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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Learning objectives

- To gain an understanding of key features of the historical development of early years provision in England
- To have an awareness of global recommendations to support an holistic approach
- To gain an understanding of the effects of globalisation on young children's learning



An holistic approach is a crucial aspect to incorporate as a central foundation for young children's learning. This chapter explores the rationale for this and the reasons why this is as highly relevant in modern times as in previous eras. Ongoing changes are taking place regarding early years provision for children aged from birth to eight, responding to numerous factors. These will be discussed and the historical background to the changes in England will be considered.

HISTORICAL FEATURES

England was the first country to experience the industrial revolution. Workers, including numbers of young children, were employed in harsh conditions until reforms were introduced. The notion of gaining skills and knowledge in preparation for future employment to gain a satisfactory job and to provide a compliant workforce, was a powerful pressure for systems concerning provision for young children. This affected young children who were, or were preparing to become, part of the workforce. When debating the school starting age the importance of earning a living was considered, with beginning and ending statutory schooling early seen as a solution for children to begin work at an early age. In 1876, children from three years old could be taken into school 'babies' rooms which offered training in alphabet recitation, picture recognition and marching to music (Anning 1991: 3). Early years provision developed from a need for childcare

to support working parents and to give disadvantaged children the opportunity to 'catch up' with their progress in readiness for school and employment.

PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

The emphasis on a preparation for an industrial workforce fostered the encouragement of strategies to promote a compliant workforce. Any successes were developed on an individual basis with strategies such as the 11+ testing for the school system implemented in the Butler Education Act, which determined the next steps and exerted a 'top-down' pressure on those working with younger children.

Yet changing family structures and employment goals encouraged new perspectives on appropriate arrangements for children. In 1967 the Central Advisory Council for education claimed, 'mothers with young children who also worked were to be deplored' (Brannen and Moss 2003: 33).

POLICIES AND PRACTICE

Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976 emphasised the financial implications of government policy, demanding 'value for money' and stressing the need for a monitoring system in order to 'maintain a proper national standard of performance'. He argued there was a strong case for the so-called 'core curriculum of basic knowledge' (Anning 1991: 7). The National Commission for Education in 1995 promoted the belief that investment of taxpayers' money in increased support for children aged 3–8 years would ensure that all children achieved a good grasp of basic skills early, to provide a foundation for future learning. Government control covered guidelines and frameworks for what was to be delivered, with regulations and accountability to ensure funding could be accessed. While maintaining this oversight of the provision, parents could access the setting of their choice. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1998 stated 'It is up to parents to decide what kind of childcare they want for their children. This is not a matter for the government' (Brannen and Moss 2003: 29). Private providers played a central role in delivering services in the childcare market. The growth in numbers of working mothers created a need for childcare arrangements and provision which were to follow government guidelines. The findings of the external regulators had a profound impact on the viability of the provision, with adults readily able to transfer their children to other childcare arrangements. By the end of the twentieth century childcare was not just for children in need but a desirable commodity for working families. National standards and regulations existed for all providers.

The background to New Labour's approach drew heavily on the USA Headstart programme. The purpose of Headstart was to give children from low-income families a 'head start', to support the transition from early years provision to formal schooling with an emphasis on school 'readiness' and an outcomes-based approach. Consideration was also given to European guidelines and targets. When England referred to the European Union agenda regarding early years provision, account was taken of proposals such as the European Commission's 10-year strategy in 1996–2006.

However, while in 1951, 12% of the workforce in England were women, by 1998 this had risen to 30%. Although childcare was the subject of public policy, the responsibility for accessing the provision was up to the individuals concerned with the responsibility of the children. This encouraged a view of the provision as a commodity and parents as the consumers. It led to a diversity of provision, with local authorities organising nursery classes and extending reception classes to enable younger children to attend. The private sector also supplied places to meet the demand in a variety of forms such as playgroups or private day nurseries. Ofsted publicly identified those settings deemed to be failing.

YOUNG CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

With the rise of four-year-olds in school and the number of working women, views regarding children in early years started to change. It became financially attractive for younger children to attend school and fill spare places. The view grew that it was a beneficial requirement for young children, rather than a necessity.

