Approaches to engagement with children 0-3 years

A literature review

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

What are the relevant key documents in the literature on listening to very young children (0-3)?

- There is a very large literature on interventions to improve parenting in the early years. Many of these are based on addressing parental deficits, but increasingly there is a shift towards acknowledging and working with parents' strengths, interests and motivations.

- There are very few examples of parents' involvement in designing or evaluating programmes within health and social care literature. This may effectively model tokenistic participation as a social norm for children just as they are laying down fundamental templates of social interaction.

- Within the wider literature, there are many examples of approaches that encourage parents as active partners with services in their child's development and education.

- This emphasis on collaboration with parents and children in early years education has led to several early years academic journals taking particular interest in participation and children's rights in the last few years, dedicating special issues to the topic (Gray and Harcourt 2012, Rodrigo *et al*. 2012).

- Work in New Zealand and Australia most explicitly examines early childhood engagement in terms of citizenship development and social justice and pays particular attention to developing spaces and cultures that encourage children's "question asking" and "question exploring" (Sands*,* Carr and Lee 2012).

- Those developing these approaches also caution that the privatisation of early years education and care curtails the prevalence and reach of this mode of working, disproportionately impacting disadvantaged families.

What does the literature tell us about any current practice which focuses on how parents/carers respond to their children (0-3)'s emotional communication?

- Research continues to show the importance of parents' consistent responsive interaction with their children from birth in terms of both short-term and long-term significant impact on children's lives, including biologically measurable outcomes and general health and wellbeing outcomes.

- Some literature highlights relational factors are more significant and can overcome detrimental environmental factors.

- The literature uses a range of descriptors to describe this important early child-parent interaction, including mind-mindedness, responsiveness and parental nurturing.

- Parenting Interventions for the earliest years use a range of approaches, with the literature reporting more positive outcomes for approaches that incorporate home visits by supporting professionals such as the Family Nurse Partnership and Early Head Start Programme.

- Strength-based approaches, which recognise that parents have existing strengths and are capable of drawing on these to solve problems, are an important component of programmes that report significant benefit. However, differences in how strength-based approaches are interpreted, implemented and positioned alongside other elements of interventions either blunt or reinforce strength-based approaches capacity to foster a culture of participatory rights with families and communities.

- Parenting interventions originally designed for pre-school and early primary school aged children with behaviour difficulties are being revised to work with parents of children of an earlier age and to address specific health and wellbeing concerns such as obesity.

Does the literature identify techniques for eliciting responses from very young children (0-3) and help us interpret their communications?

- Common to many of the approaches is an emphasis on observing the infant or child's engagement with their environment and resourcing extensions of interaction with materials that the child indicates he or she has an interest in.

- Use of simple low cost materials is modelled in many approaches. Examples include use of small torch and bell within the Mellow Bumps programme to increase an expectant mother's awareness of their child's growing sensitivity to sight and sound within the womb and use of treasure baskets for very young children to explore filled with simple objects of different shapes and textures within the Early Explorers PEEP initiative.

The work done to create spaces and cultures of inquiry in early education and care settings highlights the importance of design features that support companionable communication and mutual discovery.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Study

The aim of this research is to provide Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People with a knowledge base through a literature review of key research around the theory and practice of engagement with young children aged 0-3, especially the very youngest. Key questions that guide the review are:

- What are the relevant key documents in the literature on listening to very young children (0-3)?
- What, if anything, does the literature tell us about any current practice which focuses on how parents/carers respond to their children's (0-3s) emotional communication?
- Does the literature identify techniques for eliciting responses from very young children and help us interpret their communications?

This review will:

- enable adults and children to learn more about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in particular Article 12 (participation rights)

- celebrate and promote the variety and diversity of the ways in which young children might choose to participate in influencing their experiences and environments

- encourage adults to promote active engagement and involvement of young children in decision making.

1.2 Background

The first three years of a child's life are a time of rapid and significant growth; more than they will experience across the rest of their life course. Fundamental templates for understanding and valuing self and others are laid down during this period. Since the 1960s, a range of research has shown that infancy is a very social and interactive time. This holds very important implications for the development of children's rights, pivotal among them the right of the child to be consulted on matters that affect them. Rights are fundamentally based on reciprocal respect between individuals and respect of each other's values and needs. This reciprocity of respect is a basic human relational need and one that requires nurturing from an individual's first sentient moments (Winnicott 1964, Benjamin 1988).

As vital as infancy and early childhood are, approaches to intervening to improve parental support for a child's wellbeing are contested, while their impact is variable and their relation to children's rights under-researched. What does emerge from the literature is an important interaction between parents being

respected and listened to – particularly around their parenting concerns – and the child's development and wellbeing. For these reasons, it is important to review the literature and examine the implications for developing support for children's rights in Scotland in order to get it right for every child right from the start.

2. Methodology

2.1 Literature Review Process

Adhering to PRISMA guidelines[1] to the extent possible within the timeframe for the project, a systemic research of relevant databases[2] using key terms from the project brief[3] has been conducted. Parameters were placed upon the search to identify studies of the appropriate age range and relevant to the brief. In addition, a search was made of sector information portals such as NHS Health Scotland, IRISS, WithScotland and Education Scotland to identify practitioner evaluations that may not be included in peer reviewed databases, but are particularly relevant to the Scottish context. A table of the review process is included in Appendix 3. Over 7,000 documents were identified through the search. However, many of these did not fit the age remit or study focus. From the search, 662 documents were identified as fitting the study criteria. In the time available, further scrutiny was made of 279 of these.

Due to the large numbers of potentially relevant studies, meta-analytic studies were focused upon to provide an overview of the field and guide the examination of individual studies. Once relevant studies were identified they were subject to a realist evaluation analysis (Pawson and Tilley 1997). Realist evaluation does not answer the question "what works?", but instead asks "how do interventions work? in what contexts? with what interacting factors at play?" Realist evaluation is particularly helpful in unpacking how context and implementation strategy interact. It is particularly important to identify and examine information about implementation strategies given the purposes of the literature review. Understanding these dynamics within early childhood can inform the development of this specific brief and also lend insight into the joining up of participation strategies throughout a child's development and into adulthood and possible parenthood.

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[1] PRISMA refers to a systemic review process that makes transparent and explicit the logical steps in searching, screening for focus, rigour and analysing data (Liberatti *et al.* 2009).

[2] EBSCO host: incorporating ERIC, PubMed, Ovid, Web of Science, Taylor Francis Publication Portal, ESRC Knowledge Portal and AHRC Knowledge Portal.

[3] Key terms used: early childhood, parenting, communication, rights, attachment, intervention, co-design, and peer approaches

2.2 Ethics

The literature review has been conducted in keeping with the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (2002) as well as the Scottish Social Services Council's Code of Practice (2014), in an impartial balanced manner, open to scrutiny and with full acknowledgement of direct and indirect contributions. The Government Social Research ethical checklist framework (Scottish Government 2007), sound understanding of social research methods (Lincoln and Denzin 2013) and commitment to standards of rigour outlined in the Nolan Report (The Committee on Standards in Public Life 1996) have informed the project.

3. What are the relevant key documents in the literature on listening to very young children (0-3)?

3.1 Locating Rights Development within Wider Literature on Parent Engagement

In order to conduct a literature review that explores approaches to facilitation of positive parent/carer engagement with the very youngest children it is important to contextualise children's rights literature within the wider body of literature on children's development, wellbeing and protection.

The literature on early communication with very young children is well established within research and education circles (Trevarthen and Marwick 2002, Bruce 2004, Edwards *et al.* 1993), but rather unevenly communicated to society as a whole. Beginning with the first hours of life which present the optimal opportunity for bonding (Young 2013), communication interaction plays an important role in developing a child's strengths and resilience. Colin Trevarthen's work has been seminal in turning the research community's attention towards communicative interaction from an infant's earliest waking hours of life. It is interesting to note that Trevarthen draws on the concept of intersubjectivity that Habermas (1970) developed to explore the dynamics of mutual understanding within political philosophy. Trevarthen documented a "period of primary intersubjectivity, when sharing of intention with others becomes an effective psychological activity" as being crucial to infant development. The infant's ability and need to share subjective – especially emotional – experiences has taken on increasing importance in research on early childhood development and its impact across the lifecourse, and on interventions to improve early childhood experience. Important in this early time are the laying down of ritual exchanges of gestures, musicality and vocalisation that establish the young child's place in a community where they recognise themselves and are recognised as belonging (Trevarthen and Marwick 2002).

International studies (Sinclair 2011) confirm that the carer's responsiveness to an infant's first attempts at interaction is crucial. Here, a carer's attentiveness and ability to follow and echo a child's attempts at communication in order to build up a sense of conversation (Lyra 2007) and co-narrated story are important. Colin Trevarthen argues that babies have a sense of story and of conversation – and their shapes and meanings – before they have the language to label the individual components of them (Trevarthen 2009).

