

20th EECERA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
'KNOWLEDGE AND VOICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
Birmingham, UK 6th – 8th September 2010

SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP IN ACTION – CHILDREN' S
CENTRES IN THE LEAD

Self-organised SYMPOSIUM II/17

Chair: Pam Mundy, National College, United Kingdom

Using a collaborative inquiry approach to gain 'in situ' new knowledge of the impact of integrating practices in early years services: A cross-case study from eight localities in UK

Paper Presentation:

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A Collaborative Inquiry Approach to Gaining *'in situ'* New Knowledge of the Impact of Integrating Practices in Early Years Services: A Cross-Case Study from Eight Localities

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Case Study

- During the period 2009-10, 13 children's centre leaders from 13 UK regions registered and participated on the National College for School Leadership ISLP programme and conducted case study into their practices. Of these 10 registered with the IOE to complete the 'Leading Inquiry-based Professional Learning Communities' double module and 8 submitted assignments for accreditation at masters level.
- The study reported here is an exploratory cross-case study (Yin, 2003) of 8 children centre leaders who completed the ISLP programme, the double module and submitted assignments for accreditation.
- The study draws upon multiple sources of evidence. These include: participants' case study portfolio assignments, which include evidence-base of impact and notes following workshops and discussions.
- Interpretive analysis guided an exploration of evidence as the study progressed (Creswell, 1998).
- Participants' and Schools' rights to anonymity and confidentiality was respected and identities protected (BERA, 2004).

Leading Inquiry-based Professional Learning Communities Double Module

- **Core Module aims to ensure participants:**
 - Engage in collaboration with colleagues, children and families and key stakeholders by establishing professional learning communities
 - Conduct systematic inquiry into practice using action research methodology
 - Develop leadership roles following distributed or constructivist leadership styles
 - Evaluate impact upon practice by interpretive analysis of data providing an evidence base to inform improvement in practices

Leading Inquiry-based Professional Learning Communities

- **Bespoked Module Aim** - Exploring concept of Integrated System Leadership:

The Early Years Integrated Systems Leadership Pilot Programme, National College for Leadership of School and Children's Services

Shared Objectives – Statements of Intent:

1. *Framing our inquiries around “elements underpinning integrated systems leadership in early years (as identified by NC) allowing focus upon situated concept” of integrated systems leadership.*
2. *An understanding of systems leadership will be developed by “leading the inquiry community as I inquire into an integrated system”*
3. *As researchers who are not detached from the research being conducted we are “participants-as-practitioners-**as-leaders-as** researchers”.*
4. *Impact to be claimed will be based upon an analysis of evidence (data/information) generated and, will be discussed in relation to the situation, local/national context and academic/professional literature.*

How did we achieve this?

How do we gain 'in situ' new knowledge?

