This article reports on the findings of a thematic review of research literature about integrated early years services (IEYS) [1995-2012]. Four themes are discussed: broad support for IEYS; critiques of claims about IEYS; a focus on inter-professional practice; and the challenge of evaluating IEYS. The article concludes with reflections concerning how the evidence base for IEYS could be strengthened.
Integrated Early Years Services: A Thematic Literature Review

Abstract

This article reports on the findings of a thematic review of research literature about integrated early years services (IEYS) [1995-2012]. Four themes are discussed: broad support for IEYS; critiques of claims about IEYS; a focus on inter-professional practice; and the challenge of evaluating IEYS. The article concludes with reflections concerning how the evidence base for integrated early years services could be strengthened.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, growing recognition of the multiple, complex, interrelated and cumulative social and health challenges encountered by many families has seen increased international interest in and advocacy for integrated early years' services (IEYS) that provide a range of services available for families - often referred to as ‘joined-up’ or multi-agency services – and a concomitant interest in partnerships and collaboration. The interest in IEYS and their potential to provide ‘seamless’ and therefore, ideally, more effective support for families has prompted a rapidly expanding corpus of policy, research and professional literature. It is timely, now, to take stock of what is known about IEYS. With the intent of informing such endeavours, this paper reports findings from a thematic review of research literature about IEYS, spanning from the years 1995 – 2012. For the purposes of this review, ‘early years’ refers to the age birth to eight years. A specific aim of the review was to identify whether there is a need for further research, and if so, to identify useful foci for future studies.

Method

Literature for inclusion in the review was identified through a combination of Wilson’s five search strategies: multiple database searching, citation and footnote tracking, consultation, hand searching and browsing (Wilson, 1992, cited in White, 2009, p. 59). Six databases [EBSCOhost, Informit, JStor, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis on-line, Wiley, Sage] were searched using a Boolean search of the terms ‘integrated’, and/or ‘Collaborat*’[ive/tion] and/or ‘integrat *[ive/tion] and/or ‘inter-professional’ and/or ‘trans-disciplinary’ and/or ‘multi-agency’ and/or ‘joined-up services’, and ‘early childhood’ and/or early years, with the limiters 1995 - 2012, English only and full text only. The data base searches identified a total of 197 texts.
The titles and/or abstracts of the texts yielded through the database searches were then screened for relevance, as were the entire texts sourced through the other search strategies. Non-peer reviewed texts were also screened for their scholarly contribution (whether richly descriptive, conceptual, methodological and/or empirical). Table 1 provides an overview of the corpus of literature reviewed.

Table 1: Overview of the corpus of research literature reviewed

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category of research literature</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Nature of research foci</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Conceptual 64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edited books</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Empirical 83</td>
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<td>Book chapters (other than in above edited books)</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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The screening processes confirmed that the term ‘integrated service’ or close equivalent is used in at least four ways: Firstly, at the policy level, to refer to integration across and between government departments — sometimes described as a whole-of-government approach or joined-up government and exemplified through Sure Start in the UK, as a flagship policy initiative of the Blair government (Lewis, 2010). Secondly, the term is used at the organisational level — often also referred to interchangeably as multi-agency or inter-agency work — to refer to integration across organisations offering diverse IEYS, such as school education, early childhood education and care, early intervention and infant and maternal health, as in the Toronto First Duty Demonstration project (Corter & Pelletier, 2010). Thirdly, at the level of a single organisation that provides a range of services (e.g., education, early intervention, health) in a cohesive and coordinated way, either in the one location, such as Penn Green in the UK (Whalley, 2006) — and therefore sometimes referred to as ‘one-stop-shops’ (Wigfall, 2002, p. 111) — or across a number of sites with strong connections between those sites, such as Ngala in the vast, sparsely populated state of Western Australia (Sumsion, Press & Wong, 2012). Fourthly, and much more narrowly, the term is used to refer to the integration of care and education (Bennett, Kaga & Moss, 2010). Only literature concerned, at least
in part, with the second and third of these four usages, that is, literature examining integrated early years’ services that include a range of services and/or professionals, was included in the review. Literature that refers to integration at a policy level and integration of care and education, where there is little or no interprofessional work, is outside the scope of this paper.