Much of the research on early parenting interaction focuses on attachment, which has an extensive literature numbering in the thousands of studies. Given the time constraints of the study, in this section we will examine the meta-

analysis that has been done in this area before going on to look at studies that focus on particular aspects of attachment.

The search identified 40 meta-analytic studies. Of these, 12 were deemed to be of relevance to the study. Broadly, more recent analysis confirms in large part previous work reaffirming that initial attachment in infancy is predictive of relational health in a range of domains later in life (Dykas and Cassidy 2011, Groh *et al.* 2014, Pallini 2014), and highlight the important role of carer sensitivity to the process of attachment (De Wolfe and Van Ijzendoor 1997, Lucassen *et al*. 2011). A Scandinavian meta-analysis of attachment between pre-term babies and mothers (Korja, Latva, and Lehtonen 2012) revealed that differences between pre-term and full term mothers declined after six months and that in 5 of the 18 studies examined there was evidence of better attachment as evidenced by interaction between pre-term mothers and babies than full term, suggesting that attachment can be achieved in adverse circumstances with intentionality. In a meta-analysis of studies, Kinsey and Hupcey (2013) raise the concern that this broad term attachment is over-used and under-theorised –particularly when applied to interventions.

3.2 Understanding child and carer as a partnership

Supported by developments in dialogic psychology (Lyra, 2007), there is increasing focus on how child and carer interact as a dyad: how each member of the partnership affects the other and how they operate together as a dynamic whole. These studies are interested in untangling cause and effect between child and carer (Bradley and Corwyn 2013, Pearl *et al*. 2014). For instance, the study of Martin, Ryan and Brooks-Gunn (2013) was interested in understanding if supportive parenting influenced child's interest and persistence or if child's interest and persistence influenced supportive parenting, and concluded that parental supportiveness influences child interest more strongly and consistently than the converse. Kochanska's study (1997) defines dyadic activity in technical terms as "parent-child mutually responsive, binding, reciprocal orientation". They report that this system of reciprocity has been implicated as fundamental in socialisation. In a study that observed child mother pairs from 21 months in multiple contexts of daily interactions, two factors were identified that increased children's capacity for cooperation and mutual engagement. These were:

- a high frequency and quality of empathic perspective taking by the mother
- less resort to power to manage interaction (Kochanska 1997:94).

Much of the literature on dyads focuses on mother-child relations. However, there is growing attention to the role of fathers. Several studies look at attachment with fathers (Lucassen *et al*. 2011) and the differences between attachment with father and mother, as well as the combined impact of attachment with a parenting couple (Scrimgeour *et al.* 2013). In the meta-analysis carried out by McWayne, Downer, Campos and Harris (2013), information from 21 studies (representing 22 separate samples) was pooled across a 10-year period from 1998 to 2008). Findings revealed small to moderate positive associations with quality parenting by the father across two primary dimensions of direct father involvement (frequency of positive engagement activities and aspects of parenting quality) and five dimensions of children's early learning (representing social and cognitive domains).

The growing recognition of importance of attachment has seen a proliferation of terms used to describe it (Kochanska 1997, Bridgett *et al.* 2013, Martin, Ryan, Brooks-Gunn 2013, Landry *et al.* 2013, Meins *et al.* 2013, Nozadi *et al.* 2013). Narvaez *et al.* (2013), for example, study many of the aspects of attachment but move away from using the term "attachment", referring instead to an "Evolved Development Niche" (EDN). They assessed four characteristics of care – maternal responsivity, breastfeeding, touch, and maternal social support – and examined their effects longitudinally (prenatal to age 3) on children's pro-sociality (cooperation and social engagement), behaviour problems (internalising/externalising) and cognitive ability (intelligence, auditory comprehension and verbal expression) over three years. The study found that the specific components within EDN varied significantly and affected child outcomes differentially at different time points. However, there was significant correlation between positive EDN attributes and positive outcomes for children.

One of the largest studies on attachment (Martin, Ryan and Brooks-Gunn 2013) focuses on "maternal supportive parenting" as influencing a child's interest and persistence in problem solving which are strong predictors of successful engagement in schooling. These traits are also an important precursor for engagement with citizenship and taking up rights to be consulted on matters that affect them. A closely related term, "maternal sensitivity", was measured at 11 months in a study which reports impact on expressive language skill at 30 months (Nozadi *et al.* 2013). Early responsive parenting is highlighted in a study of the development of children with spina bifida and is reported as positively affecting the development of social learning skills (Landry *et al.* 2013).

As interest in the importance of early social interaction has been sustained over decades, longitudinal studies are now becoming available that examine the effects of early attachment upon a number of life outcomes, from frequency of

detrimental life events (De Wolfe *et al.* 1997) to susceptibility to mental health problems such as stress (Hackman *et al.* 2013) or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Lima *et al.* 2014). For instance, a longitudinal study of maternal warmth in infancy (Morgan Shaw and Forbes 2014) finds it to be positively associated with better regulation of loss and reward functioning in boys at greater socioeconomic risk at the age of 20.

Some studies are more focused not only on warmth, but parents' understanding of their child's cognitive development and their ability to anticipate and respond to a child's intentionality, described in the literature as "mind-mindedness". Meins *et al.* (2013) report that parents' mind-mindedness at 8 months predicts fewer behavioural problems for children at 61 months. The review of the literature by Meins *et al.* (2002) also found that a mother's mind-mindedness is a better predictor of secure attachment than maternal warmth, which had traditionally been assumed to be the best indicator. A study by Meins *et al.* (2002) showed a correlation between the mother's mind-mindedness and the child's development of theory of mind. A child's theory of mind is an important aspect of development in terms of rights. Literally, theory of mind helps a child to know their own mind and be able to articulate their thoughts and intentions, as well as to recognise that others have thoughts and intentions too. Both of these abilities are the fundamental building blocks of a culture where rights are reciprocally recognised and negotiated.

From these studies, three levels of increasing complexity can be seen to be at work in positive attachment and the communication between parent and child that is so fundamental to it. The first aspect of attachment is the capacity to respond to the growing child in emotional terms, responding to perceived emotional and physical needs in an emotionally supportive manner encapsulated in the term "maternal warmth". The second, more complex aspect is that of responding to a child's growing cognitive capacity and is captured in the term "mind-mindedness". Here, it is important that the parent appreciate the child's growing thinking capacity, curiosity and problem solving strategies. Keying into these, acknowledging them and coming alongside to support them is important particularly for the development of a child's participatory rights. The third level of complexity requires a parent not only to understand their child's thinking, but to also appreciate that from very early on the child has a sense that others around them are thinking too. From the moment an infant follows a pointing finger beyond the finger to an object pointed to, they are reading intentionality: that is, they have a sense of the thinking of others and are drawn to try to share in it. This is the intersubjectivity to which Trevarthen (2009) has drawn our attention.

The role of intersubjectivity, the degree to which children develop a theory of mind and the age at which they develop such a theory are drawn upon to varying degrees in the literature. Within early education curricula, Trevarthen's stance is widely accepted (Sands, Carr and Lee 2012, Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2012, Kernan 2007). However, a review of parenting interventions (Webster Stratton n.d.) reveals a reliance on the more traditional stance that holds children are not able to appreciate the perspectives of others until 4-5 years or later. This may be because parent intervention programmes often seek to counteract a parent's tendency to expect too much of a young child and punish them accordingly. An interesting compromise approach is evidenced in the anti-bullying toolkit developed by Shephard *et al.* (n.d.). In looking at a situation where someone's behaviour caused someone else to feel bullied even if harm was not intended, the researchers adopted a stance that acknowledged children may be unaware of other people's thoughts or their impact upon them, but left open the possibility that this capacity to sense another's perspective was developing. They saw this approach as

> particularly relevant to work with under 5's where they are experimenting and learning patterns of behaviour and so may not recognise their own actions as the cause of someone else's hurt. Our aim, then, was to provide activities which enabled young children to acknowledge their own feelings and emotions and begin to empathise with how other people might feel in certain situations, and also to understand the type of behaviour which could cause harm and distress to others.   (Shephard *et al*. n.d. :5)

This stance is in keeping with the approach to child development encapsulated in the report developed from the UNESCO Children's Participation In Community Settings Oslo Summit of 2000 (Chawla 2001), which encourages practitioners to take a positive stance about the possibility of competence as a starting point and sensitively support development of competency in a negotiated, responsive and respectful manner.

This review of research on early child development gives us an appreciation of the pivotal role of attachment, as well as the complexities involved within it. This provides important background with which to understand programmes of work with parents that seek to improve relationships with and outcomes for their children, which we explore below. As indicated above, interventions and curricula draw on differing discourses. They are also accountable in differing ways to differing stakeholders.

