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The SAGE Key Concepts series provides students with accessible and authoritative knowledge of the essential topics in a variety of disciplines. Cross-referenced throughout, the format encourages critical evaluation through understanding. Written by experienced and respected academics, the books are indispensable study aids and guides to comprehension.
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Many students and practitioners responded to my request to help me select the Key Concepts which should appear here. I am grateful to them for their time and thoughtful comments. Particular thanks are due to those many colleagues who kindly read sections of the book and helped me to ensure that each term was discussed with accuracy and clarity. Thanks, also, to all members of the publication team at Sage for their professional support throughout the development of this book.

Cathy Nutbrown, Sheffield
For Mathew Page – a treasure
Introduction

This book aims to provide a series of starting points which will help readers to understand more about many key topics in early childhood education and care. In the rapidly changing field of early childhood education and care, it is becoming increasingly important for students and practitioners to have an awareness of the many topics that relate to provision for young children. This book has five main aims:

• to provide starting points;
• to describe key points;
• to maintain a clear focus;
• to suggest connections between ideas; and
• to provide a confident beginning to the study and understanding of important terms in early childhood education and care.

STARTING POINTS

Each entry is written to provide a starting point for understanding a key term. The entries are brief, covering basic points and principles and providing details of further reading for those who wish to take the study of any topic further.

KEY POINTS

In the space given to each entry it is not possible to provide comprehensive details of every term featured in this book. The information contained in each entry is designed to provide an introduction and to highlight the key elements readers need to know to understand the concept under discussion. There would be little point in seeking to cover in detail all the terms discussed in this book; instead, reading lists are given at the end of each section which identify more detailed texts which deal in depth with what is being discussed here.

FOCUS

This book introduces some ‘key concepts’ taken from numerous ideas, theories, practices and policies in the field of early childhood education and care.
and care. These ‘concepts’ are not the key concepts, but are terms which most students and practitioners need some knowledge of and familiarity with. There is no space for discussion of some specific policy terms such as Early Years Development and Child Care Partnerships (EDYCCP) or Early Learning Goals, etc. Such terms are ‘time framed’ and information is better found on their dedicated web pages which are frequently updated.

Well-known research projects such as the Effective Early Learning Project (EEL), Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) and the Raising Achievement in Early Literacy (REAL) Project have not been included because detailed information about such projects is widely available and, again, better defined and researched through specific websites and publications.

The terms discussed in this book have been carefully selected by means of a survey of 300 early childhood education students and practitioners. Those chosen include a mixture of issues, types of practice, curriculum and assessment, philosophical underpinnings and some terms which have a place in the lore of early childhood education and care.

CONNECTIONS

Each of the ‘key concepts’ detailed here is listed alphabetically in the Contents list at the start of the book and cross referenced within the book with the identification of links to related topics. Connecting topics and references can easily be located by following the links. As well as details of the origins and definitions of each term, there is discussion of related research issues and examples of the term as applied in practice. Thus through concrete examples the discussion of each concept is grounded in the reality of practice.

A BEGINNING

Each entry in this book has been written to provide sufficient introductory information. This is not a dictionary or an encyclopaedia, but rather an introductory resource which will provide a confident beginning to the understanding of the many terms which are central to working in and studying early childhood education and care. Further reading is listed at the end of each entry to assist readers in following up entries where they wish to know more. This book is a resource to point you in the right direction – a beginning.
Making the most of this book

Each entry in this book follows a similar format. What follows is a guide to the structure of each entry to help readers navigate the book and find the terms and aspects they are seeking.

A brief definition

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: An international Convention listing 54 Articles of rights which are designed to prevent illness and neglect; provide education; protect from abuse and exploitation; ensure participation in decisions that affect them

Summary outline – of points covered in this entry

Declaration of the Rights of the Child; prevention, provision, protection, participation; Research issues – international focus, child health, environment, range of disciplines, young children’s understanding of their rights, Save the Children, play, bullying; examples from practice – curriculum and pedagogy, Reggio Emilia; references and indicative further reading

Origins and definitions – a discussion of how the term came into current use and its meaning.

The term has gained currency in the last fifty years, beginning with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1959. Subsequently, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was established by the United Nations in 1989. The 1959 declaration established ten principles which laid down rights to which the UN said children should be entitled: . . .
Research into the broad range of issues covered under the theme of 'children's rights' is very wide ranging and, internationally, focuses on issues which include such topics as corporal punishment, child poverty, children and the law and child labour. Child health, including issues of immunisation and pollutants in food and the environment are also issues of concern in relation to children's rights. Research articles and commentaries are published in many journals, but of specific interest is the International Journal of Children's Rights which focuses on 'critical leadership and practical policy development' in the field of children's rights . . .

There are examples of practice where children's rights are a fundamental and guiding principle of curriculum and pedagogy. Such an example can be found in the infant–toddler centres and pre-schools in Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy (see Reggio Emilia). Central concerns are . . .


Key words: child labour; children and the law; International Journal of Children's Rights; participation; play; prevention; protection; provision; Reggio Emilia; Save the Children; young children's understanding

Links: Gender; Inclusive education; Play; Reggio Emilia approach
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Assessment

Brief definition: Assessment is a part of the process of understanding what children know, understand and can do so that future teaching steps can be appropriately planned.

Summary Outline: assessment through observation; terminology; purposes of assessment; characteristics of different purposes of assessment; research issues – clarity of purpose, fitness for purpose, authenticity, informed practitioners, child involvement, respectful assessment, parental involvement; assessment and self-esteem; examples from practice – Foundation Stage Profile, recording observations; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Assessment of children’s progress and learning is part of any educator’s role and those who have worked with young children throughout the decades (and centuries) have – in some way – assessed their learning and development. It is not possible to pinpoint when people first began to think about assessment in early education, but it is safe to say that famous pioneers of early education carried out assessments in order to try to understand what children were doing and thinking. Susan Isaacs, for example, used detailed observations of children’s play to further her understanding of children’s knowledge and understanding (Isaacs, 1929) and prompted views of children as capable and powerful learners, countering the deficit view of children that was prevalent at the time.

Early assessment suffers from a problem of terminology. The word ‘assessment’ is currently in use in several contexts and carries many meanings of both purpose and practice. Because the same word is applied indiscriminately to three different purposes of assessment, there is an assumption that a shared understanding exists of what assessment means. This is far from the case and confusion over terminology continues.
throughout various policy developments in early years assessment. Nutbrown (1999) has suggested three different purposes for assessment in the early years, arguing that different tools are needed for different purposes: assessment for teaching and learning; assessment for management and accountability and assessment for research. Assessment for teaching and learning is defined as the process of identifying the details of children’s knowledge, skills and understanding in order to build a detailed picture of the child’s development and subsequent learning needs. Assessment for management and accountability prefers scores over narrative accounts of children’s learning. Such assessments included the Baseline Assessment system which measured children’s progress in predetermined objectives (SCAA, 1997) and allowed the ‘value added’ by the school to be calculated. Assessment for research includes those assessments (and often tests of ‘scales’ involving numerical outcomes) which are used specifically in research projects where quickly administered measures are needed and where uniformity of approach is necessary. One such example is the Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile (Nutbrown, 1997) which was developed to measure aspects of early literacy of 3–5 year olds. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of each of these three purposes of assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment for teaching and learning</th>
<th>Assessment for management and accountability</th>
<th>Assessment for research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on individuals</td>
<td>Focus on age cohort</td>
<td>Focus on samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned with details about each individual learner</td>
<td>Concerned with a sample of group performance</td>
<td>Concerned with performance of the sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is ongoing</td>
<td>Occurs within specific timeframe</td>
<td>Takes place at planned points in a study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Takes as long as it takes’</td>
<td>Is briefly administered or completed from previous assessment for teaching</td>
<td>Can be brief, depends on assessment and ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs no numerical outcome to be meaningful</td>
<td>Numerical outcome provides meaning</td>
<td>Numerical outcomes often essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is open-ended</td>
<td>Often consists of closed list of items</td>
<td>Often consists of closed items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informs next teaching steps</td>
<td>Informs management strategy and policy</td>
<td>Informs research decisions and findings – measures outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1  cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment for teaching and learning</th>
<th>Assessment for management and accountability</th>
<th>Assessment for research and learning and accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information relates primarily to individuals</td>
<td>Information relates primarily to classes, groups, settings or areas</td>
<td>Information relates to the sample, not to individuals or schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments required for each child</td>
<td>Some missing cases permissible</td>
<td>Some missing cases permissible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main purpose is teaching</td>
<td>Main purpose is accountability</td>
<td>Purpose is to add to knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only useful if information is used to guide teaching</td>
<td>Only useful when compared to other outcomes (of other measures of cohorts)</td>
<td>Only useful as evidence of effectiveness of research study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires professional insight into children’s learning</td>
<td>Requires competence in administration of the test</td>
<td>Requires competence in administration of the test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on established relationship with individual children to be effective</td>
<td>Can draw on information derived through interaction with individual children, but not dependent on relationship</td>
<td>Often requires no previous relationship but the ability to establish a rapport with the child at the time of the assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires ongoing professional development and experience</td>
<td>Requires short training session. Learning the test and practice</td>
<td>Requires short training session. Learning the test and practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


RESEARCH ISSUES

Assessment is an aspect of work in early childhood education which raises many research issues. Some key issues are as follows:

- **Clarity of purpose** – is the reason for assessment of children clear?
- **Fitness for purpose** – is the assessment instrument or process appropriate for the reason that assessment is being carried out?
- **Authenticity** – do the assessment tasks appropriately reflect how children learn and what young children do?
- **Informed practitioners** – have adults who are assessing young children been appropriately trained and supported?
- **Child involvement** – how can children be fitfully involved in reflecting on their own learning and how can their views of their own learning and progress be incorporated into assessment for learning?
• **Respectful assessment** – what do practitioners understand by the notion of ‘respect’ in assessing children’s learning and capabilities? Are assessments used in settings fair and honest with appropriate concern for children’s well-being and involvement?

• **Parental involvement** – the roles of parents in the assessment of children’s learning is under-researched. Their contribution to profiles of their children’s learning and development is unique and more needs to be known about practices in this aspect of assessment.

• **Assessment and self-esteem** – assessment of young children raises a number of concerns in relation to their well-being and self-esteem. Roberts writes:

> Assessment and recording arrangements carry a world of hidden messages for children and parents. Is a positive model used, one which identifies children’s special strengths as well as areas for support? Is there accurate and detailed information about children? Do adults make sure that children share their successes, both with their parents and with each other?

> These questions raise some of the issues which have a direct bearing on how children learn to see themselves. Attention to these sorts of details may have a profound effect on children’s approach to learning. Our attention to them is surely the entitlement of every child. (Roberts, 1995: 115)

### EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

In 2002, in England, the Foundation Stage Profile was introduced. The following example is taken from this Profile and illustrates how one of the items on the assessment scale for Knowledge and Understanding of the World is assessed, through indirect observation, for a number of children.

**Item 6:** ‘Finds out about past and present events in own life, and in those of family members and other people s/he knows. Begins to know about culture and beliefs and those of other people’:

After a visit by her grandmother, Grace talks to a group about the old toys she has brought for display and explains how they were used by her grandmother when she was a girl.

Zara and Helen lay out the laminated pictures in the correct sequence – baby, toddler, child, adult. Then they sort the basket of objects (keys, baby bottle, picture book, lipstick, etc., putting them next to the appropriate picture.

Sanjay takes Toby (the diary dog) home for the weekend. In circle time on Monday he describes what he did with Toby and his family during his stay.
Sally explains to her mum that her friend is having a special family dinner because her uncle is going to Australia.

When out of his wheelchair, Saram shows the class how his dad prays on the prayer mat. He has assistance to get into position but bows his head independently.

Earl and Poppy cut up the vegetables to make a traditional Caribbean dish. They comment that some of these vegetables only grow in hotter countries and are quite different from the vegetables grown in England.

(DfES/QCA, 2003: 47)

Observation is a crucial part of understanding and assessing children’s learning. The following example demonstrates the importance of involving parents in assessing their children’s learning.

Sean was three and a half years old. He attended a nursery class each morning, where he spent much of his time playing outdoors, on bikes, in tents, climbing, gardening and running. His nursery teacher was concerned that he did not benefit from the other activities available indoors – painting, writing, drawing, construction, sharing books, jigsaws and so on. Even when some of these opportunities were placed outside, Sean still seemed to avoid them. The nursery teacher spoke with Sean’s mother who said: ‘We don’t have a garden and there’s nowhere for Sean to play outside – he hasn’t got a bike and there’s no park for climbing, or swings around here, or a space to do outside things, but we have lots of books and jigsaws, Lego, playpeople, we draw and make things.’ Sean was balancing his own curriculum but the adults involved needed to share what they knew in order to understand his learning needs and current capabilities. (Nutbrown, 1996: 49)

Practitioners continue to seek and develop practical ways of recording their observations of young children in order more fully to understand their play. Making Assessment Work, a set of materials produced by the National Children's Bureau (Drummond, Rouse and Pugh, 1992), includes the example (in Figure 1) of a simple recording format which has been completed for a four-year-old who seems to have a predominant interest in a vertical schema. The format in Figure 1 shows one way of linking observations and judgements about the meaning of those observations with plans for future teaching. Many similar formats for recording are used by practitioners.
NAME: Danika, Age 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Analysis of learning</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Date/Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following a visit to some flats, D made a construction of cardboard boxes, piling one on top of the other – using a chair to reach.</td>
<td>Motor and symbolic representation of vertical schema. Work on ‘higher’ and ‘lower’. Introducing vocabulary – using appropriate vocabulary.</td>
<td>Move into counting boxes. Stabilising structure. More experiences of vertical, e.g. lifts and escalators.</td>
<td>CN 6/9/91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D on the climbing frame. Sliding down the slide. She said ‘Going up’. Rolling cars and dolls down the slope.</td>
<td>Experimenting with forces and gravity.</td>
<td>More experiences of slopes and rolling. Timing how long it takes to go down.</td>
<td>CN 14/9/91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D drew a picture. Lots of ///// lines. ‘This is water falling out of the sky. It comes down and goes in the puddles’, D said.</td>
<td>Understanding early scientific notions of rain and the environment.</td>
<td>Maybe provide different kinds of pouring tools. Showerhead, watering can to encourage observation. Feed in appropriate language.</td>
<td>CN 17/9/91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’s mum reported that D is going to the top of the stairs and watching a ball bounce to the bottom. She’s concerned.</td>
<td>Experiencing gravity and forces again.</td>
<td>Need to provide acceptable safe experiences for observing, bouncing and dropping objects.</td>
<td>CN 25/9/91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1  Format for recording observation, analysis of learning and planned teaching action.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Assessment
Brief definition  *With changes in legislation and increased state-funded provision for babies and young children under three, ways of working with children in their first three years have received more attention. ‘Birth to three’ is emerging as the term which refers to provision for and ways of working with children in their first three years of life.*

Summary Outline: resource packs; Birth to Three Matters Framework; babies, toddlers and young children under three years; government policy; principles; ‘aspects’; ‘components’; Scotland; Birth to Three: Supporting Our Youngest Children; key features of effective practice; five shared principles; research issues – effectiveness, evaluation, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, case studies; examples from practice – Calum; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The years from birth to three are now receiving more interest and attention from policy-makers as provision increases and as practitioners learn more about what the youngest children need for healthy, holistic development in their earliest years. In recent times several resource packs
have been developed to support those working with the youngest children such as: *Tuning in to Children* (NCB/BBC, 1995), *Communication between Babies in Their First Year* (Goldschmied and Selleck, 1996), *Shaping the Future* (OPU/MMU, 2000). Perhaps the most widely disseminated set of support materials was the Birth to Three Matters Framework (DfES, 2002). It was published to promote effective practice in working with children in the first three years of life and its launch included nationwide training events. The Framework was designed as a source of support, information and guidance for those working with babies, toddlers and young children under three years of age. The Framework clearly states that it:

- values and celebrates babies and children;
- recognises their individuality, efforts and achievements;
- recognises that all children have, from birth, a need to develop, learning through interaction with people and exploration of the world around them. For some children, this development may be at risk because of difficulties with communication and interaction, cognition and learning, behavioural, emotional and social development or sensory and physical development;
- recognises the ‘holistic’ nature of development and learning;
- acknowledges, values and supports the adults that work with babies and young children;
- provides opportunities for reflection on practice;
- informs and develops practice whilst acknowledging that working with babies and young children is a complex, challenging and demanding task and that often there are no easy answers.

(DfES, 2002: 4)

The Birth to Three Matters Framework was designed by a team of experts led by Professor Lesley Abbott to link with existing government policy documents and practices, such as the National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding (DfES, 2001) and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfES/QCA, 2000).

Ten principles underpin the Birth to Three Matters Framework:

- Parents and families are central to the well-being of the child.
- Relationships with other people (both adults and children) are of crucial importance in a child’s life.
- A relationship with a key person at home and in the setting is essential to youngest children’s well-being.

**Birth to three**
• Babies and young children are social beings; they are competent learners from birth.
• Learning is a shared process and children learn most effectively when, with the support of a knowledgeable and trusted adult, they are actively involved and interested.
• Caring adults count more than resources and equipment.
• Schedules and routines must flow with the child’s needs.
• Children learn when they are given appropriate responsibility, allowed to make errors, decisions and choices, and respected as autonomous and competent learners.
• Children learn by doing rather than by being told.
• Young children are vulnerable. They learn to be independent by having someone they can depend upon.

(DfES, 2002: 5)

The Birth to Three Matters Framework identifies four ‘aspects’ chosen to highlight the competence of the under threes and the interrelationship between growth, learning, development and the environments in which they live and learn. The ‘aspects’ are:

• a strong child;
• a skilful communicator;
• a competent learner;
• a healthy child.

Each aspect is divided into four ‘components’ as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A strong child</td>
<td>Me, myself, I Being Developing A sense of acknowledged self-assurance and affirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A skilful communicator</td>
<td>Being together Finding a Voice Listening and responding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A competent learner</td>
<td>Making connections Being imaginative Being creative Representing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A healthy child</td>
<td>Emotional well-being Growing and developing Keeping safe Healthy choices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Birth to three
The documentation which supports and explains the Framework gives full details of what each aspect and component covers and how these aspects of babies' and young children's development can be supported by effective practice.

In Scotland (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005) the policy document on under threes *Birth to Three: Supporting our Youngest Children* uses different terms and expressions to describe and discuss the particular nature of work with under threes. The Scottish policy is built on three, clearly interrelated, key features of effective practice in work with children from birth to three:

- relationships;
- responsive care;
- respect.

Within this rubric are five shared principles which are intended to apply, whatever the setting or service providing for the youngest children. They are:

- the best interests of children;
- the central importance of relationships;
- the need for all children to feel included;
- an understanding of the ways in which children learn;
- equality, inclusion and diversity.

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

The effectiveness of the frameworks for practice have still to be evaluated and the ways in which practitioners in home and group settings interpret various policy documents and initiatives needs still to be understood. However, the principles which underpin *Birth to Three Matters* and *Birth to Three: Supporting Our Youngest Children* are fundamentally based on respectful attention to what young children can do and what they need for healthy holistic growth and development. There are clear links with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and both documents seek to enhance understanding of the role of practitioners working with the youngest children. There is much space for research in this work. How the policy frameworks are realised in practice will be of great interest. Most important, perhaps, will be the development of a bank of case studies which tell real-life stories of babies, toddlers and practitioners in collaboration with parents to demonstrate how young
children are supported in their growth, learning and development in their earliest years. With increased interest in neuroscience and the capacity of babies to communicate, and form early relationships with other babies, there is a need for studies which help parents, policy-makers and practitioners to make decisions about how best to support their early years of learning.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

The following example, demonstrating sensitive approaches towards relationships, is taken from Scotland’s guidance on working with children under three.

Calum, 16 weeks old, is a new arrival at nursery. He is settling well and his key person, Heather, is able to tell Calum's parents that he is content throughout the day. Calum's mother, however, is distressed each morning as she leaves Calum and tells Heather that she is concerned that Calum is upset during the day and that the nursery is not telling her. Calum's mother has taken to phoning the nursery several times each day from work, asking to speak to Heather. This is not always possible, as Heather is busy and occupied with the children. This is making Calum's mother increasingly concerned. The nursery manager explains to Calum's mother that Heather is busy with the children and offers to check on Calum herself each day and report back, but Calum's mother prefers to hear directly about Calum's day from Heather.

Heather and the other three members of staff in the baby room, all of whom are building relationships with both Calum and his parents, discuss the situation with the nursery manager and share their views on how well Calum is settling and how best to reassure Calum's mother. Staff members agree that whilst Calum has settled very well, his mother needs to be reassured of this and needs to feel more included in his day. They decide, with the permission of Calum's parents, to take the opportunity to use the video camera to take footage of Calum at different points each day to give to his mother to take home with her, in addition to the digital photographs on display, so that she is able to see that he is contented and settling well.

(Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005: 16)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


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**Key words:** aspects; Birth to Three Matters Framework; Birth to Three: Supporting Our
Youngest Children; components; effective practice; government policy; principles;
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**Links:** Brain studies and neuroscience; Developmentally appropriate practice; Early
intervention studies; Key person; Heuristic play with objects; Sure Start; Treasure
baskets; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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**Brain studies and neuroscience**

**Brief definition** The study of the brain development and neurosystems
of young babies which have led to suggested implications for practice.
According to recent scientific research, babies and young children are born with the capacity to understand a lot more than was previously thought to be the case. ‘We’ve learned more in the last thirty years about what babies and young children know than we did in the preceding 2,500 years’ (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999: 22). It was not long ago that we were told that newborn babies do not feel pain, or that young children find it impossible to see the world from anything but their own perspective (David, 1999: 87), but new science-based studies, which have used video-observational work of babies, has challenged this view. ‘By using videotape we can objectively measure what babies do and look at it slowly, over and over’ (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999: 21), building on the successful observational methods of earlier scientists such as Vygotsky and Piaget, despite the differences in their theoretical approaches.

Recent studies have challenged the long-held view of babies’ ‘ignorance’ suggesting that babies, indeed, have an innate capacity from the moment they are born. More is understood now about questions such as whether babies get ‘bored’, whether they can recognise faces and whether they can differentiate between objects. Using video recordings of newborn babies in controlled situations, independent observers have noted and analysed such things as eye movements to see which pictures babies appear to prefer. Experiments such as these suggest that babies can recognise different faces within a few days of birth. The process of ‘habituation’ (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999: 27; Brierley, 1994: 81) confirm the importance of providing babies with novelty and stimulation in their environments. As Brierley noted: ‘The brain thrives on variety and stimulation. Monotony of surroundings, toys that only do one
thing are soon disregarded by the brain’ (1994: 82). A number of similar experiments have been carried out to establish the levels of understanding that babies and young children have throughout the first three years of their lives.

Studies regarding the relationship between a newborn child and his/her mother have been used to identify the complex capacity of babies. Bruner’s 1960 theory of ‘cognitive growth’ suggested that environmental and experiential factors were influences on a child’s development (Smith, 2002). Trevarthen’s (1977) focus on the communication of babies during their first six months of life concluded that a pattern of development in social behaviour was forming in all five infants in the study.

Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl (1999) suggest that despite the extensive experiments that have taken place in a bid to prove one theory over another, it is at times difficult to grasp the amazing phenomenon of how young children think. They summarise this notion in terms of three elements:

- **Foundation** – where babies are able to translate information and interpret their experiences in particular ways predicting new events;
- **Learning** – when babies use their experiences to modify and reshape their initial representation thus achieving more complex and abstract representations; and
- **Other people** – who care for the children actively yet, unconsciously promote, encourage and influence children’s representations.

However, there are limitations to what neuroscience can offer early childhood education and care. Hannon (2003) argues that while the results of the studies of neuroscience are interesting:

> They have limited implications for early childhood intervention and education in the sense of changing what is currently already done on the basis of non-neuroscience research or custom. (Hannon, 2003: 8)

Wilson (2002) suggests that brain science has little to offer parents: the factors impacting on childhood outcomes are complex and cannot be reduced solely to biomedical explanations. Wilson argues that a child’s health and welfare problems, for example, would more effectively involve a multidimensional approach, including the elimination of poverty and the scrutiny of public policy in relation to young children and families.
RESEARCH ISSUES

If children are born with innate tendencies it is important that adults harness and support those in order for children to continue their educational path in a learning environment. Learning environments and inter-person relationships become crucial. Further studies of the role of the key person and the environments provided for babies are needed in order to maximise practices and inform the development of future policies in order that provision for young children and information provided to parents is of the kind which will make the most of each child’s potential and best meet their needs.

By the age of about 12 months babies will be influenced by the actions of an adult when they are introduced to a new experience. If a child is offered a new toy, they may look for reassurance from a familiar adult before attempting to play with it. If the adult looks unsure, the baby may be put off from exploring any further (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999). This identifies the importance of the role of a familiar adult and emphasises the crucial role of the adult in scaffolding the child’s learning. Future research needs to find ways of supporting adults in developing their unique roles in the education and care of babies.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Scottish policy on provision and work with children under three demonstrates how practices can be underpinned by an understanding of neuroscience. A summary of the findings from brain studies with implications for practice includes the following:

Within the first three years of life, most babies quickly learn to interact with others around them, to walk, to talk and to solve problems at a truly amazing rate. Research into brain development in recent years has established that:

- learning takes place within the womb before a baby is even born;
- babies are born with a powerful motivation and ability to learn;
- young children's brains develop very rapidly and the responses that babies and young children receive from the others around them actively promote this rapid development;
- from birth, babies' brains are ready to begin making connections and many important brain connections are made in the first three years of life. As a result of being active and involved and by learning through exploration, discovery and interactions with others, development takes place.

Research has important implications for the ways in which adults support, care and provide for very young children. It reminds us that it is important not to underestimate the competence of even the youngest child... Babies and young children learn
positively and begin to make sense of the world through warm and accepting relationships, through enjoyable play and from being involved in everyday routines. Although young children have similar basic needs, all babies and children are unique individuals. Understanding what is unique about each child you care for allows you to meet children's needs in the special and individual way that supports the individual's development and learning. For example, all babies and children need food, warmth, affection and stimulation. However, there will be many variations in the way that individual babies like to be fed and differences in what they like to eat; there will be differences in the way that babies allow themselves to be comforted and soothed and differences in the ways that babies ask for and accept affection.

There will be differences in the ways and the pace at which they learn. This is because they are all individuals and one approach for all will not be appropriate or effective.

Young children need intimate and flexible environments, with other people, who will give them time and attention, who will show a genuine interest and delight in them . . . (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005: 23)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** adult; communication; environment; limitations of neuroscience; multidimensional approach; newborn babies; relationships; videotape

**Links:** Birth to three; Developmentally appropriate practice; Heuristic play with objects; Treasure baskets

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**Childminding and home childcare**

**Brief definition** A childminder is registered to look after one or more children under the age of eight to whom they are not related on domestic premises for reward and for a total of more than two hours in any day. (DES, 2003)

**Summary Outline:** childminding and home childcarers; National Childcare Strategy; National Childminding Association; OFSTED; childminding networks; choices for parents; qualifications; 14 National Standards; research issues – childminding as a long-term career, tensions, high-quality provision in home settings, training, professional development for childminders, quality assurance of childminding provision, support networks, relationships with parents; examples from practice – raising the status of family day care, networks; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Childminding and home childcarers

Childminding is perhaps the oldest form of childcare – beginning when women shared the care of other women’s children. Today, childminders in the UK play a crucial role in the provision of childcare places within the government’s National Childcare Strategy and government regulation ensures standards of safety, care and learning opportunities.

