

Final Report for the

4Ps- Project: Practitioners & Parents Play Partnership

Strengthening practitioner-parent collaboration through the use of partnership sessions built on Froebelian principles and pedagogy

Introduction

This project involved the development of practitioner-parent partnership model underpinned by Froebelian principles. This model involved gaining the perspectives of parents and early years practitioners on how they work together in the interests of children, and how they view play as a starting point for their partnership. Following an initial assessment of potential participant perspectives, 2 intervention sessions were designed to bring parents and professionals together to learn about play and partnership grounded in Froebel's principles.

This model recognises the complexity of the relationship between early years practitioners, children, and families. Children's play has been chosen to form the basis of bringing parents and practitioners together to talk about partnership because because of its importance in the early years and the clear association with the well-being of children and families (Ginsburg, 2007). Play is also a shared activity in that both parents and practitioners will play with the children, and they will have something to learn from each other about how they play. In the early years children learn through play, and play is recognised as a 'characteristic of effective learning' in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Early Education, 2012, p.5). Early childhood research has highlighted the significant role of play as a key feature of learning at this age, closely tied to the development of cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical behaviours (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008).

Our intervention sessions were designed to help to strengthen the relationship between children, family members and practitioners, guided by Froebel's pedagogy and having play at the centre as the main integrating element in children's development and learning. Sharing ideas on play with parents can provide those links missing between the school and the home environment and offer ways to work with parents (Canning,

2011). The development of practitioner-parent relationships through the medium of play will allow the research team to examine more closely how these interventions might strengthen practitioner-parent collaborations, as well as how practitioner-parent collaboration can support the role of play as a core element of learning and children's well-being.

The focus of our research of this model is on the relationship which involves the triad of child, parent and practitioner. It follows the principle of collaboration and positive partnership, and builds on the understanding of shared responsibilities between parents and practitioners. As such, in this report, parental involvement and parent engagement are used interchangeably to refer to the partnership between practitioners/ teachers with parents/ carers.

The Project Team

The 4Ps Project, funded by The Froebel Trust (2016-2018) (Froebel Trust, 2017), brought together researchers and experts specialising in early childhood education and Froebelian Principles and Practice from three U.K. institutes (the University of Reading, The Open University and the University of Roehampton). Inspired by Froebel's principles, the project investigated a unique yet effective way of strengthening practitioners-parent collaboration through the use of Froebelian principles and pedagogy in early years education.

Parents, practitioners, and children were brought together through two twilight sessions built on a partnership model. This model allowed practitioners and parents to work together, discuss opportunities and challenges to their effective collaboration and enhance children's opportunities to play through holistic practice.

The project's main research question is: What should be the key features of a practitioner and parent education/CPD model for early years, aiming to promote parent-practitioner partnership based on Froebelian principles?

To successfully address the main research question, we began with a consideration of existing models of parent involvement, participation, and partnership in early years settings. We conducted a search of existing literature on programme models drawing

on the expertise of one of the project team whose specialty is working with parents, carers and families in the early years. Our appraisal of existing research led to the following key points of consideration:

- There are different types of involvement reflecting different levels of collaboration. Goodall & Montgomery (2014) indicate that there is a continuum (Parental Involvement to Parental Engagement) and the closer parents are to the parental engagement end of the continuum, the greater the benefits to children. However, there is evidence that any type of parental involvement can have a positive impact on children's learning, behaviour and attendance (National College for School Leadership, 2011).
- Parental engagement is a social practice that is affected by a parent's time, energy, and resources (such as transportation and childcare) (Calabrese Barton et al, 2004).
- Partnership between practitioners and families should be a two-way process, with attention to who holds the power in the 'partnership' (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010).
- Parents need to feel valued as effective partners (Hoover Dempsey et al, 2005)
- There is a suggestion that children be at the centre of the partnership (Melhuish et al, 2008).
- Not all parents are confident in engaging with settings (Devine 2004; Ball, 2003).
- Language barriers can make communication more challenging, and therefore parents and practitioners may lack knowledge or understanding of the opportunities to become involved (Dyson, cited in Murray et al, 2015)
- There are claims that models of partnership with parents lead to norms of white middle class expectation (Whitmarsh, 2011)

The literature clearly indicates that there are benefits for partnerships between practitioners and parents, but it is not always easy to facilitate these relationships (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Schools that successfully engage parents in learning, consistently reinforce the fact that 'parents matter'. They develop a two way relationship with parents based on mutual trust, respect and a commitment to

improving learning outcomes. (Harris & Goodall, 2007). There is a need to use a range of methods to facilitate communications (Murray et al, 2015), and settings need to recognise the changing demands on family life, the increase in demands upon workers and the reduction of interaction between parents and children due to technology (Knopf and Swick ,2007).

