How far do government initiatives such as Sure Start and Every Child Matters enable all children to reach their full potential?

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The following piece of work evaluates how far Sure Start and Every Child Matters enable children to reach their full potential. It examines recent political history which has contributed to the development of the policies and analyses the benefits to children and families of integrated working. Through critical analysis it focuses on the targeted, authoritarian and gendered nature of services arguing that these have led to the stigmatisation and polarisation of certain groups within society. Children’s rights and children’s contribution to these policies, it maintains, are barely acknowledged. The main focus of the piece is the forward looking nature of both Sure Start and Every Child Matters which view the child as a future investment failing to recognise their place and value in a society of the present. This underlines a developing dichotomy between care and education.

Key words: Sure Start; Every Child Matters; multi-disciplinary; parents; childhood; social investment.

On the 11th December 2007 the Labour government published The Children’s Plan (DCSF 2007) in which the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, states:

With schools, children’s services, the voluntary sector and government all playing their part, we can ensure that every child has the best start in life (DCSF, 2007, p.4).

Part of the government’s drive to ensure equality of opportunity for children has been the implementation of Sure Start Children’s Centres and the development of the Every Child Matters framework. In the following piece of work I will critically evaluate how far these government initiatives enable children to fulfil their potential focusing on one main commonality between the two policies, the view of the child as a future investment.

The landslide Labour victory of 1997 symbolised a rejection of the neo-liberal views of the previous Conservative government which represented a lack of commitment to developing children’s services and a belief that: ‘…children were the private responsibility of their parents,’ (Pugh, 2003, p.185). Children’s services at this time were
fragmented and varied widely between different areas of the country. There was a lack of national commitment to developing pre-school provision combined with an absence of national policy (Pugh, 2003). Recognising this problem Tony Blair stated in the forward to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) (HM Treasury, 1998, Forward):

*We have looked at Key problems across government. The old departmental boundaries often do not work. Provision for young children – health, childcare support – will be co-ordinated across departments so that when children start school they are ready to learn.*

This marked the bringing together of children’s services and the birth of Sure Start Local Programmes in 1998. New Labour’s recognition of children’s rights through the development of such policies has been widely welcomed and they are now recognised as being more inclusive and progressive in their attitudes towards services for children than previous governments (Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005). Sure Start policy development has been innovative in a number of ways. Firstly it puts children central to government policy for tackling poverty and secondly it is based on empirical evidence mainly from America’s early childhood intervention programmes, such as Head Start, which showed the benefits to disadvantaged children of high quality childcare provision (Melhuish & Hall, 2007). The Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 project (EPPE) (DSCF, 2008), which has recently published its latest report, supports American research that both medium and high quality provision is an important predictor of both cognitive and social outcomes at age eleven.

Despite Sure Start having much in common with the American Head Start programme the philosophies that underpin such policies are very different. America has no comprehensive, national child or family policy. Services are targeted to those most in need with value placed on limited government interference, individualism and independence (CHIDCYFP, 2007). This neo-liberal ideology, as described earlier, was much encouraged in Britain by the Thatcher government prior to its downfall in 1997 (Pringle, 1998).

Scandinavian counties such as Norway and Sweden follow a social democratic model of welfare with: ‘...explicit family policies; universalism; gender equality; strong links with employment; generous benefits; quality early years education (ECEC) services,’ and extensive parental leave policies (CHIDCYFP, 2001). Social solidarity and equality across classes is of high importance and indeed all Swedish children: ‘...now have the right to a place in a pre-school from 12 months of age,’ (Moss, 2006, p.75). I would argue that Britain, with its increased emphasis on early education as a route out of poverty, and increased recognition of equal rights, is moving further away from its neo-liberal stance and closer to a social democratic model. However it has some way to go before reaching the ideal. Norway and Sweden: ‘...allocate the highest proportion of Gross National Product to social expenditure,’ and policies aim to make sure that all families with children have adequate incomes (Aubrey, 2008, p.12). Over the past twenty five years
however tax rates for the rich in Britain have reduced and incomes increased resulting in an increase in inequalities in income distribution (Aubrey, 2008).

Sure Start aims to prevent: ‘…social exclusion in adulthood, primarily by enabling children to realise their potential within the education system,’ (Clarke, 2006, p.699). It does this by working both directly and indirectly with the child; directly by providing such things as pre-school childcare; and indirectly by providing services for parents and the wider community (Belsky & Melhuish, 2007).