In the UK there are over 70,000 childminders, who together account for the care of around 320,000 children. For some parents childminding is the preferred option for their child, and the National Childminding Association suggests the following reasons, financial and otherwise, why this might be the case:

- Childminders can be inspected and registered by the Office for Standards in Education and approved as Home Childcarers. Parents using OFSTED approved Home Carers to look after their children in the child’s own home can apply for tax relief on some childcare costs.
- Childminders who are part of an accredited childminding network can provide early years education and parents can then qualify for financial support for this element of their child’s education and care.
- Childminders can support teenage parents to return to education or enter employment as they often care for babies, can form a supportive relationship with the parent and be flexible in their arrangements.
- Childminders use their own homes to provide childcare, so creating childcare places with childminders represents good value for money for a local authority. There is no requirement to build new premises.
- Childminders provide a diverse set of choices for parents.

(National Childminding Association, 2005: 4)

As a career, childminding can now open the door to new possibilities in childcare and education, with some childminders moving on to other childcare jobs after having acquired new qualifications while working as a childminder.

_National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding_ (DES, 2003) set a baseline for quality in childminding with 14 National Standards which are measured against specific criteria. Registered childminders are required, as a minimum, to meet the standards.
Supporting criteria differ according to the five categories of day care and childminding provision: full day care; sessional day care; crèches; out-of-school care; childminding.

The 14 National Standards

- **Standard 1: Suitable person.** Adults providing day care, looking after children or having unsupervised access to them are suitable to do so.
- **Standard 2: Organisation.** The registered person meets required adult:child ratios, ensures that training and qualifications requirements are met and organises space and resources to meet the children’s needs effectively.
- **Standard 3: Care, learning and play.** The registered person meets children’s individual needs and promotes their welfare. They plan and provide activities and play opportunities to develop children’s emotional, physical, social and intellectual capabilities.
- **Standard 4: Physical environment.** The premises are safe, secure and suitable for their purpose. They provide adequate space in an appropriate location, are welcoming to children and offer access to the necessary facilities for a range of activities which promote their development.
- **Standard 5: Equipment.** Furniture, equipment and toys are provided which are appropriate for their purpose and help to create an accessible and stimulating environment. They are of suitable design and condition, well maintained and conform to safety standards.
- **Standard 6: Safety.** The registered person takes positive steps to promote safety within the setting and on outings and ensures proper precautions are taken to prevent accidents.
- **Standard 7: Health.** The registered person promotes the good health of children and takes positive steps to prevent the spread of infection and appropriate measures when they are ill.
- **Standard 8: Food and drink.** Children are provided with regular drinks and food in adequate quantities for their needs. Food and drink is properly prepared, nutritious and complies with dietary and religious requirements.
- **Standard 9: Equal opportunities.** The registered person and staff actively promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice for all children.
- **Standard 10: Special needs (including special educational needs and disabilities).** The registered person is aware that some children may have special needs and is proactive in ensuring that appropriate action
can be taken when such a child is identified or admitted to the provision. Steps are taken to promote the welfare and development of the child within the setting in partnership with the parents and other relevant parties.

- **Standard 11: Behaviour.** Adults caring for children in the provision are able to manage a wide range of children’s behaviour in a way which promotes their welfare and development.

- **Standard 12: Working in partnership with parents and carers.** The registered person and staff work in partnership with parents to meet the needs of the children, both individually and as a group. Information is shared.

- **Standard 13: Child protection.** The registered person complies with local child protection procedures approved by the Area Child Protection Committee and ensures that all adults working and looking after children in the provision are able to put the procedures into practice.

- **Standard 14: Documentation.** Records, policies and procedures which are required for the efficient and safe management of the provision, and to promote the welfare, care and learning of children are maintained. Records about individual children are shared with the children’s parent.

  (DES, 2003: 6–8)

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

A large-scale survey of childminders in the 1990s focused on childminding as an occupation and found that:

- Childminders in the UK provided care for around 25% of children under five.
- Childminders were mostly women who chose childminding as a job because it allowed them to combine paid work with caring for their own children.
- A substantial number of childminders see childminding as a long-term career while others see it as a passing phase of employment.
- Childminders define themselves as professional childcare workers, but less strongly feel the need for training and qualifications. Personal experience of motherhood was for some an important requirement.
- Childminding demands a variety of skills, not least of which are working within a private market and negotiating relationships with parents. There was a tension between being a carer, with its emphasis
on commitment and close personal relationships, and operating as a small business in a private childcare market.

- Although working conditions are poor, childminders recorded a high level of satisfaction and commitment to their work.
- Childminders expressed dissatisfaction with what they saw as the low value placed on their work by society. This affected the views of childminders and parents about childminding as an occupation.
- Changes in democratic and employment patterns, regulation and the work of childminders are contributing to the fall in the numbers of childminders.

(Mooney et al., 2001)

Even in the context of current policy changes which have led to changes in the funding of childminding for parents who qualify for it, the above list forms an important set of research issues.

The Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICA) clarifies its vision for the future as:

One where all children are cared for, and provided with the opportunity to learn and develop in a safe, enjoyable home environment and where childminders are recognised and valued as skilled, qualified professionals.

Issues for research include:

- high-quality provision in home settings;
- training professional development for childminders;
- quality assurance of childminding provision;
- support networks;
- relationships with parents.

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

**Raising the status of family day care**

In New Zealand, the Department of Education identified a need to raise the status of home carers and so made this a political issue. Everiss (2003) describes how the establishment, in 1987, of the New Zealand Family Day Care Association (NZFDCA) and a commissioned government review of family day care gave a higher status to family day care providers by providing funding for those caring for children under two years of age. Subsidies were also offered to parents of children under two, regardless of the type of care they selected for their child. Family day carers in New Zealand...
Zealand then found themselves with increased status in the childcare and education field and at the wealthier end of the childcare ‘market’. Statutory requirements were put in place to ensure quality and training for providers entering this aspect of childcare became an area of high demand.

**Networks**

Many childminders are part of informal networks of childminders who support each other and help with holiday cover or in the event of illness. Some childminder networks organise joint activities or events. Children Come First is a quality assurance scheme developed by the National Childminding Association, the DfEE and OFSTED. In Children Come First networks childminders find support according to the needs of the local area from a coordinator who is responsible for assessing and monitoring childminders thus ensuring high-quality provision of care and education.

**REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING**


**Key words:** childminding and home childcarers; childminding as a career; childminding networks; choices for parents; high-quality provision in home settings; National Childcare Strategy; National Standards; OFSTED; qualifications; quality assurance; training professional development

**Links:** Birth to three; Foundation Stage; Key person; Play
**Brief definition** Developmentally Appropriate Practice is the design and development of curriculum and pedagogy based upon agreed stages of children’s development.

**Summary Outline:** early childhood programmes; NAEYC; twelve key principles; research issues – curriculum, the zone of proximal development, schematic development, communities of learning, Te Whāriki, equality of opportunity, developmental needs of young children; examples from practice – construction, dramatic play; references and indicative further reading.

**ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS**

In America the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has defined ‘developmentally appropriate practice’ thus:

> . . . teachers integrate the many dimensions of their knowledge base. They must know about child development and the implications of this knowledge for how to teach, the content of the curriculum – what to teach and when – how to assess what children have learned, and how to adapt curriculum and instruction to children’s individual strengths, needs and interests. (NAEYC, 1996)

The term ‘developmentally appropriate practice’, in the US, is taken to refer to early childhood programmes serving children from birth to eight years. NAEYC documentation sets out the following 12 key principles of child development and learning that inform developmentally appropriate practice:
1. Domains of children’s development – physical, social, emotional and cognitive – are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains.

2. Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills and knowledge building on those already acquired.

3. Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of each child’s functioning.

4. Early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children’s development; optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning.

5. Development proceeds in predictable directions toward greater complexity, organisation and internalisation.

6. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

7. Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them.

8. Development and learning result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds that children live in.

9. Play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.

10. Development advances when children have opportunities to practise newly acquired skills as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery.

11. Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know.

12. Children develop and learn best in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met and they feel psychologically secure.

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

Katz suggests that in developmentally appropriate approaches to the curriculum decisions about what should be learned and how it would best be learned depend on what we know of the learner’s developmental status and our understanding of the relationships between early experience and subsequent development. (1995: 109)
Herein lie the questions for research. How can educators know what *should* be learned? How are decisions about what next to teach taken? How are children’s stages of development determined? How can educators understand the connections between early experience and later development?

Of course, views of *development* and what constitutes *appropriate* development are always contestable. However, taken together with Vygotsky’s notion of the *zone of proximal development* it is possible to identify ways in which supporting children’s learning can be informed and appropriate to their stage of learning.

Such questions have underpinned many studies which have sought to inform curriculum and programme development, for example Athey’s (1990) work on schematic development, Nutbrown’s (1999) study of curriculum development based on schematic theory, Reggio Emilia preschools’ development of communities of learning through multiple modes of expression (Abbott and Nutbrown, 2001; Malaguzzi, 1996; Edwards et al., 2001) and the Curriculum *Te Whāriki* developed in New Zealand – a policy which promotes equality of opportunity in contexts of diversity (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 1995). Such studies and policy developments are evidence of the continuing quest for ways of creating a curriculum which satisfactorily meets the developmental needs of young children – internationally.

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

The following examples demonstrate the wide range of practices which can be identified as developmentally appropriate and – of course – the extent to which such practices are developmentally appropriate is always a matter of judgement. Such judgements can only usually be determined when the details of context and history are available.

A telling example of the process of reflection and improvement being undertaken in a nursery school is shown in a video made by the British Association for Early Childhood Education (Hart 1994). Three boys are seen collaborating in the construction of an elaborate vehicle, and then testing it. They put it safely on top of a cupboard, and plan to come back after lunch to add wheels and further improvements. As the headteacher observes:

> By starting with what they know, young children come to understand the contribution they can make to their own learning and to their school group. This provides the positive self-image that motivates the effort and persistence needed for learning... through long periods of uninterrupted and self-directed activity, children learn to organise, to plan and to revise their projects and to negotiate with others.

*(Scott, 1996: 41)*

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*Developmentally Appropriate Practice*
David started nursery after spending the daytime hours of the three years he had been in this world in his parents’ hairdressing salon. For the first few weeks he played in a solitary fashion for much of the time, arranging chairs in an arc, sitting all the dolls and teddies he could gather on them and talking to his ‘customers’. His teacher and nursery nurse could tell he was talking to them because they could see his lips moving, but whenever they or another child came too close, David would stop, stand still and stare at the ‘intruder’. The teacher and nursery nurse could see that, among other things, David was capable of matching one-to-one, sequencing (the attention he gave his customers showed that) and putting objects (the ‘customers’ and other items he used) into sets. All of this, however, was not their concern at the time. They recognised that David needed to continue with this activity – the best match to his familiar everyday experiences he could get in this strange new place with so many children instead of lots of adults. The nursery staff also recognised his need for time and were rewarded when he gradually allowed or invited, other children to share his play, then to involve (and direct!) an adult, and eventually to leave this activity, no longer needing it, except when his expert input was required in the setting up of a dramatic play hair salon. (David, 1996: 96)

Jenkinson writes of the crucial role of play in children’s development and how one teacher combined the requirement to give young children homework with the importance of finding time for children to play. Jenkinson wrote:

A teacher colleague of mine working in London was so concerned about her class’s lack of ability to play that for their homework she told them to go home and build a den. They announced to their surprised parents: ‘Mrs Ginn says we’ve got to make dens’. Mattresses were dragged from beds, chairs and tables upturned, sheets were draped everywhere, and a crop of dens sprang up like mushrooms. The children enjoyed themselves tremendously, and were far livelier in their work as a result. Order was restored to the various homes, although the children were keen to repeat their experience.

One den, which deserves special mention for ingenuity and charm, was erected in a small garden. An inspired and generous adult gave the children a meringue-shaped wedding dress to play with. Using clothes pegs, the children suspended the frothy white garment between the washing line and the bushes, creeping under the satin to play in secret bliss beneath the white lacy roof of their exotic pavilion. (Jenkinson, 2001: 137–8)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING

Early intervention is the term often used to describe programmes and strategies in early education which are designed to make a difference to children’s later educational achievement.
Summary Outline: educational achievement; development of programmes; inequalities; National Child Development Study; Sure Start; High Scope Perry Preschool Project; Reading Recovery; research issues – effectiveness; examples from practice – Raising Achievement in Early Literacy Development, ORIM framework; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The belief that the early years are crucial to children’s later educational achievement, and also in some cases to their social, emotional and physical development, has prompted the development of programmes, techniques and strategies which target young children who are ‘at risk’ in some way. Such programmes are designed to make a difference to children’s later educational achievement. Early intervention programmes are based on the premise that ‘beginning early’ means a greater chance of being successful and are often designed to prevent difficulties as well as to seek to overcome any difficulties which young children already have.

Early intervention programmes and strategies are fuelled by the existence of deep inequalities in many societies and such programmes have to go further than simply providing access to early childhood education or care. Making it possible to attend some form of pre-school provision often misses the most vulnerable groups, and can fail to provide the necessary support for children who are vulnerable or at risk of later school failure. The National Child Development Study (NCDS) began with data from 15,000 children all born within the same week in the UK in 1958. In the seven-year follow up it was found that the children’s teachers judged far more children whose parents were unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers to have special educational needs (24 per cent and 17 per cent) than children whose parents were in professional groups (4 per cent and 7 per cent) (Davie, Butler and Goldstein, 1972). The same NCDS sample was studied at age 11 and found 6 per cent of the 11 year olds were ‘disadvantaged’ – that is living in single-parent or large families and in families with low income and poor housing. This 6 per cent were some three and a half years behind their peers according to reading tests and more likely to be receiving additional teaching support due to learning difficulties (Wedge and Prosser, 1973).
Educational disadvantage is still linked, with some concern, to other factors such as housing, poverty, parents’ educational qualifications and so on. The recent Sure Start programme in the UK can be seen as a large-scale early intervention programme which seeks to address multiple factors which threaten children’s development. Such programmes aim to provide something specific and additional to the usual mainstream provision, are often targeted at groups most likely to benefit and seek to change something. Many parenting programmes designed to support parents in managing their toddler’s behaviour are early intervention programmes with the aim of bringing about a change in the child’s behaviour as a result of the parent changing his or her behaviour.

Since the 1960s there have been several well known early intervention programmes such as the High Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2004; Whitehurst et al., 1994). In New Zealand, the Reading Recovery programme was designed to enhance the reading development of children, who, at around six years old were below their peers in terms of assessed reading attainment. Reading Recovery has since been used in many countries as a short-term programme whereby children are ‘discontinued’ and return to usual teaching programmes as soon as they reach an acceptable level of achievement as assessed on a number of tests (Clay, 1972).

RESEARCH ISSUES

The crucial research issue in relation to early intervention is effectiveness. How can we know that early intervention programmes and strategies will achieve their aims? This is a key question which research can find answers to, but such studies require funding and the necessary methodology can be complex and the process costly. Bronfenbrenner (1974) reviewed findings of 26 experimental early intervention studies and reported on findings from two types of programme: ‘group’ and ‘parent–child’. Bronfenbrenner’s review showed that programmes involving parents had longer lasting effects than those which only provided or worked with the child. He concluded that programmes which addressed all the factors which contribute to educational failure should be developed in the future. It is just this strategy that underpins the Sure Start programmes which seek to support children’s learning and development alongside strategies to tackle difficulties in families and their communities which militate against healthy progress in childhood.
EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

In the UK there have been few experimental studies which have been designed adequately to evaluate the impact of experimental early intervention programmes. One example of such a study is the Raising Achievement in Early Literacy (REAL) Project (Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan, 2005). This study (which took place between 1995 and 2003) brought together the university, the local education authority and many Sheffield schools with the aim of promoting family literacy through work with parents of pre-school children. From the outset the project had six main aims:

1. To develop methods of working with parents to promote the literacy development of pre-school children (particularly those likely to have difficulties in the early years of school).
2. To meet some of the literacy and educational needs of the parents so involved.
3. To ensure the feasibility of methods developed.
4. To assess the effectiveness of the methods in improving children’s literacy development at school entry and afterwards.
5. To disseminate effective methods to practitioners and to equip them with new skills.
6. To inform policy-makers about the effectiveness and implications of new practices.

The most promising methods developed in Phase 1 were used to develop an 18-month ‘long duration, low intensity’ early literacy programme of work with families. Based on the ORIM framework (see pp. 96–98), the programme had five main components: home visits by programme teachers; provision of literacy resources (particularly books); centre-based group activities; special events (e.g. group library visits); and postal communication between teacher and child. The core of the programme was similar at all schools but shaped by local community circumstances and teachers’ styles. A total of 80 families from those ten schools (eight families working with each teacher) participated in the programme. Teachers were funded for release one half day per week to work with the families in their group. Adult learning opportunities for parents were also developed and offered to parents. Outcomes in terms of measures of children’s literacy showed that the programme was effective in making a difference to children’s literacy with children in the programme scoring more highly than children in control groups.
Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan (2005) report that the programme was highly valued by parents who were involved in their children’s literacy and by programme teachers. They also report on children’s enhanced achievement in literacy. Children reported that their parents were both involved in their home literacy (Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003).

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: development of programmes; educational achievement; effectiveness; ORIM framework; Raising Achievement in Early Literacy Development; social inequalities

Links: Brain studies and neuroscience; High Scope Preschool Curriculum; Play; Sure Start
Early literacy development

Brief definition ‘Early literacy development’ is the term used to refer to the ways in which young children acquire understanding, skills and knowledge related to aspects of early literacy such as: using books, early writing, using environmental print and aspects of oral language.

Summary Outline: new ways of teaching literacy; Foundation Stage; ‘Communication, Language and Literacy’; ‘strands’ of early literacy development; environmental print, books, early writing and key aspects of oral language; research issues – environmental print, books, early writing, oral language (storytelling, phonological awareness, ‘talk about literacy’), new media and popular culture; examples from practice – developing a home–school writing project; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Until the 1970s early literacy development was largely overlooked. Nursery education tended to focus on oral language and storytelling. Literacy became part of the early years curriculum during the 1980s with the growth of research in emergent literacy and a shift from a belief that literacy learning too young could be harmful to the development of practices which incorporated meaningful literacy activities which reflected children’s everyday lives into the curriculum. New ways of teaching literacy were developed during the 1980s as researchers and teachers became more aware of how children learned about writing and reading. These changes in thinking and practice were also incorporated (to some extent) in the new English National Curriculum in 1988 (DES, 1988). Since then, developments have continued with rapidity and it is
now rare to find settings where literacy is not incorporated into the curriculum and children encouraged to use reading and writing in many aspects of their play. The Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000) has promoted the incorporation of aspects of literacy learning through play and requires the assessment of literacy according to elements on a scale for ‘Communication, Language and Literacy’ which assesses: language for communication and thinking; linking sounds and letters; reading; and writing. Assessed elements include: uses phonic knowledge to read simple regular words; shows an understanding of the elements of stories, such as main character, sequence of events and openings; attempts writing for a variety of purposes, using features of different forms (DfES QCA, 2003).

It can be helpful to consider some main strands of early literacy development which research suggests are important. In a major family literacy programme involving parents and young children, the following ‘strands’ were identified: environmental print, books, early writing and key aspects of oral language (Nuttbrown, Hannon and Morgan, 2005).

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

Early literacy is an area rich in research, with key studies in environmental print, books, early writing and aspects of oral language being the subjects of international studies.

**Environmental print**

In countries where print abounds there is no shortage of examples: commercial print of all kinds can be found on clothing, buildings, packaging, household equipment and so on. It may be temporary and ever-changing as with electronic billboards and digital screens in shopping centres, cars and transport depots (bus and rail stations and airports for example). Context-based print, such as that found on household packaging and shop signs, is meaningful to young children and has a place in their reading development as children draw meaning from familiar symbols in their environment (Goodman et al., 1978; Hiebert, 1981). It has been suggested that reading begins the moment young children become aware of environmental print (Smith, 1976) and many children develop a sense of such print awareness long before going to school (Burke, 1982; Goodman, 1980). Environmental print can stimulate talk about literacy as children ask questions such as ‘What does that say?’ It also prompts children, at times, to pick out and identify from signs some
letters that are familiar to them, perhaps in their own name. Environmental print can stimulate some children to write and children often imitate the writing they see, such as notices or notes left for others.

Books

Access to books, especially good quality books, both children’s fiction and non-fiction material, is essential if children are to build a good foundation of reading in their early years. Concepts such as the quality of illustration or the overall quality of the story and look of a book are matters for personal judgement, but if children are introduced to books that are among the best in children’s publishing they are more likely to want to use them, to turn the pages, to look at the pictures and to listen to the story and to return to the book again later.

Children absorb messages very quickly, both positive and negative, so the literature offered to children and taken into homes needs to portray positive images of all members of society, including a variety of cultures and both male and female. The first encounter with a particular book is important, and the cover, feel, size, shape as well as content make a difference to whether children and parents are attracted to read it or not. Meek (1982) argued that reading books and stories together is the fundamental cornerstone of reading. In recent years there has been a growth of literature for children based on the popular culture of the time. Books related to children’s television programmes and films abound and numerous related comics for children are available in most newsagents. Marsh (2005) has argued that literacy related to children’s popular culture should be valued and children’s use of texts in comics, film and TV related story books, television and other multimedia literacies should be a part of children’s literacy repertoires.

Early writing

Some studies of researchers’ own children (Baghban, 1984; Bissex, 1980; Payton, 1984; Schickedanz, 1990) have resulted in a useful bank of material which can be used to examine the fine detail of children’s early literacy achievements and patterns of learning. Research into children’s early mark making (Ferrerio and Teberosky, 1989; Goodman, 1980; Ross and Brondy, 1987; Harste, Woodward and Burke, 1984) challenged the earlier belief that children could not and should not write until they went to school. As more was understood about ‘emergent’ or ‘developmental’ writing teachers in the early years began to watch what children were
doing and incorporate provision and support for such writing behaviours and interests into the preschool curriculum. Ferrerio and Teberosky’s (1989) work focused on the hypotheses about writing which children generated for themselves as they tried to understand writing rules and conventions. They argue that *writing is not copying an external model.* The children in their study explored various ideas and hypotheses about writing – writing, they argue, does not depend on graphic skill (their ability to make letters look conventional) but on the level of conceptualisation about writing – that is the set of hypotheses they have explored for the purpose of understanding writing. Figure 2 suggests a model of thinking about how young children make sense of writing through three processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Children see other people writing and using writing for everyday purposes: family members, people in the community and staff in education and care settings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Children are involved in writing interchanges with adults who write alongside them: birthday cards, letters, order forms, quick notes; such adults sometimes directly ‘tutor’ the children in how to write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Children make their own graphic marks which gradually become more conventional in appearance as their skills develop and knowledge about writing increases and as they try to represent the actions and products of writers and learn more about writing that enables them to develop the skills they need.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2  A model of how young children make sense of writing through three processes (Nutbrown, 1997: 34)

**Oral language (storytelling, phonological awareness, talk about literacy)**

Three aspects of oral language appear to be key to children’s literacy learning and development: storytelling, phonological awareness and ‘talk about literacy’.

**Phonological awareness**

Studies by Goswami and Bryant (1990) and Maclean, Bryant and Bradley (1987) have helped to pinpoint the importance of phonological awareness in children’s literacy development. Goswami and Bryant (1990) suggested that the important thing for children to be aware of
is what they call onset and rime in spoken words, ‘onset’ being the beginning sound and ‘rime’ being the end sound of a word. Words like ‘stroke’, and ‘stripe’, ‘strum’ and ‘strip’ share the same onset and so they are said to alliterate. Words such as ‘wing’, ‘thing’, ‘ring’ and ‘bring’ share the same rime and can be said to rhyme. Goswami and Bryant (1990) present substantial evidence from their studies of preschool children which suggests that children who are aware of onset and rime find learning to read easier. They show how pre-school tests of this kind of phonological awareness predict reading attainment later and how pre-school ‘training’ to help children detect onset and rime can boost later, reading attainment. Maclean, Bradley and Bryant (1987) found that pre-school children’s knowledge of nursery rhymes predicted later reading success in school.

Storytelling

Wells’s (1987) longitudinal study suggested that the best predictor of children’s reading attainment in school was a measure of what he termed ‘knowledge of literacy’ at school entry. Other simple measures of literacy (such as whether a child can name a favourite book Weinberger, 1996) have also been found to be powerful predictors of later reading achievement. It is likely that this type of literacy knowledge at school entry is acquired as a result of other important things happening in the pre-school years. Wells’s study of children’s language in the home identified key experiences. These were: listening to a story told; other sharing of picture books; drawing and colouring and early writing. Foremost of all of these activities was listening to stories read aloud which stood out above all the others as being related to the ‘knowledge of literacy’ measure and later test scores. Wells suggested that the reason for this centred around the various benefits children gain from listening to stories: experience of a genre later encountered in written form; extension of experience and vocabulary; increased conversation with adults; children’s own ‘inner storying’ validated; experience of language use to create worlds; and insight into storying as a means of understanding.

Talk about literacy

Written language can form an important part of the lives of pre-school children. Some will notice a great deal of print around them and some will be aware that the adults around them use print a great deal in their
everyday lives. It is therefore quite natural for children in these situations to be curious about print, to ask questions and, from time to time, to want to talk about the print they see – just as they do about other things that are of interest to them. Children’s vocabularies grow at an astonishing rate in the pre-school years and some of the new words they acquire could well be words which relate to literacy. Research continues to be carried out on how children learn literacy and how best it can be taught. Most recently the place of new media and popular culture in children’s early literacy development has attracted research interest with several studies reported in the *Journal of Early Literacy Research*.

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

The following account describes one teacher’s project to promote writing at home between parents and children.

**Developing a home–school writing project**

The project started with an initial information meeting, the aim of which was to inform parents of the progression they could expect to see as their children experimented with mark making. I wanted to share with parents the importance of letting their children ‘have a go’ rather than writing everything for them to copy.

I used overheads of progressive examples of children’s independent writing to illustrate the points I was making. I also emphasised the importance of the fact that children develop at different rates and what was important was that children developed the confidence to have a go. Parents could become involved in this process by providing meaningful opportunities for writing and children would have the opportunity to develop their skills and become confident writers.

The project ran over four weeks and revolved around a teddy bear! To begin with all the children were given a teddy along with a selection of writing materials. Each week parents had the opportunity to come to school on either a Tuesday or Wednesday morning and see me modelling the weekly writing task. This was followed by the parents working with their children on the writing task with me and the nursery nurse on hand to offer help or guidance. Every Friday the teddies went home, along with another writing task which was similar to the task completed in school during the week. This ensured that all the parents had an opportunity to be involved in the project if they wanted to, even if they could not get to the weekly sessions in school. Table 3 shows the programme.
Table 3  A four-week home–school writing programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teddy wrote a letter to his/her new friend and the children each write a reply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teddy invited his/her friend to his/her birthday party. Each child writes a reply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Writing a shopping list for the birthday party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teddy’s birthday party! The children make and write birthday cards for their teddy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcomes and achievements

The children and parents became very involved in the project. In total, 17 out of 30 children had their parent or grandparent come into school to work with them and almost everyone in the class worked at home on the weekly task.