Considerations based on a review of literature

- Partnerships exist, to greater or lesser degrees, in all settings as there is a UK policy expectation for this to be in place.
- There is an evidence base which identifies best ways forward for effective partnerships
- It is important to give parents a voice, to engage them as equals and to explicitly acknowledge their role and engagement both in and beyond the setting.
- There are a number of sensitivities (assumptions of expertise held by participating practitioners; concerns of parents which may prevent engagement) that may become apparent during the research.

Assessing Local Practices and Needs

Based on these considerations, we then sought the input of parents and professionals at 5 nurseries to help us to understand local practices and needs with regard to parent and practitioner partnerships.

Designing Parent and Practitioner Education Sessions

Based on the findings from the review of literature and the feedback from the initial questionnaire, we designed 2 twilight sessions to bring parents, practitioners, and children together to think together about play as a platform for working in partnership. These sessions were delivered at the University of Reading in May 2017.

The Sessions

Twilight Partnership Session 1

Froebel's pedagogy was the first point of discussion, right after providing a historical and cultural context for Froebel's ideas and legacy. Emphasis was given to Froebel's

concept of unity, connectedness and ‘living with children’ (sharing our lives with children as parents and practitioners in a partnership in the interests of the child). Play was presented, from a Froebelian perspective, as a spiritual activity that helps children learn, but more importantly helps children to feel part of the world and fosters their well-being, as well as adult’s well-being (Froebel, c1826, trans 1912). Play was introduced not only as a way for practitioners to work with parents, recognising its potential in relation to supporting key relationships (Canning, 2011), but also as a way of bringing parents and practitioners together, and a way for parents to communicate with practitioners about their children’s interests and feelings.

The rest of the session focused on play being used as a partnership facilitator. The participants worked in small groups and shared their perceptions and experiences in relation to parental engagement. The importance of effective communication as a key element of meaningful partnerships was explored in relation to a) possible barriers, b) the benefits to the children and c) safeguarding. The participants explored effective ways of sharing information about sensitive issues. Finally, footage of children’s play formed the basis of group discussion about play from a Froebelian perspective, which offered a deeper understanding of the importance of play and how it can be used to facilitate partnership, by encourage the sharing of information.

Twilight Partnership Session 2

The second session explored Froebel’s pedagogic principles in relation to cultivating quality interactions through ‘slow practice’. This was explored in relation to integrating mind, body and spirit and the importance of slowing down and giving time to children to play and construct their learning at their own pace highlighting the fact that every child is different. The participants were invited to share their ideas about how adopting a ‘slow practice approach’ would impact their life. This was discussed with regards to enhancing learning, being involved in day-to-day activities and taking part in decision making processes (Epstein et al., 2009).

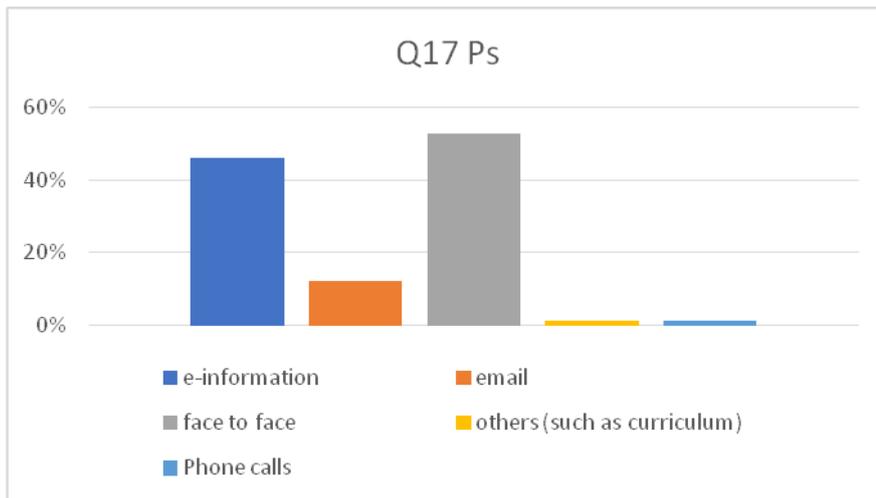
Finally, the participants worked together to reconceptualise the notion of partnership by discussing this in small groups, to illustrate partnership using markers on a large sheet of paper, and present their illustration and rationale to all groups. Discussions