The selected literature was read in full. A preliminary content analysis to ascertain the broad scope of the literature identified six key, overlapping foci: 1) rationales for, and examples of integrated services; and descriptions and/or discussions related to 2) policy, 3) barriers and facilitators, 4) professional/inter-professional practice and leadership, and 5) professional preparation/development for work in integrated services; and finally 6) reports of evaluations of integrated services.

A thematic review of the literature was then undertaken, which involved several readings of each text to identify what Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 54) refer to as semantic and latent themes. By the former, they mean patterns in explicit meanings; by the latter, patterns in “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations — and ideologies”. Here, we report only on the thematic review.

Themes

Three themes were particularly dominant: broad support for IEYS; a focus on interprofessional practice; and the challenges of evaluating IEYS. A fourth theme — critiques of claims made about IEYS — was not as prominent as the other three singled out for discussion. In our view, however, it is equally salient, and an important counter point to the theme of broad support. All four themes are interrelated, as we endeavour to highlight below.

Broad support for integrated services

Particularly prominent in the literature is broad support, from a number of disciplines, for IEYS and inter-professional work on the premise that they offer the most effective and efficient way of providing services for families — especially families from disadvantaged and/or marginalised backgrounds. Claims about the benefits of IEYS as an effective means of early intervention for ameliorating disadvantage tend to be along the lines that (i) children and their families increasingly face a number of challenging and complex — sometimes referred to as ‘wicked’ (Hughes, 2006) —
individual and social problems requiring support from multiple services; (ii) greater integration across policy, services and disciplines facilitates children’s and families’ access to early intervention and education and identification of those ‘at-risk’ (ie. brings them under the gaze of institutions), and so (iii) contributes to improved learning and developmental outcomes for children and their families, which (iv) in turn increases social capital, reduces poverty and addresses social exclusion.

Conceptually, advocacy for IEYS provision is often situated within socio-cultural theories that recognise the holistic nature of children’s development, the bi-directional influences of the socio-cultural and political contexts in which they grow and the importance of intervening early in children’s life trajectory as a way of minimising the potential for negative outcomes (see for example Edwards, 2004; Hughes, 2006; Watson, 2006). For the most part, however, arguments for IEYS provision are framed within prevailing policy initiatives, rather than theory and/or robust evidence. In the UK, for example, several authors frame their discussion of integrated services within the Every Child Matters policy (Barclay & Kerr, 2006; Carpenter, Brown & Griffen, 2007; Edwards, 2004; Hymans, 2006; Leadbetter, 2006; O’Brien et al., 2009; Watson, 2006) and For Scotland’s Children (Barclay & Kerr). Similar policy framings are evident in literature emanating from Ireland (Canavan et al., 2009) and Australia (Farrell, Taylor & Tennent, 2004). As many researchers note (Edwards, 2004; Lewis, 2010; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008; Warmington et al., 2004; Winkworth & White, 2011), largely, these arguments reflect and are embedded within globalised discourses of human and social capital, social inclusion, and economic efficiency (as a way to cut costs, and reduce duplication and redundancy).

In some of the literature reviewed, policies and government agendas seem to be accepted uncritically. The arguments for IEYS and collaborative working have such wide and intuitive appeal, that Canavan et al. (2009) contend that in many contexts they are now seen as the “holy grail” (p. 385). Canavan et al. go on to suggest that if questioned about the value or outcomes of integrated working, policy-makers, service managers or practitioners “would at worst be cautiously positive” (p. 377). Moreover, some researchers and commentators who usually adopt critical perspectives appear to see more merit than dangers in the policy emphasis on IEYS. Noting that “building social capital ... seems to be an emerging direction in educational policies”, Nichols and Jurvansuu (2008, p. 127), for example, suggest that it may be “possible for the sectors involved in integrated services (education, health, family services) to base their future operations on policies that rely more and more strongly on the same social capital framework in conceptualising outcomes and processes”. The strength and pervasiveness of these discourses can make it increasingly difficult to challenge the widely accepted orthodoxies of the benefits of IEYS provision (Hughes, 2006).
Critiques of claims about integrated services

Yet despite the overwhelming positivity in what Humes (2012, p. 169) describes as an “upbeat, feel-good rhetorical field”, there is evidence of growing critique of the assumption that “collaboration is entirely benign and desirable” (Horwath & Morrison, 2007, p. 58). Some of the strongest critiques challenge constructions of IEYS as a means of building social capital and social inclusion. One line of argument critiques the extravagance of many of the claims made. As Paton (2007, p. 450) argues, “exaggerated claims for social capital as an exclusive strategy should be disregarded” for the notion of social capital privileges network connections that may or may not be positive. Moreover, social capital can co-exist with poverty, so in itself it is an inadequate target for reducing disadvantage. A second and related critique is that grounding the rationale for integrated services in notions of social capital and social inclusion can promote hegemonic and normalising approaches and practices that privilege middle-class norms, are based on surveillance, and are thus inherently regulatory (Anning, 2005).