Therefore, early years provision was perceived as a significant factor in preparing children to be successful in school, providing a workforce for the future which could in turn strengthen the economic position of the country.

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

According to Lauder et al. we live in a 'world of collective consciousness, where we see our problems as interconnected' (2008: 4). Ideas of best provision for early childhood care can be shared globally and can respond to global influences, with an interaction of thoughts and reflections. We have become used to living with uncertainty and change and this is reflected in the constantly changing nature of early years education and care. Besides global effects requiring assimilation by the providers of early years provision, practitioners are faced with national political agendas featuring new initiatives. 'In the twenty-first century it is probably evident to every parent, professional childcare worker, kindergarten

and primary teacher that early childhood is high on the political agenda' (Gammage 2006: 235).

Changing patterns of work, where both parents seek employment, has led to an increased need for childcare arrangements to support this. A growing desire to support families in need strengthened the growth of childcare facilities and requirements. As early as 1997 Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997: 6) noted there was a 'common underlying thread' in Europe, where 'provision sprang to meet perceived needs'. Anderson and Eliassen, cited by Parsons (1995) consider a 'Europeification of national policy-making' where policies are discussed in a collaborative European context. Therefore the diverse early years settings which were developing in Europe not only sought to exist in the locality but questioned the quality of provision by sharing pedagogical ideas with colleagues further afield.

This questioning and sharing were responses to various factors. Tony Blair (2005) stated 'We have to secure Britain's future in a world ... driven by globalisation. We have to change and to modernise ... to equip everyone for this changing world' (cited in Cole 2008: 86). The notion that globalisation affects early years provision is implicated in the argument, through a response to changing forces in the contemporary world. This influences the approach to learning to prepare young children for a future workforce.

However, learning in the early years is also concerned with valuing the moment of childhood, rather than as the preparation of goals to strive for when children get older. 'At the heart of educational quality means meeting learners' diverse needs and opening rather than foreclosing opportunities to develop as individuals and as valuable members of local and global society' (Lauder et al. 2008: 16). This view requires a broad, holistic approach to address the needs of the developing child and provide challenges to learn through personal constructions of the world. Provision could become similar and standardised. Shared discussions between those interested in early years matters fosters collaboration of ideas and practice, while developing provision within local deliberations regarding appropriate practice. Therefore, early years practitioners use their professional skills to weave the requirements of national policies, influenced by global organisation recommendations, with their understandings of the individual children within their setting.

Environmental concerns, faster transport links, internet access and international organisations and companies have blurred national boundaries. These links can forge an international sharing of ideas regarding early years provision, through networking and collaboration. Prospective headteachers in England were encouraged to consider approaches used in other countries. 'Our children will become world citizens. The similarities between issues for education within a similar economic and developmental framework are appreciable whilst cultural differences can bring new thoughts to approaches to development in our countries' (NPQH Think Piece, National College for School Leadership, 2006).

Globalisation appears in literature regarding early years (Dahlberg and Moss 2007; Lauder et al. 2008) in terms of the need of the provision to prepare for future challenges. Parental need and the desire to obtain employment imposes further pressure on the demands of appropriate provision. In the current credit crisis, awareness of the desire to maintain and sustain economic viability is evident, as demonstrated in the G20 meeting in London in 2009, where leaders of countries met to decide strategies to deal with the situation. The uncertainty helps to drive discussions concerning the purpose of provision for young children, including a spectrum of views ranging from whether it should have a narrow curriculum focus as a means to gain specific skills or be viewed in broader terms as a period of childhood to enjoy in its own right. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2002) urged 'no nation today can afford to ignore opportunities for maximising investments in education'. Within this book, consideration of what knowledge and skills would be desired have been placed in an holistic manner.

Certain European countries share notions of good early years practice as a united response to international change. These dialogues between practitioners in different countries lead to changing practice. In Europe these can include networks for those concerned with the care and education of children, such as the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA). The character of communities changes as migrant workers and their children add new dimensions to the nature of the areas they move to. Inclusive practice in the early years settings flourishes, for example incorporation of modern foreign languages from an early age as part of learning about the world. Early years settings need to be viewed as diverse and multicultural environments, for example, in giving support for children who have English as an additional language.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Recommendations from international organisations have had a profound impact on national agendas.

