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The children’s centre teacher role: developing practice in the private, voluntary and independent sector

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This study assessed the impact of the role of the teacher in two children’s centres in England and identified some of the supporting and limiting factors that influenced outcomes. The teachers worked across several settings in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector, with the aim of enhancing early years practice and practitioner confidence. A conceptual framework was devised to model the impact of the teacher role based on Leithwood and Levin (2005). Teachers were found to bring vital professional knowledge and experience to the role and delivered their methods through a range of leadership styles as identified in the literature. Teachers were successful in developing practice and staff confidence in settings; this also impacted positively on outcomes for children. However, success was dependent on a number of moderating factors, including sector-related factors such as the qualifications of staff. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: early years; private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector; children’s centre teacher; leadership

Introduction

A key quality issue for early years education and care services in England concerns the potential impact of an early years teacher or other graduate professional on practice outside the school sector. Historically, few graduates have been employed in services for children aged nought to four outside maintained nursery schools and classes, where teachers have led mainly part-time provision for three- and four-year olds only (Pugh 2006). With a recent policy change (HM Treasury 2004) teachers now lead practice in children’s centres and in linked private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings serving the full nought to four age range. Additionally, the government has introduced Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) (CWDC 2007), with equivalency to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), for graduates, including children’s centre teachers (DfES 2006a), leading practice in the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfES 2007). The aim is to improve outcomes for young children and their families through the impact of an Early Years Professional (EYP) in every children’s centre by 2010 and every full daycare setting by 2015 (House of Commons 2007).

This policy represents a response to findings from the influential study of early years practice, Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) (Sylva et al. 2004a), that settings employing staff with higher qualifications provide higher quality environments, and that children make more progress. Children’s centre teachers are tasked with providing good quality educational experiences for children;

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articulating and disseminating effective practice to a range of audiences; and embracing the children’s centre philosophy (DfES 2006a). Both teacher and EYP roles (DfES 2006a; CWDC 2007) are essentially pedagogical leadership roles; the leader’s role is about generating constructive change (Kotter 1990) through direction-setting and influence (Leithwood and Levin 2005). Relating to both adult and children’s learning (Whelan 2004) the teacher’s role is complementary to that of the children’s centre manager, who is expected to lead and manage across the broader, multi-disciplinary aspects of centre work, including pedagogy (Whelan 2004).

Recent policy aims to raise practitioner qualification levels to those in the most advanced countries for this quality criterion (OECD 2006). Despite wide variations in staffing and qualifications within and across OECD countries, some countries, with integrated services for children from birth to school entry, already train graduate specialists to work across this age range (OECD 2006). The EYFS (DfES 2007) and new roles represent a move towards a more integrated service in England, although tensions relating to staffing remain (Grenier 2006).

The leadership literature
This study draws on concepts from the leadership literature relating to emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman 2000; Goleman et al. 2002) to support analysis of the impact of the children’s centre teacher leadership role. Goleman (2000) argues that emotionally intelligent leaders are self- and socially aware, expertly managing themselves and their relationships; they use up to six leadership styles matched to context, which impact differentially on organisational climate. Bolman and Deal locate EI as a set of leadership competences relating to ‘interpersonal and group dynamics’ (2003, 160) within their ‘human resource frame’. This is one of a set of four proposed frames for making sense of complex organisations to support effective leadership; any single frame can offer only partial understanding. Western (2008) explains EI as a type of social intelligence, first theorised in 1993 by Mayer and Salovey and popularised by Goleman; it draws on therapeutic leadership discourse, which developed as ‘a reaction to the cold rhetoric of scientific management and the dehumanizing aspects of modernity’ (Western 2008, 91). Western claims a continuing influence for therapeutic discourse, despite more recent discourses; for example, messiah discourse, exemplified in the transformational leadership literature, and emergent discourses such as eco-leadership. He questions Goleman’s over-expansion of the original concept and unsupported claims for EI as a quantitative assessment and training tool. However, Bolman and Deal (2003, 169) argue that the popularity of EI indicates Goleman’s effective framing of the issues, resonating with leaders’ need to reflect on ‘the relative importance of intellectual and social skills in organisational success’. While acknowledging these critiques, this study draws on Goleman’s conceptualisation for several reasons: the professional experience of one author suggests that the model can support early years leaders’ reflections on the pervasive interpersonal dimensions of their role; Western confirms a strength of therapeutic discourse as its potential to support leaders in organisations ‘with an ethos of human development’ (2008, 170); and the study uses EI to support participant reflection, not as a measurement tool.
The study also draws on Leithwood and Levin’s (2005) model conceptualising the effects of school leaders and leadership programmes on pupil learning. This model suggests that antecedents, the personal characteristics of leaders, have a significant influence on leadership effects by influencing leadership practices (the independent variables). School leaders and leadership programmes influence outcomes such as academic achievement, motivation and dropout rates. Effects on outcomes, however, are influenced by moderating variables, including factors such as family background, gender and school conditions. This model, refined by researchers in educational leadership (Simkins et al. 2006; Day 2008), has potential to support analysis of likely complex leadership effects in children’s centres.