A third line of argument critiques assumptions of improved efficiency, noting for example, that service providers are often subject to an ensemble of inconsistent or even contradictory overlapping policies from different government departments (health and education) or jurisdictions (local, state, federal) (Nichols and Juvansuu, 2008). Policy misalignments and contradictions can create tensions, misunderstandings and inconsistencies in practices, thus undermining rather than enhancing efficiency.

Other researchers (e.g., Hughes, 2006, p. 60) question uncritical suppositions about the benefits of collaborative or inter-professional work and “the assumption that working together will make everything better”. On the contrary, as Hughes points out, earlier studies from the mid 1970s (and therefore outside the scope of this review) undertaken in the UK provide “a strong thread of evidence [concerning] the problematic nature of inter-professional collaboration” (Eason, Atkins & Dyson, 2000, p. 355) and little evidence of improved outcomes for children, families or communities. Eason, Atkins and Dyson (2000) and Hughes (2006) argue that unrealistic assumptions about inter-professional work can lead to the perception that problems are primarily organisational (and inter-organisational) in nature and amenable to technical solutions, thus inhibiting innovatory approaches to entrenched and highly complex problems. A further effect, Forbes (2003) contends, can be an escalation of managerialism, and a danger that the establishment of structures and systems to support collaboration may be conflated with collaborative practice itself (Horwath & Morrison,
which, in turn, may lead to the glossing over of the complexities of practice. Ultimately, however, as Hughes (2006, p.63) maintains, effective practice requires “professional integrity” and “if one practitioner does not talk to another about a situation causing concern” improved outcomes are unlikely, no matter how strong the inter-agency links.

A further strand of critique relates to the general lack of attention to power relations between professionals and service users. Despite much of the literature arguing for the importance of integrated services for supporting family empowerment (Paton, 2007), research to date has focused primarily on practitioners and/or organisations doing work *for* children and families, as mere recipients of the service, with little attention to the rights of families, and especially the rights of children (Press, Wong, & Sumsion, 2012) or to the funds of knowledge they bring to these services (Joanou, Holiday & Swadener, 2012). Nor has there been much focused attention to power relations among professionals from different disciplines.

It is timely, therefore, that a small but growing literature, is critically examining — conceptually, empirically, and from diverse theoretical perspectives — the nature, effects and implications of differential status and power. Some of these examinations, for instance, are grounded in Foucauldian notions of surveillance and normalisation that emphasise the increasing scrutiny of the lives of marginalised groups. Others (e.g., Sumsion, Press & Wong, 2012) draw on communitarian perspectives to question whether there is scope for, and structures to support, debates about fundamental differences, for instance, in values and priorities; and if so, whether these structures take into account power relations in ways that enable democratic participation. Yet others (e.g., Forbes, 2012) build on Putnam’s (1995) distinction between bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) networks in social capital formation to warn of the potential for the development of professional silos in IEYS that marginalise professionals from disciplines perceived to be of lower status. Although critical examinations of power relations remain relatively rare, there is a strong emphasis in the literature reviewed on the importance of inter-professional practice.

*A focus on inter-professional practice*

Inter-professional practice generally refers to professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds working together, and is often described as a continuum, for example from unidisciplinary, through multi-disciplinary to inter-disciplinary and finally trans-disciplinary practice (Moore, 2008). Much of the literature describes practices and processes considered to support or to constrain effective inter-professional practice, often resulting in long lists of facilitators and barriers
which we do not rehearse here (see for examples: Hymans, 2006; Watson, 2006; Worrall-Davies & Cottrell, 2009). These understandings are derived largely from evaluations and ‘lessons learned’ from a limited number of programs: primarily Sure Start Local Programs (UK), but also from Early Head Start (USA) and Toronto First Duty Canada (cited, for instance, in Moore, 2008; Valentine, Katz & Griffith, 2007). Arguably, the understandable attention given to these high profile programs tends to eclipse accounts of smaller programs such as those of the First Nations in British Columbia described by Ball (2005) and the learning they afford.