As a result of the project it was possible to see how children developed as confident writers who were prepared to have a go. Parents were now more aware of how they could encourage their children as independent writers rather than dismissing their independent attempts and writing things for the children to copy a more perfect form. Parents were also trying to find ways of involving their children in meaningful writing tasks at home.

The project emphasised the importance of providing parents with the necessary information to enable them to work effectively with their children. I am looking forward to developing an annual programme of work with parents that will enable them to work with their children in other areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

(Hickson, 2003)

Hickson’s work is an example that could allay the fears expressed by Anning and Edwards (2003) that literacy in the early years continues to over-promote ‘conventional’ reading and writing in pre-school settings.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Early literacy development

**Key words:** books; ‘Communication, language and literacy’; early writing; environmental print; Foundation Stage; home–school; new media and popular culture; new ways of teaching literacy; oral language; ‘strands’ of early literacy development

**Links:** Family literacy; Information and Communication technology; Media and popular culture; Parental involvement

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**Early literacy development**
**Brief definition** ‘Family literacy’ is a term used to refer to the interrelated literacy practices of parents, children and others in homes, and to certain kinds of educational programmes (mostly focused on disadvantaged communities) that recognise the importance of the family dimension in the literacy learning of children or parents or both.

**Summary Outline**: literacy practices; educational programmes; adult education; early childhood education; research issues – literacy practices in the home, views of parents, learning outcomes for children and adults, Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit; examples from practice – the Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project, home visits, ORIM framework, strands of early literacy development: writing, reading and rhyming at home and greater awareness of environmental print; references and indicative further reading.

**ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS**

‘Family literacy’ is a term used to refer to the interrelated literacy practices of parents, children and others in homes (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gaines, 1988; Hannon, 2000; Heath, 1983; Hirst, 1998; Taylor, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986; Weinberger, 1996). The term also refers to certain kinds of educational programmes (mostly focused on disadvantaged communities) that recognise the importance of the family dimension in the literacy learning of children or parents or both (Cairney and Munsie, 1995; Dickinson, 1994; Hannon, 1995; Hannon and Nutbrown, 1997; Morrow, 1995; Wolfendale and Topping, 1996).

Family literacy research has become indispensable for a full understanding of how young children learn literacy and how they may be taught or helped to acquire it. Family literacy programmes belong to the field of adult education as well as to early childhood education but for the
purposes of this volume, which is concerned with early childhood literacy, programmes are viewed mainly from the perspective of early childhood education.

Hannon summarises:

... within the early childhood education strand, parental involvement in the teaching of literacy began, after a long period of routine parental exclusion, with a focus on parents helping children’s oral reading. It has gradually evolved to take on a broader concept of literacy, preschool as well as school-aged children, and support for a wider range of at-home as well as in-school activities. These actions by schools can be counted as family literacy programmes in that they clearly ‘acknowledge and make use of learners’ family relationships’ but it must be admitted that the learners with which they are concerned are mainly young children and that on the whole programmes have not so much been concerned with ‘engagement in family literacy practices’ as families’ engagement in school literacy practices. (Hannon, 2000)

RESEARCH ISSUES

Research into family literacy practices and programmes has, over the past two decades, involved three main approaches:

- observing and recording literacy practices in the home (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1975; Nutbrown, 1999; Schickedanz, 1990; Tizard and Hughes, 1984;);
- soliciting views and reports from parents (Hannon and James, 1990; Hirst, 1998; Parker, 1986; Weinberger, 1996) and children (Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003); and

Hannon (2004: 97) identifies seven key research issues: deficit approaches, targeting of programmes, evidence of effectiveness, gender, bilingualism, training for practitioners and policy research. While some of these have attracted considerable research interest and activity others remain under-researched.

In the United States many family literacy programmes have been developed and delivered by agencies whose mission is primarily with regard to adults, including libraries, colleges, adult education services, prison organisations, services to users of day care or Head Start. In England, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit promotes government-
funded ‘family literacy’ following a largely US model aimed at parents’ as well as children’s literacy.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

The Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project

The REAL family literacy programme, developed and implemented by teachers at eleven schools, was of ‘long duration’ (18 months) and ‘low intensity’. It was based on a conceptual ORIM framework developed by Hannon and Nutbrown (1997) in which parents are seen as providing opportunities, recognition, interaction and a model of literacy. The programme framework and examples of activities are fully reported (Nutbrown and Hannon, 1997; Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan, 2005) and include five components:

- home visits by programme teachers;
- provision of literacy resources;
- centre-based group activities;
- special events;
- postal communication.

In these ways the programme has sought to promote children’s experience with family members of four strands of early literacy development: writing, reading and rhyming at home and greater awareness of environmental print. There was also an optional adult education component where parents were given information about local adult education classes and the opportunity to develop a portfolio of the work they had done with their child for accreditation. Details of the ORIM framework and programme evaluation, including literacy outcomes for children, are given in Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan (2005).

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING

Brooks, G., Gorman, T., Harman, J., Hutchison, D., Kinder, K., Moor, H. and Wilkin, A.


Parker, S. (1986) “I want to give them what I never had”: can parents who are barely literate teach their children to read?”, Times Educational Supplement, 10 October, p. 23.


**Key words:** adult education; Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit; deficit approaches; early literacy development; educational programmes; effectiveness; home visiting; literacy outcomes; literacy practices; ORIM framework; parents; policy research; Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project

**Links:** Early intervention studies; Early literacy development; Parental involvement

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**Foundation Stage**

**Brief definition** The Foundation Stage is that part of the education system which covers the ages three to the end of the reception year (five plus) in England. This stage of education precedes the National Curriculum Key Stage 1 and curriculum guidance divides learning into six ‘areas’ which are assessed according to assessment scales as detailed in the Foundation Stage Profile.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The establishment of the Foundation Stage in England and Wales in 2000 marked an important point in recent early childhood education policy which included shifts in state-funding of ‘nursery’ education, new regulations and regimes for inspection of under fives provision and nationally reported assessment of four-year-olds in reception classes. Forerunners in the rapid policy changes included the publication of the Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning (SCAA, 1996) and the National Framework for Baseline Assessment (SCAA, 1997), both of which met resistance from early childhood professionals, and it was this challenge to policy-makers from the early childhood field that led to the development of the Foundation Stage. Four- and five-year-olds in reception classes were no longer loosely grouped alongside pupils in Key Stage 1 but were part of the distinct phase of education focusing on children aged three to five plus years (the end of the reception class year). This, of course, meant that some children attended a number of settings during their Foundation Stage, perhaps including a playgroup, a childminder, a nursery class and into a reception class. Figure 3 illustrates the varied experiences of different settings that children may experience within the Foundation Stage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>3.3 years</td>
<td>Nursery class</td>
<td>Joins nursery class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>3.11 years</td>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>Joins reception class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>4.11 years</td>
<td>Nursery class</td>
<td>Joins nursery class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>5.11 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Joins year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>3.2 years</td>
<td>Family centre</td>
<td>Continues to nursery centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>3.10 years</td>
<td>Nursery centre</td>
<td>Remains in nursery centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>4.10 years</td>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>Joins reception class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>5.10 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Joins year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>3.0 years</td>
<td>Nursery centre</td>
<td>Joins nursery centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>3.8 years</td>
<td>Nursery centre</td>
<td>Remains in nursery centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>4.8 years</td>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>Joins reception class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>5.8 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Remains in year 1 class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2.10 years</td>
<td>Portage home</td>
<td>Receives portage home teaching from age one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>3.6 years</td>
<td>Special school</td>
<td>Joins special school unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>4.6 years</td>
<td>Mainstream class</td>
<td>Joins mainstream reception class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>5.6 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Joins year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2.9 years</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Cared for by childminder from age nine months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Remains with childminder who is now accredited as education provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>Joins Reception class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>5.5 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Remains in year 1 class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>2.6 years</td>
<td>Home and school</td>
<td>At home and attends parent/toddler group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>3.2 years</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Joins independent school early years class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>4.2 years</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Remains in school early years class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>5.2 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Joins year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>2.4 years</td>
<td>Home and school</td>
<td>At home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>3.0 years</td>
<td>Playgroup</td>
<td>Joins playgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>4.0 years</td>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>Joins reception class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>5.0 years</td>
<td>Year 1 class</td>
<td>Joins year 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3  The varied experiences of different settings that children may encounter within the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000: 7).
For many, the introduction of the Foundation Stage represented recognition at policy level of the particular learning needs of young children and saw the return of ‘play’ as a key element in young children’s learning. The key document is the Foundation Stage Guidance (QCA, 2000) which gives examples of children at different stages of progress towards the early learning goals throughout the Foundation Stage and guidance on how practitioners can support that progress. The guidance explicitly highlights play as a central element of early years pedagogy.

Principles for early years education

The Foundation Stage is based upon the following key principles:

- Effective education requires both a relevant curriculum and practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements.
- Effective education requires practitioners who understand that children develop rapidly during the early years – physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially.
- Practitioners should ensure that all children feel included, secure and valued.
- Early years experience should build on what children already know and can do.
- No child should be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender or ability.
- Parents and practitioners should work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect within which children can have security and confidence.
- To be effective, an early years curriculum should be carefully structured.
- There should be opportunities for children to engage in activities planned by adults and also those that they plan or initiate themselves.
- Practitioners must be able to observe and respond appropriately to children.
- Well-planned, purposeful activity and appropriate intervention by practitioners will engage children in the learning process.
- For children to have rich and stimulating experiences, the learning environment should be well planned and well organised.
- Above all, effective learning and development for young children requires high-quality care and education by practitioners.

(QCA, 2000: 11–12)
Targets were replaced by ‘Early Learning Goals’ which practitioners helped children to achieve by moving through various ‘stepping stones’ in each of six ‘areas of learning’ (covering children’s physical, intellectual, emotional and social development): personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. ‘Teaching’ in the Foundation Stage was defined as:

...systematically helping children to learn so that they are helped to make connections in their learning and are actively led forward, as well as helped to reflect on what they have already learnt . . . Practitioners teach children in many ways. The different ways to teach may be selected at the planning stage or may be a perceptive response to what children do or say . . . The strategies used in learning and teaching should vary and should be adapted to suit the needs of the child. (QCA, 2000: 22)

RESEARCH ISSUES

Foundation Stage Units

Since the establishment of the Foundation Stage practitioners and policy-makers at national and local levels have been engaged in attempts to refine and develop curriculum provision for children 3–5+ so that their learning needs are met in the context of changing services and across multiple settings. The Foundation Stage Profile was developed to aid the ongoing assessment of children throughout the Foundation Stage and Foundation Stage Units began to be developed as a way of organising continuous provision for children in this age range. As the Foundation Stage Units developed during the mid-2000s, questions about their effectiveness in meeting children’s learning needs began to be asked and the need for evaluation of the management and organisation as well as the achievement of children became research issues.

Professional development and support for Foundation Stage practitioners

As the Foundation Stage has developed most local authorities have developed systems of support for practitioners working in the Foundation Stage. A number of small studies have examined the need to provide support for practitioners in settings when the Foundation Stage has brought with it a change to ways of working and increased accountability. Studies of the role of outreach workers (Webster, 2002)
and the impact of change on long serving pre-school playgroup leaders (Physick, 2005) identify the extent of the change which the introduction of the Foundation Stage has brought to many forms of provision. Other studies have examined the role of early years consultants (Stevens, 2005) in supporting practitioners in their curriculum planning in the Foundation Stage. Such studies are important, though have mostly been small in scale and scope. Future research is needed to identify ways of meeting the diverse needs of a range of practitioners working in the Foundation Stage.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Involving parents in the development of a Foundation Stage Unit

One school decided to combine its existing nursery and reception classes to form a Foundation Stage Unit, thus maximising access to available resources, space and staff. Many discussions were held and meetings with parents took place to inform them of the development. Parents of both nursery-aged children and those in the reception class were concerned. Those with children in the nursery felt that their children were too young to have to ‘compete for attention’ with the older reception aged children and that the work would be ‘too difficult’ for the younger children. Parents of children due to enter a Reception class were worried that their children would be held back as if having an extra year in the nursery class and would therefore struggle when they entered Year 1. What became clear was that parents had little information (and therefore incomplete and often inaccurate) understanding of what the Foundation Stage was and the form of curriculum and pedagogy that their children would experience. The early years staff developed a short programme of events for parents to give them the information they needed to make an informed response to the change. The Foundation Stage Unit opened as planned, still with some opposition and anxiety on the part of some parents, but at the end of the year, partly as a result of full involvement in their children’s learning and partly because they could see how their children were learning and progressing, most of the concerns were allayed. The school learned from this that it was essential to provide ongoing information for parents about organisation in the Foundation Stage and the importance of continuity and progression in their children’s learning – however that was arranged.
Communication, language and literacy

The example in Table 4, taken from the Foundation Stage Guidance, shows how stepping stones for the area of learning known as communication, language and literacy is interpreted in the actions of children.

Table 4  Stepping stones and examples of what children do in the area of learning: communication, language and literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepping stones</th>
<th>Examples of what children do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use words and/or gestures including body language such as eye contact and facial expression to communicate</td>
<td>On a visit to the canal, James’s eyes widen as the water gushes into the lock to let the boat out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arianne, who is Greek, shows how in her culture she shakes her head to mean ‘yes’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use simple statements and questions often linked to gestures.</td>
<td>As he heard a door open, Stevie looked at the practitioner, pointed and said, ‘Mummy’s back?’, making clear by the way he said the words that he was not sure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use intonation, rhythm and phrasing to make their meaning clear to others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have emerging self-confidence to speak to others about wants and interests</td>
<td>Pointing to a picture, Laura said, ‘Who’s that in the tree? I see the owl, he’s there.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use simple grammatical structures.</td>
<td>As he played in the sand, Jonathan commented, ‘I’ve got a dog called Max.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask simple questions, often in the form of ‘where’ or ‘what’. Talk alongside others, rather than with them.</td>
<td>Peter looked at him and said, ‘I’ve a dog, too.’ Jonathan asked, ‘What’s your dog’s name?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use talk to gain attention and initiate exchanges. Use action rather than talk to demonstrate or explain to others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate conversation, attend to and take account of what others say, and use talk to resolve disagreements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation Stage Guidance (QCA, 2000: 48)
REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** areas of learning; Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning; early childhood education policy; Early Learning Goals; Foundation Stage Profile; Foundation Stage Units; management and organisation; National Framework for Baseline Assessment; physical, intellectual, emotional and social development; play; professional development and support; stepping stones

**Links:** Assessment; Developmentally appropriate practice; Information and communication technology; Parental involvement; Play

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**Gender**

**Brief definition** Gender stereotyping in children’s play in early years settings is a much studied topic. Gender identities, what it is to be a boy or a girl, are a strong feature of children’s play and often impact on their choices of types of play and ‘playmates’.
Summary Outline: children’s play; gender identity; stereotypes; ‘different voices’; preferences; research issues – professional development for practitioners, parents, gendered play, gendered choices, practices and strategies, free play, pedagogical practices, ‘critical gender zone’, role of parents; examples from practice – homes and computers, ‘girls only’ computer zone; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Several studies have explored issues of gender in children’s play in the early years (Davies, 1989; MacNaughton, 1999; Tarullo, 1994), and gender identity is a strong feature in young children’s lives. Much has been written about ‘sexual equality’ and gender divides in society and interest in the implications and effects of gender on young children’s learning and experiences is rooted in a tradition of studies which have sought to understand, and later challenge, stereotypes and limited opportunities.

Tarullo (1994) suggested that girls and boys speak with ‘different voices’ in their experiences of the world and there is broad agreement in the literature that boys and girls show different kinds of behaviour and preferences in their play (Gussin Paley, 1984; Maccoby, and Jacklin, 1974). Where girls and boys do share the same play area they have often been found to use it differently, for example:

The play area of playhouse is a largely female domain and children often assume stereotypical roles on entering it. Girls are pleased to act out stories and situations. However, boys seem unhappy in deferring to the girls in the context and I have often observed boys changing roles to become animals, introducing elements of aggression, noise and disruption to the situation. (D’Arcy, 1990: 84)

Clear preferences are often exhibited, perhaps because this is one way in which children create and begin to identify with their own gender. As MacNaughton suggests:

Children’s pretend play is rich in information about how they understand gender relations. As children play at ‘having babies’, ‘being monsters’, or ‘making a hospital’, children show others what they think girls and women can and should do, and what they think boys and men can and should do. (MacNaughton, 1999: 81)
RESEARCH ISSUES

There are many issues which arise from the study of gender in early childhood education which in turn give rise to the need for further detailed study. However, three issues are of prime importance in the further understanding of this theme:

- professional development for practitioners;
- understanding the influence of parents and children’s out-of-school/care lives;
- how children demonstrate what they know about men and women – and girls and boys – through their own gendered play.

Professional development of educators in terms of gender and gendered practices is an important area of study. Examination of children’s play and gendered influences and outcomes of play can help to challenge gendered choices of children which may limit their access to particular areas of learning and avenues of understanding. For example, MacNaughton’s (2000) study involving teachers demonstrated that many teaching practices and strategies, and provision for free play, influenced the development of children’s gendered identities. In her study boys and girls consistently preferred different areas of provision and demonstrated ways of dominating the areas they chose. Through a programme of professional development the teachers adjusted their practices and were able to identify and implement a range of pedagogical practices which enabled the gendered responses of children to the provision they used to be reviewed, challenged and changed. Connolly’s work on boys and schooling in the early years (2004) examines young boys and achievement and argues that the lower educational performance of boys in the early years must be addressed. Connolly argues that there is a need to work within what he calls the ‘critical gender zone’ which he defines as:

... the distance between what a child had already come to internalise in terms of their current experiences of gender relations and the degree to which they are able to reflect upon and deconstruct these with the help of others. (Connolly, 2004: 229–30)

The role of parents and children’s home and families in influencing their ‘out-of-setting’ lives is an area which would benefit from further study. Though many studies have been developed on children’s gendered identities, in the current context of the twenty-first century it is important fully to understand the impact of social and cultural influences on children’s constructions of their gender identities. Three studies by
teachers (Leslie, 2005; Tacey, 2005; Walters, 2002) examine the impact of families and parents on children’s preferences for particular toys and on the construction of their gendered identities. Walters’s (2002) study involving parents of ten four-year-old children (five boys and five girls) showed that parents had clear ideas about the appropriateness of toys for girls and boys, and the boys liked cars, trucks and construction toys while girls preferred soft toys, Barbie dolls and dressing up games. Walters found a stereotypical view of girls’ and boys’ toys which led her to reflect on the implications for children’s learning and all round development. Tacey (2005), however, in a similar study found that some parents were actively promoting non-stereotypical choices of toys at home but believed that the school promoted the development of narrow stereotypes of gendered identity.

Vivian Gussin Paley’s study reminds that combating stereotypical behaviours of young children is not easy:

Kindergarten is a triumph of sexual stereotyping. No amount of adult subterfuge or propaganda deflects the five year old’s passion for segregation by sex. They think they have invented the differences between boys and girls and, as with any new invention, must prove that it works. The doll corner is often the best place to collect evidence. It is not simply a place to play; it is a stronghold against ambiguity. (Gussin Paley, 1984: ix)

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Homes and computers

In a nursery class the teacher noticed that the girls tended always to dominate the home corner area and the boys the outside play area. When she talked to the children they told her that they chose these things because the home area was ‘for girls’ and the computers were ‘for boys’. She challenged their thinking by asking who lived and did domestic chores at home and who used the family computer. The children’s answers showed that stereotypical behaviour they displayed in the nursery was not reflecting their home lives. Some had mothers who used computers and fathers who washed up. This example represents many research studies which have shown that young children often gravitate to stereotypical aspects of provision often defying (or denying) the experience in their daily lives. The teacher concluded that stereotypes could only be challenged through ongoing and deliberate intervention strategies which broadened out opportunities for children.
‘Girls only’ computer zone

In a playgroup setting the boys dominated the only computer, refusing to allow girls an opportunity to use the games. This continued for several sessions and practitioners discussed fairness, sharing and taking turns to no avail. Finally it was decided that the staff should declare the computer area a ‘girls only zone’ until further notice. This brought incessant complaints about injustices and unfairness from the indignant boys who were clearly shocked by the decision to ban them from their favourite activity. It did, however, make it possible for staff to demonstrate that equipment should be shared and eventually a turn-taking system was established – often successful when policed by staff or when girls reported a breach of the rules.

In both of the above examples all the members of staff were female, and in each case they felt that the lack of male role models in the settings made it more difficult to address gender issues through modelling both sexes working in all areas of the provision. The women also felt that they tended to avoid some areas – particularly large construction bricks – and concluded that they needed to examine the messages they gave to children about ‘what women do’.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Tacey, C. (2005) ‘Why do boys like to build and girls like to draw? Gender issues in
a small British military community’, in K. Hirst and C. Nutbrown (eds), Perspectives on Early Childhood Education: Contemporary Research. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Key words: computers; ‘critical gender zone’; Identity; parents; play; practices and strategies; professional development; stereotypes

Links: Inclusive education; Information and communication technology; Media and popular culture; Persona dolls

**Brief definition** The High Scope Preschool Curriculum is an approach to early learning which views children and active participants in their learning, modelled on Piagetian learning theories.

**Summary Outline:** High Scope Preschool Curriculum; active participants; ‘plan–do–review’; active learning; adult–child interaction; learning environment; routine; assessment; child observation record; 58 ‘key experiences’; research issues – longitudinal evaluations, effectiveness, High Scope Perry Preschool Project; examples from practice – in a Nursery class in the North of England, High Scope Ireland; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The High Scope Preschool Curriculum has its origins in an early intervention programme carried out in the United States in the 1960s. Developed in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the High Scope approach is widely used in many countries in the world. The curriculum is planned within a clear framework which informs classroom design and teacher intervention to ensure that children are active participants in their own learning. It is intended to be suitable for children with and without learning difficulties or physical impairment. Central to the High Scope Preschool Curriculum is the ‘plan–do–review’ model within which each child is encouraged to plan how to use their time and the resources available, to carry out their plans, and finally to review their work by discussing it with other children and their teacher. Key roles for the teacher are to support the children as they make their decisions, to help them carry out their work, to ensure that they develop a broad repertoire of experience (and do not always choose the same tasks) and to encourage skills of expression in the reviewing and reporting of their activities.

Important features of the High Scope Preschool Curriculum include the following:

• **Active learning** – using many direct experiences designed to support children’s cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.

• **Adult–child interaction** – allowing children to follow their chosen activities in the company of teachers who use observation and appropriate levels of involvement to enhance and extend children’s thinking, cooperation, decision-making and problem solving.

• **Learning environment** – organised so that areas are clearly defined and labelled, often using symbols which allow the children easily to identify them. The design of the environment is intended to maximise children’s independent access to learning areas and equipment.

• **Routine** – the daily ‘plan–do–review’ routine becomes familiar to the children and is a system which gives children choices in relation to their learning experiences, both indoors and outdoors and in small and larger groups.

• **Assessment** – is carried out mainly through observation using a High Scope Child Observation Record (suitable for children aged 2½–6 years). Observations of children are used to plan further experiences and to share with parents.
The High Scope Preschool Curriculum identifies 58 ‘key experiences’ in which children should engage. These experiences are grouped into ten clusters which, together, create a broad, balanced and developmentally appropriate curriculum. They are:

- creative representation;
- language and literacy;
- initiative and social relations;
- movement;
- music;
- classification;
- seriation;
- number;
- space;
- time.

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

A key research issue for any specific approach to teaching and learning revolves around its effectiveness in promoting children’s learning. Longitudinal evaluations of programmes using the High Scope approach have demonstrated positive developmental outcomes and sustained benefits in adulthood, such as improved social responsibility, lower rates of delinquency and later socio-economic success.

A recent study, part of the widely recognised High Scope Perry Preschool Project, included interviews of 97 per cent of study participants who were interviewed when they reached the age of 40. These adults attended a High Scope Preschool Programme when they were three and four years old. Study participants were African Americans who were born in poverty and at risk of dropping out of school. Control group members were also interviewed (they had not attended a High Scope Preschool Programme). The study found that, at age 40, the adults who had attended the pre-school programme had higher earnings, were more likely to be in employment, had committed fewer crimes and were more likely to have graduated from high school than the adults who had not attended the High Scope Preschool Programme. The full study is reported in Schweinhart et al. (2004).

Research issues for settings using a High Scope approach to the curriculum focus on how children can be supported as active learners and ways in which particular forms of adult intervention can enhance learning.
EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

In a nursery class in the North of England, a group of children gather with their key practitioner to choose their morning tasks. The children each select, from a range of magnetic symbols, three which represent the ‘jobs’ they will do that morning. Sally chooses a paint pot which means she plans to paint first, and places it next to her name on a large board. Next to it she attaches a picture of a book: she intends to go to the book corner after she has painted. Finally, she places a picture of a doll on the board. She intends to end her morning playing in the dolly corner. She tells the teacher:

These are my jobs – painting, reading and then playing with the dollies – I might put them in a pram and take them outside.

Sally and the other children go about their selected ‘jobs’ for much of the morning. After she has painted, Sally returns to the ‘jobs board’ to check what she was planning to do next – she had forgotten and told her teacher: ‘I couldn’t think what I put so I’m checking what’s next.’

At the end of the morning, the children gather in their groups with their key practitioner. They hold a ‘meeting’ and each shares something about their work that morning. Some show a painting, some give a verbal account of their play, one child points over to the brick corner where an elaborate construction remains. In this way the children are involved in reviewing their morning and showing responsibility for carrying out the activities they selected.

High Scope Ireland encompasses providers in voluntary, statutory, independent and community sectors in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Emphasis is placed on the participation of parents and children with practitioners to empower children and their families and thus enhance development and enable young children and their parents to develop their potential as citizens. The High Scope pre-school programmes are seen, in High Scope Ireland, as a means of combating social disadvantage and promoting social inclusion in highly disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. An extensive and accessible training programme is offered to promote appropriate practice and development. A Cross Border High Scope Project, commissioned by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, was developed in 2005 with the aim of enhancing the quality of early childhood provision. This is an example of using pre-school programmes as a way of investing in future positive development of communities.
REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** active participants; Adult–child interaction; ‘child observation record; Daily Routine; High Scope Ireland; High Scope Perry Preschool Project; High Scope Preschool Curriculum; key experiences; longitudinal evaluations; learning environment; plan–do–review’;

**Links:** Assessment; Birth to three; Developmentally appropriate practice; Early intervention studies; Play

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**Brief definition** Heuristic play with objects is an approach to working with children in their second year of life – when they are at the ‘toddler’ stage. This ‘method’ was developed and practised by Elinor Goldschmied working with practitioners in England, Scotland, Italy and Spain.
Origins and definitions

Heuristic play is a specific approach to play offered to children as part of the daily provision alongside other rich and varied experiences. An understanding of the term and its origins is an important underpinning to appreciating the purpose of this approach with young children.

