris Powers***  
***Institute of Child Health***  
***Department of Epidemiology and Child Health***

Main points discussed:

- the need for longitudinal studies to determine the best use of resources.
- the growing evidence of the importance of the early years of life in determining both short and long term outcomes.
- the persistence of poverty demonstrated by longitudinal studies ie poverty leaves its mark even when the issues are addressed. Adverse outcomes of poverty may not be seen immediately and the effects are not wiped out by improving later circumstances. Low socio-economic environments early in life link to poor physical and psychological states later in life.
- the clear link between teacher assessed social and development of the child and the self evaluation of health later in life.
- the need for studies to determine what works. These studies must include the assessment of social and emotional development in the early years.

***The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project***  
***Brenda Taggart, Research Coordinator***

Main points discussed:

The project

- is funded by the Department for Education and Employment and is providing information on the characteristics of over 2000 children from 114 different pre-school settings.
- is a five year longitudinal study assessing the attainment and development of children from 3-7 years of age.
- is exploring the effects of pre-school education on children's cognitive attainment and social and behavioural development at entry to school and any continuing effects of n such outcomes at age 7.
- is also investigating the contribution to children's development of individual and family characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, language and parental education and the educational environment of the home.
- will establish whatever particular kinds of pre-school experience help to reduce existing disparities in children's cognitive and social and behavioural development.

The preliminary results support the view that:

- pre-school education while by no means eliminating the powerful impact of inequalities, can play some role in helping to reduce their impact and thus is an important tool in combating social exclusion.
- the strength of background influences on children's cognitive development at entry to pre-school points to the importance of policies to promote support for families of children 0-3 year of age.
- children with no pre-school experience scored markedly lower on all measures of attainment. these children may be at risk of difficulties in adjustment to school because of low initial attainment on entry to school. However lower scores are not necessarily a direct result of a lack of pre-school experience due to the very different characteristics of the home-child sample. Many children were of minority ethnic background and many children were in receipt of school dinners. However the data suggests important associations.
- there are significant differences related to the particular pre-school centre with the largest effects being on literacy outcomes. Case studies of centres that had a positive effect are being conducted.
- attendance at pre-school (before five years of age) for 10 sessions a week did not produce any more beneficial effect on children's cognitive progress than attending for five session a week.
- a significant link between pre-school quality measures and children's outcomes
- the impact of pre-school centres on children's social and behavioural development and adjustment to school is a major feature of the project. Data to establish whether pre-school also vary on the impact of these important non-cognitive outcomes is still being analysed.

#### *Publications*

Characteristics of the EPPE Project Sample at Entry to the Study (EPPE Project)  
Parent, Family and Child Characteristics in Relation to Type of Pre-school and Socio-Economic Difference. (EPPE Project)

***Mary Jane Drummond***  
***School of Education***  
***Cambridge University***

Main points discussed:

- the focus on the management of schools within a competitive environment as opposed to educational leadership has placed head teachers at a disadvantage in relation to entering partnerships to support early learning. Schools have ‘hoovered up’ 4 year old children and do need to be involved in re-thinking the learning and teaching programs in nursery and reception classes.
- the mono-culturalism of teachers over an extended period has led to narrow thinking about learning.
- the focusing of learning and teaching programs on children’s questions. Units of study are planned around children’s questions.
- the traditional nursery school is not a cost effective way to care and educate young children. Early excellence centres are seen as the way forward as they have more impact on more aspects of the community.
- phonological awareness is being promoted as the best indicator of school success only because school success is measured by reading age. This approach does not take into account the underpinnings of learning or the breadth of curriculum necessary to equip children for future learning and life.

***Peers Early Learning Partnership (PEEP)***

***Director, Rosie Roberts***

Main points discussed:

- PEEP is concerned with raising children self esteem and their dispositions to learning and uses achievement in literacy as ‘the hook.’
- PEEP operates within the catchment area of Peers Secondary School with the initial contact with parents made through the hospital when a child is born..
- the main aims of PEEP. These are
  - \* to raise educational attainment particularly in literacy in a whole community of children through working with their parents and other important adults from the time of the child’s birth.
  - \* to develop a successful, sustainable and transferable model that complements existing pre-school provision.
- PEEP groups cover babies to 2 years, 3 year olds and nursery aged children. The groups meet once a week for one hour. Each session follows the same format with time for parent discussion of a certain aspect of literacy learning and time for parents and children together to work with the leader. Nursery PEEP provides a coordinator to replace the teacher in the class to allow the teacher to work with parents. Teachers in the program are trained as PEEP group leaders
- PEEP is attracting approximately half a birth cohort. There is some concern that the most underprivileged families are not accessing the program.
- PEEP also provides community adult education courses as part of PEEP Learning Bridge.
- the Department for Education and Employment has funded research into the outcomes of PEEP through the National Foundation for Educational Research as part of a birth to school study
- PEEP groups follow a structured curriculum (examples available)
- extending the development of PEEP through PEEP Link as an aspect of Sure Start. This says PEEP can happen in a variety of settings and offers parents options such as the provision of printed materials that can be supported by occasional home visits.

Website address: [www.peep.org.uk](http://www.peep.org.uk)

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