Children’s Centres work on the premise that interconnected symptoms require: ‘…joined up solutions which span traditional disciplinary and service demarcations,’ (Leighton, 2007, p.85). During experience at a local Sure Start centre I have witnessed this way of working. I attended Mum-to-be groups, toddler groups, meetings between parents and health visitors, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, dental practitioners and dieticians. Adults appeared to be more confident in their parenting. During conversations with them I could see that they had gained an understanding of the importance of early learning opportunities for their children. Boot and Macdonald (2006, p.279) support my observations stating that partnership between professional and parent, places emphasis: ‘…on the person rather than that which is causing difficulty, thus facilitating parent learning and understanding.’ Groups specifically set up for fathers contributed to combating gender demarcations, highlighted in the EPPE report (DCSF, 2008), by encouraging dads to be positive role models in their children’s lives. Carpenter (2002, p.201) noted that in empowering fathers: ‘…through inclusive practices, professionals can strengthen and empower the whole family network.’ Parents were involved at higher management level sitting on staff interview panels and committees deciding the services the centre provided. Bagley and Ackerley (2006, p.718) support this approach stating that: ‘…participation of the local community in the planning of community services ensures that new services will more effectively meet the community’s needs.’

Work carried out by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2004, p.1) revealed that: ‘…parenting emerged as the strongest single contextual predictor of children’s achievement.’ To achieve improvements in parenting and the home learning environment requires accessible provision. Sure Start is no longer the post code lottery it once was with those living the wrong side of the post code divide unable to access services. As the planned roll out of Children’s Centres continues towards its completion in 2010 there will soon be a centre in every community (NAO, 2006). However Willan (2007, p.28) argues that those being seen as in need of services may: ‘…be resistant to being singled out, may resent the proffered support and may avoid the interventions altogether.’ Indeed Belsky and Melhuish (2007, p.150) found that Sure Start services: ‘…produced greater benefits for the moderately disadvantaged than for the more severely disadvantaged.’ These findings were mirrored in the American Head Start programme evaluations (Belsky & Melhuish, 2007). I feel, as Willan (2007), that for Children’s Centres to be truly effective within the communities they serve they need to be seen as integral to it and not separate from it by serving only targeted, stigmatised sections of society which further isolates the poor from the rich and leads to a
stigmatisation of the service itself. If going to the Sure Start pre-school at three is seen as normal as going to school at five the service becomes accessible to all and is more likely to reach those in greatest need. Centres need to be sure: ‘...that they are creating the conditions in which all children can flourish and all parents can parent,’ (Willan, 2007, p.29). However there are deeper issues that require discussion when looking at parenting.

In Sure Start policy the key to improving children’s outcomes is visualised through parents by improving employability while at the same time improving parenting skills. This produces a paradox where parents can become confused as to whether it is better to find employment or to stay at home and parent (Graham, 2007). This confusion is reinforced by the governments ‘welfare to work’ initiative providing benefits and incentives encouraging, especially single mothers, back into the work place (Graham, 2007). But also Services provided by centres, Clarke (2006, p.701) argues, help to: ‘...construct and maintain a dominant ideology of motherhood,’ reflective of middle class concepts and attitudes which can be seen in the way mother’s are encouraged to dress, feed, discipline and educate their children. Mothers who are seen not to fit in with these concepts are at risk of being construed as ignorant or as poor parents (Clarke, 2006). For example mothers who choose not to send their children to pre-school may be viewed by others as depriving their children of a good education.

Viewed in such a way: ‘...good parenting then comes to be regarded as a question of technique instead of fundamentally about quality of relationships,’ (Clarke, 2006, p.708). This can be taken further when we examine the fact that one of the Sure Start delivery targets is to visit every new parent, living within the centre’s catchment area, in the first two months of their child’s birth. This produces what might be perceived as a ‘surveillance state’ placing emphasis on parental deficiencies (Clarke, 2006). In support of this view Jennie Bristow (2005) states that:

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\text{At a fundamental level, every Sure Start project represents the therapeutic state reaching out to control parental behaviour, and every one is premised on a fundamental distrust of parents.}
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The state intervenes through Sure Start programmes as it cannot trust all parents to parent in a way it sees fit. Lister (2006, p.326) supports this view stating that there is a: ‘...strong whiff of authoritarianism in the measures adopted to ensure that parents (typically mothers) turn their children into responsible citizens.’ Graham (2007) makes the point that in developing children’s self esteem it is important that adults surrender some power and allow children choice and a proportion of self direction. She goes on to state that:

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\text{In order for parents’ self-esteem to develop and parent-child relationships to develop it may be that professionals have to afford parents similar autonomy,}
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(Graham, 2007, p.103).
I would argue that in this case ‘professionals’ could equally refer to both policy makers and practitioners. In the case of working with Gypsy and traveller communities the home visit approach has been a particularly large stumbling block for Sure Start. Bowpitt and Chaudhary (2007, p. 258) found that by encroaching so much into traditional Gypsy life Sure Start can be seen as: ‘... continuing decades of a welfare policy that has sought to undermine that way of life and assimilate the Gypsies into the dominant culture.’

A number of the previous issues point to a gendered approach to Sure Start services. Clarke (2006, p.701) argues services are generally focussed on mothers as they are seen as: ‘...the principle means of achieving desired outcomes in children.’ Lister (2006) underpins this view by pointing to wider government policy such as the lack of equal paternity leave for fathers. She claims that policy moves towards the greater involvement of fathers have been: ‘...little more than tokenistic,’ (Lister, 2006, p.319). Although, as mentioned previously, I witnessed fathers’ involvement in Sure Start programmes the gendered nature of the services were evident. Groups tended to be in the morning or afternoon when fathers were likely to be at work. Staff at the centre were predominately female and most of the groups were led by professional women.

Sure Start services since 2003, like all other children’s services, have come under the Every Child Matters policy umbrella which: ‘...effectively extended and continued the drive towards integrated service planning and delivery for children and families,’ (Balodck et al, 2005, p.67). The Green Paper (DfES, 2003), although not drawn together in direct response to the Victoria Climbie inquiry (Laming, 2003), was never the less greatly influenced by it (Williams, 2004; Balodck et al, 2005). Children’s needs are central to its aims and it carries with it a universal ethos which joins up services for children with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention, focussing on all children rather than just the disadvantaged (Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005; Williams, 2004). Paul Boateng (DfES, 2003, p.4) emphasises the centrality of children’s welfare and rights to government thinking when he states in the document:

Children are precious. The world they must learn to inhabit is one in which they will face hazards and obstacles alongside real and growing opportunities. They are entitled not just to the sentiment of adults but a strategy that safeguards them as children and realizes their potential to the very best of our ability.

In the light of fears about future child abuse cases and the fact that the Green Paper was very detailed in its proposals the government decided to miss out the White Paper stage and moved directly to drawing up the Children Bill and this was followed in 2004 by The Children Act (Balodck et al, 2005). The main proposals of the Green Paper are: universal, integrated, targeted services involving the Police, Youth Services, and the voluntary sector; the appointment of a Director of Children’s Services and a Children’s Commissioner; joined up inspection criteria, finance and funding indicators; streamlined accountability; schools and Children’s Centres to become the focus of joined up services for children; improved information sharing; and improved training opportunities (Williams, 2004). These proposals are then framed within five outcomes for children;
Being Healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; and economic well-being (Williams, 2004). The Children Act 2004 is a large and detailed piece of legislation which raises a number of issues concerning its effective delivery and its ability in helping children to achieve their potential.

The multi agency and inclusive method of delivery is not without its critics who spotlight concerns about the efficacy of such an approach. Malin & Morrow, (2007, p. 446), state that within multi-disciplinary teamwork in Sure Start Local Programmes: ‘…professional identity can be challenged,’ and conflicts occur around models of understanding about: ‘…roles, identities, status and power, about information-sharing, and around links with other agencies,’ (Malin & Morrow, 2007, p.446). Baldock et al (2005, p.79) support this view stating that many agencies: ‘…are left to cope with complex and unforeseen challenges including different training, jargon, priorities, world views and working traditions.’ This in part is caused by national policy being interpreted at a local level, producing different targets and conflicting loyalties, (Malin & Morrow, 2007).