focused on key elements of effective partnerships (such as trust and collaboration), barriers to establishing partnerships (such as a lack of time/funding and multiculturalism/language) as well as strategies to overcome these barriers. Some strategies were explored further, such as reflective discussions, sharing positive play experiences, and role-play activities. The agreed overall aim of such strategies was identified to be the attempt to build relationships of trust between practitioners and parents.

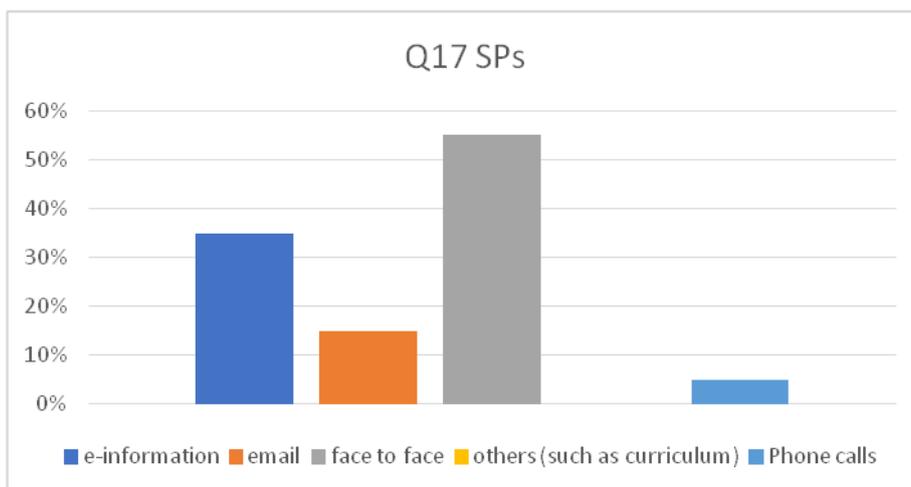
Findings from the Questionnaires

As the project is still ongoing, we are currently able to provide a summary of the preliminary data analysis of the pre- and post- session questionnaire. In relation to the pre-session questionnaire, it is very clear that both the parents and the practitioners (about 80%) felt that they are either very interested or involved in the parental engagement prior to the sessions, while at least half of them felt extremely interested or involved. This was slightly increased after the completion of the sessions, to (85%) (figures 1 and 2).

Although 75% the Practitioners consider home visits as a means of communication (as part of Q16), only 12.36% parents agree (figures 3 and 4). This might be because not all families receive a home visit which leads to parents having different perceptions. Both the parents (53%) and the practitioners (55%) feel that daily face to face communication or parent meetings is the main way of communication with each other (figures 1 to 2) in Q.17. This is also the case after the completion of the sessions, as both stakeholders see face to face meetings as the main vehicle for communication used currently in their experience. However, there are some evidence that some settings are considering and trying new ways of communication, such as social media (Facebook, Twitter), but also more attempts to open conversations around the learning taking place (and not solely focusing on routines e.g. eating, sleeping etc).