The United Nations

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was set up in November 1945, after the Second World War, with the aim to 'build peace in the minds of men'. It serves to 'function as a laboratory of ideas and a standard setter to forge universal agreements on emerging ethical issues' (www.portal.unesco). It provides a means of disseminating and sharing information and knowledge. UNESCO (2003) affirmed 'that children's holistic development

can only be ensured if there is close co-ordination or preferably integration of the education, social and health sectors, and they strongly urge governments to tackle this integration as part of their social and economic planning' (Woods 2005: xi). It included Article 6 which stated development should be interpreted holistically, that is including emotional, cognitive, social, cultural and mental as well as physical aspects of development.

In 2007 UNESCO had 193 member states. Jarvis (2008: 39) suggests that UNESCO is a 'champion of lifelong learning' which is always presented 'within a humanistic perspective'. He mentions the Faure Report which was the outcome of a UNESCO Commission on the Development of Education (1972). 'Throughout the report the whole of the person is constantly emphasised: The physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into the complete man is a fundamental aim of education.' (Jarvis 2008: 40)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a 'universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards and obligations. These basic standards – also called human rights – set minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be respected by governments' (www.unicef.org).

Article 2 stated that the Convention applied to all children. An inclusive practice was promoted to ensure all children were to be included in provisions made for them. This would require inclusive practice to support those who might need it, to access the available provision. Article 4 stated the adherence to a multi-agency approach where social services, legal, health and educational systems were involved. It recognised a possible need to change existing laws or create new ones to accommodate this target. Article 29, the goals for education, stated children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest.

In the UNESCO World Education for All Monitoring Report 2009 two of three top policy recommendations for Early Childhood Education and Care stated:

- Prioritize early childhood education and care in planning for all children.
- Strengthen the links between education planning and health provision.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The OECD was established in 1960 'to achieve the highest possible economic growth and employment and increase the standard of living in member countries, to contribute to economic expansion in both member and non-member countries and to increase world trade' (Jarvis 2008: 42).

OECD 2006 guidelines for practice incorporate the targets identified in the European Commission report. Ten policy areas proposed for consideration by governments included:

- 2. To place well-being, early development and learning at the core of ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) work, while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies.
- 8. To improve the professional education of ECEC staff.
- 10. To aspire to ECEC systems that support broad learning.

The European Commission

The European Commission has been included in the discussions as a significant player in broader deliberations. It was believed amongst member states of the Council of Europe that there were 'as many patterns of pre-school organisation' as there were 'terms to describe them,' where the 'precise levels and patterns of use reflected national history and policies' (Woodhead 1979: 2). However, by 1991, Anderson and Eliassen (cited by Parsons 1995) described a 'Europeification of national policy-making' where a level of policy making developed following European guidelines and recommended targets (cited in Parsons 1995: 236).

The European Commission formulated recommendations to provide standards for quality, while giving examples of good practice throughout Europe. This led to the European Commission's *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children* (1996), incorporated into a 10-year plan, for states to achieve within the time scale. The 40 targets included those based on the issues concerning an holistic approach, multidisciplinary working and a framework for literacy, namely:

- Target 1 Governments should provide a published and coherent statement of intent for care and education services to young children aged birth to six years and explain how such initiatives will be co-ordinated between services.
- Target 14 All services should positively assert the value of diversity.
- Target 18 The educational philosophy should be broad and include linguistic and oral skills.

The report stated:

Most countries in the industrialised world have accepted that children below the age of formal schooling benefit from some kind of collective provision, whether it is viewed as preparation for school, an opportunity to socialize with other children and adults beyond the family, or in order to enable parents to work (EC 1996: 18).

National states were strongly encouraged to address the recommendations, or at least attempt to implement many of the targets.

Moss et al. (2003) identified key features of early years policy in Europe:

- A legal right for parental leave
- Public support for the childcare needs of employed parents
- Public support for at least two years of education for all children before they start compulsory schooling. (Moss et al. 2003).