The study
This article reports a 10-month evaluation (2006–2007) of a local authority (LA) pilot for the development of the children’s centre teacher role. Two teachers worked across two centres each, with centres linked to a small group of settings, including maintained nursery classes, private nurseries and pre-schools. The teachers’ role was to work with settings to impact positively on outcomes for children. The LA selected one of each pair of centres for the evaluation. Pseudonyms have been used in reporting to ensure anonymity for centres and teachers (Cohen et al. 2007). In Crossways, with a town-centre location, Denny worked across four private nurseries and a centre drop-in for parents, carers and young children. In Maybury, with a more rural location, Noreen worked across two private nurseries, one voluntary pre-school, and the centre’s drop-in provision. The study focused on the teachers’ role in seven PVI settings and Maybury’s drop-in provision.

Objectives, linked to LA priorities, were:

1. To investigate the effects of the teacher’s role on aspects of children’s learning and development. Aspects investigated were: communication, language and literacy (CLL); personal, social and emotional development (PSE); interaction; diversity and inclusion; and promoting parental involvement.

2. To investigate the effects of the teacher’s role on practitioners’ confidence in delivering key aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum and pedagogy. Key aspects were those identified above.

3. To investigate the factors affecting the impact of the qualified teacher on children’s learning and practitioner confidence.

Methodology
The study focused on gaining understanding of a real-life problem of policy and practice to influence solutions at a local level and potentially beyond. Related knowledge claims fit with the pragmatic school of thought and the methodology includes elements of a participatory approach (Cresswell 2003). The study used qualitative and quantitative methods matched to purpose and incorporated methodological and informant triangulation to both improve accuracy and gain a fuller picture of the real-life problem (Denscombe 2007).
Planning meetings were held, the first with the two teachers, followed by individual meetings with centre managers. Aims were to refine the research design, informed by participants’ knowledge and understanding of the context; gain background information; and seek commitment to a participatory approach.

Questionnaires were used to access teacher and setting manager perceptions regarding teacher effectiveness. Selected as economical in time demands for participants, the questionnaires sought setting information such as staff numbers and qualification levels. They included rating scales and open-ended questions focused on perceptions of:

- confidence gains for practitioners in focus areas;
- the early years environment within each setting;
- what had worked well and less well for the teacher’s work in settings and the reasons.

Teachers completed a questionnaire for each setting and setting managers completed a similar questionnaire. Email and telephone follow up ensured a 100% response rate, although one manager’s questionnaire was only partly completed.

Observational assessments of setting quality were undertaken in seven settings, using scales relevant to pilot objectives from the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (Harms et al. 1998) and the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms et al. 2003), as identified in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PILOT OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>ECERS-R / ITERS Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication, language and literacy</td>
<td>Language – reasoning / Listening and talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal, social and emotional development</td>
<td>Activities – dramatic play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusion: planning for individual learning needs</td>
<td>Personal care routines – greeting/departing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusion: promoting awareness and addressing equity issues</td>
<td>Program structure – provision for children with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Activities – promoting acceptance of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement in children’s learning</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents and staff – provision for parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. ECERS-R and ITERS categories matched to pilot objectives.
These established tools use a seven-point scale (inadequate to excellent) and can be used for research and programme improvement. A researcher and teacher observed for half a day in each setting and negotiated scores.