4. What, if anything, does the literature tell us about any current practice which focuses on how parents/carers respond to their children's (0-3s) emotional communication?

4.1 Putting Theory into Practice: Evidence from Meta-Analysis of Interventions

Turning to look at interventions designed to nurture parent-child relations, many differing approaches to putting theory into practice are evident in this quite extensive literature. Meta-analysis studies provide a good entry point to understanding the commonalities across approaches and also the limitations. A cautionary note needs to be made in drawing conclusions from intervention studies as, again, there is a danger of extrapolating to the population as a whole from studies focused on describing and responding to deficits or problems. This picture is beginning to change, as the editors of a special issue devoted to positive parenting interventions note:

> …child protection agencies have mainly adopted a stance of control and supervision of malfunctioning families, pointing out their deficiencies and problems rather than focusing on family strengths and opportunities to support them…. Fortunately, the situation is changing. Even the most vulnerable families are no longer defined by their negative profile, but according to the assets and resources they have for parenting their children. (Rodrigo *et al.* 2012: 3)

The special issue reports on developing evidence of preventative programmes that focuses on strengthening protective factors rather than solely addressing risk factors with families.

The literature on efforts to improve early life experience through interventions is burgeoning, along with the number of approaches being evaluated. Table One gives an overview of parenting interventions found within the literature search (for further detail see the expanded table in Appendix 1).

Table One: **Overview of evaluative research on parenting interventions.**

Title	Evidence Base
Circle of Security	Incorporated within Mellow Bumps, there are two further studies of Circle of Security (Ramsauer et al 2014), as a stand-alone intervention. 15 articles, 1 random control trial (RCT) based in Washington DC.
EPEC – Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities	1 RCT in London.
Family Nurse Partnership (Nurse Family Partnership in USA; VoorZorg in the Netherlands)	3 Major RCTs in North America, 1 RCT nearing completion in England. Significant body of literature following up later life benefits of 3 trial populations.
Incredible Years	50 RCTs of children of variable age. Meta-analysis reports a significant improvement in child behaviour with longitudinal studies confirming this. There is 1 RCT for the toddler programme (Gross *et al.* 1999) and another ongoing at Bangor University (Griffith 2010). There has been major uptake of this approach in Wales, Ireland and England.
Mellow Parenting/Bumps	Mellow Parenting: 1 small scale study analysed videotaped parent behaviours and report a marked improvement of them (Puckering 1994). Mellow Bumps: 1 small scale study analysed parent interviews and reports a change in parental attitudes (Breustadt and Puckering 2013).
Muenster Parental Programme (MPP)	1 Small RCT, Germany.
PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnerships) Reflective Parenting (for parents to be) Early Explorers (clinic based drop in for birth -3)	4 self-evaluation studies undertaken as approach developed new aspects, study of Reflective Parenting underway in Oxford.
Raising Children With Confidence	Evaluation surveys by developers of approach suggest short term benefits and high degree of parent satisfaction.
Responsive Interaction Intervention (RII) Relationship focussed intervention (RFI)	26 studies employing group experimental or quasi experimental designs.
Triple P	33 Studies reporting variable degrees of benefit, most targeted at older age range of 3 to 5 years. RCT of Baby Triple P currently underway in Glasgow.

As Table One shows, different programmes have markedly different evidence bases. Those with the largest evidence base are those developed within university research programmes – Incredible Years at the University of Washington in the United States, Triple P at Queensland University in Australia – and subsequently taken up and evaluated worldwide. Smaller programmes developed in the UK prior to the push for evidence-based practice have been widely taken up despite a much more limited research base, largely on the basis of professional recommendation. This contrast is not unique to early childhood interventions.

Broadly, the literature tells us that intervention programmes provide a blend of awareness raising about child development and behavioural techniques to encourage improved parenting strategies. There is a spectrum of approaches taken to work with parents on these objectives. One end focuses on improving parents' own self control (Sanders and Mazzucchelli 2013), primarily through brief intervention Cognitive Behaviour Therapy techniques to overcome identified deficits. At the other end, there is a more reflective approach where the practitioner models respectful empowerment behaviours towards parents and children that the parent can then choose to incorporate into their own parenting repertoire, thereby eliciting their child's strengths.

The meta-analytic work on the range of approaches yields contradictory findings. MacLeod and Nelson (2000), in a review of 56 programmes, found evidence to support the view that an empowerment approach is critical in interventions for vulnerable families. However, a 2003 study (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van Ijzerdoorn, and Juffer 2003) reviewing 70 studies concluded programmes most effective at reducing insensitive parenting and infant attachment insecurity used a moderate number of sessions that were clearly behaviour focused. A meta-analysis that meets the Cochrane review criteria[4] (Barlow *et al*. 2010) reviewed eight studies of group parenting interventions for mothers and children under three. They found that parents reported significant benefit, but that this could not be confirmed through independent observation of behaviours. They also found that studies were rarely directed at the parents of very young children.

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[4] Cochrane reviews are systematic reviews of primary research in human health care and health policy that are defined by clearly formulated questions and stringent protocol to assess rigour of extensive search of existing literature for related data. They are internationally recognised as the highest standard in evidence-based health care.
Source: http://www.cochrane.org/cochrane-reviews/

Furlong *et al.* (2010) point out that differences in the methodology, sampling strategy and intervention approaches studied make comparisons complex. In their meta-analysis of Triple P studies, they found that there is not robust evidence that the approach works well in deprived communities, with lone parents or among younger children. Triple P is primarily a parenting programme to support parent self-control through the use of social learning theory for pre-school and early primary children with behavioural problems. A similar intervention for parents of younger children has been recently developed, as well as specialist programmes to address specific problems such as feeding (Adamson, Morawska and Sanders 2013) and attachment disorders with preterm babies (Ferrari *et al.* 2011). When studies have compared the impact of Triple P, which focuses on improving communication and relational behaviour, with an alternative programme such as healthy eating or stress reduction, there is no statistical significance in the impact. Moreover, the meta-analytic study of Fletcher, Freeman and Matthews (2011) showed that whilst Triple P has a large positive effect on mothers' parenting practices, it has a smaller effect on fathers' parenting practices.

Many of the evaluations of interventions such as Triple P (Wilson *et al.* 2012), and The Incredible Years (O'Neill *et al.* 2010) focus on the age range 3-8 where meta-analytic reviews report effectiveness for the Incredible Years approach (Menting, Orobio de Castro and Matthys 2013). There are far fewer studies done on interventions applied at the 0-3 age range, and many of these are at the upper end – such as the RCT for Incredible Years (Gross *et al.* 1999). Research of the adaptation of Incredible Years for toddlers (Griffith 2010) is ongoing at the Incredible Years Research and Development Project at Bangor University, which has conducted the only RCT of it within Sure Start programmes across England and Wales.

4.2 Findings from Intervention Specific Studies: Family Nurse Partnership

The strongest studies on interventions which are firmly focused on children's wellbeing from its earliest stages in pregnancy concern the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP), known in the USA as Nurse Family Partnership. This is a home-visiting based intervention. Meta-analysis reports that the broad approach of home visiting provides benefits such as maternal life course outcomes, child cognitive outcomes, and parent behaviours and skills (Avellar and Supplee 2013, Filene *et al.* 2013), as do individual studies based here in the UK (Byrne, Holland and Jerzembek 2010). FNP is distinct from other approaches in that the Self-Efficacy Theory developed by its author (Olds *et al.*1986) is central to the approach. Self-Efficacy Theory holds that a person's engagement in behaviour change relies not only on their belief in the benefits of the change, but more

centrally in their belief that they are able to influence the change. A process that allows the person to set the change they would like to achieve can lead to better aligned goals that the person has more confidence in achieving.

Three decades of research supports the FNP approach (Olds *et al.* 1986). It has undergone three RCTs in the USA (Olds *et al.* 1986, Kitzman *et al.* 1997, Olds *et al.* 2004) and undergoes continued scrutiny (Olds *et al.* 2013, Olds *et al.* 2014) and longitudinal study (Old *et al.* 1994, , 1998, Kitzman 2000, Eckenrode 2010). It is a specialist nurse home visitation programme that incorporates Self Efficacy Theory alongside Attachment Theory, (Olds et al. 1986) and Human Ecological Theory. Human Ecological Theory, which also underpins Getting It Right For Every Child (Stradling, McNeill, Barry 2009),contributes a holistic, contextualising perspective to the intervention. The intervention works with teenage mothers identified as at risk of poorer maternal outcomes with the goal of recruiting women by the 16th week of their pregnancy. Nurses are trained in motivation interviewing DANCE (Dyadic and Naturalistic Caregiver Experiences), PIPE (Partnership in Parenting Education), "Perinatal Mental Health" and "Compassionate Minds" approaches. The programme uses a strength-based approach incorporating motivational interviewing, which itself has an impressive evidence base. Motivational interviewing is a person-centred style of discussion designed to elicit and strengthen people's own motivations to change (Miller and Rose 2009).