Despite the descriptive nature of much of the literature, some promising lines of theorising are being pursued, most notably through the use of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (see, for e.g., Edwards, 2005; Leadbetter, 2006). Edwards, for instance, draws on CHAT to theorise inter-professional relationships through concepts such as relational agency, distributed expertise and expansive learning. These concepts are proving productive. Other theoretical perspectives used to examine the complexities of inter-professional practice include psychodynamic, systemic and social constructionist thinking (Dennison, McBay, & Shaldon, 2006) and Wenger’s (1998) community of practice (Anning et al., 2010). To date, however, they do not appear to have attracted the sustained interest and enquiry generated by CHAT. Possibly, as Bath (2011) suggests in relation to Wenger’s community of practice, while useful in conceptualising and analysing uni-professional practice, they may not offer resources that can readily encompass the complexity of inter-professional practice.

Possibly the most widely discussed aspect of inter-professional practice is its intra/inter-subjective relational nature (see, for e.g., Anning, 2005; Brooker, 2005; Robinson et al., 2004). Also widely discussed are challenges to professional identity; perceptions of professional agency/autonomy, or lack thereof; differences in professional beliefs, values, knowledge bases and cultures across disciplines; and ways of developing an ‘inter-professional identity’ (Anning et al., 2010; Humes, 2012; Leadbetter et al, 2007. Indeed, some argue that IEYS require a “new professional practice” (Edwards, 2004, p.5). Evident, too, in the literature reviewed is strong contention that new approaches to leadership are required in IEYS, where demands are seen as “profoundly different” (Frost & Stein, 2009, p.316) from those in single-professional organisations. In contrast, there is surprisingly little discussion or examination of the complex demands made of minimally qualified staff in IEYS.

There is, however, a significant degree of discussion about the need for professional preparation and on-going development for inter-professional practice — often referred to as inter-professional learning (IPL) — as well mentoring and supervision. A body of work (e.g., Edwards, 2005; Leadbetter et al., 2007) discusses IPL drawing on the theories of CHAT and Developmental
Work Research (Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999), which in turn has been adopted by others. Nevertheless, much of the discussion about IPL remains at-theoretical.

Similarly, there is little discussion of underpinning evidence on which decisions and recommendations about IPL professional preparation and development programs are made. Indeed, with respect to child protection, Charles and Horwath (2009, p. 372) contend that "the underpinning evidence base" for the content of many IPL programs "stems from experiences and reflections rather than rigorous evaluation about interagency training's impact on practice". They liken these programs to acts “of faith” (p. 364) given lack of convincing evidence of their effectiveness. What evaluations do exist tend to be based on participant interpretations, or self-assessments of learning, rather than on more objective analyses (Brown, Speth, & Scott-Little, 2002). However, Payler, Mayer and Humphries (2007) propose a potentially useful framework for evaluating the impact of IPL, which draws on situated learning theory and CHAT. Bath’s (2011) sobering analysis of the limitations of an early childhood studies degree that aimed to foster inter-professional practice by drawing on Engeström’s (2001) notion of expansive learning highlights the challenges involved.

The challenges of evaluating integrated services

Likewise, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence for the efficacy of IEYS for child and family outcomes (see the Special Issue of Children & Society [2009 vol 23] — Outcomes of Integrated Working with Children and Young People). Similarly to other reviews of literature related to IEYS (Brown & White, 2006; Moore, 2008; Warmington et al., 2004), we found that much of the work evaluating and examining IEYS comprised mostly small scale evaluations and single or multiple site case studies. Data tend to be collected through survey questionnaires, focus groups and interviews and occasionally more in-depth ethnographic field visits. Many of these studies point to benefits of IEYS delivery and inter-professional collaboration in early years’ settings for children, families, communities, services and the service system (e.g. Lord et al., 2008; O’Brien et al., 2009; Press, Sumson, & Wong, 2010).