The word ‘heuristic’ derives from the Greek ‘eurisko’ which means ‘serves to discover’ or ‘gain an understanding of . . .’ which describes exactly what these children are engaged in. By introducing this unusual word attention is focussed, in a respectful way, on the quality and dignity of what these children do, spontaneously, if provided with appropriate materials, by themselves and for themselves without active adult intervention. (Goldschmied and Hughes, 1992)

Goldschmied and Jackson (1994) summarise the practice of heuristic play thus:

Put simply it consists of offering a group of children, for a defined period of time in a controlled environment, a large number of different kinds of objects and receptacles with which they play freely without adult intervention. (p. 118)

Key sources for understanding the underlying principles and practices of heuristic play are Goldschmied and Jackson (1994) and Goldschmied and Hughes (1992). Heuristic play offers young children who are ‘on the move’ the opportunity to explore what they can do with a range of objects and how those objects behave. The adult’s role is very much affirming the child’s play as he/she is problem-solving, sorting, balancing, filling and so on. A practitioner may need to intervene if there is conflict (though Goldschmied argues that if there are sufficient quantities of everything conflict over materials rarely arises) and can offer simple vocabulary such as ‘it is by Melissa’ or ‘look underneath your hand’. The heuristic play session offers a good opportunity to observe children’s behaviour. It is imperative that all practitioners and parents are familiar with the reasons for offering such provision for young children within the day so that the uses and benefits to children’s learning and development can be maximised.
RESEARCH ISSUES

Heuristic play is part of work with children under three years of age. Heuristic play sessions have been used in many settings to support young children’s exploration and learning. There are a number of research issues which arise from these practices and further study could enhance our understanding of the following.

- What are the roles of the adults during heuristic play sessions?
- How do practitioners who play the active, almost silent and supportive observer make decisions about their role?
- What are the children doing?
- How is their learning being extended and in what ways does their activity in heuristic play sessions connect with the very different provision that they may be offered during other parts of their day?

Given that parents are key to young children’s holistic learning and development more work could be done on how the purposes and practices of heuristic play sessions are communicated to parents and how parents are helped to view their own role in providing for the exploration of objects in a home setting.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Young children, given the choice of a range of materials, can focus for some time on exploring what they can do with objects that interest them. The following examples show how the heuristic play space is set out by the adult, used by the children and finally tidied away.

In a pleasant, carpeted room, Mary began to set out the objects in readiness for the heuristic play session. To avoid children getting into tussles over a particular object, she ensured that there was plenty of everything: metal tins, balls, cockle shells, lengths of ribbon in different colours and textures, cardboard tubes of different lengths, wooden and metal curtain rings, pine cones. She selected some calming music and started it playing softly. She checked around the room to ensure that objects were well spaced and attractively presented, and positioned the low comfortable chair for her to sit in unobtrusively while she watched the children. She left to collect the children.

Jamie (14 months) had chosen a large metal tin and placed it on the floor near the watching adult. He wandered around the space and returned with a length of red velvet ribbon which he had chosen. He placed it in the tin. He pulled it out, put it in, pulled it out and finally placed it carefully in the tin. He walked around the room again and returned with a large wooden curtain ring which he fingered and turned in his small
hands. He placed it in the tin, looked at it — lying against the red velvet ribbon. He removed the curtain ring, then placed it in the tin again. Jamie made several trips around the room each time returning with a different object: a shell, a cardboard tube, a pine cone.

Nikki (17 months) found a large cardboard tube, then she walked around the room carrying and waving the tube. She looked through it. She turned the tube and looked through from the other end. She dropped the tube and picked up another tube, smaller than the first. She looked through it, turned it and looked through the other end. Nikki worked her way around the room, looking through several tubes, then seemingly abandoning them where she found them. She picked up a large shiny metal tin and held it to her face, looking through it in the same way — this time she saw the reflection of her own face in the bottom of the tin. She giggled.

Among a number of children who were using their recently acquired mobility to find objects which attracted their interest from different parts of the room sat Simone (13 months). Simone was quite a good walker, having taken her first steps at 11 months, but today she was sitting — absorbed in her exploration of a brass chain (about 20 centimetres long — each link about 5 millimetres in length). Slowly and carefully, and with great attention (seemingly unaware of the other children moving around her– one making quite a noise by dropping shells into a tin) Simone watched the chain as she lowered it to the floor. She raised her arm again, watching the chain unfurl and become straight again as she held it up. She explored the fluidity of the chain for quite for time — repeating the up and down movement of her arm. Her face showed a slight frown — such was her concentration.

At end of the session Mary involved all the children in helping tidy up. The room looked somewhat dishevelled with tubes, ribbons, tins, shells and so on seemingly scattered everywhere. Mary began by modelling how to collect each type of object into its own bag. She walked around the room collecting tins first and asking children — using clear simple language — to help in the process. Next Mary opened a large bag and gestured to the children to put all the cardboard tubes inside. Next a bag was filled with shells, another with curtain rings and so on until the room was cleared and all the objects were in their bags which Mary then placed on hooks in a store room. The children seemed to enjoy this ‘filling the bag’ activity — for many it appealed to their interest in enclosing (see schemas).

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING

Goldschmied, E. and Jackson, S. (1994) *People Under Three: Young Children in Day Care*. London: Routledge. (Chapter 8, ‘Heuristic play with objects’, pp. 118–31, gives examples of children’s play during heuristic play sessions and offers guidelines for setting up sessions and suggestions for types and quantities of objects to be used.)

*Heuristic play with objects*


**Key words:** environment; ‘eurisko’; exploration; objects; observation; practitioner

**Links:** Birth to three; Brain studies and neuroscience; Developmentally appropriate practice; Key person; Play; Schemas; Treasure baskets

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**Inclusive education**

Brief definition Definitions of the term ‘inclusive education’ are contested. However, at its broadest, inclusive education refers to the values, practices and attitudes around the creation of communities of learning which involve and ‘belong to’ all members of that community: pupils, parents, staff and others connected with the setting in some way.

Summary Outline: history of exclusion; roots of inclusion; the psychomedical legacy; the sociological response; curricular approaches; school improvement strategies; the disability studies; special educational needs; comprehensive community education; inclusion in diversity; inclusion is a process; research issues – fully inclusive education, conflicting understandings, impact of inclusion and exclusion, parents’ views, emotional and behavioural difficulties, ‘special schools’, contestable definitions, indigenous children, refugee and asylum seeking, travelling families, young children’s experiences, parents’ experiences; examples from practice – pedagogy, emotionally supportive setting, discrimination, social justice; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The term ‘inclusive education’ has come to mean many different things which can in itself create confusion for students in this area. It is in fact a contestable term used to different effect by politicians, bureaucrats and academics. ‘Inclusion’ is not a single *movement*; it is made up of many strong currents of belief, many different local struggles and myriad forms of practices (Clough, 2000: 6).

In the UK of the twenty-first century there is increasing demand for inclusive practices and equality of opportunity and access to educational provision. But this has not always been the case and the origins of inclusive education lie in a history of exclusion, segregation and inequality.

Clough (2000) traces the roots of inclusion through the last half of the twentieth century (Figure 4) from the psycho-medical legacy of the 1950s through the sociological response of the 1960s, curricular approaches

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**Figure 4** A historical interpretation of the development and interaction of ideologies leading to present thinking in inclusive education (Clough and Corbett, 2002: 9).
which dominated the 1970s, the school improvement strategies and programmes of the 1980s to the disability studies critique and the challenge of the disability movement to the state education system of the 1990s. While acknowledging that this perspective is not the only way of viewing historical developments, Clough suggests that it is these different ‘eras’ and developments which have led to the current ‘era’ of inclusion.

It is perhaps because of such roots that inclusive education is sometimes viewed as the latest term to describe the education of children with special educational needs in mainstream education settings. However, this is not how advocates of inclusive education (or of a broader social inclusion) necessarily define the term. As Booth has it:

> Some continue to want to make inclusion primarily about ‘special needs education’ or the inclusion in education of children and young people with impairments but that position seems absurd... If inclusion is about the development of comprehensive community education and about prioritising community over individualism beyond education, then the history of inclusion is the history of these struggles for an education system which serves the interests of communities and which does not exclude anyone within those communities. (Booth, 2000: 64)

As provision for education and care for children of all ages considers ways of meeting education targets together with wider social challenges the 'broad' view of inclusion seems to be gaining currency. Lingard (2000) similarly emphasises the larger structures of inclusion in diversity:

> What I want to do is to hold to a broader definition which links: across the whole social justice, equity and citizenship issues. The concept of inclusion might also encourage an across-government approach to social and economic disadvantage. (p. 101)

Barton has argued for a major role for inclusive practices in education in order to realise wider changes in society:

> Inclusion is a process. Inclusive education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing school systems – in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles – will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of all children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice. (Barton, 1998: 85)
RESEARCH ISSUES

The development of inclusive education raises many research issues including:

- the practicalities of fully inclusive education;
- conflicting understandings and definitions of what is meant by ‘inclusion’;
- the impact of inclusion and exclusion on the lives of young children;
- parents’ views and responses to the inclusion and/or exclusion of their children.

Some argue that children with particular needs are difficult to include in mainstream settings and attempts to include children who experience, for example, emotional and behavioural difficulties can be detrimental to some children unless managed with the utmost knowledge and skill (Angelides, 2000; Visser et al., 2003; Clough et al., 2004). Others take the view that there is no justification for the segregation of children in ‘Special Schools’ because they have a particular impairment (Herbert, 1998). Further research is needed to understand the relationship between inclusion and special educational needs and between inclusion and other issues of social justice. Mairian Corker put it this way:

> I don’t like using the term ‘special needs’ – it’s paradoxical to ‘inclusion’. I worry that it is increasingly part of a labelling process that is used to pick children off or as a justification for a lack of or redistribution of resources in a way that is not in the child’s interests. These labels are very dehumanising – they really get to the nub of why we are disabled people and not people with disabilities. (Corker, 2000: 77)

As Booth (2000) and Lingard (2000) illustrate, definitions of inclusion are contestable. What is meant by ‘inclusion’ varies from culture to culture, society to society, institution to institution and individual to individual. For example, in some parts of the world (perhaps particularly in the southern hemisphere) the inclusion of indigenous children in education is a key issue in terms of education and social policy and for research (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy, 2001). In other parts of the world inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking families is an issue. Some travelling families find that they are excluded from educational services or that attempts to include them threaten to violate their cultural heritage and ways of living (Lloyd et al., 2003).

The impact of inclusion and exclusion on the lives of young children is a further area for study; we need to know more about the human
impact of decisions about young children’s early education and care and how pedagogy and learning communities affect their lives and well-being. Parents’ views and responses to the inclusion and/or exclusion of their children is a further critical area for research. Berry’s study of four young children’s experiences of inclusion (Berry, 2002) demonstrates how important it is for parents to have their say in the education of the children they know best and Murray uses poetry and narrative to give voice to parents’ experiences of fighting for inclusion as a right for their children (Murray and Penman, 1996)

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

Inclusive education is as much about helping children to behave inclusively as it is about including particularly marginalised groups of society. Gussin Paley’s work (1992) provides one profound example of pedagogy which helps children to include everyone in their play; Gussin Paley’s well-known book *You Can’t Say You Can’t Play* (1992) documents the development and agreement of this ‘rule’ for the kindergarten which led to complex understandings and negotiations within an emotionally supportive setting. Gussin Paley’s work is not specifically about children with impairment or a particular identified need, but focuses on helping children voice their own stories and demonstrates her pedagogy of inclusion of all children’s contributions in the learning setting. Addressing unfairness and discrimination is recorded by Babette Brown in her book *Unlearning Discrimination in the Early Years* (1998) which describes how children were supported by their parents and teachers to challenge discrimination and bias:

Children can become active, enthusiastic and independent learners if, as their educators, we value their cultures and communities, and understand how racism and other social inequalities influence their lives. With our guidance and support children can, as this example illustrates, actively challenge unfairness:

A group of 6 year old children were looking through a toy catalogue. They told their teacher that they thought that it wasn’t fair because there were no pictures of Black children or any showing girls building or climbing. It was agreed that they should write a letter to the manufacturer. They got no reply so they wrote again. This letter was also unacknowledged. The disappointed children enthusiastically agreed with a parent who suggested that they should draw up a petition. Children, staff and parents signed and it was sent off. To the children’s delight the company replied that in future pictures in the catalogue would be more carefully chosen.

(Brown, 1998: 3)
The above example shows how children can, with support, challenge exclusive practices and learn strategies to argue for social justice.

**WORKING WITH HANNAH**

Some children who are identified as having special educational needs are successfully included in mainstream classrooms. One such child was Hannah and the two classroom assistants who worked with other professionals to include Hannah in a mainstream primary school tell Hannah’s story in an accessible and practical book called *Working with Hannah* (Wise and Glass, 2000). The account of including Hannah and meeting her specific needs includes details of finding a school, the school’s plans and preparations for Hannah, changes and adaptations in the curriculum, Hannah’s friendships, arranging and providing therapies during school time, physical care and systems of communication. *Working with Hannah* is an example of how a young child’s specific learning needs can be met and how difficulties and challenges can be overcome.

**REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING**


**Key words:** comprehensive community education; definitions; disability studies; diversity; emotional and behavioural difficulties; exclusion; parents; social justice; special educational needs; special schools

**Links:** Developmentally appropriate practice; Gender; Index for Inclusion; Parental involvement; Persona dolls; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
Brief definition  In the words of the introduction, the Index for Inclusion is:

...a resource to support the inclusive development of early years and childcare settings which include: nurseries; playgroups; parent and children centres; crèches; childminding; homecare; clubs and playschemes. The Index is a comprehensive document that can help everyone in these settings to find their own next steps for increasing the participation in play and learning of the children and young people in their care. The materials are designed to build on the knowledge and experience of practitioners and to challenge and support the development of any setting, however ‘inclusive’ it is thought to be currently. (Booth and Ainscow, 2004: 1)

Summary Outline: a broad definition of inclusion; inclusive values; increasing the participation of all; research issues – action research, language, identification of barriers to play, learning and participation, reducing discriminatory attitudes, institutional barriers, resources, support for diversity, four key ‘elements’, planning framework, inclusive policies, evolving inclusive practices; examples from practice – learning to listen, learning how to consult with parents/carers, perspectives of five practitioners; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The *Index for Inclusion* was first published in 2000 (Booth et al, 2000) and issued to all schools in the UK. A second edition was published 2002 (Booth et al., 2002), followed in 2004 by a specially adapted version for use in early years and childcare settings (Booth and Ainscow, 2004).

In the *Index*, inclusion is an approach to education and childcare according to inclusive values, rather than a concern with a particular group of children and young people. Inclusion is often seen to be associated with children and young people who have impairments or are seen as ‘having special educational needs’. However, in the *Index* inclusion is concerned with increasing the participation of all children as well as adults. We recognise that some children may be more vulnerable to exclusionary pressures than others and argue that settings should become responsive to the diversity of children and young people in their communities. (Booth and Ainscow, 2004: 1)

The *Index* takes a broad definition of inclusion, stressing participation of all children and not just the inclusion of a single group (such as children identified as having special educational needs). The *Index* seeks to support practitioners in developing their own responsiveness (and the responsiveness of the systems in place in the setting) to the diversity of children in those learning communities.

RESEARCH ISSUES

Use of the Index is, arguably, a fine example of collective and collaborative action research. Additionally, many issues for research (many of which have themselves arisen from the research of the compilers) arise from using the *Index*. Central research issues are:

- the language and what individuals mean by the term *inclusion*;
- the identification of *barriers to play, learning and participation* and identification of ways of reducing discriminatory attitudes and practices and institutional barriers;
- resources to support play, learning and participation within learning communities as key factors and the need to mobilise and maximise use of human resources including children and their parents;
- support for diversity – ways of using support which increase the capacity of the whole setting rather than only identifying support for specific individuals.
Additionally, the *Index* comprises four key ‘elements’ to support thinking about inclusive development: key concepts; a planning framework; review materials; and an inclusive process. The planning framework in the *Index* supports a structured approach to review and development and suggests ways of working on creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices. Materials are provided to enable a detailed review of all aspects of a setting and help to identify and implement priorities for change. These materials can make useful survey instruments in themselves as a way of ‘taking the pulse’ of inclusion within a setting. Using the *Index* is an inclusive process to ensure that the processes of review, planning for change and putting plans into practice are themselves inclusive. Young children, parents, staff and others associated with the provision are included in the process. All of these aspects of the index provide many avenues for research. Key, of course, is the question as to whether and how using the *Index* makes a difference and how that difference is identified in practice.

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

The following examples are taken from the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth and Ainscow, 2004) and illustrate how people who have used and are using the *Index* have utilised the process to understand more of what young children think about the setting they go to.

**Learning to listen**

We wanted to find out what our children thought about what we were doing for them. We showed some of our five year olds how to use a digital camera and one at a time asked them to take pictures of things they liked and things they did not like. One girl came back with a picture of the sensory room [a room where children can control experiences of light, sound and touch]. We were very pleased with that room and so I said ‘Oh that’s something that you really like?’ and she said ‘no, I don’t like it at all’. She said it ‘frightened’ her. I learnt my lesson, and was careful, from then on, not to jump to conclusions about what the children thought. We also discussed how we could introduce children to the room so that they could choose the level of interaction with it that they felt comfortable with. (Booth and Ainscow, 2004: 29)

**Learning how to consult with parents/carers**

The practitioners in a playgroup, serving many families on very low incomes, attempted to consult with parents/carers by handing out an adapted questionnaire. Only those parents/carers who helped out regularly replied. The practitioners invited the others, a few at a time, for a cup of tea after a session, explained the purpose of the questionnaire and talked through the main points. With the parents/carers’ agreement they kept a note of opinions expressed. As a result, the practitioners realised that many parents/carers
did not feel involved in the playgroup and did not read the information that was given out. They decided to pair practitioners with parents/carers and encourage them to stay behind for a while after sessions to build relationships and offer support. (Booth and Ainscow, 2004: 31)

In a small study which examined the perspectives of five practitioners who used the Index for Inclusion, Clough and Nutbrown asked the question: ‘Why do we need an Index?’ They concluded:

It seems that it is not uncommon to greet yet another development initiative with scepticism; as Helen said: another initiative in another glossy folder. Yet the five people we spoke to have conveyed something of a personal response to the Index which suggests a change in themselves. We are left with the impression that there is a great deal of personal interrogation, personal learning, personal change which results as an outcome of engaging with the index. As Pauline says: we ‘think’ inclusion now. Can such changes in thinking, in attitude, in realisation fail to result in changes in practice? If our five participants are in any way typical we have something to learn about the capacity of the Index to bring about personal/professional change. As Kay told us: That whole idea that ‘Inclusion’ isn’t just the latest PC term for SEN – that was really refreshing.

A key point in the interviews was the development of a shared language for discussion. Sue commented: We’ve got a language now to discuss things within the school and this change in language resulted in Pauline negotiating a change in her title as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator: I’ve asked to be called the ‘Learning Support Co-ordinator’ now. It doesn’t really fit, being a SENCO, in an inclusive school!

Their work with the Index in their settings, they told us, made a difference to them as individuals. It was not always easy, as Helen admitted: It was painful at times. I had to confront and admit some personal prejudices. But it seems that these early childhood professionals would want to recommend the Index for Inclusion to others, in other settings so that they can find out for themselves.

It's not something you can get second hand – you have to be part of the thinking, part of the change.

(Clough and Nutbrown, 2003: 92)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING

Booth, T. and Ainscow, M. (2004) Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning, Participation and Play in Early Years and Childcare. Bristol: Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education. (The Index is available from: CSIE, 1 Redland Close, Elm Lane, Redland, Bristol BS6 6UE.)


Information and communication technology

Brief definition Information and communication technology refers to all forms of technology which can be used to obtain information and to communicate with others. Some technology has been in use for decades, other forms are more recent. The place of ICT in the early years is still to be agreed.

Summary Outline: technological age; computer; television; ‘interactive toys’; learning and development; research issues – ‘for and against’, practice in incorporating ICT, developmentally appropriate use of ICT, pedagogy, developmentally appropriate curriculum (DAC), Alliance for Childhood, Fool’s Gold, dangers of computers, Tech Tonic, skilful users; examples from practice – Gamesley Early Excellence Centre, home and environmental technology; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The technological age of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries brought with it radical change which impacted on almost every aspect of life in many parts of the world, and early childhood education and care was no exception. These changes have provided equipment for work and leisure for adults and the education and play of young children which has surpassed any possible imagining. Literacy, for example, is no longer a case of putting pen to paper but increasingly of putting fingers to keyboard and reading material is not only available in a static printed form but also in fluid forms on computer and television screens – leading to new definitions of literacy (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). New digital technology has transformed the toy market leading to ‘interactive toys’ and media technology designed especially for young children (Emory, Woodard and Gridina, 2000). With the increase in technological toys and equipment produced for and marketed at young children early years practitioners, researchers and parents have, necessarily, focused on how ICT can be used with young children and how such use might affect (either positively or negatively) their learning and development. Whatever the beliefs and practices of adults, the changing culture of many children’s childhoods is inescapable and, for many, it is very different from the childhoods of their parents or teachers (Luke and Luke, 2001).

RESEARCH ISSUES

In parallel with the growth of ICT has come a growth of research interests which seems to span a ‘for and against’ continuum. Some studies seek to identify good practice in incorporating ICT in early years settings and positively exploit its use in order to support children’s learning and development whilst others raise awareness of the potential harm which overuse of technology can cause and even call for the elimination of ICT in the early years. Inevitably, there arises from such a continuum of extreme opinion numerous research issues.

O’Hara (2004) argues for a developmentally appropriate use of ICT in early years settings and the integration of ICT into the curriculum with appropriate pedagogy. The place of ICT and its appropriate use in young children’s learning and development remains an issue for research. Siraj-Blatchford and Whitebread (2003) acknowledge concerns around ICT and young children and discuss ways in which ICT in the early years can be compatible with the principles of a developmentally appropriate curriculum (DAC). They argue that imaginative use of ICT can ensure
that it supports the unique development of young children, socially and cognitively.

The Alliance for Childhood (US), in a report entitled *Fool’s Gold* which highlighted the dangers of computers in childhood, made seven key recommendations which could form an agenda for future research:

1. A refocusing in education, at home and school, on the essentials of a healthy childhood: strong bonds with caring adults; time for spontaneous, creative play; a curriculum rich in music and the other arts; reading books aloud; storytelling and poetry; rhythm and movement; cooking, building things, and other handcrafts; and gardening and other hands-on experiences of nature and the physical world.

2. A broad public dialogue on how emphasizing computers is affecting the real needs of children, especially children in low-income families.

3. A comprehensive report by the U.S. Surgeon General on the full extent of physical, emotional, and other developmental hazards computers pose to children.

4. Full disclosure by information-technology companies about the physical hazards to children of using their products.

5. A halt to the commercial hyping of harmful or useless technology for children.

6. A new emphasis on ethics, responsibility, and critical thinking in teaching older students about the personal and social effects of technology.

7. An immediate moratorium on the further introduction of computers in early childhood and elementary education, except for special cases of students with disabilities. Such a time-out is necessary to create the climate for the above recommendations to take place.

(Cordes and Miller, 2000: 98)

In a later report, *Tech Tonic: Towards a New Literacy of Technology* (2004), the Alliance for Childhood sets out three central concerns which, again, form a potential research agenda:

1. Children face a daunting technological frontier of irreversible changes in human biology and the world’s ecology. They need a radically different kind of technology education to make wise choices in such a future.

2. Children’s lives are increasingly filled with screen time rather than real time with mature, caring adults, the arts, and hands-on work and play.
Yet only real relationships, not virtual ones, will inspire and prepare them to protect the Earth and all that lives on it.

3. There is scant evidence of long-term benefits – and growing indications of harm – from the high-tech life style and education aggressively promoted by government and business. It is time for concerted citizen action to reclaim childhood for children.

(Alliance for Childhood, 2004)

Sheridan and Samuelsson-Pramling (2003) point out that ‘Sweden has enthusiastically adopted the technology and in the process has become a world leader, in terms of numbers of computers per capita and frequency of Internet use (Next Generation Forum, 1999, 2000)’. In their examination of ICT and young children Sheridan and Samuelsson-Pramling (2003) set a clear research agenda:

Although ICT is strongly related to learning, there is no self-evident connection between access to technology, changes in working methods, and improved learning for the children . . . Therefore, the following questions need to be raised: What are the conditions that would allow ICT to become a tool for the kind of learning that is the goal of preschool and school curricula? Can ICT be used in preschool and beyond to create alternative scenarios, thereby making it possible for a child to discern something he otherwise would not have? How do such factors as teachers’ education, competency, and pedagogical beliefs concerning ICT and younger children affect the likelihood of children becoming skillful users of ICT? And why are these technological skills important for young children to acquire? (p. 15)

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

At the Gamesley Early Excellence Centre in Derbyshire, England, the children are introduced to a wide range of technologies in order to ensure their growing awareness and competence in the use of such technologies. They state:

The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage suggests that practitioners should help children to become more aware of the technology that is all around them, in the setting, in their homes and in the local environment. At Gamesley these technologies are taken to include: washing machines which store information to complete the wash, rinse, spin cycles appropriate to different fabrics and finishes; the technologies involved in street lights and signals; telephones; electronic toys; cash registers; and burglar alarms. Technology is integrated into a wide range of socio-dramatic role play environments. Outdoor play vehicles and other toys may be controlled by traffic lights. The children are encouraged to play with pretend (and functioning) telephones, cash registers, office photocopiers, supermarket bar code scanners, computers, etc. One
initiative has been the use of ‘touch screen’ and . . . two-way ‘closed circuit TV’ links across the nursery using inexpensive security equipment. All of these initiatives have been evaluated in collaboration with the European Developmentally Appropriate Technology in Early Childhood. (http://www.ioe.ac.uk/edl/ATEC/datecfrm1.htm)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: Alliance for Childhood; computer; developmentally appropriate use of ICT; Fool’s Gold; health issues; home and environmental technology; interactive toys; learning and development; pedagogy; Tech Tonic; television

Links: Developmentally appropriate practice; Media and popular culture; Play
Brief definition A ‘key person’ is someone identified in group day care who has specific responsibility for a number of named children. S/he liaises with parents and attends to all aspects of the young child’s needs and development while in the setting. The key person develops a close relationship, and thus detailed knowledge of their needs, with the children to whom s/he is ‘key’.

Summary Outline: attachments; parent; close relationship; triangle of relationships; emotional attachment; separation; research issues – anxiety, nursery policies, Birth to Three Matters, role of the practitioner, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; examples from practice – children’s learning; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The constant debate about attachments have for years led many staff in nurseries to shy away from close attachments with children, fearing that the parents will be unable to cope with the idea that another person outside the family has a close relationship with their baby. Many parents who choose childcare in a nursery, as opposed to childminders or nannies, do so because they fear the child will form a close attachment to an individual carer, thus ostracising the parent and exacerbating their feelings of guilt about returning to work and leaving a young child in ‘paid for’ care for a major part of their waking day.

The idea of a ‘key person’ is that an individual member of the staff team is designated to work with and care for specific children and to liaise with their parents, forming – in some cases – a complex triangle of relationships and creating intimate interactions between child and practitioner and (often) practitioner and parent. Research suggests that in good quality settings children benefit from early education and care, thus contesting earlier concerns about emotional attachment (Moss and DfEE,
1998; Melhuish, 1991). It is considered, in many settings, to be good practice to identify a ‘key person’ for each baby and young child who can provide continuity of care and lessen anxiety around separation from his/her parent (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1993; Penn, 1999).