(figure 1)



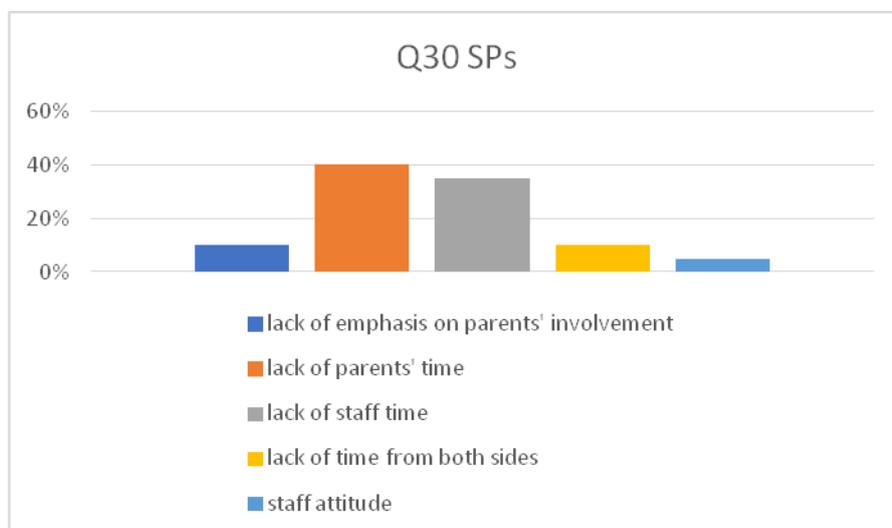
(figure 2)

In addition, it is interesting to note that 45% practitioners perceive ‘Sports Day’ (45%) and Fundraising (65%) as a way of involving parents in their children’s learning experiences. The same options only received 15.73% and 25.84% of parents respectively (figures 5-6). This suggests that perhaps for practitioners, parental engagement is not limited to a “learning” or classroom domain, something which may differ for parents. Furthermore, while the 40% of practitioners think the main way of involving parents in the children’s learning experiences is to have parents’ meetings or face to face chats, only 26% of the parents agree. Also, 35% of the parents see activities such as ‘Stay and Play’ sessions to be more important for them and their children. The same view is also shared by 35% of the practitioners, however, 35% of

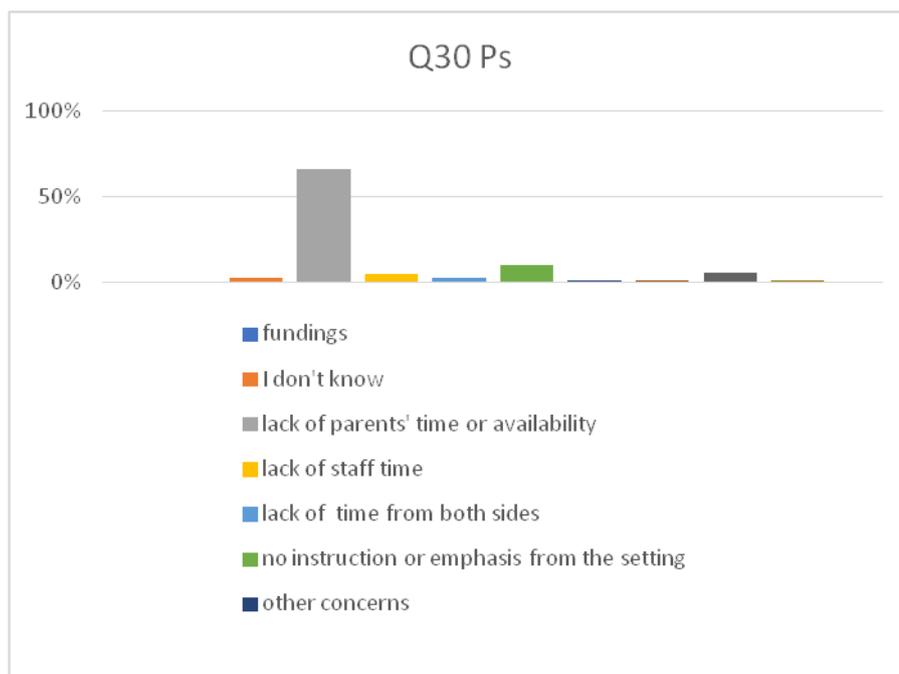
the practitioners still consider fundraising, fairs or any social events as a main way of involving the parents in children’s learning experiences.

