

Newsletter – February 2011

Dear parents and friends of Cowgate,

This newsletter brings a very warm welcome to all our new children and their families; a word from Hazel on the library; our interest in applying for the ‘Investors in Children Membership’ (detailed information is provided), a brief reminder of the Froebelian principles (and the environment) that underpins our practice here at Cowgate; it brings news from Lian about our successful new routine; Christmas Tree Festival news from Jane (Ruby’s gran); our reading this month was suggested by Karen, ‘Exploring the role and status of the male educator’ by Terry Gould.

Warm welcome

A very warm welcome to all our new children and their families we hope you will all be happy here at Cowgate.

Croilean Library

Thanks to the help of the lovely Anna Plichta-Les, the children’s library is now up and running again at Cowgate! Anna and I

spent sometime re-organising the books and making the library more user-friendly.

If you would like to take a book or two away then please just ask me. There is no longer a fee to join the library or to take out books, I just need to know which ones you are taking and when.

I hope you will make use of the books as there really are some lovely ones there.

Happy reading!

Hazel

Investing in Children

We have initiated our interest in the 'Investment in Children Membership.' Please find information below on how the award is concerned about the children's voice and their rights.

Investing in Children

Investing in Children is an organisation concerned with the human rights of children

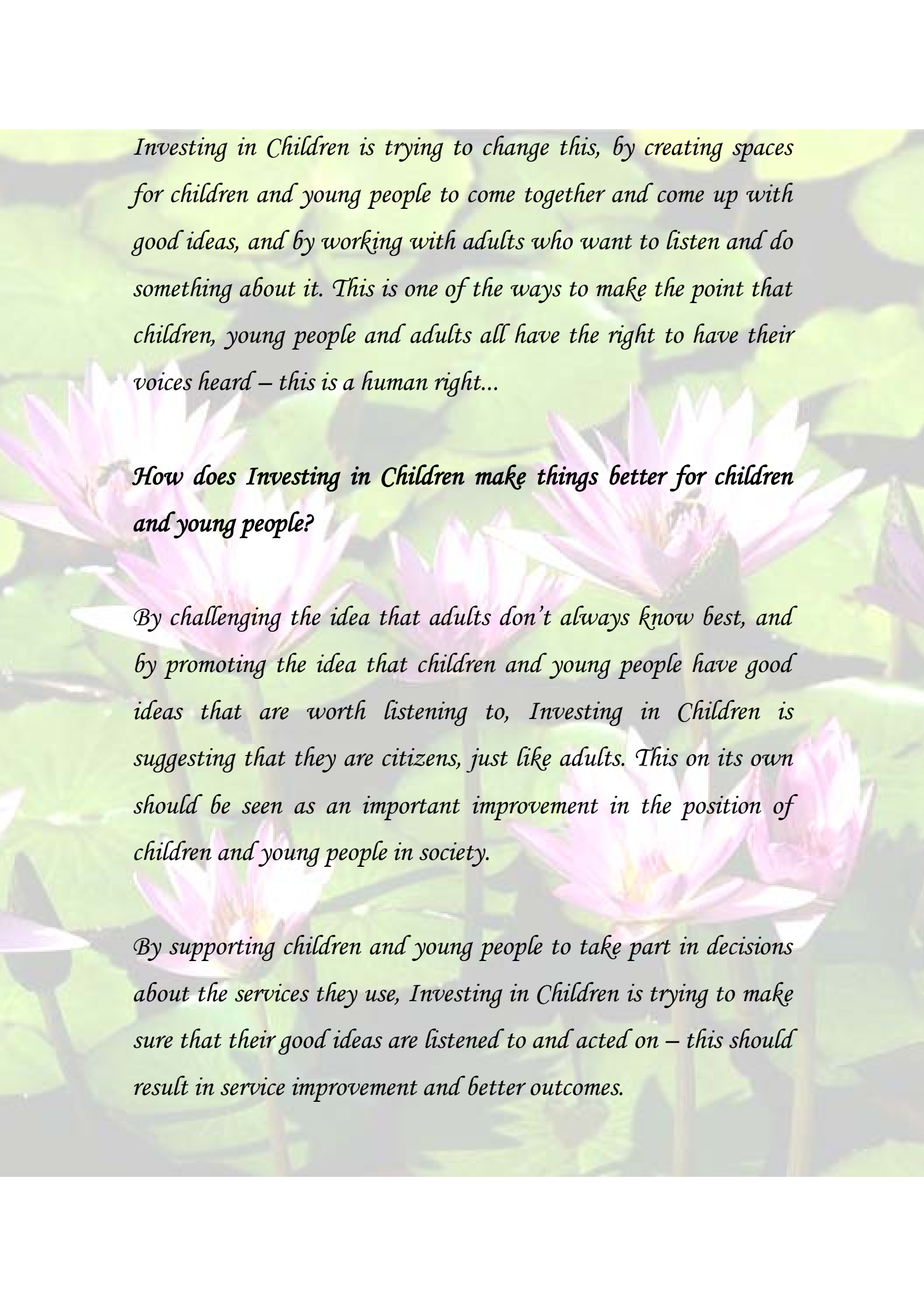
It was created in the 90s in County Durham, by managers in the local authority and the National Health Service. Over the last 11 years, Investing in Children has developed a range of different ways in which children and young people are supported to say what they want to say, and help to improve services used by them, by discussing their ideas with the adults who run the services.

In 2004, the Investing in Children Development Agency was created, to allow other organisations outside of County Durham, to use the Investing in Children approach. In this way, more people can get involved in the discussion, and everyone can learn from each other.

What is Investing in Children for?

Investing in Children promotes the human rights of children and young people.

One of the things that gets in the way of making things better for children and young people is that, by and large, when they have something to say, they aren't taken as seriously as adults. Many people still believe that 'children should be seen and not heard'.