(4) A focus group (two teachers and two centre managers) took place in the final phase of the study. Summarised findings were presented to the group as a draft of the model in Figure 2. The aim was to revise the model collaboratively, and to facilitate reflection on future development of the teacher role.

Ethical issues relating to informed consent (Cohen et al. 2007) were considered. The researchers assured all research participants, verbally and in writing, of confidentiality in reporting. The demands and potential benefits of the study were explained verbally and accepted by participants.

**Conceptualising the children’s centre teacher role**

The study set out to identify a potentially complex set of factors relating to the impact of the teacher’s leadership role. Figure 2 represents the final version of a model (drawing on Leithwood and Levin 2005; Simkins et al. 2006) developed during data analysis to summarise likely relationships between factors, incorporating amendments proposed during focus-group discussion.

The first set of factors discussed is the *antecedents* to the teachers’ performance as pedagogical leaders – the prior experiences and characteristics that teachers bring to their work, including training and continuing professional development (CPD). Findings are that the teachers brought a high level of expertise to their roles. Both

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**Figure 2.** Model of the impact of the children’s centre teacher role.
described themselves as experienced nursery and reception teachers with respectively 11 and 18 years in practitioner and senior leadership roles prior to their current role. A range of recent training included short courses on team-building and curriculum themes matched to areas where teachers now provided leadership. This claim of expertise is supported by analysis of numerical data. Before being introduced to ECERS-R and ITERS scales, the teachers rated key aspects of setting practice on a 1 to 5 scale. Comparison with later ratings using established scales shows similar rankings, except in the areas of ‘Interaction’ and ‘Provision for children with disabilities’ where teachers tended to underestimate setting quality. Teacher ratings were far more closely matched to ECERS-R and ITERS scores than those of setting managers who tended to overestimate setting quality.

Antecedents influence the second set of factors considered, the teachers’ pedagogical leadership behaviours, potentially key instigators of change. As teachers spent limited time working with particular children or parents in any setting, their impact on outcomes was mainly through influencing practitioners and managers. Goleman (2000) argues that effective leaders draw on a repertoire of leadership styles, selected as appropriate to context; his model of leadership behaviours (EI) is used below to support analysis of the teachers’ leadership behaviours.

Affiliative leadership (Goleman 2000) is a collaborative style, demonstrated by leaders who are responsive to the emotional needs of colleagues. The teachers recognised this style as essential to their leadership:

The positive relationships have been crucial, with trust and mutual respect.

Setting managers also valued these supportive, interpersonal skills:

She is good support in moments of stress...

The value of this approach to motivate in challenging circumstances was underlined by a young, inexperienced manager following an ‘unsatisfactory’ Ofsted judgement:

It has helped to support me and in turn help reinforce that we are doing well and constantly improving.

A democratic approach, exemplified by ‘collaboration, team leadership, communication’ [original emphasis] (Goleman 2000, 83) can also influence organisational climate in positive ways. Teachers reported effective use of this approach; they collaborated with managers when planning visits and foci, visiting every two to four weeks, depending on needs; and they modelled aspects of practice in response to practitioner requests. Setting managers confirmed use of this approach,

The work is joint initiation, Jean, sometimes staff may particularly ask about something so then it can be modelled.

This style, however, was not used exclusively. The teachers, while acknowledging areas of good practice, identified significant development needs across settings. For example, early in the pilot the teachers gave all settings, except one, a score of 3 (minimal) or 2 for ‘promoting awareness and addressing equity issues’; and they gave three settings a minimal rating for two or three additional areas (from ‘interaction’, ‘planning for individual learning needs’ and ‘parental involvement’). This context meets Goleman’s (2000, 82) criteria for use of a visionary approach: ‘when changes require a new vision, or when a clear direction is needed’ [original emphasis]. Questionnaire and focus-group evidence confirms the teachers’ intention in this context to communicate a vision for new ways of working, securing commitment to
change through a range of strategies matched to pilot objectives. Figure 3 identifies the strategies and examples of activity used.