In relation to ‘Face to Face Meetings’ it appears that parents do not identify this as an effective way of identifying parental needs. While the majority of the practitioners (90%) saw this as the main way to identify parents’ needs, only 44.94% of the parents thought the same (figure 7-8). Instead, over half of the parents thought that either ‘Word of Mouth’ or ‘Surveys’ were the most common way of identifying parental needs, while many of them felt that there were no specific efforts to identify their needs at all. This may suggest that when two groups meet formally, parents may find it difficult to discuss their needs directly with the practitioners. Yet, an informal chat or an anonymous/ non-direct way of communication (i.e. survey) might make it easier for parents to express their thoughts and needs.

Finally, it is important to note that while 40% and 35% of the practitioners believe respectively that parents’ and staff’s lack of time (respectively) is the main barrier to parental engagement (see Q.30), a total of 66% of the parents attribute the main barrier to their own lack of time or availability during the settings’ opening hours, rather than the practitioners’ lack of time. Nevertheless, 10% of parents think that the practitioners need to be been more proactive or highlight more the importance of parent involvement to the parents, by offering more opportunities for sharing and active involvement.



(figure 5)



(figure 6)

Findings from the Interviews

After the twilight sessions, 9 parents and 5 practitioners (including 2 setting managers) were recruited in July and August 2017, for a follow-up interview. All of the participants that were interviewed were female. The interviews were an opportunity to gain the participants perspectives on the sessions, on the Froebelian principles regarding play and connectedness and on partnerships between practitioners and parents. Findings from an initial analysis reveal that most participants found the sessions to be beneficial. More specifically, the sessions seemed to give them a platform for thinking together about the importance of partnership and the key elements of effective communication and trust.

1. The experiences of Parental Involvement (PI) before the sessions

When asked to summarise their experience of PI at the nurseries where their children attend, as a whole, the majority of participants gave very positive responses overall. Typical comments included using words such as “very good, positive, trusting, friendly, hospitable, welcoming, welcomed” and “collaborative” or “collaboration”. While some participants perceived PI as “informal” or “quite informal” which might lead to a feeling of being less valued as suggested by interview data, not all

participants, however, felt as positive. Both parents and practitioners had the following to say: “I think it’s limited. It happens, but it is limited”, “I think our conversations are very short. They are like very quick”, “Verbal communication, short communications”.

The interviews revealed that some parents and practitioners were clearly aware that time constraints affect the quality of communication between home and nursery. The time constraint has acted as one of the major barriers in PI.

When asked what PI means in practice to participants, practitioners did acknowledge that parents’ contribution play a crucial role in maintaining links with parents to develop stronger partnership in PI. As Practitioners A2 commented, “It is a three-way thing. Parent involvement is actually us listening to those parents and using their knowledge to fulfil what we’re doing because actually it is a three-way thing. It should come from all of us: the children and the parents and the staff.” Also “It’s about that dialogue with parents at the very beginning when you first, that’s what, that partnership aspect is what you can’t do your best by the children unless you have that relationship with the parents.”

These responses reflect a desire to work in partnership in the interests of children, and an understanding that there will be challenges.

2. The possible effect of the sessions

Some parents expressed more concerns from the perspective of enhancing child’s learning through a genuine partnership: “Well, to me, I like to understand where I can support my son’s learning. I don’t see nursery and home life as completely separate; I see them very much as a teamwork experience. So if there’s something that he’s expected to be learning in nursery I want to know ways that I can reinforce things at home [...] it’s just [like] we are trying more at the [twilight] sessions to speak more regularly and share ideas and make sure we are genuinely in partnership than two separate care giving units.” Similarly, another parent mentioned: “It means exactly what it says: just getting involved a little bit more at the nursery. And I don’t think I would sort of get physically involved like do any kind of volunteer work or anything

like that but I don't think I would get involved with other people's children either. But getting involved with my own child's development I guess would mean taking a bit more time to look through some of his learning journey books and find out what exactly he's been doing on a day-to-day basis."

Participants' responses reflect what Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) propose are the three main constructs believed to be central to PI:

- Parents' understanding of what they are supposed to do;
- Sense of efficacy that they can help children;
- Sense that children and schools want them to be involved.

The twilight sessions helped parents and practitioners come together on neutral ground (neither at a setting nor in a home) to talk with each other on a topic (play) that is common to both of them.

