

Playing through grief

Respecting the wisdom of a young child

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This article illustrates the importance of retaining play as central in the educational provision for early years children. A reduction in provision could result from recent changes in educational policy on young children in the UK. While the author would agree that raising standards is important, the introduction of more formalised teaching strategies for children under six years of age fails to acknowledge a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Tricia David, an early years lecturer at Canterbury Christchurch College, identified a 'Gaderene rush' to formal reading and writing in the British early years curriculum in 1993 and asserts that this has been actively encouraged by UK government education policy (Mills and Mills 1998).

Recent changes in educational policy in the UK, such as the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 and the National Numeracy Strategy in 1999, promote a more formalised delivery of the early years curriculum.

Macey (1999) argues that the review of the national curriculum did not take into account the concerns expressed by early years and Key Stage 1 teachers about the top-down, subject-divided model of learning that characterises it, or what they see as the questionable and inappropriate learning objectives that are a part of its design.

In addition, baseline assessment scales were introduced which claimed to measure children's achievements. Macey further argues that the main purpose of this assessment is to evaluate schools and teachers, based on the value added to children's achievements. This can be measured through their scores on baseline assessment scales and can then be linked with their scores in Key Stage 1 SATs (Statutory Assessment Tasks).

I believe that knowing the level of understanding in the class is important for planning purposes, and good practice would dictate some kind of baseline assessment process. However, overall scores are only useful for the teacher and school evaluation aspect of the scheme and do not benefit the individual child. Macey asserts, and I would agree, that this can make parents, teachers and children feel anxious and pressurised. These changes are forcing many good early years practitioners to abandon a play-based curriculum. There is a danger that the Sure Start (DFEE 1999) initiatives may result in a pre-

scribed curriculum for the under-threes which is also developmentally inappropriate and focused on the wrong kinds of achievement.

Consequently, opportunities to learn through play are being lost in early years' classrooms and the balance between teacher-directed learning and child-initiated learning is shifting in favour of the former.

This article illustrates the importance of maintaining opportunities for unstructured play to enable children to make sense of their experiences and to learn from them. It also acknowledges the intrinsic wisdom of the child to know how to do this through play.

The article includes a case study of a three-year-old child whose mother died. It begins with placing the study in context. The education in her school nursery class provided her with an environment in which she was shown warmth, care and respect. She was held both emotionally and physically and supported through her pain. In this atmosphere she gained the confidence to make sense of her experience by choosing and experimenting with materials and by engaging with stories in books and film. In this rich, varied and child-centred environment the adults stayed with the child's choices. They stayed with the child's not knowing and being uncertain. This was accepted as part of her new learning. She was learning to live without her mother. She was supported while she tried things out, explored and became curious. In all these ways she made sense of the world and came to terms with her loss. This remarkable story shows the capacity of a young child to explore, research, generate and modify her own working theories. Could such opportunities to learn be under threat in the present climate as a play-based curriculum is squeezed out in favour of a more subject-divided model of learning?

Those people planning and implementing educational programs need to consider that play is the metaphorical language of children and that to ignore its importance for the developing child is potentially damaging. In addition, children learn best within the context of rich relationships with others. Loris Malaguzzi, founder and past director of the Department of Early Education in the Italian region of Reggio Emilia argues:

What children learn does not follow as an automatic result from what is taught. Rather, it is in large part due to the children's own doing as a consequence of their activities and our resources. (Malaguzzi 1993, p.59)

MAKING SENSE OF EXPERIENCE IN OUR WORLD

My experience as an early years teacher has shown me that when a child is managing a major transition in life, e.g. loss, then an early years curriculum that acknowledges the importance of play and the child's choice of activity allows the most learning to occur. Indeed young children negotiating an acute loss experience or other all-absorbing emotional experience are often unable to engage with planned educational activities.

I am aware as an adult that my own experience of loss and the losses of other adults are continually negotiated through interaction. My observations inform me that this is also the case for young children. This interaction includes relationships with others, places, both physical and imagined, and the world of objects (Hunt 1998). My work as a

bereavement counsellor with adults and as an early years educator has taught me that loss and the grief that follows it is a complex and long-lasting process.