This approach is used to cover six topic areas which participants themselves prioritise in an agenda matching process. The RCT results report – among other benefits – enhanced maternal health behaviours, improved child behaviour and development, more responsive parenting, enhanced child cognitive development and lower levels of maltreatment. Longer term outcomes include more positive parenting, enhanced behavioural and cognitive development, and reduced offending behaviour (Barnes *et al.* 2009).

FNP's distinct employment of Self Efficacy Theory is of particular relevance for nurturing a rights-based family culture, as it places central importance on respecting the parents' strengths, motivation and decision making process. As with some other approaches (Breustadt and Puckering 2013), the stated intent is for the nurturing role that the nurse plays becomes a model that parents themselves can take up in relating to their child.

A Lothian NHS study of the FNP trial (Martin *et al.* 2011: 6) emphasised the importance of the strength-based approach through which a "therapeutic alliance" is built, citing participants' strong sense that their Family Nurse talked with them in a non-judgemental way, respected their confidentiality and supported them to make their own decisions.

In a study that examines what nurtures the development of participatory rights it is important to note that service users were involved in the recruitment of FNP nurses selected for the Lothian NHS programme and that consensus was achieved in identifying preferred candidates. This inclusion of parents in decision making of a crucial aspect of the programme is indicative of a consistent application of respect for parents, and is exceptional within the literature.

The report goes on to describe as crucial the motivational interviewing approach which gives participants time to identify their own questions, lines of inquiry and choices, as well as the opportunity to prioritise topics through the agenda matching process. It takes time for the development of trust to be established. The report highlights that timing was important both in terms of the pace within visits and the frequency and consistency of visits.

4.3 Implications of Intervention Strategies

Motivational Interviewing: listening as key to effective intervention

It is important to consider the literature on motivational interviewing in order to understand the subtlety of the strength-based approach and the distinct difference it brings to working with mothers of very young children. The literature on motivational interviewing cautions that training in the approach requires a sustained training and development approach to be clinically effective. Early studies comparing different training models for motivational interviewing found that one-off training workshops could be counterproductive in that they convinced clinicians they had acquired the skills to implement motivational interviewing (MI) when in fact they had not. As Miller and Rose (2009) reflect:

> This indicated that trainees need more than a one-time workshop to improve skilfulness in this complex method. Two common learning aids seemed good candidates for improving training: progressive individual feedback on performance, and personal follow-up coaching…. A practical challenge in training clinicians in MI, then, is to help them persist in behaviour change past an initial workshop exposure that may erroneously convince them that they have already learned the method. (Miller and Rose 2009:531)

Crucially, part of MI is allowing the participant to develop motivation to change before moving on to the strategising phase of the interview. This requires particular skill to assess. Where this transition is rushed, MI does not deliver significantly higher returns on investment. The one key factor in both the

training and implementation of MI – and arguably any strength-based approach – is time.

Literature about how professionals are interpreting and implementing MI or other forms of strength-based work in Scotland is limited (Cross *et al.* 2012). However, Cross *et al.* (2012) found there are widely differing interpretations of the term "strength-based", with some practitioners attributing a meaning that contradicts the theoretical underpinning outlined above. A recent study (Entwhistle *et al.* 2011) on women's uptake of opportunity to write in the Scottish Women's Handheld Maternity Record (SWHMR) – which is intended to put maternity care on a strength-based co-production footing – reported that, although women viewed this invitation positively, there was limited uptake of this offer within the SWHMR. This may indicate that limited approaches do not engage parents sufficiently to derive the benefit participation is intended to bring.

Awareness of strength-based approaches amongst health professionals, however, is likely to improve. Both England and Scotland have plans to roll out FNP much more extensively. An English RCT of FNP is currently being conducted across 18 sites, with plans to roll-out the availability of the programme to at least 13,000 participants by 2015 (Owen-Jones et al 2013), whilst in Scotland current trials in Lothian and Tayside NHS are being extended to a further five health boards recruited to develop the approach (Ormston and McConville 2013).

Interventions as rights based work?

It is also perhaps important to point out that the benefit of the interventions discussed is not focused upon rights. A case can be made that improved child behaviours do improve educational opportunities, and therefore do have a benefit in terms of the right to access to education and the right to participation in consultation (Article 12, UNICEF 1989). However, the criteria for effectiveness of interventions is framed in terms of benefit to society through reduced crime and reduced expenditure on health and social care budgets, or, in the case of Early Head Start (Robinson *et al.* 2009), in terms of increased educational attainment – with any benefit framed within a cost-benefit analysis of benefit to society as a whole. The absence of a rights-based focus is of concern and worth examining further. In contrast, therefore, it is of interest to consider an initiative explicitly framed in terms of children's rights – the Baby Friendly Initiative.

The rights that the Baby Friendly Initiative focuses upon are the rights to health and nutrition (Entwhistle 2013). The Initiative is different to the interventions reviewed above. It draws upon research on breastfeeding to support a code of best practice which it encourages countries to adopt, much as they have

adopted the UNCRC. It is worth including information about it in this review for the contrasts it provides. As well as the nutritional rights linked to rights to protection from commercial exploitation by companies marketing baby formula – which is expensive and nutritionally less beneficial than breastmilk – it also highlights that there are important relational and attachment benefits associated with breastfeeding. The evidence supporting the Baby Friendly Initiative reports that one study found that those low-income mothers who breastfed for 6-12 months had the highest scores of any group on quality of parenting interactions at age five (Gutman *et al.* 2009). Evidence has also demonstrated that a child from a low-income background who is breastfed is likely to have better health outcomes than a child from a more affluent background who is formula-fed (Wilson *et al.* 1998). The Initiative approach directs professionals to support positive parenting relationships. The standard 4 within Stage 3 directs health-visiting/public health nursing services and children's centres or equivalent early years settings in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to "Support parents to have a close and loving relationship with their baby" (Entwhistle 2013: 14).

In this section, we have seen that there are contrasting approaches to improving the supportive engagement of parents with their children. The meta-analytic reviews throw up contrasting findings and highlight different factors as being important. Drilling down into one of the most prominent interventions for very young children with increased application here in Scotland, Family Nurse Partnership, we were able to see the importance of the strength-based approach and some of the subtlety of the motivational interviewing upon which the partnership between nurse and family is based.

RCT studies and meta-analysis do not provide much insight into the detail of the interventions due to the focus and structure of reviews. Turning to smaller scale studies more of the detail of approaches comes into focus that more directly addresses the study's concern with techniques for eliciting responses from very young children and interpreting their communication.

5. Does the literature identify techniques for eliciting responses from babies and help us interpret their communications?

5.1 Evidence from Smaller Scale Studies

By expanding the review to examine smaller scale studies and qualitative analysis other important areas of early years engagement come into view, particularly early education research. The studies examined are:

- Relationship Focussed Intervention
- Peer Early Education Partnership
- Mellow Parenting and Mellow Bumps
- Te Whariki and related early years' curricular developments

Whilst three of these approaches are firmly focussed on early years education, we also include an examination of Mellow Parenting as its approach is similar and its approach to development and evaluation more closely aligned to that adopted by early years educators.

Relationship Focussed Intervention

Relationship Focussed Intervention (RFI) or Relational Interaction (RI) was developed as an early intervention to support the development of children with developmental delays or disabilities. The approach challenges the past 30 years of early intervention programmes based on the use of behavioural instructional techniques to encourage children to learn and use the behaviours and skills that characterise higher levels of developmental functioning. In contrast, RFI downplays teaching higher-level developmental behaviours and encourages parents and adults to respond to and support actions and communications that children are already doing. Research with infants of 4-18 months indicates that RFI resulted in a 50% improvement in children's rate of cognitive development and 150% improvement in their rate of communication development (Mahoney and Perales 2005). The authors hypothesise that children's developmental learning is highly dependent upon massive amounts of spontaneous practice of their existing developmental skills, which is the basis for assimilative learning.

One of the primary effects of parental responsiveness is that it enhances children's spontaneous activity. As a result, RFI enhances children's development less by teaching the skills and behaviours that characterise higher levels of developmental functioning and more by encouraging assimilative learning processes of practice and repetition. As the authors go on to explain the dynamics of parental responsiveness, they provide rich detail about what parental responsive activities look like:

> In RFI parents are taught to use Responsive Interaction (RI) strategies to interact more responsively with their children. RI strategies such as "imitate your child" or "follow your child's lead" encourage parents to become highly supportive of their children's previous behaviours; strategies such as "take one turn and wait" promote high levels of parent child-reciprocity; while strategies such as "do what my child can do" help parents match their children's current level of developmental functioning.   (Mahoney and Perales 2008:52)

The authors report that parents' responsive interaction encourages behaviours from children that are pivotal to their development success such as "attention, persistence, interest, initiation, cooperation, joint attention and affect". The authors point out that when children have the opportunity to integrate these attributes into their core learning identity through frequent occurrence, this creates a very strong foundation for further learning (Mahoney and Perales 2008:53).