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

It could be argued, then, that there are too many reasons not to implement a key person approach in a nursery, if the designation of a person who will have major responsibility for a child carries with it the danger of enhanced anxiety for the parents and, by default, the practitioner (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1993). However, Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck (2003) argue to the contrary. They claim that the benefits to the child are overwhelming. Moreover, they offer that the complex relationship difficulties surrounding the implementation of a key person approach are ‘challenges to be overcome, rather than reasons not to develop the key person approach’ (p. 12).

We introduce and argue the case for a key person approach and describe the benefits for everyone involved. We explain how any nursery can develop such an approach, whereby one or two adults in the nursery, while never taking over from parents, connect with what parents would ordinarily do: being special for the children, helping them manage throughout the day, thinking about them, getting to know them well, and sometimes worrying about them too – all of which help a child to make a strong link between home and nursery. We have called the person who bears that role the child’s *key person*. The organisational set-up within the setting that makes it all happen is the *key person approach*. (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003: vi)

Further examples are provided by practitioners working in group care settings in which a key person approach operates. The same practitioner works with the same baby each day, feeding, changing nappies and interacting with the baby in a close, respectful and dignified manner. By observing children closely, the adult can ensure that the views of the child are respected and upheld, irrespective of the age of the child.

In many families, nurseries and neighbourhoods we are not used to giving weight to the views of children of any age, especially not to babies under a year old. If we are to be strong advocates for children then we need to observe and interpret the preferences and ideas of children, especially those who don’t yet communicate with language. (Goldschmied and Selleck, 1996: 3–4)
Gillespie Edwards (2002) continues this theme, acknowledging the fears and anxiety that some practitioners may experience. Furthermore, she suggests that the key person approach requires planning and the frequent revisiting of nursery policies to support both the child/ren and the practitioner, particularly with regard to child protection. She explores both the practicalities and the complexities of the role of the key person. But nevertheless she states emphatically that babies and children require ‘being physically held and caressed . . . An attachment relationship is one of intimacy, involving all the senses’ (p. 22). Gillespie Edwards points out that the key person’s role is exhausting and demanding. It clearly involves more than just caring for the physical needs of the child.

Physical care for the youngest children is personalised, being based on not only the child’s physical needs, but also on sensitive observation of the child’s emotional state and knowledge of her preferred routines. (2002: 47)

Messages about the importance of close emotional attachments are also clearly echoed in the ‘Development matters’ section of the Component ‘Emotional well-being’ within the ‘Healthy Child’ aspect of the Birth to Three Matters: A Framework of Support for Our Youngest Children (DfES, 2003). ‘Young babies are social beings. They crave close attachments with a special person within their setting’ (DfES, 2003).

Despite some agreement about the key person being ‘a good thing’ for the very youngest children there is very little work on the impact of the development of close attachments on the professional so involved. As Goldschmied and Selleck note:

Powerful feelings that may include jealousy and rivalry will need to be acknowledged and supported in a careful management programme of support and supervision for the key people. (Goldschmied and Selleck, 1996)

The role of the practitioner is crucial in caring for and educating young children. Adults who are ‘in tune’ with children are better able to support their learning, and it could be argued that the provision of a key person should be afforded to children as a matter of right. Reflecting on the implications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for provision for young children, Page (2005: 100) argues that ‘parents and practitioners can empower young children and respect their rights by creating a respectful environment and by giving them a choice.'
EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Available examples of young children and their key workers are useful in understanding the play dynamic which develops and how the relationship and intimacy they share can enhance children’s learning.

Jane was working with three-year-old Allen and four-month-old Naomi. Allen wanted Naomi to hold a set of plastic keys. Jane gently reminded Allen that Naomi was allowed to choose what she played with (she seemed to prefer to suck her soft bunny at the time). Jane said to Allen, ‘She can choose, she doesn’t have to play with the one you like. You like to choose, she likes to choose as well.’ Jane knew Allen so well that she was confident that this explanation would help him to understand that babies have opportunities for choice as well as children who were older. Allen recognised this assertion and went away. He returned with a small selection of toys which he put at the side of baby Naomi: ‘There – now she can choose.’

Nadia was seven months old. She was sitting in her high chair eating a plate of pasta and peas. Using her left hand she carefully picked up each piece of pasta with her fingers and ate them until only the peas were left on the plate. Then she ate the peas, one at a time, picking up each one with her fingers, looking at it closely before putting it in her mouth. Lunch lasted much longer for Nadia than it did for some of the other children in the group, but her key worker knew that Nadia needed to take her time and focus, carefully and quietly, on her food. The adult knew, because she had spent so many mealtimes with Nadia that this was a part of the day not to be hurried, but to be quietly and calmly enjoyed!

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: anxiety; attachment; nursery policies; parent; relationship; separation; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Links: Birth to three; Brain studies and neuroscience; Developmentally appropriate practice; Heuristic play with objects; Observation; Parental involvement; Treasure baskets

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**Brief definition** Media and popular culture, in early childhood education and care, refers to the use of media (television, video, DVD and other ICT) – and related artefacts – in children’s home lives and in education and care settings.

**Summary Outline**: digital age; television; Internet; ‘popular culture’; artefacts; ‘McDonaldisation’; ‘new media’; computer technology; interactive technologies; research issues – threat to children’s healthy development, Fool’s Gold, risks, Child of Our Time, media hype and moral panic, Teletubbies; examples from practice – the underwater classroom, Maisie’s teletubbies; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The twenty-first century is a digital age, and much of the world relies heavily on technology in a way which previous generations have never experienced. With the growth of digital technology the early experiences of many children have changed. Television is common in most households, and it is now unusual to own only one television set. Many children have their own television and video/DVD playing equipment in their bedrooms and there are dedicated television channels for them. New digital technologies via telephones and the Internet have brought about the growth of media-based popular culture as an integral and often unexamined part of children’s lives.

The term ‘popular culture’ in the context of recent early childhood research is generally taken to mean texts and artefacts which are mass produced and known to, used and owned by many young children. Popular television programmes, for example, are often linked by the producers to dolls, figures, books or comics, lunch boxes, t-shirts, bed covers, wallpaper and so on (Kenway and Bullen, 2001). As Marsh puts it:

Children’s popular culture is often considered to be subject to the ‘McDonaldisation’ effect (Ritzer, 1998) in that it is assumed that US-based themes dominate the global market. However, this is often not the case, as the worldwide popularity of the Teletubbies (of UK origin) and Pokemon (of Japanese origin) attest. In short, this is a complex area in which assumptions made are often erroneous and the dynamic interplay between globalising and localising effects overlooked. In addition, it is important to note that culture is also produced, not simply consumed. Although children’s culture is often shaped by adults and taken up by children (or not, as the case may be) in various ways, children also create their own, child-centred cultural practices. Ultimately, definitions of children’s popular culture depend on a sensitive reading of socio-cultural practices in specific contexts. (Marsh, 2005a: 3)

A number of researchers have demonstrated the force of popular culture in the development of children’s literacy. The work of Dyson, for example, shows how television ‘superheroes’ can fuel children’s writing (Dyson, 1997, 2002). The growth of popular culture is undoubtedly linked with the development and relatively easy acquisition of recently introduced digital technologies and so the term ‘new media’ is used by some to refer to the increasing range of activities and tools which employ and exploit popular culture through the use of digital and other technology. As part of this, computer technology has had an increasing impact on the development of children’s electronic and computer-based toys and on their experiences of moving images and interactive
technologies in their own home and in group education and care settings. DVD, videos, video cameras and voice-activated technology – to name but a few – are familiar to, and even taken for granted, by many young children.

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

Jenkinson (2001) argues that excessive television watching is a serious threat to children’s healthy development, with television having a detrimental effect on children’s physical and mental health. A range of studies is cited which raise concerns about children’s obesity, inactivity, violent/aggressive behaviour, desensitisation (to real-life events) and sexual attitude/behaviour.

Concerns in the US led to the publication of *Fool’s Gold* (Cordes and Miller, 2000) a report which warned of the dangers of young children using new media technology including:

- hazards to children’s physical health (skeletal development, vision problems, obesity, toxic emissions and electromagnetic radiation);
- risks to emotional and social development (children leading isolated TV- and computer-oriented lives, limited self-motivation, detachment from community, the commercialisation of childhood);
- risks to creativity and intellectual development (limited imagination, loss of wonder, limited language and literacy development, poor concentration, limited capacity for hard work, plagiarism of others’ ideas, distraction from meaning);
- risks to moral development.

Cordes and Miller (2000) promote the development of close loving relationships, play, outdoor activity, handcrafts, conversation, poetry and storytelling with loving adults as essentials for young children in their early years of childhood.

In a study for the BBC’s *Child of Our Time* series, Marsh (2005b) argues that children live a balanced social and cultural life which includes watching television, videos and DVD, playing video games and using computers, but also includes playing with toys, playing outdoors and listening to stories read to them. Though it is difficult for parents and carers to ‘steer a path through this rather confusing mixture of media hype and moral panic’ Marsh asks, ‘Haven’t things always been this way? The adult world has often looked on the new practices of childhood with some anxiety, each generation thinking that the next one will be
corrupted by new pastimes.’ An Australian study of 20 children (10 boys and 10 girls) aged 14–24 months watching an episode of the television programme *Teletubbies* highlighted interactive and responsive skills (Roberts and Howard, 2005). These young children’s attentive responses were very strong and they made meaningful connections between the programme and their own lives. The authors write:

> We have shown our young participants using a television text both for pleasure and for making sense of their worlds and in this they are no different from older children. Indeed we would suggest that programmes like *Teletubbies* enable very young viewers to exercise and develop those skills and dispositions that make older brothers and sisters savvy operators in a pervasive media environment. (Roberts and Howard, 2005: 106)

### EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

The following example shows how early years practitioners have used children’s interest in popular television culture to extend the curriculum in ways which appeared meaningful to the children and allowed them to bring their cultural capital to the classroom.

**The underwater classroom**

Many of the children in the class had seen the Disney film *Finding Nemo* (Disney/Pixar, 2003). They were attracted to the idea of an underwater school but appalled by the idea of being taken from the ocean and confined to a small tank. The spontaneous playtime game of a group of children involved playing underwater schools. They ‘swam’ around the outdoor playground singing nursery rhymes and searching for ‘Nemo’. The teacher encouraged the children to extend their ideas into the classroom, asking them to design underwater classrooms and to imaging what it would be like if their own school was under the sea. How would they get there? What would they wear? What kinds of lessons would they have? The outcomes were some imaginative stories and classroom designs – and ‘swim time’ instead of ‘playtime’. Having researched the different types of fish featured in the film, they cast various members of staff as different types of sea creatures. The head teacher was a manta ray and their own teacher a very pink lobster (she did not ask why!).
Maisie’s Teletubbies

A practitioner asked the children to each make a list of all the things they had at home which were connected with a television character. Many lists were long, and the children needed some help to record some of the complex terms they wanted to use. What emerged was that most of the children were surrounded with books and objects which were part of their popular and media culture. Figure 5 shows Maisie’s list which begins with the names of the four soft toy dolls who are the *Teletubbies*.

Maisie’s Teletubby things:
- Tinky Winky
- Dipsy
- La La
- Po
- Lunch box with Teletubbies on
- Teletubby jamas
- Two videos
- Teletubby book – the big one
- Crayoning book
- Stickers
- Pillow case (mummy couldn’t find the quilt cover but she’ll get it for me)
- Little tiny Teletubby toys and their kitchen
- Jigsaw with Tinky Winky and rabbits
- Rabbit (a real one called La La)
- Pencils
- Felt tips
- Wellies with Tellytubby stickers on
- Teletubby T-shirt – it’s pink!
- Teletubby baseball hat for the summer
  . . . and I’m getting a Teletubby bike for my birthday (I think I am!)

Figure 5  Maisie’s Teletubby list.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** artefacts; computer technology; digital age; Fool’s Gold; Internet; McDonaldisation; television; threats

**Links:** Developmentally appropriate practice; Information and communication technology; play

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**Montessori Method**

**Brief definition** The Montessori Method describes the practices of early education developed by Dr Maria Montessori. These practices are now adopted in many early years settings which bear her name.

**Summary Outline:** Maria Montessori; learning difficulties; principles; human tendencies; process of learning; individual; research issues – transition, cultural compatibility, inclusion; examples from practice – Samir, Amy; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Maria Montessori (1870–1952) was an Italian medical doctor who worked with children with learning difficulties in socially deprived areas of Rome. In 1907 she began work with 50 children living in the slum areas of Rome who, within two years, were considered to be achieving educationally alongside other children of their age. Her success brought her world-wide acclaim.

From her early work, Montessori developed a set of principles, based on her observation of these children, which she argued were applicable to the learning of all children. The Montessori Method is based on a philosophy which encompasses a range of issues, namely: multi-age grouping of children according to periods of development; human tendencies; the process of children’s learning; the prepared environment; observation; work centres; teaching method; class size; basic lessons; areas of study; daily schedule; assessment; learning styles; and character education.

Within these many elements the notion of ‘human tendencies’ is perhaps key. Montessori developed her methods by building on her observations that learning is brought about by human tendencies to do – to act, to explore, to create. She observed that learning happened through repetition, concentration, imagination, and that learners needed to be independent in their actions while making their own decisions about what ‘work’ they should do and learning how to control their own actions.

Reflecting on her approach Montessori wrote:

Like others I had believed that it was necessary to encourage a child by means of some exterior reward that would flatter his baser sentiments, such as gluttony, vanity, or self-love, in order to foster in him a spirit of work and peace. And I was astonished when I learned that a child who is permitted to educate himself really gives up these lower instincts. I then urged the teachers to cease handing out the ordinary prizes and punishments, which were no longer suited to our children, and to confine themselves to directing them gently in their work.

The Montessori Method suggests that children aged three to six years work for those years with the same teacher, the aim being to work and learn in an environment which has been created and prepared by the teacher to encourage socialisation and learning which involves solving problems, children teaching other children and interaction. In some countries this aim is not fulfilled because children leave their Montessori setting to attend mainstream school around the age of five (sometimes earlier). There is a small number of Montessori reception classes which
continue to teach according to Montessorian principles. An underpinning premise of the Montessori Method was that children should direct their own learning and that teachers should ‘follow the child’.

Montessori was, undoubtedly, a pioneer in the field of childcare and education and, though famous for her influence on early childhood education, her work included ways of working with children of all ages. Montessorian approaches are used, internationally, in education settings and in home-based provision for children.

The Montessorian view of the process of learning is seen as having three stages:

Stage 1  Introduction of a concept by means of a lesson or other form.
Stage 2  Processing the information gained in Stage 1 and coming to an understanding of the concept through the processes of doing, experimenting, making. This stage can take some time and involve much discovery, repetition and interaction.
Stage 3  ‘Knowing’ – being about to use the concept learned to pass it on, to teach another child, to show someone or to discuss it with clear competence.

Basic lessons and ‘work’ are central elements of Montessori teaching. Many prepared materials are designed to teach children processes of work: cleaning, cooking and so on. To this end, substantial periods of time are made over to children selecting from the prepared materials, carrying out the task they have chosen and moving from area to area, working on the materials they choose without the constraints of other timetabled events.

Much of the teaching is carried out on an individual basis, the teacher intervening, based on her/his observations and tuning in to individual children’s learning styles. Teachers foster concentration and neither they nor other children are encouraged to interrupt a child who is busy working on the materials s/he has selected.

While well known for her distinctive work on early childhood curriculum and pedagogy Maria Montessori was well respected in the world of science, being invited to the US in 1915 by Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison to address an audience at the Carnegie Hall. She was politically active and her expression of anti-fascist views forced her into exile during the Second World War. She was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and – until the adoption by Italy of the euro – her face appeared on the 1000 lire note, in recognition and honour of her achievements.

Montessori Method
RESEARCH ISSUES

The Montessori method gives rise to a number of research questions, but among them is the question as to how children who attend Montessori nurseries fare when they transfer to a mainstream, non-Montessorian school environment. Barber (2005) examined the attitudes and responses of Montessori teachers and mainstream Reception classes towards the transition of children from a Montessori setting to mainstream classes at the age of five. She found that the children from Montessori classes coped well, but also identified the need for a greater exchange of information so that Reception class teachers understood the experiences that Montessori educated children had and could therefore prepare for their entry into school.

Internationally, issues for research include cultural compatibility and the ways in which the Montessori approach can be adapted to ensure that the environment and learning tasks are culturally appropriate. Work has also been developed in some settings to include children with learning difficulties – more understanding of this approach to inclusion is needed.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Samir
Three-year-old Samir chooses a tray from the shelf of his Montessori kindergarten. He takes it to a low table and sits down. On the small tray are two china bowls, one containing rice, and a spoon. Samir has chosen this tray before and he knows what to do. He begins, slowly and carefully, scooping the rice with a spoon and transferring it from one bowl to another. He works silently. A teacher nearby is working with another child, but she looks up occasionally, aware of what he is doing. She does not interfere or interrupt. Samir completes the task, returns the tray to the shelf and walks around the room while deciding what he wishes to work on next.

Amy
Amy is four and a half years old. She is working with a set of cylinders with which she is very familiar. She is sitting on a small mat, on the floor. She seems to know that the wooden cylinders, each a different size, will each only fit into one of the spaces in the accompanying tray. She works quickly and deftly. She glances up and sees another child, seemingly struggling, with a similar piece of equipment. Silently she approaches the child and moves one cylinder into the correct hole. The younger child looks at her, smiles (as he has understood what was going wrong) and continues the task he has chosen, eventually with success. Amy returns to
her cylinders, completes the task, and returns the cylinders to their shelf. She folds up her mat and replaces it with the other mats in a nearby box.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: cultural compatibility; human tendencies; inclusion; individual teaching; learning difficulties; Maria Montessori; principles; process of learning; transition

Links: Developmentally appropriate practice; Inclusive education; Play; Special educational needs

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**Parental involvement**

**Brief definition** Parental involvement in young children’s learning now refers to the myriad of programmes and systems in place in early years settings and schools to support parents’ roles in their own children’s learning and development.

**Summary Outline:** Starting with Quality (DES, 1990); Parents in Partnership project; accredited learning; research issues – Froebel Early Learning Project, PEEP, ORIM conceptual framework: Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Models; examples from practice – Sure Start, health and physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, minority groups, bilingual support, families’ homes and in group settings; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Research and practice in the past two decades has shed light on parents’ roles in their own children’s learning and prompted the development of practices and programmes to involve parents more systematically in their own children’s education. Though it is difficult to identify precise beginnings, parental involvement in their children’s learning has, for some time, been part of working with young children. It is known, for example, that Margaret Macmillan included ‘lectures’ for parents in her development of nursery schools. During the 1960s programmes to involve parents began to be developed – largely as a way of addressing poor home experiences. However, as it is currently understood, parental involvement could perhaps be traced back to the Rumbold Report Starting with Quality (DES, 1990) which promoted the idea that parents were their children’s first and most important educators. Current government policy makes it clear that involvement with parents is an expected part of early childhood education and care in all settings:

Parents are children’s first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on the child’s development and learning. Therefore, each setting should seek to develop an effective partnership with parents. (QCA, 2000)

There are many examples of parental involvement in children’s learning and, as recent examples have shown (Draper and Duffy, 2001; Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan, 2005; Whalley et al., 1997), the model of parental involvement is largely participative – a far cry from the compensatory ethos which dominated early programmes of the 1960s and 1970s.

Throughout the 1990s, Sheffield LEA, like many others, promoted partnership with parents in schools throughout the city and ‘partnerships’ took many forms with workshops, open days, opportunities for adult learning and special events being offered in many schools across the whole age range from nursery to secondary.

In one school, for example, the ‘Parents in Partnership’ project led to the development of a programme of accredited learning designed to help parents learn more about their children’s learning in order better to support them. An accredited course was designed for the parents, tailored to their needs, with four units:

- sharing your child’s school;
- sharing your child’s reading;
- sharing your child’s maths;
- sharing your child’s science.

Parental involvement
Parents’ comments confirmed the usefulness of the project and the aspirations of many to continue lifelong learning. Some said:

I’ve got a greater awareness of child-centred learning and primary education. I think that it is easy to sit back and let school and teachers get on with doing their jobs but when I think back to when I was younger and how easy it was not to do any work I want to help my child realise that learning could be fun.

Just being involved helps children because it shows your interest in what they do and helps them to understand it is worthwhile.

The headteacher of the school at the time reported:

A key aim is to raise achievement of pupils. Through being involved in the project parents can learn alongside their children and develop better understanding of the expectations of school learning and there is shared understanding of where children’s education is coming from and going to. Parents are continuing on their paths of lifelong learning too and many have yet to discover where those paths will lead. The potential is tremendous. (Firth, 1997)

Hurst and Joseph (2003) viewed the coming together of parents and practitioners as ‘sharing education’. They argued for understanding of the complex cultural differences and shifts which children, parents and practitioners experienced when they entered each other’s worlds and opportunities for each to ‘share’ the other’s. However,

The sharing of intentions and perspectives between parents and practitioners is not easy in a busy classroom. There has to be a rationale for it, and it needs links with a curriculum model which sets a value on children’s experiences at home with family and friends. It requires just as much commitment as sharing intentions with children does. Contacts with the home should be seen as a part of the curriculum, and a part of the practitioner’s responsibility to provide for children’s learning in ways that suit them. The first step is to consider what kind of contact with parents is most valuable, and to find out what kind of contact with the setting is needed by the parents. (Hurst and Joseph, 2003: 89)

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

Specific initiatives to involve parents in the early years have often focused on young children’s learning or aspects of the curriculum and helping parents learn more about their children’s ways of learning. In the late 1980s the ‘Froebel Early Learning Project’ (Athey, 1990) identified ways of helping parents to understand their children’s learning interests so that they could better support them. This theme was further developed by
Nutbrown (1999) who argued that the more parents know about how children’s learning developed, the better position they were in to understand what their children were doing and how they might further enhance learning opportunities for them. More recently the PEEP Project in Oxfordshire has developed ways of involving parents with babies and young children in several aspects of their learning and development.

The Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) (Roberts, 2001) is an early intervention initiative which aims to improve the life chances of children in disadvantaged areas. PEEP was set up in 1995 and located on an Oxford housing estate. Its purpose was to raise educational attainment, especially literacy, by supporting parents and carers in their role as first educators, giving their children a flying start at school. PEEP developed a five-year programme of support for parents (from birth to five years), which complemented pre-school provision. It offered materials, group sessions and home visits to parents. The focus is on listening, talking, playing and singing together and sharing books every day. The aim was to lay foundations for later learning. In PEEP, the ORIM framework was utilised across the curriculum. The curriculum areas were self-esteem, disposition (perseverance, curiosity and confidence), listening, talking, reading, writing and numeracy.

A recent study of work with parents to promote early literacy development has used the ORIM conceptual framework to focus on four main ways in which parents can help their children’s literacy development (Figure 6), by providing Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and a Model for their children.

**Figure 6  The ORIM Framework**
Opportunities

In the early years parents can provide vital learning opportunities for their children’s literacy development by:

- resourcing children’s drawing and writing activities;
- encouraging their socio-dramatic play;
- exposing them to, and helping them interpret, environmental print;
- exposing them to nursery rhymes and other word-play rhymes or songs which aid speech segmentation and phonological awareness;
- ensuring that story books and other written materials are available with time and space to use them;
- enabling children to participate in visits, trips or holidays which provide further opportunities to talk, read and write.

Recognition

It is important that parents are aware of, and can identify, early milestones in development as well as the achievement of clear stages in literacy learning. Parents can provide unique encouragement for children if they show recognition, their value, appreciation and understanding, of children’s early literacy achievements by, for example:

- praising children when they ‘read’ a book;
- putting their writing or drawing on show (on the fridge, kitchen wall, etc.);
- telling others (granny, auntie, etc.) what the child has done or achieved.

Interaction

Children need their parents to spend time with them, supporting, explaining, endorsing and challenging them to move on from what they know about literacy to do more. An important part of such interaction is the sharing of real-life literacy tasks where children can make a meaningful contribution, for example:

- adding their name or mark to a birthday card;
- helping to write a shopping list;
- helping to find particular items in the shops;
- turning the pages a book while a parent reads.
Through such interactions parents will enable their children to progress from what they can do now with help to becoming more independent in the future (Vygotsky, 1978).

Other forms of interaction include:

- showing children how to do something;
- deliberately teaching a child something, for example how to write his/her name;
- playing word/letter/sound games;
- participating in socio-dramatic play.

Models of literacy users

Parents can act as powerful models of literacy users if and when children see them using literacy themselves in everyday life, for example:

- reading a newspaper or magazine;
- doing the crossword;
- writing notes or shopping lists;
- following a cooking recipe;
- following instructions for assembling furniture or how to work a piece of equipment;
- writing cheques;
- filling in forms;
- signing their name.

These four concepts and the specific actions attached to them form the key roles parents can play in enhancing their children’s literacy development. Others have developed the ORIM framework to incorporate other aspects of development (Delaney, 1997; Fagan, 2000; Preece, 1999; Rigo-Toth and Ure, 2000; Roberts, 2001; Turnbull, 1998).

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Key issues for research continue to be how to involve parents in ways which are inclusive, participative, respectful and meaningful. Some settings have developed an international reputation for their work in involving parents in their children’s learning, for example the Pen Green Centre (Arnold, 2001; Whalley et al., 1997), the Coram Children’s Centre in London (Draper and Duffy, 2001) and the Sheffield Children’s

Parental involvement
Centre. Most recently, Sure Start projects have involved parents in a range of programmes to support them in promoting babies’ and young children’s health and physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Many settings develop their own specific projects to help parents learn more about their children’s learning, such as that reported by Parker (2002) who explains how sharing work with parents on children’s drawing and mark making led to enhanced understanding and enthusiasm from parents. Parker records the views of some parents who remarked:

I have been able to enter her imagination and see the world through her eyes.

Now I’m fascinated by the way she develops a drawing, rather than just looking at the end result.

I have learnt that Brandon is more capable of mark making than I first thought.

(Parker, 2002: 92)

Parker notes:

The parents learned from observing their children and developed an appreciation of their children’s high levels of involvement, discussing their children’s achievements at home with confidence, clarity and joy . . . The children have been the primary beneficiaries of this collaboration between parents and practitioners. We all had valuable knowledge and understanding to share. This was a group which enjoyed mutual respect, shared understandings, political awareness and a commitment to extending learning opportunities for young children. (Parker, 2002: 92/3)

In some cases initiatives have been targeted specifically at minority groups, including families for whom English is not the language of the home. Karran (2003) describes work with parents who are learning English as an additional language and the importance of bilingual support for such parents who want to understand more about education systems and how to help their young children. Siraj-Blatchford (1994) has argued that in some cultures ‘education’ and ‘home’ are distinct and separate and time may need to be given to explaining how home–school partnerships can support young children’s learning and development. Baz et al. (1997) have discussed the importance of bilingual early childhood educators working with parents and young children using books, early writing, rhymes and poems in families’ homes and in group settings.
REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


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Key words: accredited learning; bilingual support; group settings; homes; minority
groups; ORIM conceptual framework; Parents in Partnership project; Starting with
Quality; Sure Start

Links: Early literacy development; Family literacy; Key person; Schemas; Sure Start

Persona Dolls

Brief definition Personal Dolls are specially created dolls (about the
size of a toddler) that are used to tell stories that raise issues of
equality, promote talk and discussion of personal thoughts and
feelings and teach about difference. The dolls are designed to
represent a range of cultures and family backgrounds.