The teachers reported that all strategies worked well in some contexts but judged network meetings as particularly useful in increasing staff confidence. Several setting managers noted the value of teacher-led staff meetings for sharing a vision for new ways of working:

Whole training has benefited as everyone hearing the same messages....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading the review and development of provision</th>
<th>Modelling practice with children / parents</th>
<th>Modelling / supporting organisational processes</th>
<th>Leading / signposting CPD opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication, language and literacy (CLL)</td>
<td>Book, role play, mark-making, story and role play areas</td>
<td>Using props with storytelling Writing in a birthday card for a puppet</td>
<td>Teacher led training in settings: communicating matters Teacher led network: speech and language focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal, social and emotional development (PSE)</td>
<td>Developing a self-service snack area</td>
<td>Using Persona dolls with a small group</td>
<td>LA training: SALLEY behaviour programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Interaction and questioning styles Heuristic play</td>
<td>See above for CLL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusion</td>
<td>Auditing books for diversity</td>
<td>Use of puppets reflecting ethnic diversity Support with referral to the pre-school inclusion team</td>
<td>Teacher led network: diversity focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting parental involvement</td>
<td>Parent workshops: treasure baskets, story sacks</td>
<td>Support for action plan: parental involvement</td>
<td>Teacher led network: transition focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Strategies to communicate a vision and build commitment.
and teacher modelling, which:

helped all staff to improve their interaction and questioning skills.

However, these approaches were not always positively received or fully understood. One teacher commented that some practitioners were not seeing beyond the ‘activity idea’ when observing modelled practice; and some settings declined CPD opportunities, including staff meetings and network meetings.

Complementing work with teams, Goleman (2000, 83) identifies coaching as a style that can ‘help an employee improve performance or develop long-term strengths’. It requires an ongoing dialogue, is demanding of time, and is likely to be effective when an individual wants to change. Both teachers identified coaching as a valuable strategy in work with managers most open to professional growth. For example, in one setting, Denny reported:

…there has been a lot of work one to one with the manager which has resulted in total development of the setting and individuals.

These regularly used leadership behaviours match to four of the six styles judged by Goleman et al. (2002) as most likely to impact positively on organisational climate. There was no evidence of the commanding style which ‘demands immediate compliance’ (Goleman 2000, 82–83) or a pace-setting style (Goleman 2002); however, the teachers explained that they held a commanding style in reserve. Goleman advises both styles be used with caution.

The study evidenced the teachers’ contingent use of a repertoire of leadership behaviours, likely to impact positively on planned outcomes (Goleman 2002). The next set of factors examined is the moderating factors likely to enhance or limit this impact (see Figure 2). The national policy environment and related guidance (QCA 2000; DfES 2003) was perceived by teachers and some setting managers as mainly supportive. Effective LA training and pre-school inclusion strategies were also noted (focus group). However, one private nursery manager seemed ambivalent; she welcomed Birth to Three training but aspects of her setting’s values appeared to sit uneasily with the LA vision. The Ofsted inspection framework is a key driver for quality in England (Andreae and Matthews 2006), and teachers used Ofsted reports positively to inform setting action plans. One setting’s unsatisfactory report united staff in determination to improve practice. However, the teachers identified negative consequences for their work when Ofsted inspectors failed to identify weaknesses.

There was a range of sector-related factors, some linked, and most limiting the impact of the teacher’s role. Focus-group members reported staff retention, a national day-care issue, linked to pay, status and hours of work (Rolfe 2005), as a concern for Crossways settings, although staff in Maybury settings moved post relatively infrequently. One private nursery had not filled vacant posts, and the teacher reported the consequences as low staff morale and weakened practice. On occasion, sector conditions of service limited opportunities for CPD or its impact. For example, two staff members in a private nursery were unable to attend a three-day course, identified as important by the teacher; the owner advised taking this as unpaid leave. In another Crossways setting, the manager and teacher reported practitioners as unreceptive to an evening training session at the end of a long working day. As a further concern, Denny reported low owner commitment to investment in accommodation and resources as an issue for two of four private nurseries. The Maybury pre-school used a shared community space, with resources
packed away at the end of sessions, placing limits on the quality of provision. Finally, outdoor space was problematic for half the settings; one setting had no outdoor provision, and several settings shared play space with parked vehicles or accessed the play area through a car park.