Investing in Children is trying to change this, by creating spaces for children and young people to come together and come up with good ideas, and by working with adults who want to listen and do something about it. This is one of the ways to make the point that children, young people and adults all have the right to have their voices heard – this is a human right...

How does Investing in Children make things better for children and young people?

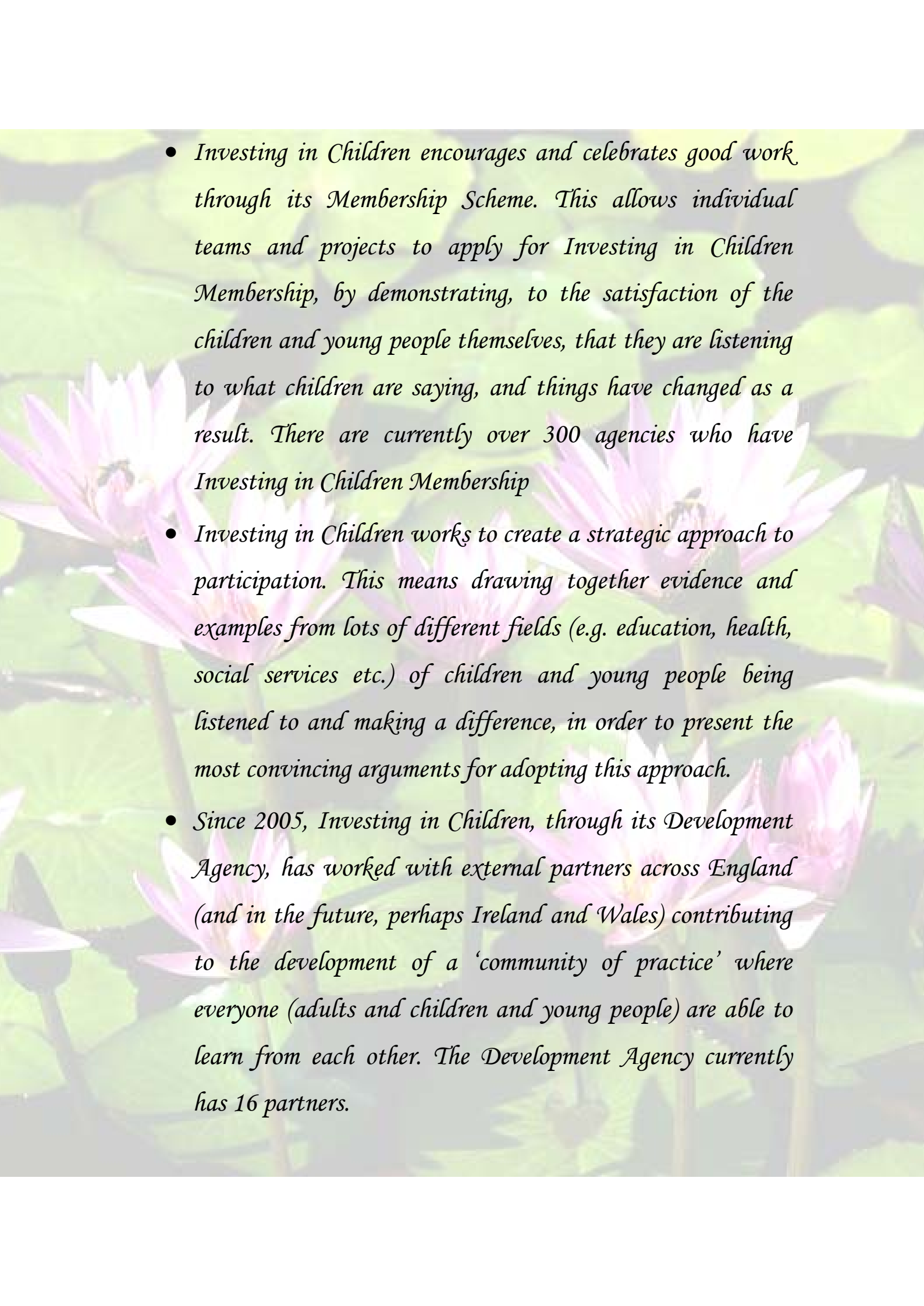
By challenging the idea that adults don't always know best, and by promoting the idea that children and young people have good ideas that are worth listening to, Investing in Children is suggesting that they are citizens, just like adults. This on its own should be seen as an important improvement in the position of children and young people in society.

By supporting children and young people to take part in decisions about the services they use, Investing in Children is trying to make sure that their good ideas are listened to and acted on – this should result in service improvement and better outcomes.

By supporting workers who are determined to provide the best possible services, and who are committed to finding out what children and young people think, but also discussing with them ideas about how things could be improved.

What does Investing in Children do?

- Investing in Children works directly with children and young people to support them to work out their ideas and present them to adults in charge. This is done mostly through Agenda Days, where children and young people have space to work out their own ideas, and research teams, where children and young people develop the best arguments to put to the key adults.*
- Investing in Children provides a staff development programme (so that staff from partner organisations will be able to use the approach for themselves), a regular newsletter (so that good ideas are shared), and publishes good examples of how this approach has made things better, in order to get as many people as possible to understand the citizenship rights of children and young people.*

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- *Investing in Children encourages and celebrates good work through its Membership Scheme. This allows individual teams and projects to apply for Investing in Children Membership, by demonstrating, to the satisfaction of the children and young people themselves, that they are listening to what children are saying, and things have changed as a result. There are currently over 300 agencies who have Investing in Children Membership*
 - *Investing in Children works to create a strategic approach to participation. This means drawing together evidence and examples from lots of different fields (e.g. education, health, social services etc.) of children and young people being listened to and making a difference, in order to present the most convincing arguments for adopting this approach.*
 - *Since 2005, Investing in Children, through its Development Agency, has worked with external partners across England (and in the future, perhaps Ireland and Wales) contributing to the development of a 'community of practice' where everyone (adults and children and young people) are able to learn from each other. The Development Agency currently has 16 partners.*

- *Investing in Children contributes to national and international debates about the human rights of children and young people*

Liam Cairns

Investing in Children Director

So...watch this space 😊

Froebelian Principles

As you are aware Karen, Lian and Teresa are currently being formally trained on the Froebel Course at Edinburgh University. Due to this, in part, but mostly because of our new families we thought you might appreciate a little reminder of the Froebelian principles that underpin our practice.

