



Staff Focus – [Nicola Stobbs](#),

Course Leader for the BA (Hons) Early Childhood in Society

Niki has worked for the Department for Children and Families since 2012. During this time, she has collaborated on evaluations of the 'Family Links' Parenting Programme and kinship care support. She is experienced in working with vulnerable and under-represented people including minority groups in areas of deprivation, Gypsy Romany Traveller individuals and kinship families. Niki is the author of several articles, chapters and books and is also the course leader for the Early Childhood in Society degree.



Niki's Publications

Musgrave, J. & Stobbs, N. (2015) Early Years Placements: A Critical Guide to Outstanding Work-Based Learning. Northwich. Critical Publishing Ltd

Musgrave, J. & Stobbs, N. (2015) Proper Placements Nursery World, (13-26 July Edition)

Stobbs, N. & Prowle, A. (2016/17) Becoming a kinship carer – education and support needs of grandparents who are parenting. International Journal of Birth and Parenting (Vol 4, issue 2, Winter 2016/7).

Stobbs, N. & Prowle, A. (2017) Becoming a kinship carer – education and support needs of grandparents who are parenting. International Journal of Birth and Parenting. Vol 4. Issue 2

Stobbs, N. Harvell, J & Reed, M. (2017) Developing PD within the EYFS curriculum framework in Fleet, Patterson & Robertson, Pedagogical Documentation in Early Years Practice. London. Sage.

Prowle, N. & Stobbs, N. (2017) Nursery World: Good to Talk (1-14 May 2017 edition).

Stobbs, N. & Gallagher, S. (2017) Assessment and feedback, in Musgrave, J. Savin-Baden, M. & Stobbs, N. (eds) Studying for Your Early Years Degree: skills and knowledge for becoming an effective practitioner. St Albans. Critical Publishing Ltd.

Stobbs, N. & Musgrave, J. (2017) Learning in the Workplace. In Musgrave, J. Savin-Baden, M. & Stobbs, N. (eds) Studying for Your Early Years Degree: skills and knowledge for becoming an effective practitioner. St Albans. Critical Publishing Ltd.

Musgrave, J. Savin-Baden, M. & Stobbs, N. (eds) (2017) Studying for Your Early Years Degree: skills and knowledge for becoming an effective practitioner. St Albans. Critical Publishing Ltd.

Stobbs, N. & Prowle, A. (2017) Kith and Kin Nursery World: (16-29 Oct 2017 edition)

Stobbs, N. (2019) Time to Talk? Nursery World (4-17 Feb 2019 edition)

Alcock, S. & Stobbs, N. (eds) (2019) Rethinking Play as Pedagogy. Oxon. Routledge

Stobbs, N. (2019) The play, pedagogy, learning and teaching divide: can we close the gap? TACTYC Reflections. Available at: <https://tactyc.org.uk/reflections/>

Research during the COVID-19 pandemic

A study was carried out by CACHE (now NCFE) to raise an awareness of the critical work carried out by those working in education and childcare during the Covid-19 pandemic. This video outlines a series of reflections from across the sector, including Angela Hodgkins and Janet Harvell from DCF. Angela's research examined the emotional impact of the pandemic on early years practitioners and Janet's research celebrates the resilience of staff and children during this time.

Please take a look: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6znWThLwz9g>

Team Publications and Presentations

On 28th January 2022, **Angela Hodgkins** and **Nicola Watson** attended the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network Annual Conference and presented "preparing students for the emotion work of early childhood practice". Our PhD students also presented and an outline of their contributions follows.

Angela also achieved the publication below, based upon her PhD research:

Hodgkins, A. (2022), Exploring early childhood practitioners' perceptions of empathy with children and families: initial findings, *Educational Review* <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.2023471>

Amanda Sheehy, DCF associate lecturer, presented a paper at the ECSDN conference in January. The paper covered her PhD research into the **promotion of gender equality in primary schools through teacher reflection**. An outline of this is given below as food for thought.



In early childhood, children may receive extensive and formative messages about the significance and implications of gender (Paechter, 2007; Reay, 2001; Renzetti, Curran, and Maier, 2014) with possible consequences for their future interests and career choices (Hayes et al, 2018; Bian, Leslie and Cimpian, 2017). Taking a social constructionist approach, this study deems gender to be performative (Butler, 1990), with understanding of appropriate behaviour governed by social norms (Foucault, 1979). It uses Bronfenbrenner's (1981) model of ecological development to identify teachers as one of the significant influences in children's lives.

Focussing specifically on teachers' reflections on their own attitudes to gender and how this can impact on their practice, Amanda's study furthers understanding of how teachers' promotion of gender equality in the classroom can be enhanced through seeking to explore and evaluate the attitudes of a sample of teachers. Participants were interviewed about their gender construction, life experiences, influences, childhood and attitudes towards gender equality. They reflected on the implicit messages they may convey to their pupils and how they could improve their practice, considering language, learning environment, resources and curriculum content. The findings suggest that inviting teachers to reflect on their practice in this way could be a powerful tool in promoting gender equality with children.

TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS

It is that key moment where you just reflect. But you have to go through that training to break apart those assumptions. You have to shatter them to then build them up.