While at Sure Start I could see that practitioner’s roles often appeared quite fluid and job descriptions, appearing to change almost daily, were difficult to pin down. This however was more often in response to the ever changing issues greeting them at the door each morning as oppose to internal conflicts and lack of identity. Potter and Carpenter (2008, p.770) emphasise the need for: ‘…whole staff training to support the development of a team-wide approach.’ A point taken up by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2006) who fear that numbers of qualified and skilled practitioners will not keep up with the new multi-agency way of working and expansion in the sector. According to a report prepared for UNISON, (2006, p5), employers and learners are unsure which qualifications are: …fit for purpose,’ and question the value of academic qualifications above hands on training. In my own experience this confusion is evident among the employment of teaching assistants who have qualifications ranging from NVQs to degree level but little demarcation in pay.

Integrated front-line delivery of services to children should mean that they are safeguarded from harm; receive early effective support; have better opportunities to reach their potential, and have quick access to targeted services (Chand, 2008). However Chand (2008) highlights research which demonstrates that services show little recognition of families whose first language is not English and that anti-racist and equal opportunity policy is not being put into practice. Every Child Matters documentation does not differentiate between the needs of different cultures. In Every Child Matters: Change for Children (DFES, 2004, p.21, electronic source) the term: ‘…minority ethnic groups,’ is used. This does not highlight which groups are being referred to and more importantly does not distinguish between different cultural parenting practices. Chand (2008, p.14) argues that: ‘…differences in child-rearing methods between cultures make understanding what is the norm and what is deviant in a culture problematic.’ Being ill informed about these differences leads to moral judgments being: ‘…reduced to unhelpful stereotypes,’ (Chand, 2008, p.14) which in turn leads to a disproportionate
number of ‘minority ethnic families’ becoming the centre of referrals involving child welfare concerns (Chand, 2008).

The needs of children and families seeking asylum appear to be omitted from the Every Child Matters document (Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005). Their already difficult situation is exacerbated by government policies which directly contradict the Every Child Matters agenda. The Asylum and Immigration Bill, announced in 2003 threatens the withdrawal of welfare from failed asylum seekers putting them at risk of abject poverty with the result that children may then be removed by social services (Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005). Williams (2004, p.415) highlights how: ‘…by dint of ‘unjoined-up’ policy making,’ the aims at the very foundation of Every Child Matters are undermined. I would argue that in this situation children are being used as a tool to deter or remove immigrants and the centrality of the child has been lost from government policy thinking. In support of this Lister (2006, p.323) highlights that: ‘…pivotal government documents such as Every Child Matters make no reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK is a signatory.’ A document which is meant to be centred on the needs of children makes no reference to their fundamental rights and in doing so fails to recognise those in greatest need. Of the children that are recognised within the document their contribution to its development has been minimal. It refers only twice to their consultation (Williams, 2004).

In talking about children ’making a positive contribution’ Every Child Matters lays claim to a new sociology of childhood which recognises children as: ‘…active and competent members of society,’ (Wyness, 2000, p.25). But in only allowing children minimal involvement it removes them from existing social structures by not giving them an adequate opportunity to contribute to policy which directly affects them (Wyness, 2000). One area in which they were consulted was in defining ‘enjoying and achieving’. However in the finished document the outcome refers only to educational achievement. Like Williams (2004) I feel this does not reflect adequate consultation. She states: ‘…it characterises a rather dreary vision of childhood which is about getting through your exams and keeping out of trouble,’ (Williams, 2004, p.412).

The enormous contribution that both Sure Start and Every Child Matters have made to the provision and delivery of front-line services to children must not be downplayed. The holistic, universal and multi-disciplinary approach to children delivered through accessible services based in Children’s Centres and schools have gone a long way towards enabling children to fulfil their potential (Williams, 2004). However it falls short of enabling all children to fulfil their potential. The stigmatisation of families and services still exists (Willan, 2007) and these services sometimes appear intrusive authoritarian and gendered (Lister, 2006). Documentation does not recognise some of the most disenfranchised groups within society (Chand, 2008; Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005) and fails to give children a voice or acknowledge their rights (Williams, 2004; Lister, 2006). Because Sure Start now comes under the umbrella of Every Child Matters there are many advantages and disadvantages common to both but there is one large common thread which requires deeper examination.
In aiming to enable children to fulfil their potential Sure Start and Every Child Matters are: ‘…framed within a social investment approach which values education as the route out of exclusion and into employability,’ (Williams, 2004, p.423). These are policies that look to the future adulthood of children which: ‘…has involved the partial eclipse of childhood and the child qua child,’ (Lister, 2006, p.321). The ‘social investment state’ is a term coined by Anthony Giddens, who in 1998, visualised investment in human capital as an alternative to the traditional welfare state (Lister, 2006). The Childcare Strategy illustrates beautifully the centrality that social investment thinking has within government policy when it states:

*It is in the nation's social and economic interests that children get a good start in life for children are the citizens, workers, parents and leaders of the future (HM Treasury, 2004: para 2.11).*

It appears to me that visualizing childhood in this way creates discourses which affect our attitudes to children and those directly involved with their care that is parents and practitioners. Children are placed in a specific time frame that of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’. The ‘becoming’ child is valued for their potential contributions rather than as a: ‘…social actor in his or her own right, who is actively constructing his or her own childhood’, (Upichard, 2008, p.304).

In enabling children to fulfil their potential we need to recognise their contributions and needs in the present, otherwise we are at risk of viewing children as: ‘…progressing from a state of vulnerability to sophistication, from an earlier lack of skills to a later possession of abilities,’ (Young 1990, p.4). When children learn a skill they are indeed taking ownership of a new ability but like adults learning a new skill this is not taken from a standpoint of complete ignorance. The present focus on educational attainment and future potential at the expense of present enjoyment suggests: ‘…a view of children as adults in waiting: play and enjoyment are in their very essence about the quality of children and young peoples lives,’ (Kelley, 2004). Government policies like Sure Start and Every Child Matters which look to the future potential of children, and indeed their parents, fail to address their present needs. Lister (2006, p.321) supports this stating that education and childcare policies: ‘…are more orientated towards employment priorities – current and future – than towards children’s well-being.’ Norman Glass who was in charge of the Treasury working group which proposed the setting up of Sure Start in 1998 later states in the Guardian Society News and Features section (2005, p2) that for poor mothers: ‘…work was the answer, and Sure Start was to play its role as a sort of New Deal for Toddlers.’ He goes on to state:

*So Sure Start, originally a child-centred programme, became embroiled in the childcare agenda and the need to roll out as many childcare places as possible to support maternal employment (Glass, 2005).*
The ‘social investment state’ puts the present needs of the child and parent in direct conflict. It also fails to recognise those children who are not seen as: ‘…opportunities for promoting a more market-friendly society,’ (Lister, 2006, p.324); the disabled, ethnic minorities, Traveller’s children and the children of asylum seekers. But more than this it aims to achieve its goals by reaching into the very heart of our society by changing the culture of parenting (Clarke, 2006, p.710). In support of this Clarke states:

The behaviour and characteristics of poor parents come to be seen as the problem, for reasons that are driven by instrumental aims in relation to their children.

The first main objective of Sure Start has been the improvement of social and emotional development by supporting parents in developing good bonds with their children (Clarke, 2006). However since the introduction of the Every Child Matters agenda the focus has moved from one of support to one of intervention and child protection (Clarke, 2006, p.420). Children become viewed as a future investment that requires careful nurturing. This is highlighted by Williams (2004, p.420) who argues that the Green Paper positions children and parents in terms: ‘…of their relationships with each other and with professionals, rather than the networks of mutual care and support of which they are part.’ The knowledge of what it takes to be a good parent is seen to come from professionals, from the outside and not from the wider extended family and friends. In doing this it also fails to recognise wider issues such as inadequate income, poor housing and overcrowding as contributing to the poor outcomes of children and chooses to focus on parental inadequacies which in part can be exacerbated by these wider problems (Clarke, 2006).