The principles developed by Froebel focus on the child as an individual (see for example principles 1,2.); the child as a member of their family and community, (principle 6); and the child as a part of the ecological system (principle 4); The principles also recognise the role play has in developing the child and the integrity of childhood. Alongside these principles the ideal environment for running an early childhood centre is explained. The main focus of the environment is that it is one that is safe, intellectually challenging,

interactive with outside, inside and community and promotes learning, interdependence and independence.

Main Principles

1.

Recognition of the uniqueness of each child's capacity and potential.

2.

An holistic view of each child's development.

3.

Recognition of the importance of play as a central integrating element in a child's development and learning.

4.

An ecological view of humankind in the natural world.

5.

Recognition of the integrity of childhood in its own right.

6.

Recognition of the child as part of a family and a community.

An environment which is;

- *physically safe but intellectually challenging, promoting curiosity, enquiry, sensory stimulation and aesthetic awareness*
- *demonstrates the unity of indoors and outdoors, of the cultural and the natural*
- *allows free access to a rich range of materials that promote open-ended opportunities for play, representation and creativity*
- *entails the setting being an integral part of the community it serves, working in close partnership with parents and other skilled adults*
- *is educative rather than merely amusing or occupying*
- *promotes interdependence as well as independence, community as well as individuality and responsibility as well as freedom.*

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

A word from Lian

Dear Parents,

Karen, Teresa and I have been wonderfully enthused by our learning journey while attending the Froebel course. We would

always have liked to consider ourselves as reflective practitioners, but I firmly believe that since embarking on the course we have become more and more attuned to the needs of the children, our families and each other. As a consequence, the end of day routine became an area of interest. As you know, our belief is that we can always improve, for example, where those little items of clothing hid...just when our parents came to collect their children. Karen had a great idea, which she discussed with the end of day staff, to try to improve the flow and prepare the children for collection. While we would always like the children to inform our practice, we feel that the changes are beneficial in that we are fostering responsibility and continuing the practice that happens throughout the day. That, while our policy is to provide free flow play and meaningful experiences there are also expectations inherent in the children's choices. For example, the child who chooses to make a crispie is expected to complete the sequence by washing up their pot afterwards, the child who chooses to build in the bricks is expected to return them to the shelves, leaving the area tidy and appealing for their friends. Therefore, our afternoon routine has been altered slightly. Between 4.30 and 5.00, staff and children will have a tidy up time, both in the room and the corridor, supporting the locating of hats, coats, shoes and toys. At 5, all children from each

of the three rooms will come together for hot chocolate in a gathering time, the aim being to foster the community feeling and send our children home with a wee warm satisfied tummy! Singing and or stories will follow, before the children adjourn to the music room for a “peaceful time” (proper name still to be determined, maybe you have some suggestions?) at 5.20. Candles will be lit, gentle music played to prepare children for their homeward journey. Therefore, between 5 and 5.20 children will be collected from Sala Infantil, and after 5.20 from the music room. This may be a winter solution, with the practice changing in the warmer weather to having our gathering at 5.00 in the garden, with maybe milk or water served outside. We hope that this will help harmonise our afternoons, and certainly the feed back from staff has been that this time is beneficial. Should you have any comments, queries or suggestions, please do not hesitate to speak to myself or Karen at the end of the day.

Best Wishes

Lian

Christmas Tree Festival by Jane Brown

A Tale of two Edinburgh City Centre Institutions at Christmas!

In November 2010 the congregation of St Andrews and St Georges West wished to affirm, promote and reach out to the local communities and businesses that surrounded the church in George Street at Christmas. They came up with the idea of having a Christmas Tree Festival. Trees and lights were sponsored by the local community and decorations were provided by organisations and businesses in the locality which reflected their particular work. We had trees from John Lewis, George Street Association, Chiquito's, Cunningham House, Amnesty International and First Hand to name but a few.

There were two other aims of the venture: to raise money for the homeless at Christmas; and last but not least – because for the church the time approaching Christmas is a time of hope and of waiting confidently for new beginnings- the congregation wanted to open it's beautiful sanctuary and welcome as many people as possible for a stunning and joyful celebration of this great festival.

As a Cowgate under 5's Granny and helper at the Festival I mentioned it to Karen Thomson one morning as something the children could visit. The Nursery were very enthusiastic from the start as they were looking for an activity for the children where they could see and be part of the Edinburgh's City Centre Christmas festivities and yet be in a warm, safe and welcoming place.

The visits to the Festival (three in all) were highly successful as evidenced by the following entry in the visitor's book....

“ We have really enjoyed our visits- our children have delighted in being in the Church and seeing the trees, our staff have been moved by the messages on the trees. What a wonderful idea. We hope we could sponsor a tree next year!

In the true spirit of the Festival the next entry in the book was from a local business man who was visiting at the same time. He had also enjoyed his visit and seeing the children's interaction so much that he left his details to sponsor a tree for the Nursery!

The Amnesty International tree sponsors were particularly pleased with all the greeting cards that were made by the children for Eynulla Fatullayev and Johan Teterissa, imprisoned human rights activists. The cards have been sent off to both men.

Finally the last words go to St Andrew's and St George's West Church Festival helpers, who would like to thank the nursery for bringing the children. The helpers were delighted to see the children and found their interest and wonder in the trees uplifting and inspiring.

Jane Brown (Ruby Brown's Granny)

That is all for this month. The reading for this month is below read on if you wish to, if not...



The very warmest wishes

Lynn and the Cowgate team.