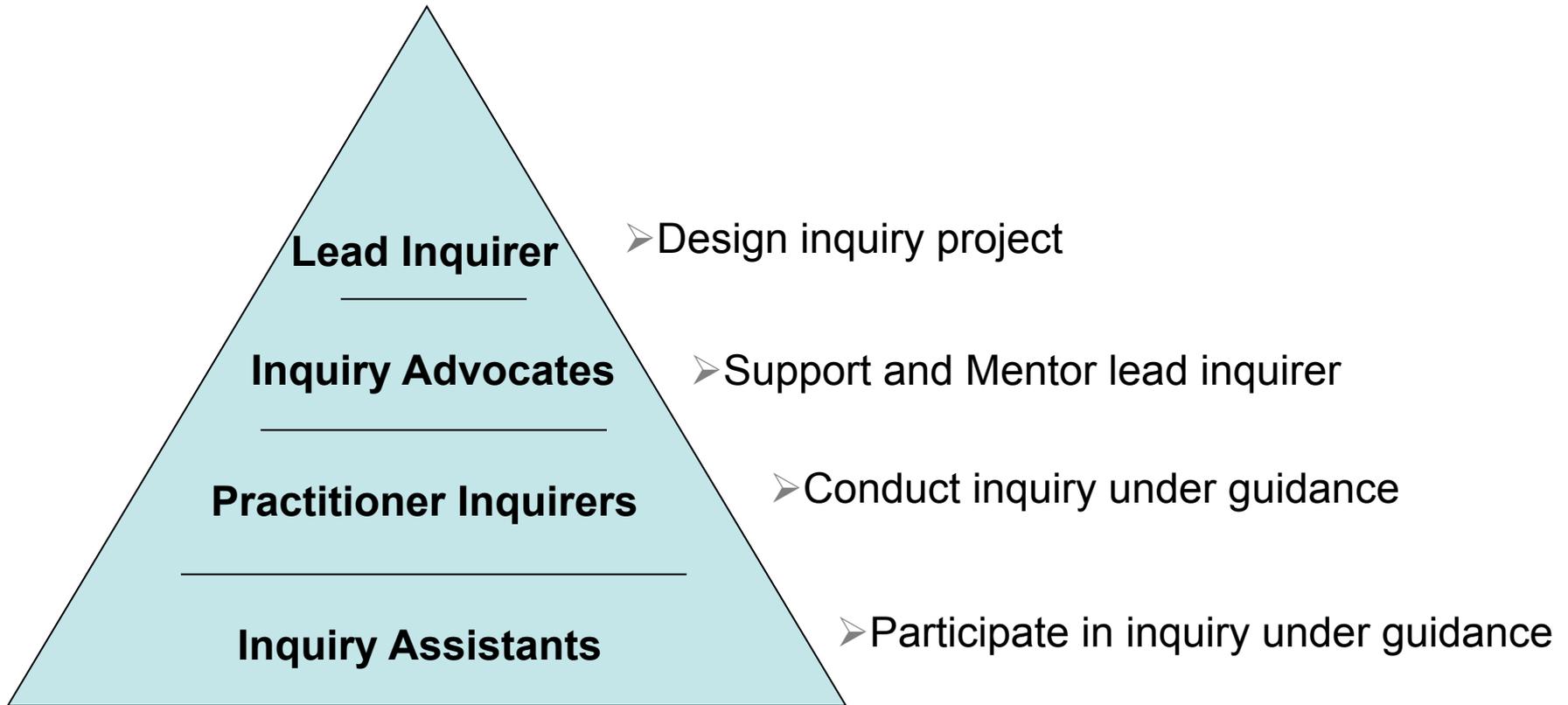
Collaborative Inquiry Approach

- **Integrated approach to research design drawing upon:**
 - ‘situated learning’
 - (Lave and Wenger 1991)
 - building communities of practice
 - (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, Mayer, 2010)
 - creating effective professional learning communities
 - (Bolam *et.al.*, 2005)
 - engaging participants in reflexive process of action research
 - (Robertson 2000)
 - developing ‘enquiry-minded leadership’
 - (Stoll, Bolam & Collarbone 2002).