Summary Outline: anti-bias persona dolls; Anti-Bias Curriculum Task
Force; group setting; discrimination, fairness and social justice issues;
research issues – effectiveness of the strategy, professional development
for practitioners, understanding of diversity; examples from practice –
City of Phoenix Head Start Persona Dolls Project, persona dolls in higher
education; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Anti-bias Persona Dolls emanate from the work of Derman-Sparkes in the US as part of the work of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force. The dolls are used by practitioners to create and tell stories which challenge children to think about issues of equality in the lives of young children. The dolls are given personalities, with details of their names, birthday, family members, life history, geographical and cultural background. The dolls are of child-like size and practitioners who use them employ strategies to help the children see the dolls as part of the group. These Persona Dolls are not toys, but ‘brought’ to the group by the practitioner who might tell a story about the doll or ask the children to help the doll deal with something that has happened to him/her. Dolls are obtainable commercially, but could be made by people with the skills and knowledge to ensure that they and their clothes are culturally appropriate and that any particular physical features are accurate.

Brown (1998) suggests that dolls can be introduced as follows:

. . . One could be told about a particular doll – let’s call her Beverly. She is four years old, loves riding her bike, painting and looking at books. She can’t hear very well so everyone in her family uses sign language when they talk to her. Sometimes children tease her and then she feels sad. She lives with her Black mum who is a doctor, her White dad who is a nursery school teacher, her sisters, Pam who is 7 and Irene who is 9 years old. They live in a flat which is right next to a park. Beverly has just started going to the same school as her sisters. . . The children can be encouraged to tell their own stories about the dolls and their families. (Brown, 1998: 101)

With the doll in the group setting, children become involved in the stories of their lives and engage in the issues which affect them (being teased, being called names, wearing glasses, hearing aids, and so on) and become involved in deciding how, in the group the children could help to make things fairer and more positive for the doll. The dolls are an aid to helping children learn about discrimination, fairness and social justice issues.

RESEARCH ISSUES

There are several areas for research, not least in the effectiveness of the strategy of using persona dolls to help children understand discrimination and to extend their knowledge of lives of people who are different from them. Studies are needed of the effectiveness of professional development for practitioners who use the dolls and how work with the dolls can be sustained and incorporated into the curriculum and pedagogy of the setting.
Derman-Sparkes and Taus (1989) suggest that children can begin to reach an understanding of diversity through storytelling. They write:

Between the ages of two and five years old, children are forming self-identities and building social interaction skills. At the same time, they are becoming aware of and curious about gender, race, ethnicity and disabilities. Gradually young children begin to figure out how they are alike and how they are different from other people, and how they feel about those differences. (p. 43)

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

City of Phoenix Head Start Persona Dolls Project

The City of Phoenix Head Start Persona Dolls Project (Colunga, 2003) began in 1994 and included a training programme for Head Start teachers, using dolls with different types of hair, skin tone, abilities, ages and clothing. The dolls were given their own unique identities that included a name, family, likes and dislikes, cultural background and idiosyncratic personal details (as all children have). The teachers used the dolls to tell stories about them, the things that happened to them, difficulties they encountered, their troubles and their pleasures. Those who used the dolls most successfully integrated them into their classroom practice throughout the year – weaving stories of the dolls into the children’s experiences and introducing them to new ideas and experiences of others.

Persona dolls in higher education

Farmer (2002) used persona dolls with a mixed aged group (from 17–50) of 25 BTEC Early Years students studying a ‘values and personal development’ module at a college of further education. Each doll was given a family background as summarised in Table 5.

The profiles of the dolls were created to represent a range of families, traditions, cultures and circumstances as the examples in Figure 7 show.
Table 5  Family structure and lifestyles of the Persona Dolls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of doll</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Occupation classification. (NS-SEC)</th>
<th>Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ayisha</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>Accountant and teacher</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Nuclear, 2 children</td>
<td>Previously farming</td>
<td>4- bedroom large house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>3-bedroom bungalow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurema</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>Doctor and house husband</td>
<td>1.2 4-bedroom detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>International company – no level</td>
<td>Nice house near beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Nuclear, 2 children</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Nuclear, 2 children</td>
<td>Both parents work in the media</td>
<td>2 Large semi-detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayra</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>Doctor and vet</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa-May</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>Nurse and firefighter</td>
<td>2 Not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santinia</td>
<td>Extended + 1 child</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Caravan/cottage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sita</td>
<td>Nuclear, 3 children</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NS-SEC) National Statistics Socio-economic Classifications


*Jumera* is English, 3½ years old, youngest of three. Mother, a doctor, is from Angola. Father, a ‘house husband’. Holiday – a first visit to Angola. Doll has two outfits, for England and for Africa.

*Mayra* is Thai, with an English mother, Thai father, 3 years old, with an older and a younger brother. The family has recently arrived from Thailand. Mayra likes painting, poetry, stories and playing with dolls.

*Santinia* is 5 years old, English, and her parents are Spanish. They live with her grandparents and travel as a group of six caravans. Liti her rag doll is carried in a bag. She enjoys drawing and painting, as she has no television in the caravan.

Figure 7  Profiles of selected Persona Dolls (Farmer, 2002: 148)

*Source:* (Farmer, 2002: 148)
The use of the dolls had a great impact on the students’ understanding of their own beliefs, values and prejudices and of the assumption they held about others who were different from themselves. Farmer writes:

In challenging the ‘truths’ of class, age, status, race, ethnicity, gender, ability or language superiority, I intended the students to develop understanding and tolerance for diversity. I would not presume to suggest that their attitudes, long-held prejudices or assumptions have been altered . . . But . . . 21 of the 25 students were able to relate to at least one area of diversity, address their own concerns and show awareness of how intolerance, discrimination and prejudice affects everyone. (Farmer, 2002: 154)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force; discrimination; effectiveness; professional development; social justice issues; understanding of diversity

Links: Developmentally appropriate practice; Gender; Inclusive education; Special educational needs; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Persona Dolls
Play

Brief definition Play in childhood is an exceedingly complex phenomenon. It is an activity which combines into a single whole, very different strands of thought and experience. Many of these persist in adult life. (Lowenfeld, 1935)

Well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge. (Foundation Stage Guidance, DfES/QCA, 2000: 25).

Summary Outline: defining play; pioneers; Structuring Play in the Early Years at School; well-being, development and learning; birth to three; research issues – children’s roles, international contexts; examples from practice – Zoe and the water wheel, Foundation Stage Guidance, war, weapon and superhero play, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

As is it generally understood in early childhood education and care, play is a central component of children’s experiences and a key means by which they learn. Defining play is problematic, though the word ‘play’ is used liberally and with the assumption that its meaning is understood. Several famous pioneers of early childhood education – Montessori, Steiner, Froebel, Isaacs, the MacMillan sisters – included play as central to their work in developing nursery and kindergarten curricula. Play has, been both heralded as the essential means through which children learn and castigated and sidelines in favour of ensuring that young children should ‘work’ in school. In the introduction to their book Structuring Play in the Early Years at School Manning and Sharp (1977) explain the purpose of the project on which they report:
The idea of the project first arose because of the difficulties which many teachers were experiencing in using play in the classroom. Although accepting that children learn and develop through play and that play is a motivating force for children's learning, many teachers are pressurised by the very full first school curriculum and large classes to neglect play as a means of teaching. They leave children to play on their own. In addition, many parents' expectations are that children will 'work' when they come to school, not 'play'. (p. 7)

Some thirty years later many teachers continue to struggle to ‘fit’ play into their pedagogic repertoire and, though play is now to some degree reinstated in terms of the early years, some practitioners still lack the necessary skills and confidence to support children’s play. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) reviewed research on early years pedagogy, curriculum and adult roles. Of play the review stated:

Several key studies have provided an evidence base on the quality of play, its educational benefits, and the pedagogy of play, in the contexts of preschool and school settings (Tizard et al., 1975; Sylva et al., 1980; Wood et al., 1980; Meadows and Cashdan, 1988; Hutt et al., 1989; Bennett and Kell, 1989; Cleave and Brown, 1991; Bennett et al., 1997). Most of these studies did not focus specifically on play, but on broader curriculum and pedagogical processes, of which play was an integral part. Their findings were critical of the quality of play, the dislocation between rhetoric and reality of play; the extent to which play and learning were linked; the role of the adults in children’s play; and how play was utilised towards educational outcomes. The consistent picture to emerge from these studies is that play in practice has been limited in frequency, duration and quality, with teachers and other adults too often adopting a reactive ‘watching and waiting’ approach. (BERA EYSIG, 2003: 14)

While research evidence is inconclusive, the propensity of children the world over to play, and the perceived benefits of play to children’s holistic development provide a strong case for the professional exploration of the role of play in supporting children’s well-being, development and learning.

In recent years more attention has been paid to children from birth to three and their play, too, is an issue for many practitioners. Manning-Morton and Thorp (2004) examine the importance of play for children under three years of age and identify the crucial role for adults in such play in supporting and developing play experiences. Play is seen in relation to all aspects of a child’s day, integral to and part of a holistic approach to early education and care for very young children.

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**Play**
RESEARCH ISSUES

Research continues to focus on definitions of play, children's roles and interests in play and how play is supported in various forms of early years provision in a variety of international contexts. These themes continue to form the research agenda and, internationally, rich examples of children's play are still necessary. Questions about the efficacy of play as a pedagogical tool remain and successive governments show varied commitment to early years and the school curriculum in relation to play. The implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, for example, promoted the importance of the basic skills and threatened play. Teachers became anxious that standards were raised and play was sidelined (and in some cases eliminated). Christmas (2005) asked the teachers and other staff in her small village school for their views on play. She found that while people generally thought it was 'OK to play', worries over the play/work balance remained.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Zoe and the water wheel

Zoe, aged 4 years, was playing in the water trough in the nursery. She was experimenting with a jug and water wheel, spending a considerable time filling the jug, pouring the water over the wheel and watching it turn. She poured water at different speeds, and from different heights. Her teacher watched and eventually asked: 'Can you tell me what is happening?' Zoe looked at her and began her explanation: 'The wheel doesn't like to get wet, so it runs fast to get away from the water. When all the water is gone, it stays still again!' Zoe knew that the water made the wheel turn but ascribed attributes of thought and feeling to the wheel. (Nutbrown, 1999: 3)

The Foundation Stage Guidance says this about play in early years settings:

In playing, they behave in different ways: sometimes their play will be boisterous, sometimes they will describe and discuss what they are doing, sometimes they will be quiet and reflective as they play.

The role of the practitioner is crucial in:

• planning and resourcing a challenging environment;
• supporting children's learning through planned play activity;
• extending and supporting children's spontaneous play;
• extending and developing children's language and communication in their play.
Through play, in a secure environment with effective adult support, children can:

- explore, develop and represent learning experiences that help them make sense of the world;
- practise and build up ideas, concepts and skills;
- learn how to control impulses and understand the need for rules;
- be alone, be alongside others or cooperate as they talk or rehearse their feelings;
- take risks and make mistakes;
- think creatively and imaginatively;
- communicate with others as they investigate or solve problems;
- express fears or relive anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.

(DfES/QCA, 2002: 25)

The themes of children’s play are often influenced by their experiences – either first hand or secondary experiences such as those gleaned from television or stories. The practices of practitioners faced with war and gun play vary from ‘zero tolerance’ to a strategy of embracing and seeking to enhance the play. Holland (2003) argues that war, weapon and superhero play properly supported with sensitive adult guidance can be generally positive experiences for children and practitioners, resulting in imaginative play and social development. Hyder (2004) explores the importance of play for young refugee children’s development. She considers the implications of war and conflict on young children and notes how opportunities for play are often denied them. Hyder’s work with young refugee children is set in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and she argues that play is a healing experience for young children affected by war and conflict.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** birth to three; children’s roles; defining play; Foundation Stage Guidance; international contexts; pioneers; Structuring Play in the Early Years at School; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; war, weapon and superhero play; well-being, development and learning

**Links:** Birth to three; Brain studies and Neuroscience; Developmentally appropriate practice; Foundation Stage; Heuristic play with objects; Media and popular culture; Montessori Method; Quality; Reggio Emilia approach; Schemas; Steiner-Waldorf kindergarten; Treasure baskets; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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**Quality**

*Brief definition* ‘Quality’ has evolved as the term used to describe merits of provision and practices in early childhood education and care. It is a term that evades precise definition.
Summary Outline: ‘effective’; ‘best practice’; multifaceted concept; National Standards; Early Excellence Centres; Sure Start; policies and practices; inspection frameworks; research issues – coordination of services, parents are the prime educators of their children, consistency, continuity and progression in pedagogy, equality of opportunity, acting in the best interests of children, respect; examples from practice – Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years, Effective Provision of Preschool Education; references and indicative further reading.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The issue of what is ‘good’ for children in the early years of their organised education is one that impinges on many factors and which has pervaded policy and practice in modern times. The extent to which early childhood education is ‘good’ for children, the forms of early years practice and types of provision which are most ‘effective’ and the activities in settings which are ‘best practice’ in extending children’s holistic development are all questions which, together, inform discussion about the ‘quality’ of provision for young children – and more recently – for their families too. The ‘quality’ discussion centres around what is offered to young children, where it is offered, by whom and to what effect. Definitions of ‘high’ or ‘good’ quality – or of ‘best practice’ – and beliefs about how to achieve such quality in providing for children’s early education and care determine many things, such as the qualifications of staff who work with young children, the nature of equipment, the premises and physical surroundings and facilities, the nature of the curriculum, the pedagogical practices – to name but a few. Quality is a multifaceted concept and is, necessarily, culturally determined. It is impossible (and probably undesirable) to produce a single ‘blueprint’ for quality in early childhood education and care and apply it – universally – in everyday education settings throughout the world. Needs, opportunities, priorities and individual choices vary and if early childhood settings are to be of good quality then one factor which determines its worth is the extent to which the provision is meaningful and appropriate to those who use it.

Discussion in the early childhood literature on quality suggests that the many factors which contribute to quality provision – which is ‘good’ for children – include:
• the involvement of parents;
• liaison between a range of agencies and sectors;
• the rights and needs of the children;
• environment, equipment and resources;
• health, safety and protection;
• curriculum and learning opportunities;
• roles of professionals and responsible adults;
• management and organisation;
• observation, assessment and recording achievement;
• evaluation and review of provision.

National Standards exist to ensure that provision meets agreed levels of care though these alone do not necessarily constitute the highest quality of provision that it is possible to achieve. In recent years new forms of provision have been developed, such as Early Excellence Centres which have been flagged as the modern pioneers of good practice and quality provision. One feature of such centres is the multifaceted nature of provision which combines a range of services under one umbrella of service for children and their families. Such coordinated provision is a key aim of Sure Start.

The many factors to be considered in developing and defining quality can be seen as touchstones for policies and practices in early childhood provision and can act as signposts to achieving and monitoring quality. Statements of principle which overarch all provision for young children need to be considered, discussed, adopted, adapted, applied and evaluated on a regular basis – this process of perpetual reflection in itself constituting an element of quality provision.

Many systems exist for the monitoring of quality provided by settings and services. Inspection frameworks are clear and transparent and serve to provide a form of quality assurance as measured against agreed and published standards and criteria. However, those standards and frameworks alone do not define the essence of quality as informed by research and as it is continually developed in practice.

RESEARCH ISSUES

Six factors could be considered as starting points for quality and form a clear research agenda:

• coordination of services;
• parents as the prime educators of their children;

Quality
• consistency, continuity and progression in pedagogy;
• equality of opportunity;
• acting in the best interests of children;
• respect.

Coordination of services

Before formal schooling begins, many young children receive early experiences of education and care in a range of settings, and different settings and services may be the responsibility of different government departments, or private, voluntary or other community groups. Agencies responsible for young children are now required to collaborate in providing for them and Sure Start programmes and the Children Act, 2005 make for 'joined up' services for children and their families – the 'one-stop shop' appears to be one element which will constitute quality provision in the early twenty-first century. Quality provision for young children is enhanced when:

• information is available to parents about what kinds of provision is available for children;
• multiprofessional and interagency training and professional development is available for people who work with and need to know more about young children and their learning;
• policy and practices in terms of the transition of children from one setting to another are coherent and take account of the needs and family backgrounds of the children and their parents;
• networks of provision are established to facilitate the sharing of understanding about provision for children’s needs and their learning. (Pugh, 2001; DES/Sure Start, 2003).

Parents are the prime educators of their children

Early childhood educators working in home or group settings are increasingly aware of the central role of children’s parents in their living and learning. Parents are responsible for their children’s experiences and so two-way dialogue, consultation and information sharing needs to be an aim of early education. Educators in all early childhood education and care settings need to develop positive relationships with parents which reflect the primary role of parents in their children's lives and clear policies on parental involvement can help to develop frameworks for the involvement of all parents. (Draper and Duffy, 2001; Nutbrown and Hannon, 1997; Whalley, 1997).
Consistency, continuity and progression in pedagogy

Children have developing minds and bodies which need to be nurtured and protected as they grow towards independence. Consistency of care is important; for example, children feel secure when they know who is looking after them, who their teacher is, who will be at playgroup, who will put them to bed. Children need opportunities to develop consistent relationships with other children and with adults, and so develop confidence in themselves and trust in others.

Continuity of care and education is crucial in the early years of childhood, and increasingly early education centres for children under three are attending to the need to have a key person who takes major responsibility for all aspects of their learning and development and care routines in the group settings (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003; Page, 2005). Nutbrown (1994) discusses the importance of continuity in curriculum terms, both in relation to content and structure (or form) of children’s thinking, and the importance of children having space and opportunity to construct their own continuities of learning as well as experiencing teacher-constructed or controlled continuity.

The progression of individual children, their development and growth need to be monitored and some dialogue between parents and other educators concerned with the child needs to take place if children move from one setting to another. Children’s learning and development can be supported and extended by planned learning opportunities, according to their needs.

(Goldschmied and Jackson, 1994; Nutbrown, 1999; DfES/QCA, 2000)

Equality of opportunity

The principle of equality for all children and families is a responsibility at national, local, community, group and individual level. Those responsible for planning services need to ensure that facilities are available, accessible and appropriate for the needs of all members of the community – however young. Services and facilities for children who are disabled should be available to all children in their local communities and education settings for all young children need to be critically aware of and challenging toward the racist and sexist practices which marginalise, exclude and discriminate against some families. In striving for equality, educators must ask themselves questions about their practice with
children and their parents. On the UK context, Nutbrown poses a number of questions:

Is the important role of all parents acknowledged? Do all parents believe that the workers who spend time with their children want them as parents to be involved? Are black parents, single parents, parents living in extreme poverty, parents who are disabled, parents who complain and ask questions, parents of children with special educational needs, are they all involved in the life and developments within the group setting as far as they wish to be? Or do educators select in some ways the parents who they feel will be 'best' fitted for the roles they have created for them? (Nutbrown, 1996: 139)

Where children are concerned, educators need to examine their interactions with all the children under their care. As Nutbrown (1996: 54) has it:

Respectful educators will strive to afford every child equality of opportunity. Not just those who are easy to work with, obliging, endearing, clean, pretty, articulate, capable, but every child – respecting them for who they are, respecting their language, their culture, their history, their family, their abilities, their needs, their name, their ways and their very essence. This means understanding children’s needs and building on their abilities.

(Brooker, 2005; Brown, 1998; Siraj-Blatchford, 1994)

**Acting in the best interests of children**

Any form of provision for young children should consider what practices are actually in their best interests. Practices and routines are sometimes adopted because they suit the adults, but stocktaking the rationale for practices can identify whether what happens in terms of routines, curriculum, assessment and a range of activities within those elements of work is done in way which is best for the children or because it may make the working day slightly easier for adults. Questions of quality, what is good and bad for children or what is best for children, in the early stages of learning are constant matters for debate, but some factors can perhaps be undisputed. That it is in children's best interests that the building in which they learn is safe and, that they are free from danger of abduction or health risks, for example, are not issues for debate. The UN Convention on the rights of children to *survival, development, protection* and *participation* in their societies, and clearly there are implications here for early childhood settings and services. Yet there are many aspects of quality which are more
contestable: what children ‘should’ learn; how they ‘should’ be taught; when and how such learning ‘should’ be assessed, to name but a few. Responses to such issues need to be developed in an international context, with appropriate consideration of culture, heritage, expectations, legislation and rights.

(DES, 2004; UN, 1989)

Respect

It can be argued that achieving the best for young children is a matter of adopting a respectful and inclusive attitude to all aspects of provision and practice. A respectful disposition to young children and their families enables educators to work for what is best for young children. When advocates of respectful provision are accused of being ‘idealistic’ or of ‘romanticising’ early childhood, their meaning is misunderstood. Respect is not about ‘being nice’. It is about being clear, honest, courteous, diligent and consistent. Respect for children will enable adults to fulfil their responsibilities towards children. Respect for children is a disposition which enables adults who work with young children to fulfil their responsibilities, enabling recreation where children discover and make and play and grow.

(DES/Sure Start, 2003; Nutbrown, 1998; Rinaldi, 1999)

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Early childhood practice and research is rich with examples of high-quality provision for young children. In the context of the above, quality, too, is a personal construct – it lies, in the eye of the beholder. This section therefore includes not examples of ‘quality’, but commentaries on – or essentials for – quality.

A good tourist guide is what we need to guide us in our journey of becoming good educators. In negotiating highways and byways she hints at curious encounters and new discoveries and asks ‘what use is it to us, to have only a motoring map with a big fat blue line, impelling us to speed up it, never knowing, actually, where we are or where we might go? And what use are we then to the children whom we presume to educate!?’ Driving headlong down the goals-oriented motorway, we miss the wealth of possibilities to either side. (Drummond, 1999)

The REPEY (Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years) study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) sought to identify how the quality characteristics highlighted in the project worked in practice to impact
positively on children’s learning. REPEY findings indicated that three things were important: adult and child involvement, cognitive engagement and instruction (such as modelling, demonstration, explanation and questioning). REPEY highlights the complex nature of achieving quality in teaching and learning.

The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study has reported on factors – in a range of pre-school settings – which impact on children’s achievement (Sammons et al., 2002a, 2002b; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). It could be described as the largest and most intensive scrutiny of quality and the impact of quality in early childhood settings in the UK. The study has helped to identify the aspects of pre-school provision which positively impact on children’s learning and development in the early years.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** coordination of services; ‘effective’ or ‘best practice’; effective provision of pre-school education; equality; inspection frameworks; interests of children; National Standards; parents; pedagogy; policies and practices; Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years; respect

**Links:** Birth to three; Foundation Stage; Gender; Inclusive education; Play; Sure Start; Te Whāriki; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
**Reggio Emilia approach**

**Brief definition** The ‘Reggio approach’ refers to a set of pedagogical practices – developed in Reggio Emilia, Italy, which is based on respect for childhood and the development of communities of learners.

**Summary Outline:** ‘Hundred Languages of Childhood’; competent learners; listen to children; environment; Malaguzzi; play; atelier, atelierista; research issues – children’s achievement, transferability, listening in pedagogy, roles of adults, parents’ views, special educational needs, inclusion, architecture; examples from practice – The Fountains, re-proposing, revisiting, Sightlines Initiative, creative thinking; references and indicative further reading.

**ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS**

Reggio Emilia is a small town in Northern Italy where, in 1779, the Italian tricolour was ‘born’ thus giving the town an important place in Italian history. However, its claim to fame in early childhood terms is due to its international reputation for the quality of its provision for young children. Reggio Emilia is important to the world of early childhood because of its reputation for pioneering approaches to pre-school education. Since the 1960s, when the municipality of Reggio Emilia began setting up its distinctive form of pre-school education, the municipality has grown in international significance for the quality of provision it offers for young children. The ‘Reggio approach’ has gained world-wide recognition, stimulated by international tours of the ‘Hundred Languages of Childhood’ exhibition which explains the approach and illustrates the processes and outcomes of its pedagogical approach through video and examples of children’s work. Numerous visitors from around the globe have expressed...
great interest and respect for the work of Reggio Emilia’s infant–toddler (for children up to three years) and pre-school (3-6 years) centres.

The Reggio Emilia approach to education has been developed through generations and evolved from a resolve to provide a better future for children following the years of occupation during the Second World War. The children who attend Reggio Emilia centres today are benefiting from the investment and commitment of their ancestors who created the foundations of an approach to pre-school pedagogy based on community and citizenship. Central to the Reggio approach are carefully articulate theories of children as powerful, competent learners and users of multiple forms of expression, of the need for educators to listen to children and of the importance of the environment in facilitating children’s learning. The whole environment is crucial in the Reggio system and, as Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio approach to pre-school education wrote:

> . . . we consider the environment to be an essential constituent element of any theoretical or political research in education. We hold to be equally valuable the rationality of the environment, its capacity for harmonious coexistence, and its highly important forms and functions. Moreover, we place enormous value on the role of the environment as a motivation and animating force in creating spaces for relations, options and emotional and cognitive situations that produce a sense of well-being and security.

It has been said that the environment should act as a kind of aquarium, which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and culture of the people who live in it. (Malaguzzi, 1996: 40)

Those pre-school environments are distinctive in character, with their open central piazza where children meet, play and share, their communal dining spaces where food is shared leisurely over conversation, their mirrors and light spaces for exploring shape and space from different angles and the atelier (the art studio) where children work with the atelierista (the experienced and qualified artist on the staff). Colour and light are all important, as are documentary descriptions of the various projects children have carried out. The distinctiveness of the environments is difficult to describe but Leask’s description of her son’s infant–toddler centre gives a flavour:

> . . . Entering the school for the first time, the impact of my first impressions of so many years before came flooding back as we looked around a light open space filled with examples of children’s work (but this was August – why weren’t the walls bare?), written panels illustrated with photos, plants, a mix of small chairs and antique furniture, bric-a-brac, tiny beautiful treasures, delicate old objects and instruments, photos and examples of work that had obviously been there for many years – the sort of domestic archaeological layering that takes place over time in all our homes. (Leask, 2001: 43–4)
RESEARCH ISSUES

The Reggio Emilia approach to pedagogy in the early years raises many issues for research. Interested visitors often ask about the impact of such an approach on children’s achievement and how the children cope with the transition from this form of learning experience to a more formal Italian state school system at six years old. But the questions which those from other countries and cultures might ask are broader and more specifically oriented towards the transferability of the Reggio approach to their own settings. Would such an approach work in Birmingham, or Sydney, or Dubai, or Bangkok? Peter Moss responds to this very question like this:

... I see Reggio as an important, but not a generalisable experience. We cannot escape responsibility for making our own choices about early childhood by ‘buy in’ to a ‘Reggio programme’: for the choices we face are political and ethical, not between competing programmes or ‘models of good practice’. At a time when in Britain a rhetoric of choice and diversity in the provision of early childhood services is matched by the application of a range of ‘human technologies’... intended to secure increasing standardisation in practice and purpose and to normalise our thinking and doing, one reason why Reggio is so important is that it reminds us that it is possible to think and do differently – that there are many different ways of working with young children, and indeed evaluating our work. It is not that those in Reggio are right, and we in Britain are necessarily wrong. Rather, Reggio self-consciously chooses to work within a particular paradigm, aware that such a choice has certain consequences, In Britain on the other hand there is a lack of paradigmatic self-awareness, and instead a search for absolutes: the right way, best practice, quality, excellence. While we seek the answer which will enable us to foreclose, in Reggio they understand that even after 30 years or more, their work remains provisional, continually open to new conditions, perspectives, understandings and possibilities. (Moss, 2001: 125–6)

Abbott and Nutbrown (2001) identified a number of research issues stimulated by experiencing the work in Reggio Emilia pre-schools and infant–toddler centres including:

- the place of play;
- the role of listening in pedagogy;
- the roles of adults;
- parents’ views and expectations;
- special educational needs;
- inclusion;
- architecture in pre-schools;
- dealing with children’s responses to difficult issues.