Exploring the role and status of the male educator

'Buildings as well as systems can appear as negative to males in early years settings' – exploring the role and status of the male educator working with the under-threes.

Terry Gould

Following a successful career in industry I gave up a sales directorship to become a mature student training to be a primary school teacher; something I'd been interested in doing for a number of years. People I worked with and most of my other friends at the time insisted I was making a huge mistake, not least financially, but it was something I very much wanted to do. My experiences from being a father of three children made me feel I had something worthwhile to offer to children as a teacher. I was very aware at that time that most primary teachers were female. The decision I made to become a teacher was not based on financial criteria but on ideas of personal fulfilment and job satisfaction. Becoming a teacher, for me, was almost like responding to a vocational call, one that I have not regretted answering.

The training for which I enrolled involved four years of full-time study for a B'Ed Honours degree. I later opted for the latter two years to involve specialization in the early years. On applying to train I opted initially to teach older children, but having taken the opportunity to work with very young children, decided that the early years were a critically important time in a child's life and was

where I felt I wanted to teach. Never did I imagine that one day I would be working with children as young as 2.

At the time of writing I am employed by the teaching service of an inner-city local authority, at one of their community nursery centres. I am the only male teacher in this service but there is also a male nursery officer working at one of the other community nursery centres. These community nursery centres are jointly funded by the Education and Social Services Departments of the authority, and cater for children in need between the ages of 2 and 5 (as identified by the Children Act 1989).

My wife, who initially trained as a nursery nurse, now holds a management post with the Special Support Service of a neighbouring local authority. The experiences she has been able to share with me, along with my own experiences, have enormously helped my ability to relate to, and emphasise with, my nursery centre colleagues; including recognising the often under-valued nature of their experience and work. Personal experiences, both in my professional work and in my own family life, have led me to believe that children benefit from having opportunities to develop positive relationships with both male and female educators. I

believe that as a society the UK needs to move as quickly as possible away from its comparatively gender-segregated employment market. This includes, most significantly for me, that of educare and other child-related services. My experiences of working with 2 to 5 year olds and developing relationships with their parents/carers have been predominantly positive. I firmly advocate that all male teachers should give serious consideration to spending some time working with and learning about this age group; and most importantly that they be given the opportunity and encouragement to do so!

Where are the men?

'The shortage of men in childcare settings is a major obstacle because it conveys the message that only women know how to look after and teach young children, and that only women can be gentle and caring' (Goldschmied and Jackson 1994: 147).

Despite the existence of increased levels of equal opportunity in the work-place it is still unusual to find a male educarer working with 2 to 5 year olds, and even more unusual to find one working with children under the age of 3. Males remain poorly represented in

both educate of under 5s and related occupations. According to collated official statistics of male and female staff working in services for children (childcare and related occupations) in the UK in 1991, less than 2% were male (Jensen 1996:31). The question often raised is why should this be the case? What are the reasons that males in the mid-1990s remain so underrepresented at this critically important stage of children's learning and development? Evidence shows that young children benefit from both male and female role models and influences to support, encourage and nurture their individual personalities and abilities. The male aspect of this influence is recognized as significant by many, including Hancock, who points out (1996: 48) that helping to offer children 'alternative role models (and) encourage greater male participation in the home and gender equality' is important. The reasons why men appear reluctant to opt for a career working with young children appear complex, and none are comprehensibly able to explain the reality that over 98% of staff in UK educate services are female. Clearly, difficulties in initial recruitment and training are significant aspects of the problem and may, among other things, be partially due to perceptions of gender appropriateness and gender discrimination against males.

Gender discrimination

Apparently much of British society in the late 1990s still holds deep-rooted, stereotypical views on the role of men working with young children. Indeed as Broadhead reminds us, men can face 'special problems' in gaining employment in nurseries. This idea is supported by evidence including that of 'a man who had been refused jobs in two nurseries (and) was awarded compensation on the grounds of sex discrimination' (Broadhead 1993: 11). Some years ago, expressing a desire to work with nursery-aged children to an experienced primary school head teacher brought a rather negative response. It was explained to me that a substantial number of governors, male and female, would view it unfavourably owing to their very fixed personal ideas.

Until then I'd seen the biggest obstacle to men working in the nursery as being the lack of qualified men feeling they wanted to and were able to do the job. At that point the idea of discrimination hadn't figured in my thinking but here it began to rear its head as I began to realise that, just as there are those who are subtly discriminated against in the job market because of the colour of their skin, their age, or their culture, this can also apply

to males working with young children. I admit to being somewhat surprised at that time because many of the advertisements for nursery teachers were boldly decorated with statements such as: 'this authority is an equal opportunity employer', or 'we are committed to working towards equal opportunity'.

Yet despite the rhetoric, and the bold print in the advertisements, I was finding out that perhaps some of the people empowered to employ me as an educator might make every effort not to do so because of their stereotypical personal views!

Despite how we might like things to be, discrimination does exist against men in areas traditionally seen as 'women's work', such as educate in nursery settings. The 1996 annual report of the Equal Opportunities Agency reveals that today the majority of gender discrimination cases are now being brought by men. These cases seem to arise as a result of the negative influences of past experiences in communities, families and workplaces on those with 'power to appoint'. The way many of those with power respond negatively to males in certain roles sends out powerful false messages about gender appropriateness. So views like those of

Michelle Elliot, 'I would look with great suspicion on a man who specifically wants to work with nursery age children' (Daily Telegraph, 4 October 1993), though clearly grounded in a positive desire to protect children from being abused by males, can actually become negative influences on young children's opportunities to relate to males and their ideas on gender appropriateness. Such views can have a very direct effect on the recruitment of males to work with young children.