Evaluations of large scale IEYS interventions designed to improve national outcomes (such as social inclusion), have tended to focus largely on processes and generally have not convincingly demonstrated the impact of IEYS on child and family level outcomes (Edwards et al., 2006; Lord et al., 2008). However, the most recent findings from the large (more than 5000 participants) National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS, 2012) point to promising effects on child and family outcomes for those living in an area with a Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP). The NESS study compared children
and families living in areas with SSLPs to children and families living in similar areas without SSLPs (drawn from the Millennium Cohort Study). The NESS suggests that SSLPs were successful in reaching families who are the most likely to be disadvantaged; and revealed some benefits for families in living in an area with SSLP related to family functioning and maternal well-being, including for those living in the “most extreme disadvantage” (n.p). But no significant differences were identified for child development outcomes. The study’s authors conclude that SSLPs “need to focus more directly on improvements to young children’s daily experience which is a primary engine of child development” (p.39) – the movement from the more general Sure Start Local Programs to Sure Start Children’s Centres may go some way to addressing these concerns. Sure Start Children’s Centres developed from Sure Start Local Programs and have a specific focus on improving children’s well-being through provision of a range of integrated services for children (aged 0 – 5) and their families, such as, education, health and employment services (UK Department of Education, 2013).

Notwithstanding these recent evaluations, as Valentine, Katz and Griffiths attest, “the evidence base for the effectiveness of service integration for producing better outcomes for children is very thin indeed” (2007, p.5). Moreover, as Winkworth and White (2011, p. 2) caution, “it is not reasonable to assume that collaboration per se will always have a positive impact or that the impact is always commensurate with the resources expended”.

Several reasons for the lack of evaluations are proposed in the literature: the relatively recent emergence of IEYS, and consequently, insufficient time to demonstrate long term outcomes; failure to build evaluation component into the development of many IEYS; and the inherent difficulty in developing causal relationships between integration and outcomes for children, due in part to a lack of tools sufficiently sensitive enough to measure outcomes (Valentine, Katz & Griffiths, 2007). For example, O’Brien et al. (2009) found that a large scale evaluation of IEYS in the UK using national indicators, did not demonstrate change despite qualitative data provided by practitioners yielding multiple examples of how working in integrated ways had improved outcomes for children in individual services. Likewise, the NESS study reported methodological challenges.

What clearly emerges from the literature evaluating IEYS, however, is that they are not a panacea. For instance, through a small scale evaluation Abbott, Watson and Townsley (2005) found that whilst IEYS in the UK made a positive difference to families with children with complex health care needs, they did not improve socio-emotional wellbeing. Further, Wigfall (2002) found that even in ‘one-stop-shops’ some families still have difficulty negotiating all of the services on offer. Wigfall further cautions that concentration of services at one site, rather than dispersed distribution, can exacerbate difficulties of access for some families. Moreover, there is some doubt that universal,
non-stigmatising and non-intrusive integrated services are sufficient for providing the intense support needed by the most vulnerable of children and families (Carpenter, Brown & Griffin, 2007).

**Reflections on the Literature Reviewed**

We are conscious of the limitations of our review. In particular, we have not undertaken a systematic review in that the corpus of literature was compiled over approximately 12 months. Over that period, our emphases and interests, within the broad areas of integrated services and inter-professional practice, shifted slightly. With the exception of database searches, the literature identified through our search strategies reflected those slight shifts. We are also aware that the preponderance of UK and Australian literature identified through some of our search strategies reflects our geographical location and Australian policy interest in UK initiatives. It was not until the review had been completed, for example, that we became aware that the terms ‘full-service schools’ and ‘community learning center schools’, and their variations, are used in the USA to refer to similar kinds of integrated service that have been the focus of this review. Much of literature about these schools includes a focus on the early years and therefore would have warranted inclusion in the review.