Engage in Collaborative Participation

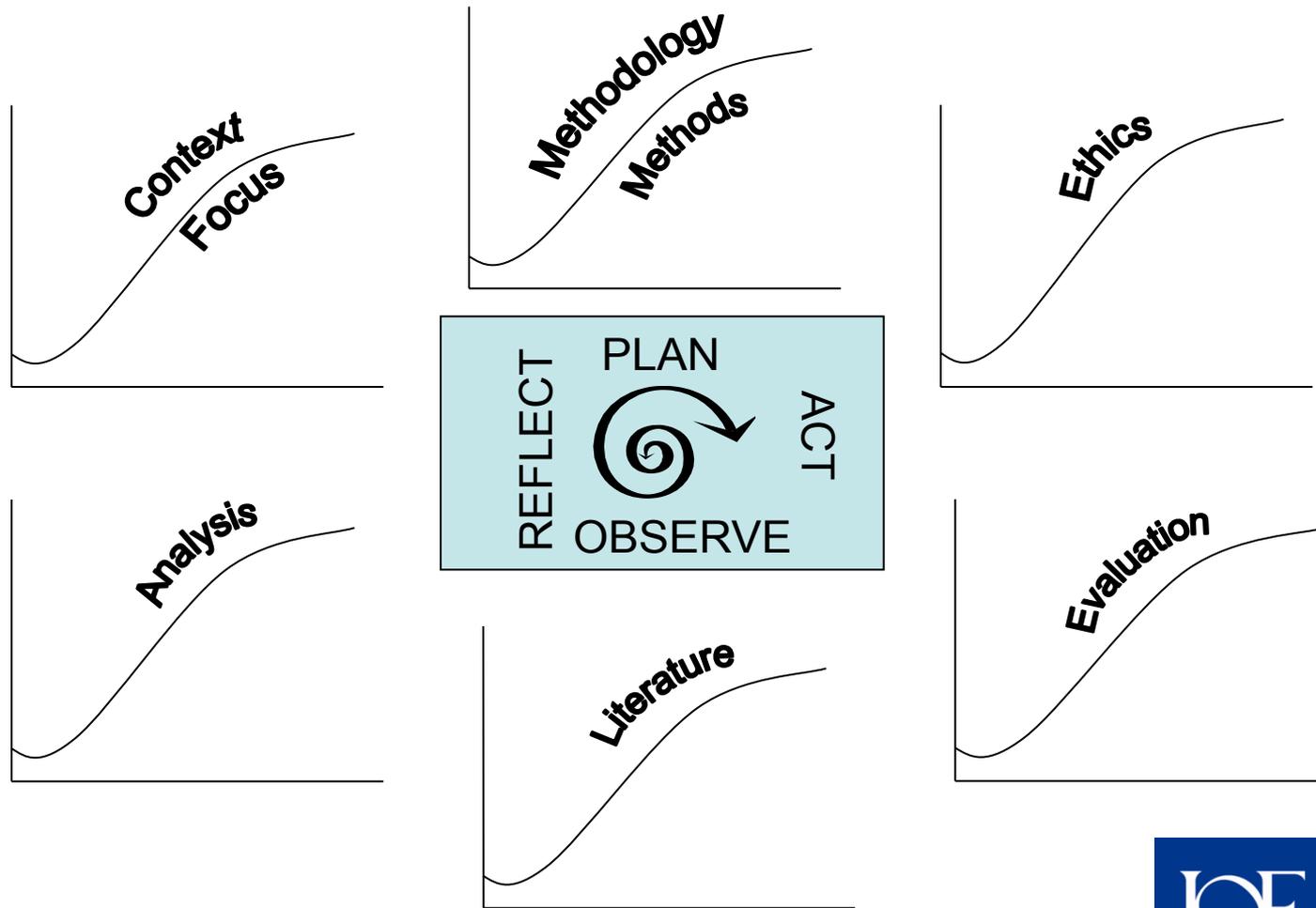


Building an Inquiry Community



(Mayer, 2010)