Gender appropriateness

The EU, in its recent Green Paper on Social Policy, recognises that 'The gender based division of family and employment responsibilities not only constrains women's lives but also deprives men of the emotional rewards resulting from the care and development of children' (quoted in Jensen 1996: 5). It has put forward the need for a commitment positively to encourage men to participate more in the care and upbringing of children. This clearly includes males working in the care and education of young children. Such a commitment needs to begin from birth, providing both male and female role models of involvement. There is evidence, from my own experiences, that some children come into nursery

provision with emergent ideas about what it means to be a boy or a girl, and that this has often been influenced by parental perspectives and the visual media.

For some this may include ideas similar to those that boys play with guns or cars while girls bake or play with dolls. One of the most important duties of the educator, male or female, is to ensure that children's learning experiences (everything they do, see and hear) are not restricted by stereotypical ideas such as these. With this in mind the educator of the late 1990s and beyond should be positively encouraged to provide wide experiences/learning opportunities for all his/her children. Changing gender roles, within society appears to be highly relevant. Indeed, research into the career choices of secondary school children seems to indicate strongly that they make decisions about careers based on a variety of criteria, many of which have been built up through their experiences during the previous years of their life. Perhaps not surprisingly one of these criteria is the notion whether or not the career is seen as appropriate to their gender. It would seem that our children's lives and other learning experiences influence how they later see themselves as part of their community and wider society. Jensen (1996: 25) highlighted a significant aspect of this when

finding that 'one of the obstacles to more participation by men in childcare services is the myth that caring for children is not men's work.'

Caring for children appears to be the focus of many such myths, including the myth of the 'New Man'. It was suggested by a newspaper report (LA Times, February 1995) in the USA that American men were changing and sharing more and more childcare duties with their partners, thus creating 'New Man'. A recent study found this to be wildly untrue and just a 'figment of the imagination'. The findings from this study showed that American women spent on average 10.7 hours each weekday caring for pre-school children, while fathers take charge without the mother's help for less than an hour a day on average (Stearman and Van der Gaag 1995: 46). Children need to learn from as early an age as possible that caring for children is as much men's work as it is women's, and they should be encouraged to understand why. Gender should not be used to create artificial barriers in terms of roles in society, not least in the education and care of young children. Having males working in education and related services for young children can be a significant part of young children learning about gender issues.

Hughes (1991: 146) sums up some of the feelings of those who recognise the value of males, as well as females, working with young children, in her claim that 'it is...sad that many children never have the experience of being taught by a male teacher in the early years of their schooling'. She recognises too that 'this is particularly poignant for children whose experience of men at home is limited or whose feelings towards men are hostile'. Most importantly, we need to understand, as Hughes (1991: 146) points out, that both boys and girls can suffer through missing out on such experiences. However, even at a time when the importance of having male educators is becoming more widely recognised, men appear to continue to be disadvantaged by the system and some of those who work within it.

Disadvantaged by the system

Often difficulties encountered by males are not limited to direct personal discrimination. Disadvantage can also be meted out by the system itself: a system that doesn't seem to encourage males to work with young children and in some cases actively discourages them from doing so. Males are often not helped by the design and

layout of the buildings and grounds have not been planned like traditional mixed workplace settings such as offices or factories. They are often designed or, in practice, utilised as female (adult) only units with, for example, only female toilets or facilities which then have to be adapted to cater for any male employees.

This can, in some situations, cause all sorts of problems including those of privacy and access, which in turn can negatively impinge upon relationships in the workplace between males and females. Male educare colleagues (I haven't had very any, I might add!) have passed on comments to me which they've overheard in establishments in which they've been employed, such as: "Till he came we didn't have to queue for the loo. Why should he have one loo all to himself when we have to share one between six of us!"

Also, when many of the buildings and grounds were designed this was done in a way which does not appear to have consciously taken adequate account of male workers' potential interests, including adventure areas, growing areas, woodwork areas, etc...all of which can help educarers, both male and female, to offer children wider learning opportunities. In identifying male areas of potential interest it is important to be clear that these

areas are in practice not just areas males can be interested in. Many females find them of particular interest too; hence they are, in reality, areas which educarers of both genders can focus on jointly in partnership.

A male applying to work in the majority of nursery settings has to consider that the system can often be anti-male. Even where it does not appear to be like this, he is likely to be the only male working in the building. It can be very off-putting to the male. However, it needs to be recognised that most staff appear to regard the employment of males as positive both for themselves and for the children, even if there are some initial difficulties to sort out.

I can bear witness to this on a personal level. In the majority of settings where I've worked, it has not been a major problem for me as a male to join a hitherto all-female team. Indeed, the three most influential people on my career with under-fives, through their support and encouragement, are all females. However, I recognise that there always exists the potential for the existence of major difficulties: those wishing to exercise their discriminatory views

can choose from a whole range of other areas to find a reason why the male presence is unsuitable while masking their real reason, that of gender discrimination. Such situations may not always come from within the setting itself. For example, it may be adverse influence or assessment from supporting LEA services, such as advisors or inspectors, who consciously or unconsciously exercise their prejudices against males. Those who address a male educator's competence or ability are most likely to be female, as very few early years advisers or nursery head teachers are male. The fact that I have felt discriminated against only once for being male in a nursery setting does encourage me to believe that the occurrence of such situations is relatively rare. However, my experience of personally encountering gender discrimination has also made me highly aware of how difficult a situation a male can sometimes find himself in.

The male educator can, in some cases, appear isolated and the odd one out because of the existing system. This can be noticeable even from as early as interview stage. Differences can be exploited by some in negative ways, particularly by those who feel very anti-male at that period of time and for whatever reasons are unable to prevent this from clouding their judgement. The likelihood is that

the majority, if not all, of those who interview the male educator will be female. Such a situation is borne out by my own experiences and can potentially leave the way open for some level of discrimination to take place. In interviews for nursery posts in which I have participated, only one ever had a male member on the interview panel, and he was outnumbered by the other seven female panel members.