3. Barriers to Partnership

The interviews gave us an opportunity to find out from parents and practitioners about the challenges and barriers they perceive in partnerships. The barriers we present here are time, communication, training and issues related to diversity and culture. These were the most salient in our findings.

3.1 Time

Lack of time was the major barrier that all participants referred to in the interviews. Findings from the questionnaires reflected the same pattern. This might in particular be an issue for British parents as according to BBC's report (2011, noted in Wilson, 2015), workers work for longer hours in the UK than most of their counterparts in the rest of Europe. A parent commented: "I think another big, I mean a big barrier for any of the practitioners is time, and the parents, is time [...] The reality is when is the best time of day to ever get together with the parents and the child or are the parents and form little groups. It's very hard to get an opinion." Another parent said: "So lack of staff time, lack of parents' time, I guess the number of children that each person has to care for."

While it is so challenging to find more time in today's busy parenting life and also "make this possible without putting additional pressure on parents and also to enable practitioners to do their jobs effectively" (Wilson, 2015, p. 84), Wilson (2015) and Fleischmann and de Haas (2016) suggest the idea of time investment: "[...]so rather than thinking along those lines, you might want to consider alternatives rather than additions; smart thinking strategies which save time [...] It can be seen as an investment rather than a drain on time" (Wilson, 2015, p. 84). Parent W had a resonance with this strategy. She suggested that practitioners and the setting should spend more time in the beginning "to make the investment of the time to make sure that they understand what [the child] is up to".

3.2 Communication

Partnership working with parents does not always go smoothly. There was no shortage of evidence in the present study of a communication gap between parents and practitioners in this respect, which is presented below through a number of examples. One example was that several parents commented that they felt the message conveyed by the settings, which could be given either face to face, in a weekly update newsletter or a phone call on a day-to-day basis, were either "*generic*" or '*irrelevant*' information to their own child. Under such circumstances, parents felt the ineffective communication which simply, in one parent's words, "wasted some time messaging me about that" , as the parent's time was not spent on the exchange of child-related information on a busy day.

Another experience of lack of communication reported by a parent was that one practitioner called her to update some information about the child which was actually passed over to another practitioner by herself in the morning, something that demonstrated a communication gap between practitioners.

Another aspect related to the level of communication is the depth. "*Superficial*" was the word participants used: "I think a lot of practitioners don't really know how to actually ask the right questions sometimes. I think it's very superficial sometimes [...] I think I was aware of that superficial communication, I think. And I think because I

go to all the nurseries in the group and because of my collecting my granddaughter I was aware of those same things, that superficial feedback, that superficial - I'm chatting at the end of the day, I'm collecting my child and thinking this isn't good enough. We need to do more to develop that relationship" (a setting manager).

The twilight sessions gave parents and practitioners an opportunity to discuss a topic of common interest that was directly related to their common interests with the children. Both parents and practitioners appreciated the opportunity to work together and develop relationships of trust. A parent specifically said "The biggest thing for me was the chance to engage better with the staff from my own setting. Having the discipline of being outside of the setting and meeting up separately for those two sessions, we've never done anything like that before. It's like meeting these people outside of work and thinking oh, you know, there's two sides to this." A practitioner similarly noted that it was beneficial "...being able to talk to other parents that weren't attending our (setting) but had other experiences from other settings. You realise you're not alone."

Because of the limited communication between parents and practitioners which took place from time to time, new issues came to the fore. Some parents and practitioners felt uncertain about each other's genuine interest of PI: "Some parents are very interested to talk about the child and tell us things about the child. But some others they are not very interested to listen about their child's day, they just want to come and pick their child up and go home. Some of them they are not, they don't want to listen." A practitioner commented that "Because sometimes there are parents who want to know more about their children. They need more time to talk. I can see that maybe because we are busy. I can see it's something they [my colleagues] do not like. They are thinking like "I need to go inside", or "I need to go home."