Whilst the thrust of this study is that RFI results in developmental benefit – particularly for children with developmental delays – it is important to note that parents joining in seemed to result in the child feeling listened to and validated. Therefore, this approach provides insight into techniques parents can use to encourage children's self-esteem and worth – which are crucial for the development of their sense of entitlement to rights.

Peers Early Education Partnership

Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) has a smaller evidence base (Evangelou and Sylva 2003) than the RCT evidenced approaches reviewed above, but can report significant longitudinal benefit for the communities studied (Evangelou *et al.* 2007). Originally conceived in 1995 as a literacy programme with an expanding focus on numeracy, self-esteem and readiness to learn, the Partnership has been delivered as weekly parenting sessions for parents of children 0-5. The principles underlying PEEP are that:

> . . . babies are active social beings and learners from the outset. It supports "parents as parents", encouraging them in their role as their child's first and most important educator, not by "teaching" their child, but by "communicating" with them, emphasising the interactive and nurturing qualities associated with learning.
>
>   (Evangelou et al 2007: 586)

The programme focuses on supporting parents to nurture a communicative bond with their child:

> By watching a baby very closely, you can tune in to the tiny gestures with which a baby talks. If we can talk back to babies so that conversations can develop, they will not only talk more, but will also learn to make more and more complex sounds. You could try chatting to the baby as if she were an older child. You could tell her what you are doing. Tell her what is coming next and give her a chance to answer. When you speak, she will listen intently to your voice. When you pause, she will answer you.
>
> (PEEP, 2000, p. 18)

Interesting developments of PEEP include Early Explorers, an initiative developed to reach parents unlikely to engage in group settings. The approach works in conjunction with health partners to provide an informal drop-in opportunity at clinics where play interactions are modelled to encourage parents' mind-mindedness. Treasure baskets with simple objects of different shapes and textures for babies are available. PEEP authors have also developed The Reflective Parenting programme, which focuses on supporting parents-to-be to think about their baby as an "intentional being" with his or her own feelings and to put themselves in their baby's shoes. Both of these developments draw on specific aspects of attachment that focus on reading an infant's early intersubjectivity and taking the mind-minded approach highlighted as significant above.

Mellow Parenting and Mellow Bumps

The Mellow Parenting approach incorporates attachment theory, behavioural strategies such as cognitive behaviour theory, information about infant development and keeping well. The programme takes a holistic approach, combining discussion with parents apart from children and shared mealtime with children, followed by shared activity time with children to allow for informal shared time together to act as a kind of rehearsal space for change.

Mellow Bumps was developed specifically to address the need for support for women's psychological wellbeing during pregnancy, as research indicated ante-natal classes have not been shown to have a positive mental health effect and fail to engage younger, unmarried and lower economic class mothers in the UK (Breustedt and Puckering 2013, Mabelis and Marryat 2011). In contrast to conventional antenatal education, there is a focus on engagement and increasing accessibility in the delivery of the intervention, as exemplified by the emphasis on providing transport and delivering groups in community settings which are not likely to be viewed as stigmatising by participants. The programme

incorporates the Circle of Security approach, which draws on object relations theory – itself a refinement of attachment theory – and uses outings into community to decrease social isolation of expectant mums. The programme is of interest as it encourages expectant mothers to start communicating with and understanding the responses of their infant pre-birth. For example, activities they are encouraged to try at home include the use of a small torch and bell to increase an expectant mother's awareness of her baby's growing sensitivity to sight and sound within the womb. Like FNP and the PEEP's Reflective Parenting approach detailed above, Mellow Bumps seeks to take advantage of pregnancy as a crucial time of adjustment and preparation.

Te Whariki and related Early Childhood Education Curriculum Developments for Birth-Five

Educational settings have a different tradition of gathering evidence than health settings, and therefore a different literature that it is important to consult.

Where educational curricula begin at birth, there are important insights about the care and development approaches they use. New Zealand and Australia are important examples. A review of the curricular development documents (Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2012, Assessment for Learning and Development Project Consortium 2012) highlights three interrelated aspects of provision: the importance of creating *spaces* that *support cultures of companionable learning*, which in turn set a context for *sustained shared thinking* and conversations, both of which are best supported within a curriculum that *integrates wellbeing with learning*.

Mitchell and Carr (2014) report on work in New Zealand as part of the Te Whariki curriculum that views teaching and learning as being about reciprocal relationships with people, places and things. They focus attention on how the context is developed to "enhance a dialogue landscape that families can participate in". Context is seen as combining a number of important factors that can give rise to what Carr (2001) describes as a dispositional milieu:

> The effects of early childhood experiences are the result of complex interactions between the learner and the learning place, between learning dispositions and a dispositional milieu. Children respond to (and) 'read' a new environment in various ways: in some cases to seize opportunities to enrich their current interests through involvement, challenge, communication and responsibility; and sometimes to avoid learning.   (Carr 2001: 42)

Such a context can be seen as supporting sustained shared thinking and sustained shared conversations, another important concept to arise from work

in Australia and New Zealand. As Appendix 2 illustrates, sustained shared thinking is an important activity. This space of companionable learning involves entering into the child's focus of interest with them and exploring it together, in such a way that they can take the lead as well as benefiting from the perspective the adult brings to the exploration. Like attachment theory, there is a lineage of research associated with this concept going back to Vygotsky (1986).

The role that photography plays within this is also important, as photographs that capture dialogue between child and object can facilitate dialogue between child and family (Dunphy 2012, Whalley *et al.* 2012). An approach developed by Cross (2013) explores how a similar dialogue with parents can be supported through developing a folded holder for photographs, artwork and other materials to be kept in order to trace a child's early exploration with books known as the Story Pockets Approach.

Developing cultures for shared thinking to support wellbeing is an area of early educator work also receiving increased attention. In the report Report on the Outcomes Project: *Shining a Light On Children's Learning*, the 0-3 inquiry identified important steps to a wellbeing approach such as:

- focussing conversations less on problems, and more on what children do, say, learn and share

- the importance of celebrating little things

- connecting physical milestones – buttoning a coat– with child's emotional wellbeing and sense of self – feelings of pride, self sufficiency (Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2012: 32).

Practitioners described being more mindful and aware in their interactions with young children and infants, paying closer attention to gestures, following the lead of the child and experiencing the satisfaction and closeness of exploring things together (Assessment for Learning and Development Consortium 2012).

It is worth noting that the Baby Effective Early Learning Program (Pascal and Bertram 2006) also emphasises attention to very young children's engagement which they divide into two aspects: connectedness and exploring the environment. Connectedness means having a sense of location in the world. It includes an infant's or toddler's independence, openness, alertness, participation and friendliness, and can be seen in children's ability to relate to others, to interlink events and situations in their life and to feel part of the whole. Pascal and Bertram (2006) have developed a scale that describes three levels for three key elements of engagement – connectedness, exploring the environment and making sense of the environment. The adult engagement

measure of this scale focuses on the involvement of the parent in conjunction with the child's engagement (Podmore and Luff 2012).

An indication of the changes to practice this emphasis leads to is given by one of the educators contributing to the community of practice project:

> I have richer conversations with children and families and I have replaced the word "doing" with "learning". This has led to a significant change in the way parents view their child. Focusing on what the child is learning helps to remind us that learning is an ongoing process that continues throughout life, and is not simply defined as the acquisition of a particular skill or set of skills.
>
> (Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2012:16)

The importance of highlighting this for parents is further emphasised as the educator continues to reflect on changing practice:

> Parents ask questions about what the learning means for their baby and how it contributes to their development. Some will comment that they have never thought of their child as being an active contributor to their own learning but rather that learning "just happens". They may have viewed their baby and infant as more of a receiver of their physical care and emotional comfort.
>
> (Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2012: 17)

This work to recognise very young children's active engagement in their learning through their interaction with their environment has important counterparts in Britain (Dunphy 2012), such as the work of Clark and Bernard van Leer (2007) on involving young children in designing early education spaces and Hackett's (2014) collaborative research with parents on the child's meaning making, which explores children's embodied and tacit place making.

The importance of attention to play environments also comes across in the research studies that support the development of Ireland's curricula for 0-3 year olds:

> Observations of children under three years old at play indicate that they are uncomfortable with wide-open spaces, preferring small-scale spaces and the presence of a nurturing adult close by. As they are close to the ground – often sitting and crawling on it – details in the ground that are responsive to their exploratory urges are very important.
>
> (Kernan 2007:6)

Johnson's (2013) study that examined three parent play group settings in Australia found that attention to environment not only benefits children but has important implications for how support for parents can be offered within a play setting.