Freud's (1917) papers on mourning were seminal in constructing bereavement theories, which occupy a central position in bereavement therapy and counselling today. Bowlby's (1960, 1969, 1973, 1980) work on attachment and loss, and Parkes and Bowlby's (1970) consequent development of these ideas and application to adult grief experience, form the basis of present-day psychodynamically based theory. These theories attempt to simplify the process and reduce it to a stage model, resulting either in a healthy acceptance or a pathological non-acceptance of the loss (Parkes 1965a, 1965b, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1996). Parkes (1971) also writes about grief and describes it as a psychosocial transition, with a more cognitive slant. It is also a process by which we adapt to major change in life. These models are useful because they simplify a complex process and give it some structure, but in trying to provide a learning environment for young children I am aware of the inadequacies of these models in explaining the need for multiple opportunities for the child, who is experiencing the pain of grief, to interact with others and their environment through play and story.

Ingram, Hunt and Robson (1999) argue that the complexity of grief must be acknowledged and accepted. Hunt (1998) also argues that there is a 'grieving self'. That is, a part of the self that is always grieving. This is not always conscious, nor is it pathological. It just exists. There are times when the intensity and pain of loss is tremendous many years after a loss. A trigger from the environment can result in a sudden rush of feeling and it is as if the time since the loss had never elapsed. The sight of a Christmas tree can bring back the pain of loss to a child for many years after the experience. This knowledge is undocumented but has become known to me through my work as a counsellor and teacher over a number of years.

Of course, young children have many experiences of loss. There is not only loss through death, as is the focus in the case study presented in this article, but also for example, loss of a certain home life or parent through separation and divorce, loss of a healthy parent, or loss of friends due to transitions between different education and care settings. One adult that I have interviewed for research was aware of the loss of a safe childhood due to various forms of abuse (Hunt 1999).

In my work with both adults and children I have noticed that people make use of many different media to negotiate and make sense of their experiences. These can include books and stories, poems, films, pictures, soap opera, lyrics and music of popular songs, and many more. All the opportunities open to people are articulated through lived cultures. This means everything in a culture that enables the process of making sense of experience. Mulhearn (1980, p.32) captures the essence of culture where he defines it as:

The complex unity of those practices that produce sense. In simple terms the everyday life experience, i.e. the experience that enables us to produce sense and construct our reality.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF FINDING MYSELF WITHIN THE STORY OF ANOTHER

I will continue the argument that an early years curriculum should include play, access to chosen stories and free choice of activity, by illustrating the concept of 'finding myself within the story of another'. This is how good stories work. There is something communicated to the reader or listener that enables an intensive engagement with the story. Bettelheim (1978, p.6) explains the uses of enchantment in fairy tales:

The more I try to understand why these stories are so successful at enriching the inner life of the child, the more I realised that these tales, in a much deeper sense than any other reading material, start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being. They speak about his severe inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understands, and without belittling the most serious inner struggles which growing up entails, offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions.

A mechanical delivery of a story to children via the National Literacy Strategy by an unimaginative educator can take away the engagement with the story. Of course, effective educators can offer stories and poems in a creative way to children, but large classes of very young mixed-age-group children with the lack of a classroom assistant to support can impede the educator's ability to do this when structuring a lesson within the constraints of the National Literacy Strategy. The Strategy also requires that children work independently of the teacher on tasks, which if not carefully planned, allowing for the developmental stage of the young children, can result in activity that does not encourage appreciation of the story and does not allow the psychological engagement that Bettelheim describes.

My own experience of this intense engagement can be illustrated by the following account. I was fortunate enough to attend a writer's workshop in London facilitated by the American/Irish poet, Michael Donaghy. Michael introduced me to a poem that I was emotionally moved by and found myself repeatedly returning to. This repeated returning to a story or poem behaviour is familiar to educators of young children. Often, they will repeatedly ask for the same story or poem to be read to them. The poem that stimulated this response in me is as follows:

The Story of the White Cup

I am not sure why I want to tell it
 Since the cup was not mine and I was not there,
 and it may not have been white after all.
 When I tell it, though, it is white, and the girl
 To whom it has just been given, by her mother,
 Is eight. She is holding a white cup against her breast,
 and her mother has just said goodbye, though those
 could not have been, exactly, the words. No one knows
 what her father has said, but when I tell it,
 he is either helping someone very old with a bag,
 a worn valise held in place with a rope,
 or asking a guard for a cigarette. There is, of course,

no cigarette. The cattle trucks stand with their doors
 slid back. They are black inside, and the girl
 who has just been given a cup and told to walk
 in a straight line and told to look like she wants
 a drink of water, who screamed in the truck
 all the way to the station, who knew, at eight,
 where she was going, is holding a cup to her breast
 and walking away, going nowhere, for water.
 She does not turn, but when she has found water,
 which she does, in all versions of the story, everywhere,
 she takes a small sip of it, and swallows.