After the twilight partnership sessions, many parents and practitioners acknowledge the importance of timely, useful and genuine two-way communication in PI. They had also been aware of and also agreed that they need to take the initiative and voice themselves: "I think it made me realise that the onus is on me just as much. I think I used to expect them to come and approach me every day and I would go well they

didn't bother to speak to me today; whereas now I'm much more aware that it's a two-way thing." Similarly, a parent said: "I think it's that relationship that is key and that's right from the very beginning. But you build on that, you can't suddenly assume that parents know what your role is, you've got to be able to express that and talk about that; what you're doing at the setting with them."

In addition, while all parent participants recognised the importance of shared responsibilities with practitioners for children's learning and development, out of 9 parents, there were 4 parents who expressed explicitly their views of treating settings as customer service-oriented domains, which has an impact on their expectations for communication: "...the ways to get the messages across to parents is more important in some senses than what the children are achieving – because the parents are the ones who are trusting the care providers, they're paying for it and pay a lot of money for it as well. And to get minimal feedback from your childcare setting is quite hard." Another parent said, "[...] now all of a sudden they're going to have to be paying for things and as soon as you pay for time you feel you need to take the most advantage of it you can, so you don't want to sit there and have this good long chat with your childcare provider because you want them to be now looking after your child while you go get on with whatever you wanted to do [...] So I suppose there's a lot of tricky little issues... having to deal with people. People's time and money and those are things that people hold very dear and so you're also dealing with individual personalities which I think must be very difficult."

3.3 Training

Training staff in working with parents is generally beneficial as it can be a positive move in supporting those who feel unprepared for the process of parent partnerships, or practitioners who may have positive views on their approach to parental involvement but struggle to practically implement any successful strategies. Goodall and Vorhaus (2010, p.7) highlight that "to engage effectively with parents, staff require training and coaching, particularly when working with parents whose backgrounds are very different to their own". One of the practitioners who has a non-British background, experienced the difficulties. As a new and inexperienced member

of staff, she encountered a lot of practical and psychological challenges: “I don’t have to say something about their children because that’s not proper. They [those thoughts] are in my mind. Nobody told me anything about you shouldn’t say. Nobody tells me anything, or any limit. But I feel that maybe if I told them your baby is crying all the day, it’s something.... That is not going to be... they are not going to feel good. To be honest, it’s not proper. When the interviewer asked if she had training for this, the practitioner indicated that she did, but that it was brief: “it was more for the routines. I learned the routines in the nursery but not for how to talk with parents, how to be with the children.”

Parents also responded with a similar feeling about not being ‘trained’ to be a parent, or to work as a partner with a practitioner. It is not every parent who felt confident about what they were supposed to do: “I mean we are parents because we have, I mean we have not been trained to be parents but some parts are just intuition” (Parent J4). As such, parents also need support from the setting and practitioners in developing their own skills and understanding of childcare or child development so as to contribute to the child’s development.

3.4 Issues of diversity and culture

People have become much more mobile than ever before. We can expect that many nursery settings in urban centers will have cultural and linguistic diversity. It is important to acknowledge and support families in their experiences of crossing cultures, and living as a family that may feel different than the majority culture. A parent gave an example of how feeling different affected her. Her daughter came to the setting with a hair style that reflected her cultural heritage. Yet, it caused ‘restlessness’ among the practitioners. When asked the question of what kind of benefits parental involvement can bring, the mother gave the following responses: “For the setting - I think it gives them an insight to know what a child’s home life is because everyone comes from different backgrounds and things [...] So when she comes in with a different hairstyle and then they were making a big deal of it and I’m thinking, to me, this is nothing, but to them they’re just like wow she looks different. ... I’m just doing her hair, this is what I do for everyone else. Would you comment on everyone else? It kind of makes it a centrepiece when it doesn’t really

need to be – which was one of the things that used to get on my nerves. But they appreciate that now so they don't mention it”

In addition, there was also a practitioner who raised the concern of facing or experiencing “negative consequences” if a more open dialogue took place between them and parents. *Fear* was the word used, even though the *fear* was completely subjective according to what they reported. For example, the practitioner was new to the nursery, inexperienced and unaware of what kind of information could be exchanged between her and parents: “For example, if one child scratched another child, or was pushing his friends. And you need to let his parents know what he did. Maybe the parents do not have any adequate reaction. (you might think to yourself) ... Maybe next time I need to be quiet.... Because maybe they think you are not doing your job properly. You can feel that it is your fault. So maybe next time you need to be quiet.”