A Systematic Process of Inquiry into Practice

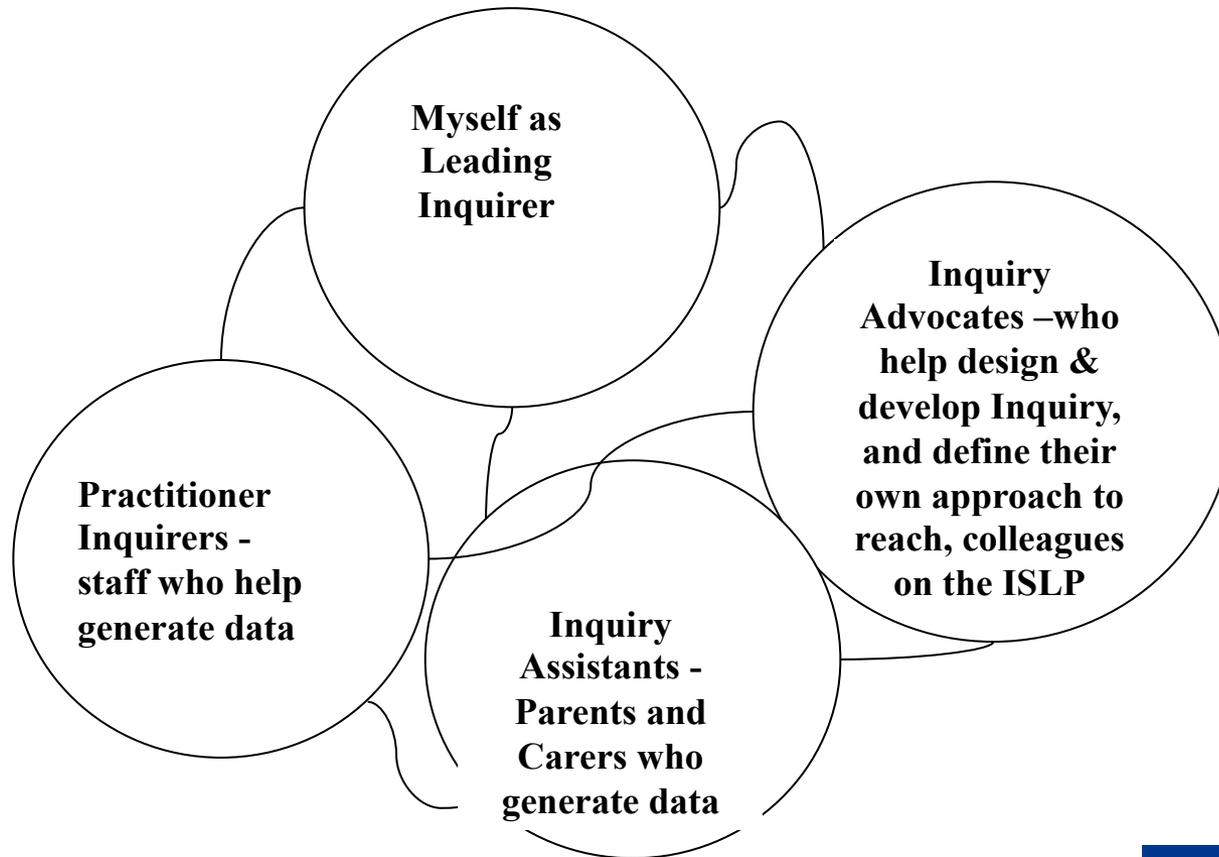


Case Studies

- Outcomes based collaborative practice – working across professional groups (Participants SM, SB)
- Engagement of service-users & service reach (CW, DP, PH)
- Service-user & community decision-making & participation (PN, JR, AM)

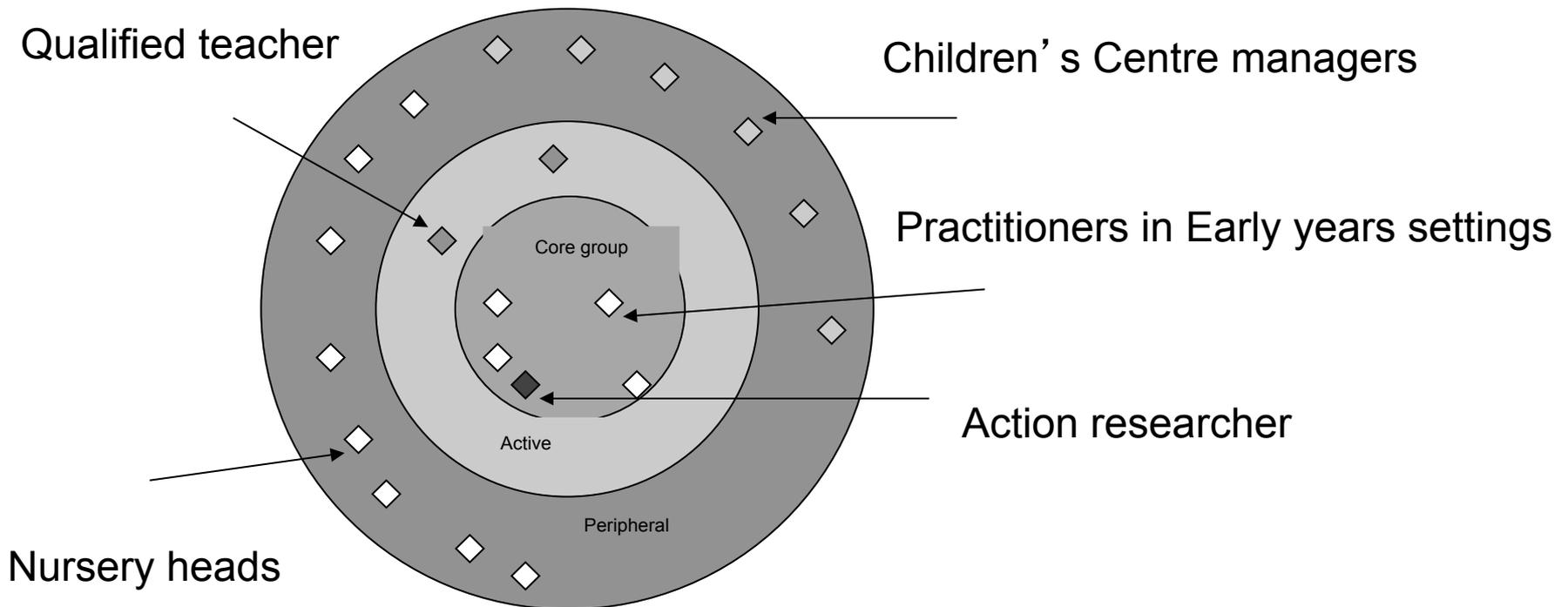
Findings: Building Inquiry Communities

(Inquiry Community-DP)



Findings: Building Inquiry Communities

(Inquiry Community-DP)



Findings: Evidence-based Outcomes (Case Study by PH)

- Focus: How can we make our services more attractive to families with children with disabilities?
- Rationale: High numbers of families with children with disabilities not accessing provision. Not fully represented.
- Method: Focus Day with families and professionals
- Findings: Good Provision/Quality. Issues with transport, parking, access, parent's perceptions of being judged, professionals work in isolation.
- Recommendations: Parents involved in setting up CC annual conference. Creation of a discussion forum with parents and professionals.