With much appearing to be potentially against males, why do men, such as myself and others, still make the choice to work with very young children? The National Children's Homes Action for Children Report, What's He Doing at the Family Centre? (Ruxton 1992: 35) quotes Andrew, an educator, as being attracted to work with the younger children because he felt that 'the process of socialisation and education is so important earlier on'. Having taught across the primary age from nursery to upper juniors I feel, similarly to Andrew, that the nursery stage is the foundation for the rest of the child's learning and development, hence of the highest importance. Men continue to be disadvantaged by a system which doesn't seem to encourage them to work with young children and therefore appears not to support young children having the opportunity to experience being taught by a male in their early

years. Such a situation appears symptomatic of the way some would have relations exist between males and young children.

Male relationships with young children

The fact that there are those who treat all men with suspicion can be put down, in the main, to fears or experiences of sexual abuse. Some, though not rejecting the idea of having male educators, feel that males should have some controls put on certain aspects of their work. These include a female tutor at the Institute of Education who feels that 'men do have to be very careful about when and how they touch a child... There are things a woman can do which might be misconstrued in a man' (Hancock 1996: 48)

A male development officer of the National Children's Bureau, who argues that relationships between males and young children may have to be different from those between females and young children, indicates feeling that 'as a male member of staff you may have to be prepared to accept that some restrictions on what you can do with children may be necessary' (Hancock 1996: 48)

While agreeing that there is a need to protect children from sexual, or any other forms of abuse, I disagree most strongly with the balance of such standpoints, not least on the grounds of equality of opportunity including parent's, children's and male educator's rights. My view is that such restrictions on practice should not be allowed to exist because they have extremely negative effects. In the main they serve little purpose except to reinforce existing prejudices; sometimes they distort them still further. They also seriously undermine the quality of the role of the male educator because they adversely affect both public confidence in the male educator and the male educator's own confidence and ability to act naturally and effectively within their role and context. As Hancock (1996: 48) argues, 'insisting that all toileting is done by female workers...conveys all sorts of negative hidden messages to children about gender roles.'

Adams (1994: 97) supports this perspective on hidden messages in pointing out that 'Children's attitudes and expectations are influenced by their experiences at home, in their communities, at nursery, playgroup and school.' Hancock focuses on the legal aspects of such restrictions, pointing out that legislation is beginning to support the abandonment of what she terms 'short-

sighted policies', when she refers to a recent case on which an industrial tribunal forced a Norwich crèche to 'scrap its policy preventing men from changing nappies or accompanying children to the toilet after the tribunal upheld claims of sex discrimination' (Hancock 1996: 48).

The potential sexual abuse argument against employing men in childcare services appears to be particularly strong in the UK. However, as Jensen observes, 'it does not appear at all in the Danish debate. This does not mean that cases of sexual abuse in childcare services are not to be found' (1996: 23) but they are not used as an argument against employing males in childcare services. Significantly, and probably as a result of this, substantially higher numbers of males are employed in childcare-related services in Denmark than in the UK. It seems that in the UK we need to support and value the role of males in educare and related services much more.

Relationships with parents

At a recent staff appraisal (May 1995) of my performance relating to aspects of communication, parents' views were sought. The

following list comprises just some of the comments parents made regarding me as a male educator. All the comments, apart from being 'like a second dad', could most certainly just as easily have been made about a female educator:

- *He is easy to talk to.*
- *He is very approachable.*
- *He listens well to us and to our children.*
- *He's like a second dad to my child.*
- *It feels like he really knows your child.*
- *He makes my child feel really welcome at the nursery.*
- *He has explained a lot of things about education.*
- *I feel I can speak to him at any time.*
- *My child really loves him.*
- *He is so good with the children, they all like him.*
- *He uses first name terms; that's important.*
- *I wish he could move to my child's next school as his teacher.*
- *He's easy-going and easy to talk to.*
- *He involves us.*

All of the comments made were very positive. As all were made in confidence, of course, I am unaware which parents made them and cannot research them further. What they clearly show is that parents of children at this inner-city community nursery centre feel extremely positive about having this male on the staff, both for themselves and for their education. They feel valued by this male and extremely happy for their child to be in his care. The comments are really more about the person – me – and not so much, if at all, about my gender.

In this nursery centre setting no parental concerns appear to exist about the safety of their children with me – a male educator. Yet there is evidence of concern created within society about potential relationships between men and young children involving the likelihood of sexual abuse.

The level of such a concern is, in my view, having a highly detrimental effect on the provision for young children because males are being increasingly put off choosing a career with young children. They are being made to feel that such a career choice is no longer gender-appropriate. My concerns have been echoed by others, including most recently the Chief Executive of the Teacher

Training Agency. She is alarmed at the current shortage of males in primary education, which seems to be getting worse, based on statistics that the number of men entering this area of the profession has dramatically declined over recent years. Her current view is that, based on current trends in the primary section, 'we shall have no men left in the profession by 2010' (Jensen 1996: 12).

As we have seen, parents of children in nursery settings can have very positive perceptions about a male educator working with their child. However, this may depend very much on the individual male. I would question whether it is not just the same regarding parents' positive acceptance of female educators? Perceptions and viewpoints do appear highly relevant: for example, some single female parents seem particularly pleased and approve of me as a male interacting with their child. I have also found that in some cases a male presence can be influential in helping to develop more positive relationships with fathers as well as with mothers. For example, some fathers appear to feel more relaxed dealing with or talking to a male when first coming into the nursery setting. Because of this it may be that these fathers are more willing to become involved in talk with staff when bringing or collecting their child.

At our nursery centre last year we had one father who didn't respond positively to the efforts of female staff who tried desperately hard to develop a relationship through dialogue with him. When I, as a male, approached him to try to develop dialogue he appeared more relaxed and responded positively. Over a period of several weeks I did manage to establish a relationship with him through which we were able to help both his family and his child much more. As staff, we all noticed that as this father grew in confidence in coming in to speak with me, he also spoke more to female staff and importantly his son developed more confidence and appeared happier attending the nursery.