Roger Mitchell for Helen

When I thought about the sadness this evoked in me, I concluded that it was because the poem was about a mother and father taking an opportunity to save their child's life in desperate circumstances. The price they paid was never seeing her again and knowing that they would not be there for her in life. On a cognitive level this explanation satisfied me. I was moved to tears but felt unable to express this within the group of strangers where I first heard the poem read.

As time went by I began to come to different layers of understanding and realised that the part of me that is always grieving, that is, the 'grieving self', was touched by this experience and I had begun to interact with it. When I was a young child I spent some time separated from my parents and have come to realise that this early separation has had a profound effect on my life. This poem enables me to revisit that loss and to express some of the sadness from that time through the process of aesthetic distance. The poem is a metaphor that I recognise. In this way I seek out the cultural experiences surrounding me and choose, from a vast array, the expressions that enable my understanding and acceptance of my life experience.

When young children are fed a diet of literature which is decided for them on all occasions, it denies them the opportunity to fully engage with their own choices. Of course, in order to engage at all some teacher-chosen literature must be offered. However, too rigid a program with no opportunity for repeated reading of personally selected literature denies the child the opportunity to experience and process that life experience through the metaphors offered in the chosen story

SOPHISTICATED IMAGERY

Before practising as a teacher, I had always thought that young children produced simple images. With the awareness that adults make use of all aspects of everyday cultural experience to make sense of their lives, I began to piece together the things I know about young children in this respect. While a student teacher on teaching practice with a class of six- and seven-year-olds I was keen to encourage creative writing. My tutor at the university assured me that it was unnecessary to teach young children to write poetry. His advice was to provide them with an environment rich in poetry and in their own time

they will begin to compose poems and leave them on my desk or slip them into my pocket as had been his experience. The practice lasted six weeks and by the fifth week there was no sign of a spontaneous poetry despite the rich provision. Finally, I resorted to a writing frame using a four-line simile structure. This would be acceptable within the Literacy Strategy as a way into writing poetry for young children:

My ... (loved one) is like a piece of furniture.

My ... (loved one) is like a time of day.

My ... (loved one) is like a piece of fruit.

My ... (loved one) is like an animal.

After a few minutes, Roland, a six-year-old child, put down his pencil. I looked at his work; I was unable to read it, as it was illegible. I asked Roland to read it to me. This is what he read:

My grandmother is like a chest full of fish that you cannot move.

She's not like any time of day.

She's like night.

She's not like any kind of fruit.

She's like a stone.

She's not like any kind of animal.

She's like a dead one.

I was astounded by the sophisticated imagery in Roland's poem. He hadn't given it a lot of thought but it was extremely powerful. Knowing that Roland was the child from a second relationship and his father was in his early seventies and his grandmother in her early nineties, I felt that he had portrayed this frail, elderly woman so beautifully.

I became aware that a child as young as Roland could find similes that expressed so vividly and communicated so clearly his understanding of his grandmother. Not being able to write had not prevented him from creating this poem.

This example shows how the National Literacy Strategy could be very powerful in providing a structure for engagement with ideas and creativity for children of this age. However, without the opportunity to play and develop creativity in the younger years, this later experience could be less rich. Roland had experienced a very good nursery and reception class environment in which the curriculum was taught through play.

Roland's poem and other experiences I gained from teaching young children helped me to begin to form some ideas about the considerable depth of feeling and ability to express this depth within people. Whatever their age there seemed to be a capacity to access deep feelings and to express them. I became interested in what people, i.e. adults and children, actually did to make sense of their loss experiences. Worden (1982, 1991) argues that there are tasks of mourning to complete in grief in order to come to an acceptance of the loss. I was beginning to question the narrowness of Worden's (1982, 1991) list of tasks. It seemed to me that accepting the loss, experiencing the pain and expressing

this by talking about it was only part of the story. Literature in all its forms, other art forms and play seem to offer an arena for negotiation of the experience of loss. The loss of time for young children to soak up these stories, poems and play experiences cannot be replaced by a content-led curriculum.