Reggio Emilia approach
Perhaps it is fair to say that the key research issues arising from Reggio Emilia are global and transferable, and have been identified by Carlina Rinaldo, pedagogical director in Reggio Emilia. She asked:

- What do we hope for children?
- What do we expect from children?
- What is the relationship between school and research?
- What is the relationship between school and community?
- What is the relationship between school, family and society?
- What is the relationship between school and life?
- Is school a preparation for, or part of, life?

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

A well-known example of Reggio practice is published as *The Fountains* (Reggio Children, 1995). This project involved children in the creation of ‘un luna park degli uccellini’ an ‘amusement park for birds’. The children at ‘La Vialetta’ school spent many weeks in a collaborative project to create an amusement park for the birds in their pre-school garden. The introduction to the account of the project states:

> It is only through a process of rereading, reflection and revisiting that children are able to organise what they have learned from a single experience within a broader system of relations. These processes are individually and socially constructed, and herein lies the image of the child as an active constructor of his or her knowledge, which is one of the fundamental premises of the philosophy and practice that has come to be known as the ‘Reggio Approach’. The *Amusement Park for Birds* is a wonderful example of school as a place where children are encouraged to reflect on an experience rather than simply have an experience, a context that stimulates children not only to observe but also to reflect on their observations. (Forman, in Reggio Children, 1995: 6)

This well documented example of the Reggio approach involved the children in collaborative, social construction of knowledges and understandings in a learning community. They revisited and revised their understanding day by day – rethinking and reconstructing their learning, in process, together.

Following a visit to the Reggio Emilia pre-schools, Parker (2001) developed her own practice of re-proposing to children their ideas and their language and inviting them to revise and rethink what they had done and said on previous occasions. In her account of the development of her practice with young bilingual children she concludes:
Working through some of the ideas I brought back from Reggio leads me to suggest that:

- Re-proposing children’s talk enables children to expand on their theories and extend them. This process shows children that their ideas and thoughts are valued and can be shared and discussed. It reinforces their previous learning and develops them further. The children were confident in their use of new vocabulary and of tenses, and made connections.
- Revisiting children’s mark-making results in similar outcomes. They can add to their work, review and alter theories. Their self-esteem develops and the adult has a starting point to develop the children’s representational and cognitive skills. The added detail is significant.
- The processes of reproducing and revisiting children’s theories has an impact on developing children’s confidence in speaking English as an additional language.
- Working in a group together enables children to appreciate each other’s achievements, learn from each other and develop their confidence.
- The value of focusing our attention on the children’s concerns and interests is reinforced, allowing opportunities for spontaneous talk between children about those ideas and experiences that fascinate and inspire them.

To enable practitioners to value children’s theories through revisiting and reproducing requires some thought in practical terms of space, time, resources and staffing. All these issues have been considered in the Reggio Emilia settings and opportunities for extended study of a theory are provided for.

(Parker, 2001: 91)

The Sightlines Initiative is the UK reference point for the Reggio Children Network and was created to support creative thinking and to develop practice in the UK that promotes the growth of children’s creative potential through:

- innovative projects;
- reflective practice;
- professional networking between artists and educators;
- advocacy, training and support.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** atelier, atelierista; environment; Hundred Languages of Childhood; Malaguzzi; parents’ views; pedagogy; play; roles of adults; Sightlines Initiative; The Fountains; transferability

**Links:** Developmentally appropriate practice; Play; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

**Schemas**

**Brief definition** As generally understood in present early childhood pedagogy a schema is ‘a pattern of repeatable behaviour into which experiences are assimilated and that are gradually co-ordinated’ (Athey, 1990: 37). The work of Athey, (1990) made popular the incorporation of schema into early childhood pedagogy in the learning of 3-5 year olds. More recent work has extended understanding of schematic learning to work with babies and toddlers.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

There is no single or definitive definition of the term ‘schema’ and, although the current use of the term in early childhood education and care is that given above, earlier work (Piaget, 1960) identifies schemas as part of the study of cognitive structures of young children’s developing minds. Athey (1990) gives a thorough explanation of the various roots and definitions of the term as derived from the work of Piaget (1969), Bartlett (1932) and Neisser (1976).

We now know more about the learning patterns (or schemas) of babies and how they might think and learn. Goldschmied (1989) demonstrates how babies, given safe, stimulating and supportive opportunities, will use their senses and their developing physical skills to learn about the objects they encounter. Babies, as they suck, handle and smell, are in a world of discovery – they puzzle, enjoy social interactions with others and make attempts to communicate their feelings and their needs. By watching young babies some of the early patterns of gazing and following with their eyes may be picked up, some of these basic patterns of behaviour (or schemas) being quite obvious to the observer. As babies suck and grasp they work on, develop and refine the early schematic behaviours which foster their early foundations of learning. Early patterns of behaviour seen in babies become more complex and more numerous, eventually becoming connected so that babies and young children coordinate their actions.

Toddlers may work hard, collecting together a pile of objects in the lap of their carer, walking to and fro, backwards and forwards, bringing one object at a time. They are working on a pattern of behaviour which has a consistent thread running through it. Their patterns of action and thought at this point are related to the consistent back-and-forth
movement. Such early schemas of babies form the basis of the patterns of behaviour which children show between the ages of two and five years, and these in turn become established foundations of learning.

Athey (1990) maintains that children will notice elements in their environment, depending upon their interests at the time, and that they have their own intrinsic motivation which must be facilitated by materials and support from adults. Athey focused on how 2–5 year old children also work on particular patterns of behaviour, referring to each of these patterns as a schema as defined above. A number of patterns of behaviour were identified by Athey as part of the Froebel Early Education Project (which collected and analysed over 5000 observations of 20 2–5 year olds over two years). These were named according to their characteristics. For example, a ‘vertical schema’ is so called because it relates to up-and-down movements. Athey discusses children’s learning and development in terms of the following schemas:

- dynamic vertical;
- dynamic back and forth;
- dynamic circular;
- going over and under;
- going round a boundary;
- enveloping and containing space;
- going through a boundary.

The actions and marks related to these descriptions of movement can be identified in young children’s drawing and mark making, and Athey illustrates how such patterns can be represented in children’s play, their thinking and their language. Athey argues that patterns pervade children’s actions and speech as well as their mark making. Detailed descriptions and discussion of ways in which different patterns of learning can be represented through action, speech and mark making are given by Athey, who further illustrates in theoretical and practical terms how forms of thought (schemas) once identified can be nourished with worthwhile content.

If a child is focusing on a particular schema related to ‘roundness’ we could say that s/he is working on a circular schema. The form is ‘roundness’ and the content can be anything which extends this form: wheels, rotating machinery, rolling a ball, the spinning of planets! Similarly, a child interested in ‘up and down-ness’ could be working on a vertical schema. The form is ‘up and down’; related content can include using ladders, using the climbing frame, watching parascending or
skydiving, riding in a lift or on an escalator. In the same way, if a child is interested in enclosing and enveloping schemas, the form is ‘insideness’ and related content may include wrapping presents, hatching chick eggs, en croûte cookery, mining and burrowing.

RESEARCH ISSUES

The main task for research is to provide further evidence of how children’s schemas might be used to nourish children’s thinking and how practitioners can develop their pedagogy to incorporate working with children’s schemas.

Case studies are needed to demonstrate how current policy on the curriculum in the Early Years accommodates children’s developmental patterns of learning. Educators can then provide a more appropriate curriculum which matches the developmental levels and interests of the children, using their knowledge of schemas and their skills as observers to develop greater awareness of children’s patterns of learning and so understand more about children’s predominant interests. Practitioner research of this kind, which illuminates the fine detail of individual children’s learning, can add to the bank of research studies which will, in turn, enable practitioners to reflect on their own strategies for helping young children to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.

Studies of children’s schemas and how the curriculum provides for such learning needs reveal the relationship between theories of learning (such as Schematic Development) and current curriculum planning and pedagogy (Arnold, 2002).

There is also space for further research to consider how assessment – through observation of children’s schemas – can be incorporated into the required procedures (such as the Foundation Stage Profile) and assist practitioners in making decisions about the next steps in teaching and learning.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Belinda’s enclosing schema

Belinda was three years old and she seemed to be tuned into spotting or seeking out opportunities to enclose or be enclosed and objects which enclosed. At home she enjoyed emptying and filling the washing machine, and in the garden and the bath she filled numerous containers with water to the point that they overflowed. She and her mother built up a
collection of tins and boxes that she enjoyed fitting inside one another in different combinations and she often enjoyed sitting inside cardboard boxes used to carry the shopping from the supermarket, sometimes pretending that the box was a car, bus, boat or rocket. Some of Belinda’s favourite books contained stories of hiding or enclosing, in one way or another, such as *Boxed In* (Williams, 1991) and *Where’s Spot?* (Hill, 1980). At her sessional group Belinda particularly enjoyed playing in the house and hiding the farm animals inside the little wooden farm buildings. She dressed up and liked to play in the tunnel and hidey boxes outside.

Exploring her enveloping/containing schema, Belinda encountered much which linked with different areas of learning and experience. She learned about being with others and being apart, about cooperating when equipment needed to be shared and about dealing with her emotions when she wanted to be the only person to play in the house and was told to allow other children to play too. Opportunities at home and in the group enabled Belinda to explore her schema and develop her knowledge. The adults around her, sensitised to her interests, provided encouragement where a lack of knowledge might have led some adults to stop Belinda doing some of the things she found interesting.

All the adults who lived or worked with Belinda were able to support and extend her learning. She encountered situations which required her to develop and refine mathematical skills of collecting, sorting, selecting, counting, ordering, reordering, grading, categorising and placing. She puzzled over ideas of shape and size and how things fitted together. She asked questions such as ‘Why does the washing have to get covered in water before it is clean?’, ‘Why do we have to wrap the potatoes before they go in the oven?’ , ‘Why won’t this one [big tin] fit inside this one here [smaller tin]?’ Her mother extended her interest and in doing so provided more connections between experiences, such as involving her in baking, washing, writing letters and posting them. They looked at holes and hiding places, talked about being inside a lift and packed the shopping into boxes in the supermarket. She began to learn more about space and place relationships, finding out about relative size. Belinda’s mother acted on what she saw and what she understood.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Schemas

**Key words:** actions and speech; babies’ development; curriculum and pedagogy; developmentally appropriate practice; form and content; Foundation Stage Profile; Froebel Early Education Project; learning patterns; patterns of behaviour

**Links:** Assessment; Developmentally appropriate practice; Foundation Stage; Heuristic play with objects; Play; Treasure baskets

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**Special educational needs**

**Brief definition** Special educational needs is the official term in the UK applied to children who are identified as having learning difficulties which may require additional support or provision to ensure they reach their potential.

**Summary Outline:** Warnock Report; statements of special educational needs; individual education plan; agencies and processes; Foundation Stage; Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs; special educational provision; research issues – inclusive education, attitudinal response, practical responses, stories of children, research agenda; examples from practice – Stephen’s reception class, learning difficulties, special educational needs and ‘special rights’ in Italy, communicating with Hannah; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The term ‘special educational needs’ is often used to describe many different physical and learning needs and combinations of needs which have an impact on the form and content of educational provision most appropriate for the child. Now widely used, the term came into being in 1978, when the Warnock Report from the Commission on Special Education (DES, 1978) concluded that children should not be identified according to ‘handicap’ and sent to schools which specialised in dealing with that particular ‘category’ of difficulty, but rather that educational difficulties should be identified and provided for accordingly. The term ‘Special Educational Needs’ (SEN) thus became key in UK education legislation and has been familiar to teachers, other practitioners, parents and policy-makers since that time. Statements of Special Educational Needs were needed to detail the particular needs of children with identified difficulties and an Individual Education Plan was to be developed for each child to detail how their needs would be met in practical terms.

Herbert (1998) suggests that it is difficult to define ‘special educational needs’ in the context of the early years, largely because children with SEN are not a single identifiable group but individuals with specific and idiosyncratic ‘needs’. Children under five vary widely in their development and the years before school are often years of rapid growth and change. Needs change as do the children who are identified as having SEN. Herbert (1998: 94) notes that the ‘story’ of a child’s special educational needs can often be complex and involve many agencies and processes including:

- early identification;
- medical diagnosis;
- prediction of need;
- role of the professionals;
- interagency collaboration;
- partnership with parents and carers;
- support and training of staff;
- the nature of assessment;
- differing forms of provision.

In recent years, in the UK, there has been massive expansion of provision for children under five and, in many cases, provision for children with learning difficulties has often been a matter of priority. However, this has not always
been the case. Wall (2003) traces the development of pre-school provision in the UK from the late 1800s to the present day, and discusses the motivation of some pioneers to provide for young children with ‘special needs’ which in many cases were attributable to poverty and war. For example, the MacMillan sisters in the early 1900s developed nursery schools for the children of the poor and succeeded in developing a provision addressing children’s health issues which inhibited their growth and development.

The development of provision across the UK during the 1990s and the drive to provide for all young children where there is specific need and all three and four year olds whose parents wish them to attend some form of provision have highlighted the need to identify and support children whose needs are particular or who fall into what is termed special educational needs. SEN has become an issue for many settings and is a concern of all practitioners – to varying degrees – from time to time. Roffey (2001) highlights the importance of collaboration, communication and coordination between agencies and between providers, practitioners and families. Special educational needs is no longer an issue only for Special Schools but it is likely that most early years settings will provide for some children who are identified as having Special Educational Needs of some form.

In current policy terms the Foundation Stage Guidance is clear about the expectations of practitioners in providing for young children identified as having SEN or who are disabled. The Guidance states:

**Children with special educational needs and disabilities**

Practitioners will need to plan for each child’s individual learning requirements, including those children who need additional support or have particular needs or disabilities. The focus should be on removing barriers for children where these already exist and on preventing learning difficulties from developing. Early years practitioners have a key role to play in working with parents to identify learning needs and respond quickly to any area of particular difficulty, and to develop an effective strategy to meet these needs, making good use of individual education plans, so that later difficulties can be avoided. Wherever possible, practitioners should work together with staff from other agencies, such as local and community health services, to provide the best learning opportunities for individual children.

Practitioners should take specific action to help children with special educational needs to make the best possible progress by:

- providing for those who need help with communication, language and literacy skills, and planning, where necessary, to develop understanding through the use of all available senses and experiences through, for example: using alternative and augmentative communication, including signs and symbols; using visual and written materials in different formats, including large print and symbol text; using information and communication technology (ICT), other technological aids and taped materials; using materials and resources that children can access through...
sight, touch, sound and smell; increasing children's knowledge of the wider world by using word descriptions and other stimuli to extend their experiences and imagination.

- planning for full participation in learning and in all physical and practical activity through, for example: providing additional support from adults, when needed; adapting activities or environments; providing alternative activities; and using specialist aids and equipment, where appropriate.
- helping children who have particular difficulties with behaviour to take part in learning effectively through, for example: setting reasonable expectations that have been discussed with the child and with parents and carers; establishing clear boundaries and appreciating and praising children's efforts; encouraging and promoting positive behaviour; giving children every chance and encouragement to develop the skills they need to work well with another child or children; helping children to manage their behaviour and to value and respect their own contribution and that of others.

(QCA/DfES, 2000: 18–19)

The revised Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2001) marked a shift in thinking in relation to SEN which carries important implications for providing for children with SEN. According to the Code of Practice there are four principal areas of special educational need, which relate to:

1. Communication and interaction
2. Cognition and learning
3. Behaviour, emotional and social development
4. Sensory and/or physical impairment.

The Code states that a child has special educational Needs if s/he has a learning difficulty which necessitates special educational provision. Their difficulties may be apparent if:

- a child has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age;
- has a disability which prevents or hinders the child from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority; and
- is under five years of age and falls within either definition above or would do so if special education provision was not made for the child.

(Clough and Garner, 2003)
RESEARCH ISSUES

Early education settings have, for many years, given priority to children with learning difficulties or to those identified as having SEN. Nutbrown (1998) has argued that early education – at its best – is inclusive education because of the emphasis, in practice, of identifying and meeting the individual learning needs of all young children. It is often the experience of those who work in Early Years settings that young children are included as a first option. Many such settings would argue that supporting children with learning difficulties is as much about an attitudinal response as it is about practical responses.

Research in recent years has begun to focus on telling the stories of children within the SEN category and of how they fare in special and mainstream schools (Berry, 2002; Pereera, 2000; Wise and Glass, 2000), but more such accounts are needed in order to help practitioners and policy-makers learn more of the experiences of parents, children and practitioners so involved.

Studies are also needed of the relationships between addressing learning difficulties, meeting special educational needs, inclusive education and how learning difficulties are variously ‘constructed’ by parents, policy-makers and practitioners. There are often diverse views on what ‘special educational needs’ are and on how they should be met. Many such views are inferred from particular sets of circumstances and, Clough (2000: 6) argues, give rise to the following questions which could well form part of a research agenda:

• Where do the various ‘constructions’ of difficulty come from?
• How are they evidenced?
• How are they communicated?
• How are they challenged? How do they change?
• Who changes constructions of educational need, of difference and of difficulty?

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Stephen’s reception class

This was the first time in her short career that Steven’s reception class teacher had had a child with a Statement of Special Educational Need in her class. She was conscious that by choosing the inclusive option Steven’s parents had accepted that he needed to interact with his peer group and not become, once more, dependent upon adults. She was reassured by the headteacher that it was not a scenario of ‘success of failure’ and
was given support to evaluate her own practice in a way which led her to believe that her established skills of providing a well structured and stimulating learning environment for all children were particularly relevant for Steven. She realised that it was her duty to attend not only to what was ‘special’ about Steven but also to what was ‘ordinary’ and that there was no mystique to analysing tasks. She was already doing this and making them accessible to all children, including children with learning difficulties. (Herbert, 1998: 103)

Learning difficulties, special educational needs and ‘special rights’ in Italy

In 1971, Italy was one of the first countries in Europe to legislate for the integration of children with learning difficulties into mainstream schooling. In 1997 the law stated that: ‘All children with handicaps, regardless of the nature and seriousness of their handicaps, are to be integrated in normal mainstream school classes’ (Menegoi-Buzzi, 1999: 18). In the Reggio Emilia pre-schools of Northern Italy, children with learning difficulties are regarded as having special rights (rather than special needs) and Phillips (2001) argues that the Reggio pedagogy of listening gives ‘voice’ to all young children in Reggio pre-schools.

Communicating with Hannah

For practitioners, teaching young children with learning difficulties necessitates knowing the child, not generalising from abstract information about ‘conditions’. Hannah had Down’s syndrome. She was included in the local infant school, and her class teachers in Years 1 and 2 (Tricia Robinson and Sue Small) wrote:

Our main concern was how we were going to communicate with Hannah. The training we had in Maketon as a whole school was invaluable. What we didn’t realise at the time, not knowing Hannah, was how helpful she was going to be. She helped us teach her by being so receptive and yet so patient when we failed to understand her . . . Teaching Hannah was so rewarding. (Wise and Glass, 2000: 67)

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: agencies and processes; attitudinal and practical responses; case studies of children; Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs; Foundation Stage; inclusive education; individual education plan; statements of special educational need; Warnock Report

Links: Assessment; Developmentally appropriate practice; Foundation Stage; Inclusive education; Index for inclusion: early years and childcare; Parental involvement; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Special educational needs
Steiner-Waldorf kindergarten

**Brief definition** Steiner-Waldorf kindergartens are early childhood settings which follow pedagogical practices based on the anthroposophical work of Rudolf Steiner.

**Summary Outline:** Rudolf Steiner; Emil Molt; Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory; anthroposophy; comprehensive, socially inclusive co-educational; Elizabeth von Grunelius; imitation and example; research issues – Steiner pedagogy, technology, play, men in Steiner Early Years settings, attachment, protection and nurture; examples from practice – little kittens, the train, Free to Learn; references and indicative further reading.

**ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS**

Rudolf Steiner conceived of education as an art – creative, progressive, social and individual. Teaching is essentially vocation, a challenging yet fulfilling task, and teachers, in common with their pupils, remain learners. Not limited to schooling, teaching and learning mean taking one’s place in the world, working with enthusiasm, acting with consideration, involving oneself responsibly (Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship at: http://www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk/teaching). Now an international movement, Steiner-Waldorf kindergartens are found in many countries, with over 40 in the UK.

Steiner-Waldorf kindergartens are built on the work of Rudolf Steiner and Emil Molt (managing director of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory). The title Steiner-Waldorf recognises the collaborative work of the two. The first Waldorf school was opened in 1919 in Stuttgart, with funding from the Waldorf Astoria company.
Emil Molt wrote:

I felt the tragedy of the working class: to be held back by lack of money from sharing the education of the rich middle class. I also had a sense of what it would mean for social progress if we could support a new educational endeavour within our factory . . . (Molt, 1991: 3)

The first school thrived, educating over 1,000 pupils and stimulating the opening of new schools in Germany, Switzerland, England, the Netherlands and the US. Nazi attempts to interfere with the curriculum and the pressures of the Second World War forced the closure of the school in 1939 but it reopened in 1946 and remains on the same site today.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was Austrian, a scientist and a philosopher who founded *anthroposophy* meaning – from the Greek – ‘wisdom of man’. Anthroposophy is a way of looking at one’s whole life in connection with the spirit. For many Steiner-educated pupils and Steiner teachers and parents of children in Steiner schools, anthroposophy is a way of life, not just a basis for a system of education. Of Steiner’s early life Oldfield (2001: 169) writes:

. . . he helped with farm work, roamed in the forest, and responded to the peace and beauty of the natural environment. On the other hand he was exposed to technology, industry and science through his father’s railway work. These two worlds – nature and science – were to remain lifelong interests . . . He was aware from an early age that there was a vast range of experience beyond physical, material reality. The visible, represented by the world of science and matter, and the invisible spiritual world, were to become as much a source of inspiration for his later initiatives as was his interest in both the inner and outer experiences, and the wholeness of the developing human being.

In his later life Steiner was greatly concerned with social issues. These were the foundation of the Steiner-Waldorf school movement which, some 80 years after his death, is still active internationally and offers a comprehensive, socially inclusive co-educational alternative to state education systems in many countries.

The first Waldorf kindergarten was opened in 1926 and was developed and run under the direction of Elizabeth von Grunelius, a teacher who had worked closely with Steiner in defining what kindergarten education in a Steiner school should look like. The Waldorf plan for early childhood education was published as ‘Educating the Young Child’ (Grunelius, 1974) in England in 1955 and set out the underpinning structures of the Steiner-Waldorf kindergarten provision. This was built upon *imitation* and
example and included three key aspects:

- Kindergartens should become places where children are protected from the harmful influences of ‘our highly intellectual age’.
- Waldorf education can find roots anywhere as it rests upon an understanding of ‘what is universally and fundamentally human’.
- The education rests on this understanding only, and therefore allows space for ‘the ever fresh initiative of individual teachers’.

(Oldfield, 2001: 166)

Elizabeth von Grunelius died in 1989 aged 94, having supported – in different ways – the international development of some 1,500 early childhood centres in some 30 countries.

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

Key questions for research in terms of mainstream education centre around what practitioners in other forms of provision can learn from Steiner pedagogy. The central image of the child as in need of nurture and protection and an emphasis on the physical, of movement and of doing, are interesting points of reference for comparative studies. One factor in relation to the funding of children attending Steiner kindergartens has been the place of technology in the setting. Traditionally, the Steiner early years curriculum has no place for computer technology and this has been an issue in relation to funding in the Foundation Stage.

In terms of ‘opening up’ knowledge of Steiner-Waldorf kindergarten practice to wider understanding, there is a need for case studies of children playing in such early years settings and for accessible reports of practice and discussion of pedagogy in multi-system fora.

Some of the important ideals in Steiner Waldorf Kindergartens, such as attachment, protection and nurture, challenge mainstream thinking and current government policy. However, the importance of creating places where children can play freely and the very different role of the adult – as model – offer areas for further thoughts and research.

It is not uncommon to find male teachers working in Steiner-Waldorf kindergartens, the proportion of men in Steiner early years settings being far higher that that of mainstream Foundation Stage settings. Research could ask the question as to how Steiner Settings successfully recruit and retain male practitioners whereas the mainstream continues to struggle to attract men to the profession.
EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Steiner-Waldorf kindergartens are immediately recognisable for their homely characteristics. Furniture is often wooden and the equipment available for the children is made of natural materials. Plastic toys are not a feature in Steiner kindergartens.

The three little kittens

A large woollen blanket was draped over the wooden kitchen table. Muffled sounds could be heard form under the table, and eventually mewing and scratching sounds emerged. A small girl peeped out ‘meow? Meow? MEEEOOWW?’ Two other heads appeared alongside her, making similar kitten-like noises. The teacher turned to the kindergarten assistant. ‘Do you think the kittens need some milk?’ he asked her? She nodded. The teacher took a pottery bowl from the kitchen shelf and placed it under the table. ‘There, kittens – some fresh milk for you.’ Meeowing, scratching, playing and curling up to sleep continued for some time, the kittens cosy under their table in their kitten home.

The train

Six children were on the train to the seaside. They had arranged eight wooden chairs one behind the other in a row. Each had a seat and the driver was making engine noises as they continued their journey – soon all the passengers were also contributing to the roar of the engine and ‘steering’. Children got on and off as the train stopped frequently and the driver announced the names of places he knew. Then finally – ‘Exeter – get off here everybody – this is the end of the train.’ Passengers alighted the train as instructed and after some rearrangement a new train – with two new drivers – left the station for ‘Scotland’.

The kindergarten teacher glanced at the children from time to time while preparing the ingredients and equipment to make bread – the train and its passengers imagined their journey without adult interference.

Lynn Oldfield (2001) in Free to Learn provides a clear discussion of Steiner-Waldorf pedagogy and several examples illustrate aspects of this work.
REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** anthroposophy; Elizabeth von Grunelius; Emil Molt; imitation and example; men in Steiner early years settings; play; Rudolf Steiner; technology

**Links:** Information and communication technology; Media and popular culture; Play

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**Brief definition** Sure Start is a government programme with the stated aims of achieving better outcomes for children, parents and communities by:

- increasing the availability of childcare for all children;
- improving health and emotional development for young children;
- supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The Sure Start programme began in the UK in 1999, working with a range of agencies in health, employment and education to achieve its comprehensive aims to provide children with a Sure Start and make them ready to ‘flourish’. Working within local communities to develop local projects, the key Sure Start aims are achieved by:

- helping services develop in disadvantaged areas alongside the provision of financial help for parents to afford childcare; rolling out the principles driving the Sure Start approach to all services for children and parents.

With some variation Sure Start operates in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Investment in Sure Start by 2005–06 amounted to £1.5 billion.

Key elements of the Sure Start programme are:

- **Early education for all** – free part-time early education for three and four year olds in the Foundation Stage.
- **Increased quality and quantity of childcare** – start-up grants for childminders, nurseries and after-school care, inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted); help for working parents with their childcare costs; local Children’s Information Services and a national information service for parents; information for parents; and employment advice linked to information on childcare.
- **Local programmes** – children’s centres (with links with Sure, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres) in the most disadvantaged areas to offer families early education, childcare and health and family support with advice on employment opportunities.