This father needed to bring and collect his son as his partner was in and out of hospital and unable to do so. Jensen (1996: 27) in his research found that some fathers preferred their child to attend a nursery where there were some male workers. This may be because of cultural reasons or due to a lack of confidence or just that some men feel awkward in talking or dealing with female staff. Not all fathers or male carers, however, are able to bring and collect their child from nursery settings. As professionals, we must remain mindful of the importance, in our work with children and their

families, of involving fathers/male carers as much as possible. The research of Ghedini et al. (1995: 29-30) and others underlines this point.

Reflections

Since my appointment to the community nursery centre almost two years ago I have had time to reflect on my own situation. I feel that, initially, settling in was made easier by the fact that the centre had previously had a male teacher for a short period and also I'd had previous experience of working in settings where I was the only male. The staff team was a very experienced one who, as a whole, recognized the value of the children, parents and themselves of having a male educator on the team. The management team was particularly aware, committed and supportive of me. I was made to feel welcome and to feel valued.

The head teacher and interviewing panel members, through fiercely committed to equal opportunity, made my appointment on merit but recognized the value of a male member of staff as helping to reflect on community more fully in terms of gender. As a local by birth, a parent of three children – two girls and a boy, and lately

grandparent of a 3-year old grandson – I have been able to bring cultural and life experiences to the fore which have greatly helped me to empathize with the children, parents/carers, staff and the community. What I have experienced appears to contradict some of the experiences of other males in educare settings, such as Trevor Chandler (1990: 31-5) but I find no problems with such variations of experience. I have functioned within a different role to Trevor and others in that the majority of my work has been with the children on the 'shop floor' as part of the team. It has not been difficult for me, as a male, to come to work at my current community nursery centre. This has been, in my view, mainly for the following reasons:

- I had a highly positive attitude of wanting to be there, coupled with a set of life and work experiences which greatly contributed to my conceptual understanding, perceptions and thinking concerning the role of the teacher and the team at the centre.*
- Because of his level of experience and development of the staff at the centre they did not find it difficult to relate to me as a male team member. This support of colleagues has been*

the single most important aspect of being able to develop within my role.

- *I was able to value and respond positively to other staff members' skills and training, particularly as my partner trained initially as a nursery nurse.*
- *Mothers did not see me as a threat because I was a man even though some had been victims of violence from a male partner. On the contrary, they saw me as a person to whom their children could relate and respond to positively. Any anger women have towards men as not been directed at me. It appears I am accepted as being the professional educator I am.*
- *The high level of support and encouragement from parents/carers has been highly significant in making me feel welcome and valued.*
- *There has been some teasing of me as a teacher but not in a way which threatens me merely as a male. Staff have got to know my strengths and my weaknesses and generally feel happy to seek my advice as I seek theirs. We recognise as a team that no person has all the answers,*

- *My presence, though altering the dynamics of the centre in some respects, I consider that it has done so positively and in a whole-team way.*

Increasing the numbers of males in educare and related services

We need more males in educare services to address issues of both equality and quality of those services for children and their families. Having appropriate numbers of males and females in educare services plays a critical role in supporting and ensuring equal opportunities within that provision for all our children. Even as the idea takes hold, that more men are needed in these services (as appears to be happening) it needs to be recognised that we must be patient as it is likely to be a lengthy process. The level and speed of success in achieving the goal of higher numbers of males will, I feel, very much depend upon the actions taken to encourage them to take up the profession. While the status of young children in our society remains low, their care and education will continue to be a low priority.

An important question is who is likely to be most influential and successful in altering this situation? Which organisation, authority

or institution? Or is it a much more fundamental question of values? This is always a difficult question to answer as each of those involved needs individually, as well as jointly, to take up the issues and integrate them into their own policies and practice. I have already considered the role of the LEA but here is also a list of some other bodies with the power to influence males to take a greater interest in working with young children:

- *Local authorities*
- *Trade unions*
- *Training institutions*
- *Careers officers*
- *The government and political parties*
- *Childcare centres and educare settings*
- *Parents' organisations*
- *Voluntary organisations*

The level of research and knowledge about males in educare services seems extremely limited. What is needed, therefore, is large scale funding for research to be undertaken to ascertain what the advantages and disadvantages are of employing more males in this

professional field, along with exploring barriers which exist to male recruitment. From this it is important to investigate the most appropriate and efficient policies which, when implemented, will enable recruitment of appropriate levels of males into this area of work.

My view is that training institutions are probably one of the most powerful agencies to influence and promote greater levels of male recruits into educare services. I say this because unless there are sufficient numbers of qualified males available to work in these services it is pointless and ineffective for local authorities, other organisations and educare settings, to create policies themselves and have high ideals about employing a more gender-balanced workforce, Again, this is related to the status of work with young children and the career prospects of all workers in this field.

Career officers and teachers in schools and in local authority offices are also extremely important as they have the advantage of being in a position to influence young adults positively to consider a choice of further education in order to qualify to enter such work. They can inform students and other young people they are in contact

with, that educare work is for males just as much as it is for females.

The small percentage of males in educare and child-related services is part of a national problem reflecting and involving a gender-segregated labour market. Those jobs which are stereotypically dominated by males have much higher status, and importantly higher pay, than those dominated by females. Educare work is dominated by females and as such, like that of welfare and care work, has lower status and pay. We need to influence those with the power to make efforts to change how things are so that the status and pay of any job is not determined by the gender of those engaged in the work but more by the nature and importance of the work itself. For this to happen, a shift in people's thinking needs to take place so that men and women become considered just as important as each other in life and work generally.

The UK might do well to emulate campaigns such as that launched in Viborg, Denmark, in 1994 called 'Children also Need Men'; in Kalmar, Sweden, entitled 'Come into Childcare Services You Men!' and in 1995 by the Employment Office in Aarhus, Denmark, entitled 'The Recruitment of Men for Pedagogic Training'. The aim

of the latter is to have 33% of those entering training to be male by the year 2005.