I don't remember any specific training as part of my teacher training that was about gender equality. It's not something I think I've ever had much training on.

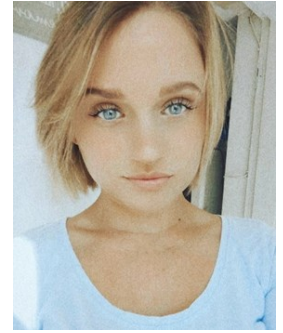
You need someone to open your eyes don't you? Even if you're not meaning to come across as if you're treating boys and girls differently or the way you address a group of children, you should be aware of it.

The importance that I place on [gender equality] isn't particularly high which is silly because I know it is a big problem and there's evidence for that so maybe I need to be more aware.

I'd always say, "You can be whatever you want to be," but I think I prove it more now with my practice.

The first thing you do is change your practice. That's the environment you set. They learn so much from you as a person. It's more important than the... colours or interests. It's you. It's your comments, your expectations, your tone.

Developing Humans: How EY students are well positioned in becoming resilient leaders.



Emma Laurence reflects upon her PhD Research into leadership.

Having studied the BA in Early Childhood before embarking on my PhD research into educational leadership, it struck me that reviewing the literature on leadership and leader development became a series of déjà vu moments; many of the conditions required for successful leader development directly reflected my knowledge of child development. I consider these parallels an interesting learning opportunity both for Early Years practitioners and for leadership theorists. For example, adaptive leadership theorists describe a productive zone of disequilibrium, which depicts an uncomfortable 'space' between sufficient provocation, where challenge is high but not so high that it seems insurmountable. This will be familiar to those early years practitioners aware of either Piaget's (1936) theory of cognitive development or Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development.

Another point to arise from the literature was that leaders often experience a fear of failure and feel a need to protect vested interests as a result of working within a sector characterised by the high levels of accountability and low levels of support. As educators we are conscious what an obstacle fear of failure can present for learners in accessing meaningful development opportunities.

It is clear within leadership literature that relational issues such as trust and security are crucial to effective leadership, as well as to the leaders' meaningful development. In times of uncertainty leaders often display both relational oriented behaviours and task-oriented behaviours. Leaders need to feel like consistent and predictable people who we feel will respond to the emerging needs of the organisation and it is through a secure and trustful relationship that leadership can be most effectively enacted. These are also the conditions required for secure attachments in the Early Years.

These are just a few examples of these déjà vu moments that I have experienced whilst exploring the leadership literature. And whilst drawing these parallels may be misconstrued as condescension, considering our understanding of child development through a broader lens of *human* development offers an opportunity for reflecting on leadership which nurtures human potential. What happens to the general capacity of the organisation if the principles of the EYFS – that is positive relationships, enabling environments and a recognition of the uniqueness of each individual, are applied to everyone therein? What happens when psychological and emotional safety and a feeling of security and trust are afforded to professionals in the workplace? Within the EY profession we care deeply about the holistic needs for children in a way that we often overlook for ourselves, and it is not childish to exist as a holistic being nor is it childish that our well-being impacts upon our development.

References

Piaget, J. (1936). *Origins of intelligence in the child*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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Reflections

Gallagher, S. and N. Stobbs (2021) 'Utopia as method with early childhood undergraduates: personal political potential and practitioner power', Paper presentation at the online conference, *Social Pedagogy and Social Education: Here and Now – Creating Hope in Dystopia*, International Online Conference 22-24 June 2021, Thempra and SPA (Social Pedagogy Association Asociación de Pedagogía Social).

Senior Lecturer, Stuart Gallagher reflects on the conference.

Niki Stobbs and Sue Baylis have blazed a trail in connecting our Early Childhood studies and department's ethos with social pedagogy. And, together, Niki and I have taught a module on utopia and early childhood for a number of years. Then, along comes a social pedagogy conference about utopia! Well, dystopia really, and how to create hope in tough times.

Niki and I presented a paper that captured the mood of a module, a module in which we use Levitas's Utopia as Method to help students fulfil their potential as early childhood advocates and to be change-makers for their sector.

We began by engaging in a common theme of Early Childhood undergraduate programmes: that childhood is socially constructed. We feel that this theme means our students must face at least two conclusions: first, dystopian accounts of the 21st-century (including global health, ecological, financial and concomitant crises) imply dystopian constructions of childhood; and, second, undergraduates as social actors have a part to play in resisting dystopia through conscious control over utopian action.

Where the Early Years sector is often characterised as underpaid and undervalued, overlooked and over-ruled, Utopia as Method enables students to consider their individual and collective power to effect change on behalf of very young children's best interests.

Our presentation was part of a collection of international perspectives on social pedagogy. Once all had been presented, Niki and I were delighted to participate in an online discussion about the work being done to help people learn to face the future and to shape it positively. On the screen were the familiar faces of friends made when Niki and Sue validated the Early Childhood course with the Social Pedagogy Professional Association. There were new faces too, to help join the dots between our module's work and the wider history and current principles of social pedagogy.

We're currently writing up the presentation as a journal article, to keep that dialogue alive. The connections made at this conference have helped sustain our hope for our students in the dystopian landscape of their practice. We're confident they'll create hope for the children in their care.

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