Despite these limitations, we feel equipped to make the following observations. Above all, there is an urgent imperative to build a stronger evidence base. We are not alone, of course, in making this observation. We more-or-less concur with Valentine, Katz and Griffiths (2007, p. 7) that “it is virtually impossible to use the most rigorous research methods to measure outcomes of integrated services. In most cases it is neither feasible nor ethical to randomly allocate families to ‘joined-up’ and ‘not joined-up’ services and then compare outcomes”. Notwithstanding these difficulties, we believe it is ethically incumbent upon researchers to find ways to accurately determine whether these costly ways of working are indeed beneficial for families; so that “scarce resources be used responsibly and to the maximum benefit of the population” (Winkworth & White, 2011, p.2). There appear to be emerging signs of some promising developments that warrant tracking, such as a recently-commenced Australian randomised control trial and cost benefit analysis study of an integrated service for children ‘at risk’ (Hill et al., 2011) that has recently incorporated a longitudinal qualitative component. It seems highly likely that addressing the challenges of evaluating integrated services, one of the four themes discussed earlier in this review, will require the bringing together of diverse and complementary methodological expertise.
In our view, addressing what appears to be, for the most part, largely a-historical perspectives offers further possibilities for strengthening the evidence base. With some notable exceptions (Anning, 2005; Hughes, 2006; Lewis, 2010) across the corpus of literature reviewed, there is little recognition of the advocacy that has existed previously for IEYS, acknowledgement of previous iterations of IEYS or consideration of why government support for IEYS has failed to be sustained. Given the policy driven nature of much of the advocacy for IEYS, detailed earlier, attending to this history could provide potentially valuable lessons for contemporary advocacy for integrated early childhood services, and inform critical policy reviews (Wong & Press, 2013).

Further scope for strengthening the evidence base lies in both deepening and broadening the theoretical resources employed for IEYS research. The CHAT-informed research discussed previously highlights the benefits of sustained scholarship by a critical mass of researchers with shared theoretical interests. The concentration of theoretical focus and its application to diverse empirical contexts merits emulation. At the same time, a broadening of theoretical resources is needed. As a fruitful direction for future enquiry, we suggest greater attention to discursive practices, from a wide range of theoretical perspectives and drawing on disciplines more removed from IEYS – see, for example, Arber’s (2008) investigation of discursive practices in inter-professional team meetings in palliative care; and a study of organisational discourses by Hardy, Lawrence and Grant (2005).

Eliciting a broader range of range of perspectives on and experiences of IEYS would also assist in strengthening the evidence base. With notable exceptions (e.g., Broadhead, Meleady & Delgada, 2008; Farrell, Tayler & Tennant, 2004; Joanou, Holiday & Swadener, 2012; Kellett, 2011), the perspectives of children and, to a large extent families, remain largely absent in much of the existing literature. Moreover, there is a general lack of attention to the complexities associated with what constitutes quality in different professional fields and the challenges of putting into practice understandings from different disciplines to achieve high quality integrated services. For example, despite the importance of curriculum in high quality early childhood education, there is little acknowledgement or discussion of the place of curriculum in IEYS in the literature reviewed.

In addition, as pointed out by many researchers, the lack of consistency in terms used across the IEYS literature can make it difficult to locate research, to compare across research findings, and thus to build a cumulative evidence base – as we found with our omission of findings from the US context. Given that contextual differences in IEYS provision and policy will almost inevitably continue to mean the use of widely varying terminology, it is essential that individual researchers explain their terminology clearly.
In conclusion, whilst there are critiques of IEYS, the literature examined in this review broadly supports these types of services, especially for the most disadvantaged families. There is a growing body of evidence that points to the benefits of IEYS, but, in the literature examined, links between IEYS and family and child outcomes were difficult to ascribe. In particular, there were no demonstrated benefits of IEYS for children’s development nor were there any cost benefit analyses. Further, much of the literature has focused on inter-professional practices, but little is known about the diversity of perspectives, including those of families and children, or minimally trained staff in these settings. IEYS have been advocated and trialled in the past, but this history is often overlooked.

What is abundantly clear is that IEYS are complex. We would argue therefore, for the need for sustained, theoretically rich and robust investigations. Amongst many areas that warrant further attention are:

1. The capacity, or otherwise, of IEYS to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged children and families.
2. The ways in which power relationships play out between professionals, and between families, children and professionals, in IEYS.
3. The cost benefits of IEYS.
4. The most effective way to prepare professionals to work in IEYS.

We suggest that such investigations require teams of researchers, with diverse theoretical, methodological and professional expertise, working together to develop multifaceted projects that respond to the complexity of IEYS.

There are strong conceptual arguments for the provision of IEYS, congruent with current policy initiatives grounded in social inclusion and social capital discourses — culminating in a political mandate for IEYS provision (Horwath & Morrison, 2007). When the policy focus shifts, however, it is likely that so too will the interest in IEYS — as has happened historically. Without a strong evidence base, it will be difficult to rigorously defend IEYS, or indeed to know whether IEYS should be defended at all.

References