A CASE STUDY

I would also argue for the continuation of an early years curriculum that values the freedom to choose activities in a carefully prepared and rich environment for learning. The experience I had of teaching a grieving child further strengthens the idea that a content-led curriculum is not beneficial in enabling the child to make sense of experience and to learn from her experience. Indeed, the Rumbold Report, constructed before the recent UK policy changes, supports this view:

The educator working with under fives must pay careful attention, not just to the content of the child's learning, but also to the way in which that learning is offered to and experienced by the child, and the role of all those involved in the process. Children are affected by the context in which learning takes place, the people involved in it, and the values and beliefs, which are embedded in it. For the early years educator, therefore, the *process* of education – how children are encouraged to learn – is as important as, and inseparable from, the *content* – what they learn. We believe that this principle must underlie all curriculum planning for the under fives. (DES 1990, paras 67-8, original emphasis)

As an experienced teacher, I was teaching in a nursery class in a primary school when I met the child that I will call Sally. The following information is offered to the reader to help place this learning experience in context. Sally was born prematurely after an induced delivery. Her mother had cancer and could only be given the necessary treatment after the birth. During the first three years of her life her sick mother who was a single parent cared for Sally. She had no contact with her father. When Sally arrived at the nursery she had many difficulties. Her physical development had been affected by the early-induced birth and she had great difficulty making sounds due to a damaged respiratory system. She was small for her age, unable to express herself verbally apart from a few basic words. Her behaviour was uncontrollable from her mother's point of view. A health visitor who had seen her kicking her mother, who was too ill to manage her behaviour, had referred her to the nursery. She also tipped the contents of the health visitor's bag onto the floor and climbed across the furniture to physically land on her from behind the sofa.

Over the first few weeks Sally became settled. She responded positively to the nursery environment, which was characterised by the emphasis on creating the right psychological climate for growth and development. As staff in the nursery, we were aware of the centrality of the relationship between the children and ourselves and we aimed to create relationships characterised by Rogers' (1957) core conditions. In short, this could be experienced as acceptance, honesty and non-possessive love. It was our aim to show

the children respect, to accept them as individuals with choices and preferences. We also aimed to be 'real', for example, to make it clear that as adults we were responsible for them and at times we would make decisions for them in their best interests and that other times they could make their own decisions. In this way we constantly struggled to maintain relationships with the children, characterised by Rogers' core conditions. In addition we provided a child-centred environment in which children could be independent in tasks and in deciding upon tasks. This was carefully balanced with a planned and taught educational program based on accurate, continuous assessment and record-keeping that met the needs of the children in our care. Sally's grief began before her mother died. Three months into her time with us in the nursery her mother was admitted to a local hospice. Sally was now living with her mother's aunt and family and was visiting her mother daily. She became very distressed around this time. She was separated from her mother and, due to the nature of her mother's illness, unable to get physically close to her because of the pain this would cause. Also, her mother towards the end of her life felt unable to touch or talk to Sally. Sally saw her mother disintegrating before her and the sadness was profound.

When Sally's mother eventually died, Sally entered a very dark phase. She came each day to the nursery carried by her mother's aunt, who was also distraught with grief. She was physically limp and constantly crying, sobbing or moaning. She was unable to express herself verbally and called out every so often 'mammy, mammy'. The staff at the nursery felt completely helpless. She was in a state of complete despair and we found her pain unbearable.

My counselling experience and my experience as a teacher made me aware that it was important for Sally not to feel alone but at the same time I was also aware that the pain had to be accepted. It was decided that we would enable the crying and accept it. We held her physically close. She insisted on being carried around the nursery and would not tolerate being left alone anywhere. This behaviour continued for some weeks. This seem to mirror the observations made by the Robinsons in the 1950s of children left in hospital at this age, and Bowlby's consequent work on Attachment Theory. Sally exhibited the identified behaviour on separation from the main caregiver, observed by Bowlby (1980). Gradually, Sally became content to be left for a few minutes but this corresponded with a huge resistance to any change in the nursery, no matter how small. She would not tolerate any furniture being moved or wall displays being changed without great upset. She was very unwilling to allow new adults or children to enter the physical space and would physically attack any newcomers to the nursery.

As her teacher I was becoming increasingly concerned for Sally and also began to feel de-skilled as a professional; why couldn't I find some key to unlock her distress and unhappiness and make it better for her? I would have given many things to see her feel better. However, it was not to be for some months.