Findings: Evidence-based Outcomes (Case Study by PH)

- Focus: How can parents and community representatives on the Children’s Centre advisory board, contribute effectively in the decision-making process?
- Rationale: Process does not facilitate shared power. Little evidence of parental engagement or that they influence services.
- Method: Questionnaire, Focus Group
- Findings: The inquiry evidenced that the current system was disjointed from the wider body of parents.
- Recommendations: Whole centre strategy. Review of systems. Timing of Info to parents. Evidence the decision- making process.



Findings: Evidence-based Outcomes (Case Study by DP)

- Focus: What strategies can be put in place for those who feel ‘reached’, but whom research/professionals feel would benefit from greater engagement?
- Rationale: Concern that process doesn’t facilitate shared power – is tokenistic
- Method: Semi-structured interviews and Focus groups
- Findings: Quality of systems for engaging with wider community not developed enough.
- Recommendations: Emphasised need to think about community engagement and how to measure reach.

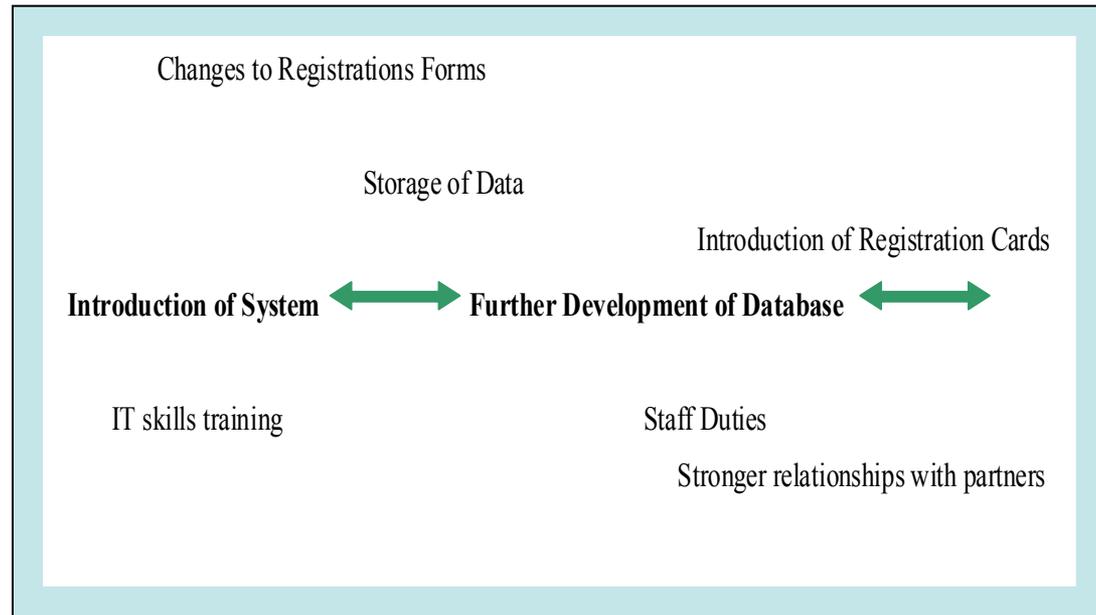
Findings: Evidence-based Impact (Case Study by JR)

- Improvements to Children's Centre environment to reflect positive aspects of community and such family and friends, pride using community facilities
- Community Promotional Posters: [Community Posters JR.pdf](#)

Findings: Evidence-based Impact (Case Study by SB)

-How can Children's Centres and Extended Schools Consortium work in partnership to provide a fluid continuation and progression of services for families?

- Data System



Findings: Evidence-based Impact (Case Study by SM)

- How can the Neighbourhood work collaboratively to improve community cohesion, engaging schools, children's centre and local parents?
- Excerpt from portfolio: [Extract Case Study SM.doc](#)

Conclusions:

- Emerging understandings by individual centre leaders about their centre's integrated practices, community and family participation and engagement and integrating services has derived from a process of collaborative inquiry.
- The 'in situ' new knowledge gained by individual centre leaders is highly context specific and informs decision-making by leaders.
- The concept of integrated system leadership is being understood by centre leaders through the process of inquiry:
 - reflecting upon process, evidence-base, outcomes and 'narrowing' their understanding to context.

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