Measures introduced by the youth justice system further demonise parents by making them responsible for their children’s truancy and physical chastisement (Williams, 2004). However Sure Start encourages parents to be actively involved with the development of the programme. This: ‘…suggests a contradictory conceptualization of parents as both competent and incompetent,’ (Clarke, 2006, p.717). Parental involvement recognises them as capable and aware of the needs of their children however a programme that focuses on targets assumes deficits and a need for parents to be educated (Clarke, 2006). Further more the importance placed on the home learning environment means that life at home becomes a preparation, a means to prepare children for a future in education, rather than it being valued as a place in the present providing love, security and enjoyment. In support of this argument Clarke (2006, p.709) states that: ‘…measuring the ‘home learning environment’ reduces the child’s home to its role in producing a particular outcome.’ She goes on to state:

The things that parents or others do with children are described in terms of their contribution to producing a discrete set of attributes with a statistical correlation with other longer term goals, particularly educational outcomes (Clarke, 2006, p.710).
Parenting and the home learning environment become environmental influences on children which can be modified to produce desired outcomes (Clarke, 2006) and indeed Williams (2004, p.141) argues that within Every Child Matters: ‘…parents are constructed as partners (with the government, voluntary and business sectors), responsible for ensuring their children’s education and employment.’

The bringing together of children’s services under the education banner by the newly created Department of Children, Schools and Families, and the setting up of Children’s Centres and schools as front-line locations for multi-disciplinary services to children means that in the merging of education and care a child’s potential can now be visualised holistically by promoting not only intellectual development but also emotional, physical and creative development (Williams, 2006). The new Early Years Foundation Stage for children from birth to five years, introduced in 2008, reinforces this new ideology. Moss (2006) argues that we need to adopt this approach to overcome a developing dichotomy between the provision of care and education. He highlights the problem by giving the example of Children’s Centres which in deprived areas provide a broad spectrum of services for children and families ranging from early years education to services for parents, whereas in less deprived areas, services are limited to information and advice about childcare (Moss, 2006). It assumes that early years education is not as beneficial to certain families but according to Willan (2007) this is not always the case. Hayes (2008) argues that rather than early years provision being seen as a mixture of education and care, the idea of a nurturing pedagogy should be adopted. She states that: ‘…reconceptualizing care as nurture would strengthen the attention to the educative value of care,’ (Hayes, 2008, p.436). However this type of language, increasingly used in the context of the Every Child Matters agenda, only seems to serve to reinforce the forward thinking nature of such policies. It appears to push aside the role and value of care in favour of its use as a preparation for a well educated society. This is exacerbated by an increased emphasis on training and qualifications for early years practitioners, and the testing and target-centred culture of education. Again the child’s future contribution becomes the priority. Williams (2004, p.414) supports this view arguing that the main theme throughout the Every Child Matters Green Paper is that education is seen: ‘…as the basis to employability, and employability as the insurance against poverty.’

In conclusion the Sure Start programme announced in 1998 and the Every Child Matters Green Paper (2003) were introduced with the aim of preventing: ‘…social exclusion in adulthood, primarily by enabling children to realize their potential,’ (Clarke, 2006, p.699). The bringing together of children’s services and a new multi-disciplinary approach to delivery have been seen as vital innovations in achieving this (Clarke, 2006). However services often appear to be intrusive, authoritarian, gendered and portray middle class attitudes of parenthood leading to the stigmatization of certain sections of society (Clarke, 2006; Willan, 2007). The disabled, ethnic minorities, Traveller’s children and the children of asylum seekers fail to have their needs addressed due to a lack of training, unhelpful stereotypes and conflicting policy (Chand, 2008; Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005; Lister, 2006) and children in general have not been consulted adequately during the development of documentation (Williams, 2004). The main commonality however
between both policies is their failure to recognize children’s contributions in the present (Kelley, 2004). As Sure Start developed: ‘…the importance of pre-school education has become an increasingly central issue,’ (Clarke, 2006, p.709) and parental behaviour and parents’ involvement in their own and their children’s education have been identified by research such as the EPPE study as an important influence on children’s development (Clarke, 2006) and adopted by government as part of a social investment approach to alleviating social exclusion and poverty. Clarke (2006, p.716) states that:

*It focuses on the manipulation of the child’s immediate environment, primarily individual maternal behaviour, rather than on structural inequalities; and on individual educational achievement as the principal mechanism for avoiding social exclusion in the longer term.*

Documentation is framed by: ‘…an understanding of children’s risks and opportunities rather than an understanding of the place of childhood in society,’ (Williams, 2004, p.423-424). Children are not visualised as young human beings in their own right and this: ‘…forces us to neglect or dismiss the present everyday realities of being a child,’ (Upichard, 2008, p.304); realities which have a direct impact on future potential.

**References**