The international comparative study of Løkken and Moser (2012) demonstrates the importance of taking into consideration children's perspectives and rights in the architectural design and landscaping of early years learning environments, whilst Jolly (1995) focuses on the adaptions of outdoor space for very young children so that their use of it is not eclipsed by more mobile older children.

The forest school approach, which situates learning and play in natural environments, is also yielding interesting insights about the relation between rights development and play environments. Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011) Canadian study of participation and rights opportunities within outdoor play found that educators reported forming more egalitarian and fulfilling relationships with children in outdoor activities.

5.2 Very Young Children's Rights Beyond Buildings

Further search of urban geography literature yields useful related work – such as Raittila (2012), which explores the intergenerational character of young children's everyday experience of urban environments. The study consisted of observing children's spontaneous chat in these spaces as well as children's guided tours of a city block. Raittila uses Soja's (1996) concept of thirdspace, which emphasises the importance of space as a blend of the physical built environment and how that space is imagined and perceived by those who interact with it. Raittila's study extends the argument that people's lives and perceptions are as real as buildings to examine the importance of these in very young children's perspectives and lives. Findings from the *Growing Up in Scotland Study* (Bradshaw *et al.* 2009) also highlight the important interaction between parents' perceptions of environment and their parenting activities and strategies.

Talbot (2013) examined a particular facet of this third space: that of parents' negotiation of the tensions between risk and development, and thus the tension between their young children's rights to protection and rights to growth and decision making. The context of the study was one in which parents identified isolation and the decline of community as impacting on their risk strategies, which they sought to mitigate through local parenting networks. In contrast, Koops (2014) study "Songs from the Car Seat" investigated children aged between 10 months and four and a half years music making while being transported in the car – a very enclosed everyday family space that can be easily

overlooked, despite its growing prevalence in many families' routines. The study found that the car provided some benefits for music making – including reduced distractions and proximity to siblings – leading to increased sibling interaction at times and opportunity for parent and child reflection.

6. Positioning Parents: the wider rights context

It is important to take a step back and reflect on how parents as well as children are positioned within the studies highlighted in this review. Rights are fundamentally relational in nature, and so it is important to consider how policies, research frameworks and institutional practices position parent and child, rather than looking at their relationships in isolation. Rodrigo *et al*. (2012) note that as part of the turn to positive parenting programmes:

> . . . it is increasingly recognized that parents themselves have a say in the process, not only as receivers or recipients of help, but as partners and contributors to their own process of change, drawing upon their own experiences of what works in their families.
>
> (Rodrigo et al, 2012: 3)

The study of McWayne *et al*. (2013a) drawing on Moll's "funds of knowledge" approach shows that – particularly for disadvantaged communities – drawing on parents' expertise leads to significant improvements of the service and outcomes for children.

Increased respect for and attention to parents' views and expertise is signalled here in Scotland within policy. A core component of the GIRFEC model is the involvement of children and families in decision making and respect for their rights (Scottish Government 2010b) as well as the increased attention to strength-based approaches in health policy detailed above and indicated in *The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHS Scotland* (Scottish Government 2010a) and *Reducing Antenatal Health Inequalities Outcome Focussed Evidence into Action Guidance* (Scottish Government 2011).

Delving beneath the top-line policy rhetoric, it is difficult to assess the degree to which parents are being included in design and evaluation of services as much of this detail has not been subjected to rigorous independent research. One important example is that of learning disabled parents' evaluation of the perinatal NHS resource CHANGE, an easy read version of NHS educational materials that expecting learning disabled parents receive (People First (Scotland) Parenting Group, n.d.). The evaluation found that the materials were accessible – with good illustrations and well organised – but that they were not widely available, thus disadvantaging learning disabled parents.

Research has shown that including parents as designer and evaluators can have important correlated effects for both children and communities (O'Leary, Burkett and Brathwaite 2011), but that these partnerships with services are fragile and susceptible to curtailment by larger political decisions that have a negative impact on parents and families alike (Cross 2010, Bagley and Ackerley2006, Bagley 2007). Bagley's research followed a SureStart project that involved parents in decision making for the development of increased services and training, and details the impact of subsequent withdrawal of NHS funding and staffing of the project. Cross' (2010) study highlights similar dynamics within local authority restructuring of services. Whilst a change of government has sharply curtailed Sure Start and follow on projects in England, here in Scotland an information request to WithScotland (2014) reveals that there are an increasing number of projects including parents in design, evaluation and facilitation of services. However, many of these are at an early stage of development.

As well as considering how parents are positioned in terms of policy making, their position in terms of the economy of child care provision has also been highlighted in research as a rights issue. In examining how children's rights as a whole can be supported in early years, Mitchell (2013) argues that marketisation of the early years education sector has had a negative impact on children's rights and that the sector poorly supports parents in the early developmental and educational choices. Drawing on international research which shows privatised care employs less well qualified staff and has higher turnover rates and poorer CPD training, Mitchell (2013) argues that privatised services do not provide spaces for parents to collaborate in early years settings and that corporate provision's standardisation of the service product minimises responsiveness to local cultural context or individual parental initiative. In contrast, state provision of early years centres has very good examples of fostering parent groups, providing context for long term informal support and providing trusted stable meeting points for parents. She argues that this is a children's rights issue, as:

> corporate childcare does not operate as a community facility and
> there is not the opportunity for parents, teachers and children to take
> responsibility in deciding the shape of the services – contrary to
> articles 5 and 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
> (Mitchell 2013: 56)

The Lothian trial of FNP, previously examined, also draws attention to the wider service context that impacts on parenting, with evaluators noting that:

External factors that might impact on FNP's ability to deliver [its] outcomes – such as the availability and perceived suitability of services specifically for young parents, or client concerns about affordable childcare to enable them to work. Thus, while FNP appears to have the potential to have a range of positive impacts on short, medium and long-term outcomes, its ability to impact on these in practice will depend not only on the delivery of FNP itself, but also how it interacts with and is supported by the wider service landscape
(Ormston and McConville 2013: iv).

This concludes the assessment of research data relevant to developing an engagement strategy with parents of very young children on supporting children's rights. It is a quite diverse literature which reveals there are several different facets to families with very young children and also a range of settings in which to engage with families. Below, we draw the findings together and reflect on their import for the engagement strategy.

7. Towards celebrating and promoting young children's participation: their experiences and their environments

7.1 Limitations of Study

As the literature review demonstrates, there are important gaps in the knowledge base.

In terms of the theoretical base, there are tensions between psychologists who place an emphasis on intersubjectivity and those who theorise development within a more individualised model. Researchers are seeking to refine an understanding of attachment using differing terminology and frameworks of analysis, which makes comparisons difficult. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the importance of mind mindedness – or a parent's attention to their child's developing thinking and inquiring – is of crucial importance.

In terms of research on interventions, there are some which have wide uptake and high practitioner approval that have not been examined in random control trial conditions. Meta-analysis of studies throws up questions of rigour and conflict of interest for some high-profile parenting interventions. The focus on evidence base pushes research in the direction of quantitative design with emphasis on measurement with coded analytic tools rated as highly reliable. This masks some of the very detail that it would be useful to consider.

7.2 Summary of Findings

Bearing in mind these limitations, this review has drawn together useful insights that can inform an engagement process with parents of very young children.

- There is a very large literature on interventions to improve parenting in the early years. Many of these are based on addressing parental deficits, but increasingly there is a shift towards acknowledging and working with parents' strengths, interests and motivations.

- There are very few examples of parents' involvement in designing or evaluating programmes within health and social care literature. This may effectively model tokenistic participation as a social norm for children just as they are laying down fundamental templates of social interaction.

- Within the early education literature, there are more examples of approaches that encourage parents as active partners with services in their child's development and education.

- This emphasis on collaboration with parents and children in early years education has led to several early years academic journals taking

particular interest in participation and children's rights in the last few years, dedicating special issues to the topic (Gray and Harcourt 2012, Rodrigo *et al.* 2012).

- Work in New Zealand and Australia most explicitly examines early childhood engagement in terms of citizenship development and social justice and pays particular attention to developing spaces and cultures that encourage children's "question asking" and "question exploring" (Sands Carr and Lee 2012).

- Those developing these approaches also caution that the privatisation of early years education and care curtails the prevalence and reach of this mode of working, disproportionately impacting disadvantaged families.

Lessons from current practice to support parent's engagement with very young children

Within this literature there are important insights that can inform an engagement project with parents around supporting their child's rights from birth.