**Sure Start principles**

Sure Start supports families from pregnancy until children are 14 years old (16 if they are disabled). The following seven principles underpin Sure Start work:

1. **Working with parents and children.** Every family should get access to a range of services that will deliver better outcomes for both children and parents, meeting their needs and stretching their aspirations.

2. **Services for everyone.** But not the same service for everyone. Families have distinctly different needs, both between different families, in different locations and across time in the same family. Services should recognise and respond to these varying needs.

3. **Flexible at point of delivery.** All services should be designed to encourage access. For example, opening hours, location, transport issues and care for other children in the family need to be considered. Where possible we must enable families to get the health and family support services they need through a single point of contact.

4. **Starting very early.** Services for young children and parents should start at the first antenatal visit. This means not only advice on health in pregnancy, but preparation for parenthood, decisions about returning to work (or indeed, starting work) after the birth, advice on childcare options and on support services available.

5. **Respectful and transparent.** Services should be customer driven, whether or not the service is free.

6. **Community driven and professionally coordinated.** All professionals with an interest in children and families should be sharing expertise and listening to local people on service priorities. This should be done through consultation and by day-to-day listening to parents.

7. **Outcome driven.** All services for children and parents need to have as their purpose better outcomes for children. The government needs to acknowledge this by reducing bureaucracy and simplifying funding to ensure a joined up approach with partners.

(Sure Start Introduction SSULeaflet, 01/12/03)
RESEARCH ISSUES

Much Sure Start oriented research has been in the form of evaluation of programmes, and there is a wealth of reports available from the National Evaluation of Sure Start which is available online. Hannon (1999) suggests that there are four areas in which educational research can contribute to Sure Start research:

- *lessons from the past* – drawing on evidence from effective pre-school programmes;
- *relevant research findings* – about, for example, the effects of poverty on early educational attainment;
- *research into new programmes* – such as those involving parents in early literacy development; and
- *evaluation methods* – allocating resources for local projects to evaluate their own work through systematic, self-critical and clearly reported evaluation which becomes a means of sharing Sure Start work.

Hannon (1999) identified the following questions to ask about Sure Start programmes: Are programmes relevant?

- How well is the programme documented?
- For what communities is it designed?
- For what age is it designed?
- Has it been adequately evaluated?
- It is shown to be valued by families?
- Do claims go beyond evidence?
- Will potential benefits justify resources?
- What are the staff development implications?
- How can the community assess its potential?

Hannon further suggests that local evaluations of Sure Start should consider how they articulate with the national evaluation, their use of external or practitioner research, whether formative or summative, the resources needed and the need for outside support or consultation. Finally, Hannon lists ten points that local evaluations of Sure Start work should cover:

1. Community profile
2. Description of services/implementation
3. Take-up, participation and drop-out
4. Judgements of quality of services  
5. Views of staff  
6. Views of community  
7. Outcomes for children  
8. Outcomes for adults  
9. Key lessons learned  

(Hannon, 1999: 6)

Weinberger et al. (2005) report on the collaboration between one local Sure Start programme and its local university to develop and evaluate the initiative over a five-year period. They describe the range of services in health, education and social welfare provided through the Sure Start programme and examine the implications for inter-agency work and the lessons learned.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Sure Start programmes are wide ranging and include a myriad of activities including:

- family support;
- work with teenage mothers;
- breastfeeding support;
- home safety;
- smoking cessation;
- play and learning programmes;
- language development screening;
- media literacy projects;
- reading projects;
- community involvement.

The beginnings of many of these activities are identified through community surveys. The following examples give an indication of the kinds of programmes developed through Sure Start.

Breastfeeding in Ravensdale

Mothers from the Ravensdale area were surveyed to assess the impact of the Sure Start Breastfeeding Incentive Scheme on their own experiences of breastfeeding their babies. The 26 participants in the
survey reported that they valued the midwife support offered and the peer support available from other Sure Start mothers. Twenty-three per cent attributed their continued breastfeeding to the programme (Sharp, 2003).

**Ready for School**

In Exeter, a nursery and a first school jointly developed a ‘Ready for School’ project to find ways of overcoming the social isolation of many children in the area. Initially the project had three elements: a nurture group, a language enrichment programme and additional support for children’s play, language and development. The programme, according to several measures, appeared to make a difference to children’s use of language and communication, many making better than expected progress. Outcomes are earlier identification of children with speech and language difficulties, and the positive involvement of parents in their children’s learning and development. (Randell, Payne-Cook and Marlow, 2004).

**REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING**


Sure Start: Introduction. See online at: http://www.surestart.gov.uk or contact Department of Work and Pensions/Department for Education and Skills, PO Box 5050 Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.


**Key words:** collaboration; disadvantaged areas; local community projects; multi-agency; National Evaluation of Sure Start; Sure Start principles

**Links:** Birth to three; Brain studies and neuroscience; Developmentally appropriate practice; Early intervention studies; Family literacy; Play; Parental involvement; Special educational needs
**Brief definition** Te Whāriki is the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s early childhood curriculum policy statement (He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa). Te Whāriki is a framework for providing for tamariki/children’s early learning and development within a socio-cultural context. It emphasises the learning partnership between kaiako/teachers, parents and whānau/families. Kaiako/teachers weave a holistic curriculum in response to tamariki/children's learning and development in the early childhood setting and the wider context of the child’s world.

**Summary Outline:** bilingual curriculum; holistic; the principles, strands and goals; principles – empowerment – whakamana, holistic development – kotahitanga, family and community – whānau tangata, relationships – ngā hononga; ‘strands’: well-being, belonging, contributing, communicating and exploring; research issues – Quality in Diversity, social and cultural concerns, ‘foundations’, ‘goals’ and ‘children’s entitlements’, intercultural studies; examples from practice – Goal 4 in the ‘Belonging’ strand; references and indicative further reading.

**ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS**

Te Whāriki is a bilingual document which sets out the curriculum policy and framework from birth to five in New Zealand. It has been widely acclaimed in many other countries and, similar to the inspirational work of Reggio Emilia, has inspired an interest in practices and policies in early childhood which see children as central to their community and learning as a shared experience. For this reason, many early childhood educators have an interest in the Te Whāriki framework and the principles which

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1 see online at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl3567_v1/whariki.pdf; for general enquiries regarding Te Whāriki, contact Early Childhood Information on (04) 463 7692 or e-mail: ece.info@minedu.govt.nz
Early childhood is ‘... a period of momentous significance for all people growing up in [our] culture... By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, and as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth.’ (Donaldson et al., 1983: 1)

The introduction states:

This statement is an exciting new development for education in New Zealand. It is the first national curriculum statement for the early childhood sector. This curriculum statement provides the basis for consistent high quality curriculum delivery in the diverse range of early childhood services in New Zealand. Over the past century, early childhood care and education services in New Zealand have been established to meet the particular needs of children, parents, and communities, as well as those of society as a whole. Today early childhood services are jointly involved with families in the socialisation, care, and education of children. (p. 4)

The underpinnings are explicitly holistic, with the stated aspirations for children

... to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (p. 9)

The Te Whāriki sets out the principles, strands and goals for the early childhood years, appropriately differentiated for babies, toddlers and young children. ‘Curriculum’ is defined as ‘the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development’ (p. 10).

There are four foundation principles for the early childhood curriculum:

1. Empowerment – Whakamana – the early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow.
3. Family and Community – Whānau Tangata – the wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum.

(Carr and May, 2000)

Carr and May (2000) describe how the development of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum rejected a subject-based framework and favoured instead, ‘strands’: well being, belonging, contributing, communicating and exploring. The strands and goals arise from the principles and are woven around these principles in patterns that reflect the diversity of each early childhood education service. Together, the principles, strands, goals, and learning outcomes set the framework for the curriculum Whāriki (whariki being the Maori word for ‘mat’). The ethos behind Te Whāriki is that every child has a curriculum mat fitting his or her needs, culture and personality. Everyone is different, but each has the same principles and strands in its warp and weft. Other strands, more individually defined, can be added thus making the curriculum for every child unique and appropriate.

RESEARCH ISSUES

Te Whāriki stimulated research in the UK, and the Early Childhood Education Forum (ECEF) instigated a curriculum project Quality in Diversity. The project sought to bring together the views of early childhood educators in a range of settings and address the curriculum and development needs of children aged from birth to seven years (ECEF, 1998). The holistic approach to learning and the embeddedness of the social and cultural concerns of the New Zealand curriculum can be recognised in the UK work, Quality in Diversity, which was described as a ‘framework to enable early childhood practitioners to think about, understand, support and extend the learning of young children from birth to the age of eight’ (ECEF, 1998: 1). Quality and Diversity was not described as a curriculum and has no official government status, but was instead considered a ‘framework’ with ‘foundations’, ‘goals’ and ‘children’s entitlements’. Though Quality in Diversity did not have the impact on early childhood education in the UK that Te Whāriki did in New Zealand, the work to develop it was key in opening up discussion and development to promote a more holistic approach to young children’s development.

Perhaps the most obvious research issue to arise from this work and the stimulus it provided in the UK is the need for more cross-cultural studies of curriculum approaches and frameworks and the importance of understanding early childhood education interculturally.
EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

*Te Whāriki* is rich with examples of how the various ‘goals’ for children are realised in practice. The example in Figure 8 shows how Goal 4 of the ‘Belonging’ strand is applied to work with babies, toddlers and young children.

Goal 4  *Children and their families experience an environment where they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.*

Examples

**For infants:**
- Infants’ behaviour on both their good days and their bad days is accepted without judgement, and the programme has sufficient flexibility to accommodate natural variations.
- Adults gently encourage infants to accept that they will also attend to and care for other children.
- Familiar, unhurried adults are always nearby.

**For toddlers:**
- Adults help toddlers begin to manage their feelings appropriately.
- Adults offer only genuine choices and respect the toddlers’ decisions.
- Possible causes of conflict and frustration for toddlers are minimised.
- Toddlers are given support in dealing with conflict and frustrations.
- Toddlers’ intensity of feelings is understood, accepted and dealt with, and their conflicting feelings are seen as a normal and important part of their development.
- Consistent and manageable expectations and limits are set.

**For young children:**
- The programme provides opportunities to discuss and negotiate fairness and justice with adults.
- Young children have opportunities to discuss their feelings and the feelings and expectations of others.
- Strategies for managing behaviour are used not only to prevent unacceptable behaviour but also to develop ideas of fairness and justice and to introduce new social skills.
- The programme provides frequent opportunities for children to make their own decisions and be self-reliant.
- The environment and routines are planned to minimise confrontation and conflict, for instance, from crowding and queueing.

Figure 8  *Box 4 Goal 4 of the ‘Belonging’ strand is applied differentially to work with babies, toddlers and young children (Te Whāriki, 1966: 63).*
REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


Key words: bilingual curriculum; empowerment – Whakamana; family and community – Whānau Tangata; holistic; holistic development – Kotahitanga; intercultural studies; principles, strands and goals; Quality in Diversity; relationships – Ngā Hononga; social and cultural; ‘strands’: well-being, belonging, contributing, communicating and exploring

Links: Birth to three; Developmentally appropriate practice; Inclusive education; Persona dolls; Reggio Emilia; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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**Treasure baskets**

**Brief definition** The treasure basket is a basket of objects, designed for use by babies (approximately 6–9 months) who can sit up comfortably but not yet crawl, to offer opportunity for investigation and exploration using all the senses.

**Summary Outline:** variety and quality; dimensions; objects in the treasure basket; attentive adult; research issues – impact on babies’ learning and development, home use, adults’ roles; Birth to Three Matters, work with parents; examples from practice – Matthew’s treasure basket, involving parents, the attentive adult; references and indicative further reading.
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The treasure basket was developed by Elinor Goldschmied (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1994). Based on observations in many cultures of how young babies first learn about the world, this early stage of providing for babies’ learning offers a means of ensuring that babies experience variety and quality. The underpinning philosophy is described thus:

A baby’s first toy is the body of her caring adult. A baby grasps her parent’s fingers, handles her mother’s breast, entwining her fingers in her mother’s hair or her father’s beard, grabs at earrings, necklaces or spectacles . . . Awareness of her own body grows as a baby crams her small fist into her mouth and, lying on her back, identifies her feet and toes . . . From an early age, a baby will grasp an offered rattle . . . Eye, hand and mouth co-ordination marks a big step forward, but like all skills, if it is to develop, the baby needs opportunities to practise.

As a baby’s waking time extends and she begins to sit upright, first propped up by cushions or in a relaxing chair, then independently, a whole new horizon opens up. It may be that she can now see the underneath of a table, our shoes and ankles, the moving hem of a trouser leg, in addition to the other interesting items in the room. She has a kind of worm’s eye view of the world, but none the less intriguing for that. (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1994: 86–7)

It was in response to the need for babies at this stage to be provided with interesting experiences which provided stimulus for all the senses that the treasure basket was devised. The treasure basket (the dimensions of which should be 36 cm in diameter and 10–15 cm high, flat bottomed with no handle and strong enough for an infant to lean on without tipping up) is filled to the brim with objects to allow baby plenty of scope to sort through and to select what appeals to him/her. A baby using a treasure basket must be seated comfortably (with a supporting cushion if necessary), sideways on to the basket with the rim near enough for an elbow to rest upon it, and in a position which makes it easy for him/her to see and reach objects in the basket. If the baby cannot yet move for themselves, the watching adult will need to pay careful attention to any signs that the baby needs help to shift position or stop play with the basket. There are two important elements about the practice of using treasure baskets: the objects it contains and the role of the adult.

The objects in the treasure basket must be washable and made from natural materials (not plastic) and should be augmented and changed regularly to maintain interest. Suggested objects include: large pebbles, shells, big feathers, corks, a lemon, an apple, small baskets, shaving brush, small wooden boxes, wooden curtain ring, wooden egg cup, metal spoon,
small tin, length of chain, bunch of keys, leather purse, small herb bag, tinfoil, cardboard tube. In all (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1994) recommend around 100 objects which are either natural or made from natural materials – wood, raffia, metal, leather, rubber, fur, paper.

The attentive adult – usually the baby’s key person – has a crucial but largely silent role. S/he should sit nearby, preferably on a low, comfortable chair so that s/he can respond and affirm the child at play. The role of the adult is crucial in supporting and affirming the child’s desire to concentrate and explore. Almost every child will approach this differently and so the practitioner should be wholly focused on the baby (or babies) but should not select items for the baby, allowing him/her to choose for themselves.

**RESEARCH ISSUES**

Although treasure baskets are widely used in many settings, the impact of their use on babies’ learning and development is not widely understood and there are limited case studies or extended observations of the use of treasure baskets. Work with babies would benefit from understanding more of (a) how babies use Treasure Baskets both in home and group settings, and (b) how the adults involved in supporting babies’ explorations of objects in a treasure basket see their role.

With the development of the *Birth to Three Matters* Framework (Abbott and Langston, 2005; DfES, 2002) research now needs to focus on the incorporation of established practices into the policy framework for work with babies and young children under three in order to ensure a balanced living and learning experience. Additionally, work with parents, to ensure their understanding of the principles behind the treasure basket, is crucial. Misunderstandings and worries about safety need to be addressed through a participative approach to working in partnership with parents and ensuring that family and cultural concerns and wishes are respected.

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

**Matthew’s treasure basket**

Christmas had seen the arrival of Matthew’s treasure basket. At six months old he was just the right age to begin his exploration of the natural materials offered to him. At the time of the observation, Matthew, just turned nine months old, was used to handling, mouthing, sorting and selecting his favourite items from his basket.
Matthew’s mother, Kate places the treasure basket with its abundance of natural materials in the middle of a large cleared space in the room. She then asks Matthew gently if he would like to play with his treasure. He waves his arms and legs frantically as his eyes rest on the basket. Kate places Matthew close enough for him to reach right into the basket. He immediately reaches in with his right hand and selects a long wooden handled spatula. ‘Oohh, ahh,’ he says and looks directly at his mother. She smiles at him in approval. Still holding the spatula he proceeds to kneel up and lean across the basket in order to reach a long brown silk scarf. He pulls at the scarf and squeals in delight as he pulls the fabric through his fingers. ‘Oohh, ahh,’ he repeats. He lets go of the spatula and abandons the scarf to his side. His eyes rest on a large blue stone, and he picks up the large stone with his right hand and turns it over on his lap using both hands. Still using both hands he picks the stone up and begins to bite it, making a noise as his teeth grind against the hard surface. He smiles, looking at his mother as he repeatedly bites the stone over and over again. He stops, holds the stone up to his face and looks at it intently then puts it to his mouth once more. He then picks up the wooden spatula again and, while holding it firmly in one hand, he turns the contents of the basket over with his other hand, squealing loudly with delight as he discovers the matching long-handled fork. Matthew looks at his mother and waves both items in the air smiling and rocking on his knees saying ‘Oohh, ahh’. He turns away from the basket and waves the long-handled implements up and down in his hands, first one, then the other, then both together. He turns back to the basket with a puzzled expression and for a few seconds stops waving the items. He drops the fork and reaches back into the basket and randomly picks up items one at a time, looks at them and then discards them on the floor beside him. He continues this pattern for several seconds until he comes upon a long-handled brush. He picks up the brush, pauses and then waves it in his left hand, all the time continuing to hold the wooden spatula in his right hand. For several seconds he proceeds to bang the long-handled items together, smiling as the two wooden items make a sound as they come together. He then spots the wooden fork he had disposed of earlier and letting go of the brush picks up the wooden fork and bangs it together with the spatula. ‘Baba, baba, da, da, da,’ he says, then a little more loudly he repeats ‘Baba, baba, da, da, da.’ Just when it seems that he is giving signals that he has finished with the items in the basket he notices another long scarf. Letting go of both the wooden items he reaches into the basket and tugs the scarf. He pulls it over his face and blows raspberries. He smiles at his mother and she smiles at him. The material
falls to the floor and Matthew looks up at his mother and waves his arms up and down. Kate, realising that Matthew is signalling that he has finished with his treasure basket for today, reaches down and holds her arms out to him. Matthew instantly smiles, holds his arms up to her. As she sweeps him into her arms, Matthew snuggles into his mother’s neck and with his thumb in his mouth says ‘kai, kai, kai’ a pleasurable comfort sound that Matthew vocalises when seemingly enjoying close contact with his family members.

Involving parents

Siobhan was seven months old and attended a day-care setting for two days a week. The treasure basket was established practice in the setting and practitioners had taken great care to ensure that parents knew about its use and understood the rationale behind the selection of its contents. Siobhan’s father came to collect her early one day and found his young baby sitting on the floor sucking a metal garlic crusher. He looked horrified! The practitioner signalled the father to sit on the chair next to her and together they watched his baby. His fears about the danger that the object might pose for his baby reduced as he witnessed the attentiveness of his daughter. The practitioners pointed silently to the baby’s curled toes and the father smiled. When the session was over, the practitioner and the father talked. He said that he understood the principles behind the treasure basket – they had been carefully explained by his baby’s key person when Siobhan began at the centre. He was, however, concerned that some objects were potentially dangerous and asked the centre to review the contents. Following discussion among the team it was decided to withdraw some more controversial objects from the treasure baskets – the staff believing that it was better slightly to reduce the contents (though still providing a large variety of objects) than create unnecessary anxiety for parents.

The watching, attentive adult

Treasure basket time is a good time to observe babies and to build a picture of what children ‘can do’. Patterns of behaviour and early schemas can be observed. For example, Does Matthew always choose the items with a long handle? How does this relate to items he enjoys at other times of the day when the treasure basket is not available? How does Matthew select toys generally? Does he loose interest if the long-handled items are not in the treasure basket? The practitioner can use his/her observations to build
on Matthew’s interest in long-handed items and discuss this particular interest with parents to learn if there is a similar pattern or preference at home. With appropriate permission and if unobtrusive and not distracting to the baby, photographs can be taken to share with his/her parents and included in the personal profile.

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING

Key words: adults’ roles; babies’ learning and development; home use; objects; parents; variety and quality

Links: Birth to three matters; Brain studies and neuroscience; Heuristic play with objects; Key person; Play
ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The term has gained currency in the last fifty years, beginning with the Declaration of Rights of the Child by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1959. Subsequently, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was established by the United Nations in 1989. The 1959 declaration established ten principles which laid down rights to which the UN said children should be entitled:

The right to:

1. equality, regardless of race, colour, religion, sex or nationality
2. healthy mental and physical development
3. a name and a nationality
4. sufficient food, housing and medical care
5. special care if handicapped
6. love, understanding and care
7. free education, play and recreation
8. immediate aid in the event of disasters and emergencies
9. protection from cruelty, neglect and exploitation
10. protection from persecution and to an upbringing in the spirit of world-wide brotherhood and peace.

The language of the Declaration of 1959 is somewhat changed in the Convention of 1989, where 54 detailed Articles define the range of children’s rights under four categories. The Convention states children’s rights to:

1. prevention (of illness and neglect);
2. provision (of education with specific references to children who are disabled);
3. protection (from abuse and exploitation);
4. participation (in decisions which affect them).
RESEARCH ISSUES

Research into the broad range of issues covered under the theme of ‘children’s rights’ is very wide ranging and, internationally, focuses on issues which include such topics as corporal punishment, child poverty, children and the law, child labour and child health (including immunisation, food and the environment). Though research issues and articles are published in many journals across the range of disciplines, the *International Journal of Children’s Rights* focuses on ‘critical leadership and practical policy development’ in the field of children’s rights and is a key source of information on current projects and research. Work from a range of disciplines which seek to further children’s rights internationally is reported in the journal (which focuses on children of all ages). Such areas of work include: law, legal and political theory, psychology, psychiatry, educational theory, sociology, social administration and social work, health, social anthropology, economics, theology and history.

Research in the field is varied and the two examples included here are indicative of the field of study. In Sweden children’s rights have been a focus of interest and concern since the UN Convention was signed in 1989. Studies have included work on young children’s understanding of their rights and the development of practical materials to help children to learn about the Convention and to discuss their rights (Backstrom, 1997). Similar resources have been developed in other countries (Covell and Howe, 1999).

A Save the Children study of young children’s rights (Alderson, 2000) examined children’s involvement in decisions which affected them. Based in the UK, the study showed how children’s contributions were often unrecognised by adults and how many adults, due largely to their desire to protect children from danger, denied children basic freedoms to be with their friends and play in the park. Alderson (2000) gives many examples of young children participating in decisions about their lives such as suggesting ideas for the development of play facilities, buildings and menus and getting involved in strategies to resolve bullying.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

There are many examples of practice where children’s rights are a fundamental and guiding principle of curriculum and pedagogy. One such example can be found in the infant–toddler centres and pre-schools in Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy (see Reggio Emilia). Central concerns are:
The rights of children: the fact that the rights of children are recognised as the rights of all children is the sign of a more accomplished humanity.

The rights of teachers: for the teachers, each and every one of them, it is a condition that enhances communication and the comparison of ideas and experiences, all of which enrich the tools of professional evaluation.

The rights of parents: participation and research are, in fact, two terms that summarise much of the overall conception of our educational theory. These two terms might also be seen as the best prerequisites for initiating and maintaining a cooperative understanding between parents and teachers, with all the value that is added to the educational prospects of the children.

(Malaguzzi, 1996: 2)

A second example is to be found in daily practice. That is to say that, though it is governments which have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, thus declaring their commitment to working within their countries to realise and protect children’s rights as enshrined in the Convention, much of the reality of putting children’s rights into practice lies in the hands of individual practitioners working in services and settings for children and their families.

There are obligations on governments, yes, but there are responsibilities for every adult citizen too. (Nutbrown, 1996: 108)

Such arguments continue to be made, with concerns that too great a focus is still being placed on the UN Convention, on Geneva and on the structure of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and too little on development and progress at a more local level (Veernam and Levine, 2000).

REFERENCES AND INDICATIVE FURTHER READING


**Key words:** child labour; children and the law; International Journal of Children’s Rights; participation; play; prevention; protection; provision; Reggio Emilia; Save the Children; young children’s understanding

**Links:** Gender; Inclusive education; Play; Reggio Emilia approach

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**Glossary**

**Atelier.** In Reggio Emilia pre-schools, the studio, workshop or art room, furnished with a wide variety of resources and materials, used by all the children and adults in the pre-school.

**Desirable Learning Outcomes (DLO).** Age-related goals which young children should achieve on entry to school at the age of five years. The DLOs were replaced in September 2000 by Early Learning Goals.

**Early Excellence Centres.** Centres designated by the DfEE providing a range of integrated services for children from birth to five years and their families.

**Early Learning Goals.** Outcomes in six areas of learning which children should achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage: personal, social and emotional communication; language and literacy; mathematical; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical; creative.

**Early Years Childcare Inspector.** A person employed by OFSTED who is responsible for regulating and inspecting day care and childminding provision.

**OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education).** The government agency responsible for the inspection of provision.

**Practitioners.** The generic term currently in use in the UK to refer to all adults who work with young children in home or group settings, regardless of job title or qualification.

**Reception classes.** The first year of formal schooling in the UK is called the reception class. Children often attend the reception class between the ages of four and five.

**Registered person.** A person deemed qualified to care for children and whose name appears on the certificate of registration. The registered person has overall responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the National Standards are met. A company, committee or other group may be the registered person.

**Setting.** The generic term to refer to all forms of provision (home and group) where young children are cared for and educated, including: childminding, LEA nurseries, playgroups, independent provision, voluntary groups.
FURTHER RESOURCES

Reading list
In addition to the specific sources listed at the end of each entry in this book, the following list gives general sources which cover a range of topics in early childhood education and care.


Glossary

JOURNALS

In addition to Internet sources and books, international journals (many available online as well as in hard copy) are an important source of information on current research in early childhood education and care.

Early Child Development and Care
Early Childhood Matters
Early Education
Early Years
International Journal of Early Childhood Education
International Journal of Early Years Education

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ORGANISATIONS

4 Nations Child Policy Network
4 Children (formerly Kids’ Clubs Network)
Alliance for Childhood
Bernard van Leer Foundation
Birth to Three Matters
British Association for Early Childhood Education
Bullying Online – helping parents and pupils deal with school bullying
capt – child accident prevention trust
Childcare Exchange
ChildLine
Community Playthings
Council for Awards in Children’s Care and Education (CACHE)
Daycare Trust
DfES
Early Childhood Australia Inc. (ECA)
Early Education
Early Learning DENI (Department for Education in Northern Ireland)
Early Learning Resource Unit (South Africa)
Educational Resources Information Centre – Clearing House for Elementary and Early
Childhood Education (US)
For Parents by Parents
Foundation Stage
Learning Through Landscapes
National Association for the Education of the Young Child (NAEYC)
National Childminding Association (NCMA)
National Children’s Bureau
National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
NSPCC/EduCare Child Protection Awareness Programme
Nurture Group Network
OFSTED
OMEP Organisation Mondiale pour l’Education Préscolaire
Scottish Executive – Education Department (SEED) Learning and Teaching Scotland
Sightlines Initiative
Sure Start
Talk to your baby – National Literacy Trust
The National Childbirth Trust
The Parenting Education and Support Forum
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
Welsh Education Department
World Forum Foundation

INTERNET SOURCES

Due to the ever-changing nature of the world wide web, specific URL addresses are not
included. However, most of the above organisations have useful websites which provide
a range of information and useful links to other Internet sources which may be
found through an appropriate Internet search engine.

Glossary