The 1994 Danish campaign (Children also Need Men) was run in cooperation between the Ministry of Employment, the Employment Office, training colleges and two unions for pedagogues. The campaign was promoted in all the training colleges in Denmark and involved the distribution of a high poster and colourful brochure along with major press and media coverage. A course was set up for men-only to train as pedagogues, and special training material was prepared. Success was achieved through this in attracting more males in work with young children.

What has been a common feature in all of these three campaigns is that they have been well funded, on a large scale and nationally promoted. Most noticeably, however, the most important source of impetus appears to be national government. They are the only organisation with access to sufficient funding for campaigns and training on such a large scale that they can be effective in driving home the message that 'children need males too!'

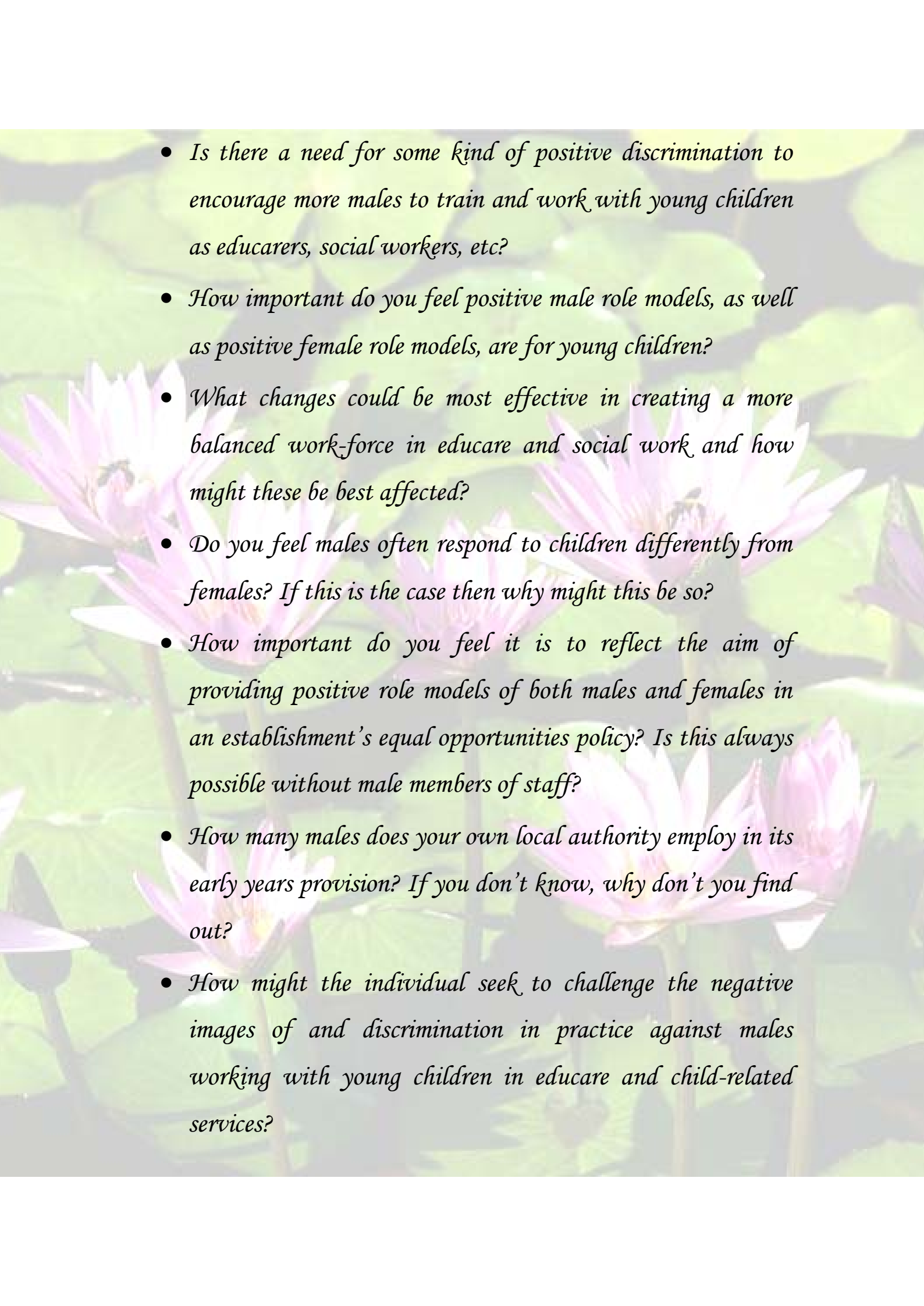
'Children need males too!'

While this chapter has concerned itself with the importance of males in the educare of young children it is important to remember that this is within a context that the role of females in educare is highly important too. Young children need to be able to interact with, and respond to, both males and females.

In this short chapter it is impossible fully to address all the issues related to males working with young children. What we need is more literature and research which explores this sometimes sensitive area of male employment. It is most important now that having read this chapter you think and talk much more about the issues involved and seek to make your views not just known but acted upon!

Here are some questions you might want to think about having read this chapter:

- *What, in your view, are the reasons why males remain so under-represented in educare and child related services?*

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- *Is there a need for some kind of positive discrimination to encourage more males to train and work with young children as educarers, social workers, etc?*
 - *How important do you feel positive male role models, as well as positive female role models, are for young children?*
 - *What changes could be most effective in creating a more balanced work-force in educare and social work and how might these be best affected?*
 - *Do you feel males often respond to children differently from females? If this is the case then why might this be so?*
 - *How important do you feel it is to reflect the aim of providing positive role models of both males and females in an establishment's equal opportunities policy? Is this always possible without male members of staff?*
 - *How many males does your own local authority employ in its early years provision? If you don't know, why don't you find out?*
 - *How might the individual seek to challenge the negative images of and discrimination in practice against males working with young children in educare and child-related services?*