- Research continues to show the importance of parents' consistent responsive interaction with their children from birth in terms of both short-term and long-term significant impact on children's lives— including biologically measurable outcomes and general health and wellbeing outcomes.

- Some literature highlights relational factors are more significant and can overcome detrimental environmental factors.

- The literature uses a range of descriptors to describe this important early child-parent interaction including mind-mindedness, responsiveness and parental nurturing.

- Parenting Interventions for the earliest years use a range of approaches, with the literature reporting more positive outcomes for approaches that incorporate home visits by supporting professionals such as the Family Nurse Partnership and the Early Head Start Programme.

- Strength-based approaches which focus on recognising that parents have existing strengths and are capable of drawing on these to solve problems are an important component of programmes that report significant benefit. However, differences in how strength-based approaches are interpreted, implemented and positioned alongside other elements of interventions either blunt or reinforce the capacity of such approaches to foster a culture of participatory rights with families and communities.

- Parenting interventions originally designed for pre-school and early primary school aged children with behaviour difficulties are being revised to work with parents of children of an earlier age and to address specific health and wellbeing concerns such as obesity.

In terms of engaging with very young children to understand their views

- Common to many of the approaches is an emphasis on observing the infant or child's engagement with their environment and resourcing extensions of interaction with materials that the child indicates he or she has an interest in.

- Use of simple low cost materials is modelled in many approaches. Examples include the use of a small torch and bell within the Mellow Bumps to increase an expectant mother's awareness of their child's growing sensitivity to sight and sound within the womb, and the use of treasure baskets for babies to explore filled with simple objects of different shapes and textures within the Early Explorers PEEP initiative.

- The work done to create spaces and cultures of inquiry in early education and care settings highlight the importance of design features that support companionable communication and mutual discovery.

7.3 Further reflections on the findings

Reflecting on these findings, a number of points for consideration are also worth noting.

Sustained Shared Thinking

The place of sustained shared thinking is important for very young children just as it is for pre-schoolers. In infancy, this may be primarily through shared interaction of gesture and the musicality of the human voice and its elastic capabilities. Confidence that this is not only worthwhile but crucially important activity does need to be more widely encouraged, and contexts in which it can be explored supported.

Listening as a Skilled Craft

As an examination of Family Nurse Partnership and motivational interviewing showed, the quality of listening can vary considerably and deserves particular attention. The brief asked this study to look at what the literature can tell us about specific techniques for interpreting communication with very young children. The literature on attachment has shown there are a range of descriptors, all of which imply listening. However, a description of the quality of listening remains elusive. Rather than being a technical process for which

precise step-by-step instructions can be given, it is more like a craft, that is, an activity acquired through apprenticeship requiring hours of observation and practice to refine, which requires continual practice to retain and a community of learning to support. Listening in some respects requires the synthesis of opposites: a tuning in to appreciate the fine detail of an infant's gestures and vocalisation whilst at the same time a widening out and openness to the possible interpretations of the infant's intentions. One's sense that one has been listened to goes beyond the obvious body language that supports it.

The Importance of Full Surround Consultation

The process of getting consultation right can become overly focused on getting an instrument right, and this can preclude important ways that children communicate their preferences through play. Roger Hart, who is well known for drawing childhood practitioners' attention to Arnstien's ladder of participation, places much more emphasis on paying attention to children's embodied and spatialised means of making their views known. Observing how children interact with their environment, augmenting what they seem interested in to further what they can do, observing their enacted responses and making adjustments accordingly are hallmarks of the approach he advocates (Hart, Iltus and Beeton 2004). Thus, a dialogue mediated through play objects and environment takes place over time.

Taking Time

As the Family Nurse Partnership and New Zealand and Australian curricular development both stress, one of the most valuable resources a child needs is time. In the guide to quality listening, even a few seconds given to attending further to a child before responding it suggests can make a difference. However, there are further considerations to do with the pacing and rhythm of activities in which timing is also important, as well as the aspect of having time for just being there. Participatory research with children done in a number of international settings by Harcourt also emphasises the importance of phasing and pacing inquiry so that young children establish relationships and can build cumulative knowledge and successive learning strategies (Harcourt 2011).

The role of legitimate peripheral participation

Whilst this study has highlighted particular strategies for tuning into communication with very young children, literature on engagement with pre-school children is also relevant. Where very young children share a setting with pre-school children whether within the family or a birth-to-five care setting, they are keen observers of interactions of those slightly older than them. These

observations play an important role in their enculturation. The constructivist view of development (Wertsch 1991) places crucial importance on the peripheral participation children access and its role in forming aspirational identities.

Dispelling Myths

As we have seen, the focus of many interventions seeks to awaken a parent's awareness of their child's complex and meaningful communication and relational activity. This may meet with resistance for a number of cultural factors, compounded by oversimplification of Piagetian concepts that are in wide circulation amongst the general population. Sinclair (2011) identifies parallels between Finnish and Scottish cultures of avoidant parenting which may stem from similar traditional practices. Whilst these may no longer be prevalent, they have woven into our culture habitual ways of thinking about and fitting young children into busy lives. Reimagining and reassessing common sense is an important aspect of discussing the right start to children's rights.

Considering Context

In considering how the literature can support a consultation with parents about their role in the developments of rights for their children from birth, the social-political context is important to keep in focus. Given the findings above, the following questions may enable this:

- How might parents want to engage in a dialogue about what would best resource the relationships they want with their children?

- Can a discussion of choice be expanded from those that marketisation offers?

8. Concluding remarks

In closing, whilst the breadth of literature on parenting and its impact on very young children is very extensive, there are still areas of knowledge that deserve closer attention. The engagement process offers an opportunity to make an important contribution. From this review, we can identify that a further search of policy and practitioner literature and case study research could yield further findings on:

- practitioner reflections on observing and interacting with very young children
- the important dynamic of how children interact with their environment
- the role of arts in participation work with very young families
- fathers' role in early years and changing practice to support this work with disabled parents and disabled children to support parenting for participation
- effective approaches for working with parents with alcohol and substance misuse issues.

Including parents in further design and development of a consultation journey would yield important findings about how this form of co-production can:

- incorporate parents' perspectives and concerns into design and facilitation strategies
- support articulation of children's rights in an engaging way for parents of young children
- provide a forum in which the interplay between children's, parents and environmental rights interact

As we highlighted in the introduction, the first years of a child's life are the most pivotal and the role parents play in supporting their development most vital. It is an optimal time to do engagement work on children's rights. The picture that emerges from the review is an encouraging one, with many recent positive developments in policy and practice that can support the engagement project.

Glossary

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory describes the dynamics of long-term relationships between humans. Its most important tenet is that an infant needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally.

Attunement

Includes the alignment of states of mind in moments of engagement, during which affect is communicated with facial expression, vocalisations, body gestures and eye contact.

Dialogic Psychology

In terms of education psychology, it consists of moving from symbolic conceptions of mind and internalist perspectives that focus on mental schemata of previous knowledge to theories that see intersubjectivity and communication as the primary factors in learning.

Dispositional Milieu

A dispositional milieu is a place, an environment, or a community in which learning dispositions are enhanced (or avoided).

Dyad

A dyad is a group of two people, the smallest possible social group. As an adjective, "dyadic" describes their interaction. The pair of individuals in a dyad can be linked via romantic interest, family relation, interests, work, partners in crime and so on.

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity emphasizes that shared cognition and consensus is essential in the shaping of our ideas and relations. Language is viewed as communal rather than private. Empirically, the intersubjective school is inspired by research on infant's non-verbal communication. A main issue is how central relational issues are communicated at a very fast pace in a non-verbal fashion.

Involvement

A state of intense, wholehearted mental activity, characterised by sustained concentration and intrinsic motivation. Highly involved children – and adults – operate at the limit of their capacities, learning to change ways of responding and understanding in a manner that leads to deep-level learning (adapted from Laevers 1994). Children's involvement can be recognised by their facial, vocal

and emotional expressions, the energy, attention and care they apply and the creativity and complexity they bring to the situation (adapted from Reflect, Respect, Relate, Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments 2009).

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Newcomers become members of a community initially by participating in simple and low-risk tasks that are nonetheless productive and necessary to further the goals of the community. Through peripheral activities, novices become acquainted with the tasks, vocabulary, and organizing principles of the community. (Lave and Wegner 1991).

Mind-mindedness

The carer's proclivity to consider and treat her child as having a mind and capable of intentional behaviour in their own and distinct mental life (Meins *et al.* 2002).

Self Efficacy Theory

Seeks to temper behaviourialist models of personal development and change by highlighting the importance of performance and motivation, in part determining how effective people believe they can be. Therefore, it is important to attend to a person's choices and views as part of a change process.