3.5 Froebelian principles

With regard to Froebelian principles, only a few practitioners had been familiar with Froebel prior to the sessions, and none of the parents. All of the interviewees noted that they found Froebel's ideas to be intriguing and resonant to their own desires for what is in a child's best interests. Given that most participants were not familiar with Froebel prior to these sessions, it is not surprising that many articulated a surface level understanding of Froebel's ideas, such as recognising the ‘importance of play’ and practice that is ‘led by the child’ rather than aspects of Froebel's principles that were discussed in the session such as unity and connectedness, the spiritual quality of play, and the importance of making oneself present as a companion ‘living with children.’ However, the sessions offered the opportunity to the participants to view play from a Froebelian perspective, as a means for recognising the unity and connectedness of children with their families, communities, and settings/schools. Finally, it is possible that because of the sessions, both parents and practitioners are trying to communicate more regularly and more meaningfully, which is a key aspect of effective partnerships. The need for further sessions and/or other opportunities for the two parties to work together and build partnerships was apparent, which clearly points to the necessity for similar activities to take place in the future.

Conclusion

Throughout the project's duration (Nov. 2016 – Dec. 2017), the importance of parental involvement and the positive impact the twilight sessions can have on parents and practitioners became evident. The project demonstrated the multidimensional character of parental involvement, as the evidence gathered indicates that many complex yet dynamic contextual factors shape and determine parental involvement. The project recognises this complexity and suggests for parents and practitioners to have systematic opportunities to discuss and share ideas, in order to develop trust relationships and constructive partnerships between them.

Our assessment of the parents' and practitioners' views on partnership working gave us insight on how to further support working together in the interests of children. With play as a starting point, we found that both parents and practitioners could come together to think about a topic in which they both had experience and power. This further underscores the relevance of a distinctly Froebelian approach to practitioner and parent education.

Parents share meaning and knowledge with their children through engagement in everyday activities, as well as in play, and they continue to support their children's learning once they enter institutional settings, such as nurseries or child care. Once children enter institutional child care or educational environments, the scope of their experiences and relationships with other people widens (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Effective and meaningful collaboration, as an essential part of practitioners' and parents' partnership, requires mutual respect and recognition of the contribution each key agent makes towards children's development (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). In addition, collaboration entails reflection, exchange of knowledge and coming together to generate creativity and innovation (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), so as to support all children educationally, socially, and emotionally. Even though there is a broad understanding of the role parents can take, which includes talking, listening, role modelling and managing expectations, as well as ensuring school attendance (Muschamp, Wikeley, Ridge & Balarin, 2007), practice often falls short of the ideal (Epstein et al., 2009; Wilson, 2015) as some educational settings do not promote

effective and meaningful partnership opportunities between practitioners and parents (Phtiaka, 2008; Baum & Montgomery-Schwartz, 2004). This is the case even though partnerships have a solid theoretical background and are supported both rhetorically and by legislation by the Department of Education in the UK, due to a variety of reasons; such as the managerial discourse within UK educational settings that constructs parents as potential consumers (Laluvein, 2010), or the challenges faced when performance in schools is prioritised over creativity (Rogers, 2007). Additional barriers to collaboration in practitioners' and parents' everyday lives include lack of time, past negative experiences, as well as different interpretations of what collaboration is and how it can take place (Pieridou, 2013).

The 4Ps Project focused on the development of a changing practitioner-parent partnership that recognises the complexity of their relationship and the positive impact a constructive partnership may have for children and their learning outcomes, both in their life and overall well-being. To encourage and support the development of this constructive relationship, this project was built upon the Froebelian principles of (a) the relationship of every child to family and community and (b) the role of play and creativity as central integrating elements in development and learning (Brehony, 2009). At the core of the project are the elements of the Froebelian pedagogy such as the power of play, the importance of knowledgeable and appropriately qualified staff, and the need for early years settings to be an integral part of the community, working in close partnership with parents and other skilled adults.

We found the sessions to be successful in these aims, and are further evaluating the post-session data to determine a set of recommendations for parent-practitioner partnership working.

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