Sally was exhibiting all the identified behaviours associated with mourning: panic, crying out loud; searching in places over and over again; wandering; being unable to settle; and having very little ability to concentrate (Parkes 1970). She was unable to play,

uninterested in being with other children, uninterested in mark-making or books and stories. At home she wanted to watch a video made of her mother at the hospice's Christmas party over and over again almost every afternoon. For the following three years at Christmas, following her mother's death, Sally would collapse in a sobbing heap at the sight of our school Christmas tree. She also found the sight of any man in clerical clothing unbearable. I can only assume that a priest had visited her mother and maybe had contact with the family after her death. Slowly and almost imperceptibly she started to take part in the life of the nursery and she began by playing alone. She would not tolerate other children near her when she played and would forcibly evict anyone who tried to join in or play alongside her.

She began by selecting a plastic polar bear and its baby in the small world water polar area of the nursery. She spent hours playing the same identically repeated game in the coloured-blue, cold water. Around the top of the water trough there was a small circular path. She would walk the adult and baby polar bear along the path circling the blue water. Every so often she would drop the baby into the water and let it sink to the bottom then she would exclaim, with a deep intake of breath, 'Oh no!', and with this the game would begin again. I do not know what this game meant to Sally although I have some ideas. It is my assertion that the play described above is a metaphorical process. Sally had created a metaphor that expressed the meaning she intended. She needed to play this game in order to make sense of her experience. I had a sense that she was driven to play it and repeat it and it was my feeling to respect it, to value it, to give her the time, space and privacy to play it for as long as she needed to. Eventually she stopped playing the game.

PLAY AND PLAY THERAPY

Play is necessary for children. It is not purely recreational:

Playing is how children try out and learn about their world. Play is therefore essential for healthy development. For children, play is serious, purposeful business through which they develop mentally, physically, and socially. Play is the child's form of self-therapy through which confusions, anxieties and conflicts are often worked through. Through the safety of play children can try out their own new ways of being. Play performs a vital function for the child. It is far more than frivolous, light-hearted, pleasurable activity that adults usually make of it. Play also serves as a symbolic language ... Children experience much that they cannot as yet express in language, and so they use play to formulate and assimilate what they experience. (Oaklander 1978, p.160)

Person-centred play therapy theories support the notion that a child will choose the toys that best express the emotional turmoil within (West 1996). I began to make some links with the behaviour I observed in Sally, theories about play, play therapy and some metaphor theory/therapy I was teaching to adult students training to be counsellors at this time.

In parallel to my experience as a teacher in this early years classroom, I was also counselling and teaching counselling on the Master of Arts degree at the University of

Durham and was involved in teaching counselling students about the work of David Groves (1989). Groves is a therapist who originates from New Zealand and practises his therapy in the UK and the USA. His approach is known as Healing Metaphor Therapy. Groves argues that adults who have experienced childhood traumas which are extremely frightening can experience a splitting of the psyche. In this way a part of the child becomes detached from the whole and the damaged part of the child remains frozen in time within the adult. This can cause all kinds of problems and symptoms for adults such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts etc. Groves continues to argue that traditional psychodynamic approaches can, at worst, retraumatise individuals by regressing people into past trauma, or at least have little or no effect.

He devised a model for this state, using time (T) of the event, minus the moment just before the trauma occurs (-1); this is known as T-1. The child, in order to protect itself, splits and part of the child is left in the -1 place just before the trauma. It is the task of the therapist to help the client to reach the wounded child within through the use of various therapeutic techniques. This enables the client to pass through the -1 state to T, thus rejoining the split. These techniques support the client's own construction of metaphors to make sense of the present symptoms. Often trauma can be located in somatic expression such as chest pain, migraine, stomach problems, backache and so on. Sally had experienced the trauma of her mother dying and it became clear to me that, through the vehicle of play, she was able to create a metaphor to heal herself. According to Groves, these self-created metaphors are containers and these containers hold the power for self-healing. It seemed incredible but I was beginning to believe that this three-year-old child knew what she needed to do to bring about this healing and she proceeded to do it. For our part, we accepted this wisdom and gave her the freedom to choose her play activities.