As a positive sector-related factor, teachers commented on good adult–child ratios, significantly better than in most schools. However, a teacher noted that, without practitioner understanding of pedagogy, good ratios can limit children’s opportunities to act independently. EPPE (Sylva et al. 2004) confirms quality in settings with a ‘care’ tradition as linked to qualification levels, more than ratios. Practitioner and manager qualifications were similar across pilot settings and matched the national pattern (Owen 2006); few staff were qualified or enrolled on courses above Level 3; and just one setting manager had a degree. A teacher identified the relatively large number of inexperienced staff in one setting as a particular issue for her work.

Children’s centre factors are important moderating factors, particularly for work with parents. Focus-group members identified more community ownership and ‘readiness’ for the children’s centre agenda in Maybury. They saw this as relating to the more established, rural community; the recruitment of staff from within the community; and opportunities to build on a former Sure Start Local Programme. In contrast, day-care in Crossways settings attracted parents who worked or studied in the town centre but lived elsewhere. The centre also faced challenges of reach in relation to families from diverse cultures, including asylum-seeking families (Anning et al. 2007).

The leadership behaviours of children’s centre teachers influenced key intermediate outcomes, moderated as explained above. Teacher and manager reports suggest that teachers successfully supported staff professional development and learning, although the extent varied significantly across settings and focus areas. Some positive comments are noted above and, at best, one teacher reported the achievement of ‘a culture of self improvement’. Managers and teachers reported satisfactory or better increases for practitioner confidence in most focus areas, with some good or excellent gains in some settings. However, teachers rated confidence gains for ‘promoting awareness and addressing equity issues’ as limited in four of eight settings.

Centre outcomes contrasted sharply in terms of achieving the collaboration of teacher, manager, practitioners and parents within a learning community. Focus-group members described significant developments at Maybury, for example popular, monthly ‘Ask the families’ evenings to discuss centre issues, and a centre strategy of listening to parents when planning developments, identified as an essential strategy by Anning et al. (2007). Crossways was at a much earlier stage in planning this work. Both teachers reported some impact on the development and learning of parents, achieved through teacher-led parent workshops. There was also significant development for a sub-group of Maybury parents, who had progressed through volunteering to accredited training, and on to employment in the centre (final outcome 3), supported by the teacher and wider team.

Intermediate outcomes influenced final outcomes, examined below. Setting-based practice with children and families was the outcome most clearly evidenced in this study, with ECERS-R and ITERS scores identifying significant variations in quality across settings and focus areas at the end of the pilot. Three of seven settings scored
between 5.6 (good) and 6.25 (approaching excellent) for ‘Interaction’ and three Maybury settings scored 5 (good) for ‘Provision for parents’. Additionally, three inclusive Crossways settings gained two scores of 7 (excellent) and a score of 6.25 for ‘Provision for children with disabilities’; the teacher noted strong links with LA pre-school inclusion services. All settings were rated as 4 (between minimal and good) or just above for other focus areas excepting one area of weakness, ‘promoting awareness and addressing equity issues’. Here, in line with national findings (Sylva et al. 2004) and despite teacher strategies (see Figure 3), scores were low; five settings scored 3 (minimal) and two settings scored 2.

Turning to children’s learning, the lack of direct measures is a limitation of the study, although likely outcomes can be inferred. Sylva et al. claim that quality, measured by ECERS-R subscales for ‘Interaction’ and ‘Language-Reasoning’ is ‘associated with gains in several cognitive outcomes’ (2004, 26). Alongside good or better ECERS-R scores for ‘Interaction’ (see above), teachers reported good or better practitioner confidence gains for ‘Interaction’ in half the settings and for CLL in six of eight settings. This suggests a likely impact on aspects of children’s learning in most settings. However, teachers remained concerned that interactions in several settings were too adult-directed, with little opportunity for what Sylva et al. (2004) term ‘sustained shared thinking.’

The career development of managers, staff and parents is closely linked to their professional development and there is some evidence of progression, linked to CPD opportunities. Some practitioners had moved to promoted posts and several Maybury parents moved on to paid employment within the centre or elsewhere. One manager, encouraged by the teacher, was considering a foundation degree to improve career prospects, but possibly outside the private sector. Looking to the future, the capacity for individual development appeared stronger at Maybury, with established approaches to developing parents and volunteers, and stable staffing. Both centres offered opportunities for the development of teams with good availability of CPD, alongside opportunities for involvement in planning and evaluation. However, staff qualification levels left settings over-reliant on teacher expertise to lead developments. Maybury had good capacity for continuing community development, with relative stability and high community ownership, while Crossways faced significant challenges.

