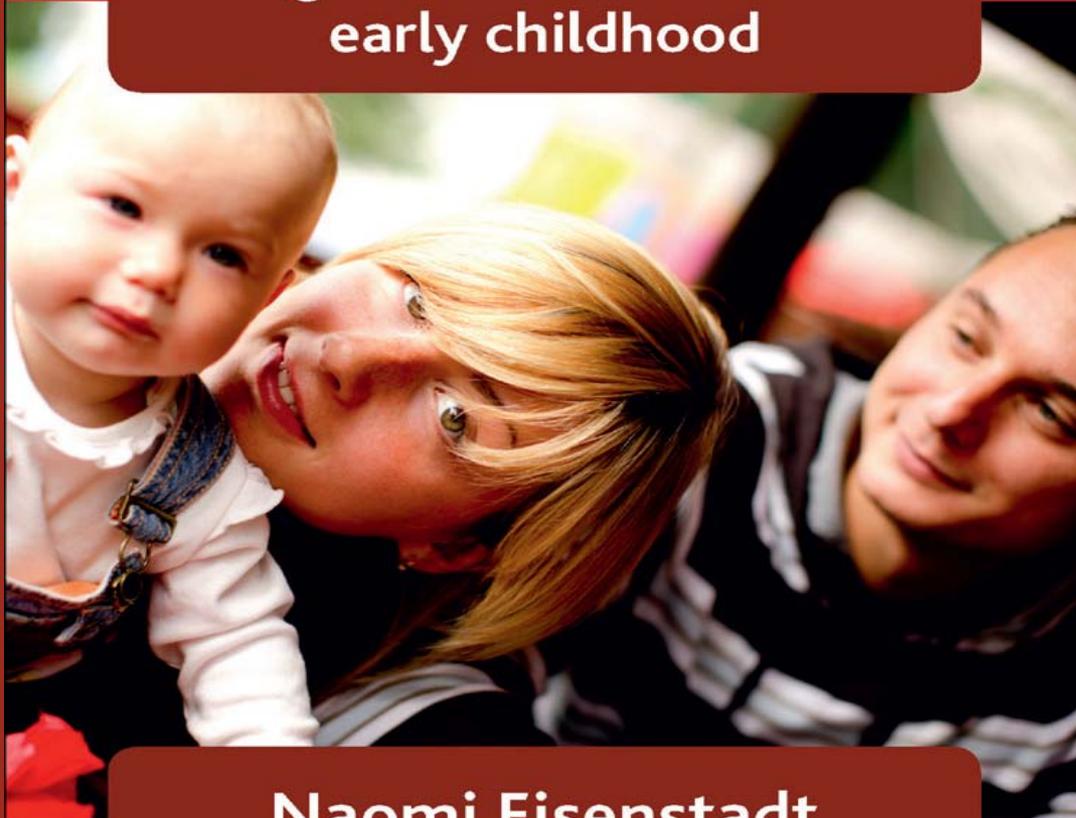


# Providing a Sure Start

How government discovered early childhood



Naomi Eisenstadt

# How it all started: key features of a new govt

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- New Labour
- New relationship between No 10 and 11
- New ways of making policy: Modernizing Govt
- New ways of allocating resources: the CSR process and PSAs
- New Labour and children

# 1997 Manifesto

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- Commitment to free early education, all 4 year olds and eventually all three year olds
- Commitment to a National Childcare Strategy, relevant to welfare to work policies
- Anti poverty commitment largely about New Deals (child poverty pledge 1999)
- A 'pilot' programme of Early Excellence Centres, bringing education and care together

# 1998: The CSR on children under 8

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## Key findings:

- Poverty is bad for children, especially experience of poverty in the early years
- Most public expenditure on over 4s, once children are in school
- Several depts involved in services for under 5s, but no overall strategy
- Wide differences of quantity and quality of early years services across the country
- The right kind of services could help narrow the gap between poor children and the rest

# Sure Start is born

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- Announced in Parliament, July 1998
- Initial plan of 250 local programmes; allocation of £450 million over 3 years
- PSA set the overall aims and objectives but local freedom to design local programme to meet PSA targets
- Tight loose design consistent with Mod. Agenda:
  - User not provider led
  - Flexible, responsive services sensitive to local needs
  - Joined up across different agencies and professions
  - Focus on outcomes not inputs
  - Evidence based?
    - Yes, in terms of imp of early years,
    - no in terms of actual design

# Innovative Governance

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## At the centre

- cross depts: DfEE, Health, and HMT
- Cabinet level minister SoS for Education, day to day control, Minister for Public Health
- Steering group from 6 depts
- Personal accountability through head of the Unit

## At local level

- Lead body to organise the plan
- Acct body to hold the money
- Partnership board including all key agencies, vol sector and **local parents**
- Small area with no clear administrative borders

# Innovative design

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- Outcome not input funded, based on PSA targets
- Attempt to separate essential bureaucratic process of accounting for £ from decisions on spend (lead body and accountable body)
- Catchment areas not based on particular administrative boundaries, locally determined
- No competitive bidding process: support to write a plan, tap on when plan approved

# The big debates

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- Programme design
- Evaluation design: no RCT
- Expanding too fast (successful scaling up)
- **Handover to LAs**
  - Weakening of ring fence
  - Boards became 'advisory' weakening of parent role
- All children, poor children, the very poorest children, seriously dysfunctional families

# What we got wrong

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- Cross govt arrangements create over ambitious expectations: 'Sure Start and global warming' Every minister wants and expects something different
- Spending money fast and building a new infrastructure with local participation takes a long time
- The actual task was very difficult, no arrangements for programme manager support and devt
- All analogies were simply wrong: the implicit but unvoiced models of civil servants were unsuited to the task (not school, not health visiting, a new kind of public service offer)
- New kinds of civil servants (me) not well prepared for the complexities of Whitehall

# What we achieved

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- Wide acceptance that Govt does have a role to play after birth and before school
- A publicly funded universal early years and childcare service is established, and unlikely to be dismantled
- National network of Children's Centres: embedded notion of integration at the front line; services from them will ebb and flow, but basic infrastructure in place, and very popular with public and voters
- Key factor in achievements: **political will**

# Lessons on innovation

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Key tension between maintaining nature of innovation, and scaling up quickly

*'This sort of new model can only grow if it has a fair amount of insulation and buffering from the rest of the system'* Geoff Mulgan

Going to scale requires some version of standardisation, hence dampening and diluting of innovation;

Success when what seemed innovative is just what we do everyday.

# Lessons for the front line

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- Engagement and parent satisfaction needs to be matched with quality of activity
- Data systems essential to know
  - Who is not coming
  - Are those who are coming engaged in activities that will make a difference
- Cross agency working requires *systems leadership* at local level
- It is hard because it is, not because you are not good enough!