Sustained Shared Thinking

An episode in which two or more individuals (children together, or adults and children) "work together" in an intellectual way to do something like solving a problem, clarifying a concept, evaluating activities or extending a narrative. Both parties contribute to the thinking, and both develop and extend the line or lines of inquiry (Siraj-Blatchford 2009).

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Web Resources

Circle of Security: http://circleofsecurity.net/resources/publications/

Centre for Research in Early Childhood: http://www.crec.co.uk/

Happy Suns and Sad Sheep Anit Bully Pack for us with under fives: http://www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk/uploads/publications/21.pdf

Incredible Years: http://incredibleyears.com/

Land of Me – a series of early learning apps now published by Ladybird: http://www.madeinme.com/the-land-of-me/

PEEP: http://www.peep.org.uk/

STARS Project: http://parentsusingdrugs.org.uk

Stella Project http://www.womeninlondon.org.uk/archive/gldvpst.htm

Strengthening Families: http://strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org

Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority: http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/documents/earlyyears/outcomesprojectabridged.pdf

Appendix 1: Evaluative Research on Parenting Interventions

Overview of Intervention Types

Title	Approach	Evidence Base
Empowering Parents; Empowering Communities (EPEC)	Peer mentoring approach to address behaviour problems in pre-school early primary children.	One Random Control Trial (RCT) in London
Family Nurse Partnership (Nurse Family Partnership in USA; VoorZorg in the Netherlands)	Programme aims are to improve pregnancy outcomes, the health and wellbeing of first time parents and their children, child development and families' economic self-sufficiency through partnership working with midwife from 10 weeks of pregnancy through to child's second year. Based on Attachment theory, Self-Efficacy Theory (Olds 2006, Houston Miller 2011) and Human Ecological Theory.	Three large RCTs in North America, RCT nearing completion in England.
Incredible Years	Programmes address behavioural problems from 0-12 with the majority of studies focusing on the 3-7 age range. The Incredible Years Toddler Programme focuses on: (1) secure attachment or bonding with parents; (2) development of language, social and emotional expression; and (3) developing a sense of self and unique individuality. Typically, Incredible Years consists of a 14 session collaborative-based intervention for parents that uses group discussions and role plays in combination with video material to illustrate various parenting and discipline strategies, introduce non-aversive discipline strategies, foster cooperation, strengthen relationships and promote positive parenting techniques such as child-directed play and encouragement. (McGilloway *et al.* 2011)	50 RCT's of children of variable age. Meta-analysis reports a significant improvement in child behaviour with longitudinal studies confirming this. There is one RCT for the toddler programme (Gross *et al.* 1999) and one ongoing at Bangor University (Griffiths 2011)

Title	Approach	Evidence Base
Mellow Parenting Programmes: **Mellow Bumps** **Mellow Mums** **Mellow Dads** **Mellow Babies** **Mellow Toddlers** **Mellow Futures**	Mellow Parenting programmes are targeted particularly at families who have additional support needs and who may find it difficult to engage with or access mainstream services. The programmes are based on attachment and social learning theory and designed to improve parent-child relationships. Components of a mums or dads group include: strengths based video feedback, group work and joint activities with either babies or children. Mellow Futures supports parents with learning disabilities and includes a mentor to help reinforce the key messages and skills. Mellow Bumps is an 8 week antenatal programme it focuses on attachment and encourages stress reduction and relaxation. Outcomes of Mellow Parenting include: Improved parent-child interaction Decreased child behaviour problems Improved parents' wellbeing Increased parents' effectiveness and confidence in parenting Improved children's school readiness including language development A reduction in parents' stress, depression and anxiety	Small scale evaluation of individual programmes report a range of improvements. (Puckering *et al*. 1994). (Breustadt and Puckering 2013).
Muenster Parental Programme (MPP)	A responsive parenting programme for parents of children with hearing loss aged 3-18 months. The programme comprises six group sessions and two single training sessions with video feedback supported by individual counselling pre and post programme delivery. The focus of the programme lies in enhancing parents' responsive behaviour and in reducing inappropriate initiative behaviour.	One Small RCT, Germany

Title	Approach	Evidence Base
Parents Early Education Partnerships (PEEP) **Reflective Parenting (for parents to be)** **Early Explorers (clinic based drop in)**	An initiative originally conceived in 1995 as a literacy programme with an expanding focus on numeracy, self-esteem and readiness to learn, delivered as weekly parenting sessions for parents of children aged 0-5. Early Explorers and informal drop-in session models play interaction to encourage parents' mind-mindedness. The Reflective Parenting programme focuses on supporting parents-to-be to think about their baby as an "intentional being" with his or her own feelings, and to put themselves in their baby's shoes.	4 self-evaluation studies undertaken as approach developed new aspects, study of Reflective Parenting underway in Oxford.
Raising Children With Confidence	A seven week programme for parents and practitioners on children's mental development with an aim to support mental health by focussing on the importance of relationships, positive interactions and role modelling in nurturing a sense of meaning and belonging, and developing emotionally strong individuals and communities, developed in Edinburgh with Big Lottery money.	Evaluation surveys by developers of the approach suggest short term benefits and high degree of parent satisfaction.
Responsive Interaction Intervention(RII) or Relation Focussed Intervention (RFI)	An approach to promoting the developmental and social emotional functioning of young children with developmental delays by encouraging parents to engage in highly responsive interactions with them. RFI was derived from two basic concepts supported by child development theory and research: (1) parents are likely to have a greater impact on their children's development than professionals or other adults because of the substantially greater number of opportunities they have to provide developmental stimulation and support to their children; and (2) parents promote their children's development by engaging in highly responsive interactions with them.	26 studies employing group experimental or quasi-experimental designs.
Triple P	Programme for parents of preschool and early primary children, with earlier age intervention more recently developed. Five levels of approach from information provision (level 1) to intensive 1-to-1 support (level 5). Specialist programmes to address specific problems such as feeding (Adamson *et al.* 2013).	33 Studies reporting variable degrees of benefit. RCT currently underway in Glasgow for children aged 3-7 years.

Appendix 2: Examples of Guides to Improve Listening to Very Young Children

a) Sustained Shared Thinking Examples

Tuning in: Listening carefully to what is being said, observing body language and what the child is doing.

Showing genuine interest: Giving their whole attention to the child, maintaining eye contact, affirming, smiling, nodding.

Respecting children's own decisions and choices by inviting children to elaborate:

Saying things like "I really want to know more about this" and listening and engaging in the response.

Recapping: "So you think that ..."

Offering the adult's own experience "I like to listen to music when I cook at home."

Clarifying ideas: "Right Darren, so you think that this stone will melt if I boil it in water?"

Suggesting: "You might like to try doing it this way."

Reminding: "Don't forget that you said that this stone will melt if I boil it."

Using encouragement to further thinking: "You have really thought hard about where to put this door in the palace – where will you put the windows?"

Offering an alternative viewpoint: "Maybe Goldilocks wasn't naughty when she ate the porridge?"

Speculating: "Do you think the three bears would have liked Goldilocks to come to live with them as their friend?"

Reciprocating: "Thank goodness that you were wearing wellington boots when you jumped in those puddles, George. Look at my feet, they are soaking wet!"

Asking open questions: "How did you ... ?" "Why does this ... ?" "What happens next?" "What do you think?" "I wonder what would happen if ... ?"

Modelling thinking: "I have to think hard about what I do this evening. I need take my library books back to the library and stop off at the supermarket to get some food for tomorrow, but I just won't have time to do all of these things."

Source: Siraj-Blatchford (2005)

b) Wellbeing Observation Tool Questions on Meaning

What experiences give this child genuine situations of meaning?

How do you know?

How do they talk about these experiences?

In reflection, are they able to reconnect with the feelings or experiences that gave them meaning?

How do they connect with shared experiences of the group?

Do they join in during situations of shared purpose?

Do they give or contribute to others or class groups in any way? (Pro-social behaviours)

Source: Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2012)

Appendix 3: Search Results Table

Searching EBSCO host, Web of Science, Taylor Francis Journal Portal for the following terms in all fields	Records Found	Records Screened As Eligible
Attachment AND Parenting AND Infant	5,687	432
Attachment AND Parenting AND Infant AND Meta-analysis	40	12
Early Childhood AND Parenting AND Intervention	372	129
Early Childhood AND Parenting AND Communication	30	4
Early Childhood AND Peer Approaches	2	0
Early Childhood AND Design AND Space	200	14
Early Childhood AND Design AND Space	170	18
Early Childhood AND Parenting Intervention AND Participation	2	2
Family Nurse Partnership	61	14
Incredible Years	61	7
PEEP	1	1
RFI	22	22
Triple P, early childhood, intervention	162	
Early Childhood AND Parenting AND Bonding	360	7
Early Childhood and Positive Attachment	0	0
TOTAL	7,170	662

Eligibility criteria: age range, focus of study, relevance to remit.

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