**Discussion and conclusions**

This small-scale study has identified the variable impact of the work of two children’s centre teachers and identified key supporting and limiting factors influencing outcomes. A collaboratively developed model, drawing on Leithwood and Levin (2005) and Goleman (2003), supports conceptualisation of the teacher role and the complex relationships between variables. Key positive factors influencing outcomes were teachers’ expert knowledge and understanding of curriculum and pedagogy (Sylva et al. 2004b); their skills in drawing on a repertoire of leadership styles (Goleman et al. 2003); national frameworks and guidance (QCA 2000; DfES 2003); and a supportive LA strategy. Limiting factors were the challenging aspects of the Crossways context (Anning et al. 2007); the early stage of development of this centre; and PVI sector characteristics (Nicholson et al. 2008). The expertise of the teachers was spread thinly; each teacher worked in eight or more linked PVI settings;
and some settings had three or more staff teams working with different age groups. Where several moderating factors worked against the teacher’s influence, impact was likely to be limited.

The small scale of this study and the varying pattern of policy implementation across LAs limits the generalisability of findings. However, the mixed findings, alongside other recent studies, can raise issues for early years policy and practice in England. Some have relevance for other countries concerned to broaden and strengthen conceptualisation of the early years leadership role (Rodd 2006). The first issue concerns how current training schemes prepare early years teachers for the children’s centre leadership role. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, 76) have argued that staff across early years settings require ‘support in developing their subject knowledge and their knowledge of how to scaffold children’s learning’. Teachers in this study had relevant expertise and effective leadership skills but there are questions about the current training of early years teachers for this demanding role, with a lack of focus on practice with under-threes (Pugh 2006); and limited foci on both learning through play (Broadhead 2008) and leadership. With the current expansion of children’s centres, Broadhead’s call for a radical rethinking of teacher education in the early years seems timely.

Related to this is the question of ongoing professional development for children’s centre teachers. Children’s centre contexts are likely to be complex and challenging, even for experienced teachers. Opportunities for in-depth reflection on leadership behaviours are important and yet the two teachers in this study had attended short leadership and management courses only. In England, two programmes, National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) (NCSL 2007) and EYP (CWDC 2007), offer opportunities for relevant leadership development. EYP standards focus more comprehensively on pedagogical leadership, presenting an opportunity to extend expertise in areas addressed only weakly in initial training. However, there is a further need to consider ongoing CPD. EYP networks being set up by LAs provide a potentially useful approach (Continyou 2008).

LAs have strategic responsibilities for children’s centres (DfES 2006b) and this study suggests the importance of their work in shaping supportive, LA-wide structures and processes. To improve the impact of the children’s centre teacher role, LAs could consider their role in relation to issues identified in this study. For example, alongside training programmes for practitioners and managers, it could be useful to offer tailored, subsidised training for setting owners. Where an owner has a solely business background and lacks relevant professional qualifications, knowledge and understanding of quality issues may be weak.

Finally, at a national level there are significant PVI sector issues to be addressed. Study findings suggest that, despite the efforts of committed and able pedagogical leaders, sector quality can be vulnerable to negative and interlinked moderating factors. Qualification levels are critical, and the government has strived to raise levels through funding for foundation degrees (DCSF 2008) and EYPS pathways (CWDC 2007). However, the Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2007 (Nicholson et al. 2008), documents problems with take-up of funding and identifies only 6% of full day-care staff with a Level 5 qualification or above. The survey also confirms other limiting factors highlighted in this study: sustainability issues are significant, with only 30% of full day-care providers making a profit and 33% just covering costs;
there are staff turnover rates of 15% in the full day-care sector; and continuing low rates of pay compare poorly with the school sector.

Ambitious government targets for EYPs in children’s centres and PVI settings (House of Commons 2007) are central to the government vision for quality in early years services and the integration of education and care. Achievement of the EYP targets could address the concern raised by this study that the children’s centre teacher influence is spread too thinly to achieve the government’s aspirations in the PVI sector. However, unless some persistent, PVI sector issues are more radically addressed, it seems unlikely that the potential of children’s centre teacher and EYP roles will be fully realised.

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