Sally became very fond of the Raymond Briggs story, *The Snowman* (Briggs 1990). She would ask for the story to be read repeatedly. This same repeated desire was apparent in Sally as I had observed in me when I repeatedly turned to the poem 'The White Cup'. She would bring the story-book to show me and point to the last image in the story. This was the image of the snowman melting, and all the reader can see is the character James and the snowman's hat and scarf on the ground. She would always ask 'Is he dead'? I always gave the same explanation and she always asked the same question. It's my feeling that she was using the metaphor of the melting snowman to understand that her mother's body was gone and that she was dead and that meant she would not come back. This, however, is my interpretation. Sally was unable to tell me what it meant to her and Groves would say that this is not important – the metaphor has the power to heal whether we understand it or not.

My final example of Sally selecting a metaphor from the nursery environment to bring about self-healing was a BBC wildlife film about a baby squirrel found one day in the woods by a BBC cameraman and his dog. The cameraman returns to his home for his camera and documents the life of the squirrel as he attempts to hand rear him. Eventually

he hits upon the idea of introducing the squirrel to his cat and her little newly born kittens. The cat is still feeding the kittens and the squirrel is accepted and reared by the cat.

The nursery group of children enjoyed the film as part of a project on woodland wildlife. At the end of the film Sally stood up and pointed at the grey screen. She repeated, 'I born, I born, I born'. She did this in a slow determined voice with her eyes fixed on the screen.

The adults in the room were moved by this experience and under no doubt that Sally had recognised her own life in the story. She was now living in a family planning to adopt her. Remarkably at three years of age she was able to recognise her self in this story and to use this story as a metaphor for her own experience of being an orphan adopted by a kind and loving family.

CONCLUSION

In my experience as an early years teacher, it is clear to me that young children have a profound and deep capacity to know what they need to do in the world to make sense of their life experiences. Play is a language that children use to express and to self-heal. Highly constructed programs including tasks and exercises designed to teach children or to assist young children in coping with significant loss do not trust the child's capacity to find his or her own metaphors for experience. It is my belief that if educators of young children can provide a relationship characterised by the core conditions (Rogers 1957) and respect the wisdom of the child, then good educational experience and emotional self-healing can occur.

Educational strategies for raising standards are essential if children are to receive their right to a good education in the UK. However, young children do need to be exposed to learning in an environment with adults who are aware of their changing developmental needs and can offer an appropriate curriculum. Too much formal teaching at too young an age may have the reverse effect. Standards will not be raised if children are not offered educational experiences which are meaningful to them and to their lives. The case study above illustrates how a developmentally appropriate early years curriculum managed by well-trained and informed educators can enable a child to learn about her loss experience and make some sense out of it.

Play is the metaphorical language of children, and objects can be manipulated to create the metaphor they need to self-heal. In addition they make use of metaphors they find in their environment. This choice is idiosyncratic and cannot be managed for the child. For example, while there are many texts that are constructed by adults about loss, it is my belief that the most powerful texts will be the texts selected by the child, because it is within that metaphor that the self-healing can begin. Interestingly, some years after my experiences with Sally I was reading an article about Raymond Briggs, the author of *The Snowman*, and learnt that he wrote the story while in deep grief, within six months of his mother's, father's and wife's deaths. It's amazing that such a young child should select this story and maybe, in some way, understand the loss message while in a state of loss herself.

The documentary film is another example of a medium providing a metaphor for Sally with no intention on the part of the creator. Sally found what she needed where and when she needed it. Therefore it is the task of the early years teacher to:

1. Provide a psychologically safe environment with relationships characterised by Rogers' core conditions.
2. In addition to planned content of the curriculum, provide a rich, stimulating play environment for the child to choose from, and the time and space to play, and be prepared to enter the child's world of play and to share in that playfulness and story-making.
3. Facilitate emotional learning in addition to cognitive, social and physical learning.
4. Be aware that the child will need to be supported emotionally and will find his or her own metaphors that express his or her experience.
5. Realise that pain is part of life and to allow the expression of that pain; a child has the right to experience the pain of loss or any other pain they feel.

It is the task of the present government, in the UK, to listen to concerns expressed by early years educators in response to recent policy changes and the effect these are having on the youngest children and to realise that raising standards in education involves making a good start with young children in a way that is developmentally appropriate for those children.

The pressure group Early Education has made great progress in influencing government policy, particularly on the Early Learning Goals recently designed for children under five years, and the chief executive, Wendy Scott, has recently been appointed to advise the minister responsible for early years education in the UK. Therefore, it feels as if the knowledge and experience of early years educators is being valued and is beginning to influence educational policy in the UK. Play is important and must not be lost if raising standards in educational achievement are to be successful

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