National governments were required to address the growing needs of provision for young children to support working parents, while provision attained certain standards. Esping-Andersen (Moss et al. 2003: 5) notes the 'open method of co-ordination' adopted by the European Union at its Lisbon Summit in 2000, which concerned a 'practice of cross-national policy' and where the objective was to 'institutionalise processes for sharing policy experience and the diffusion of best practices'. He continues that the 'key advantage of the open method of co-ordination for the advancement of a social Europe lies in its potential of reconciling national diversity and democratic accountability of the nation-state with common policy ambitions and measures of policy effectiveness through benchmarking and monitoring'. Jarvis (2008: 44) agrees, stating that 'throughout the European documents' one of the main aims is 'to create a united Europe'. The objective is also stated 'to provide employment for all its workers and to advance the knowledge and technological level of its workforce'. Thus, while highlighting specific examples of good practice throughout Europe, the standardisation of provision appears to be at the forefront of the European Commission's recommendations, in order to meet the needs of working parents and the children in early years settings.

The Enterprise Development website maintains 'for any country to transform itself into a viable, knowledge-based economy, internal, institutional change will be crucial' (www.govmonitor.com). Local and individual settings have responsibility for providing the framework for learning, within national guidelines, to ensure young children's development and progress.

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CARE IN ENGLAND

In England children were perceived as 'not there yet' with educational aims to prepare children for later schooling. This went alongside universal goals of development to form the progression for learning, with a consideration of those who do not conform possibly at risk of failing to achieve prescribed goals.

Activities were devised based on enabling the child as an individual to progress through developmental stages. Rather than waiting for the child to accumulate enough experience to move on to the next stage, the adult or more experienced child supported the learner's progression. Progression was devised through such theories as those of Piaget (1950), Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (1966). Settings were therefore highly 'organised and planned and there is less emphasis on children's self-initiative' (McQuail et al. 2003: 14).

The emphasis was on teacher initiated and directed tasks with basic academic skills within a structured framework comprising core knowledge for the children to learn. Links were sought with schools for 'in the UK ... there is a strong emphasis on school "readiness" with parents being encouraged to "educate" their

children in the skills and knowledge which will allow them to succeed in school' (Smidt 2006: 85). According to Brannen and Moss (2003: 25) 'England has a National Childcare Strategy in 1998, although for those settings linked to schools the focus could have been on education for early years rather than an emphasis on care.'

A basic curriculum was sought for all children to succeed as part of the future workforce. David Blunkett, the then Secretary of State for Education, in the Foreword to a key government green paper, *The Learning Age* (1998), described the purpose of learning as

the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition (cited in Bottery 2001: 206).

The curriculum was linked to the perceived requirements for the future economic wealth of the country. The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 gave rise to pressure for some practitioners who were encouraged to implement the strategy in Foundation Stage settings for three- and four-year-olds. In 1999 the Chief Inspector of Schools argued that the inclusion of reading, writing and numeracy in the early years curriculum would help to overcome educational disadvantage experienced by children from poorer backgrounds. The desire to ensure all children had the necessary skills needed for the workforce led to further guidelines for early years practice. The introduction in 2000 of the Curriculum Guidelines for the Foundation Stage aimed to give parity of provision to all three- and four-year-old children.

The OECD publication *Starting Strong* (2006: 141), noting key features of the English early years system, included the following curricula traditions:

- The child is a person to be formed.
- An early years centre is a place of development, learning and instruction. Children are expected to reach pre-determined goals.
- There is a prescribed ministerial curriculum, with goals and outcomes.
- There is a focus on learning and skills, especially in areas of school readiness.
- The national curriculum must be 'delivered' correctly.
- It incorporates a growing focus on individual competence in the national language. There is an emphasis on emergent literacy practices.
- Prescribed targets are set at a national level.
- Indoors is the primary learning space, with resources focused here.
- Learning outcomes and assessment are required.
- Quality control is evident with inspection undertaken by external regulators.

This approach to learning strives to enable children to progress in their learning, yet Gammage argues that the best care and education possible is 'not about

“hot-housing” children, or about forcing them into early academic endeavour’ (2006: 241). He cites evidence from neuroscience research which states ‘early childhood is the period when the human organism responds to the environment with such malleability that the very architecture of the brain is affected’ (Gammage, 2006: 236).

Urban (2008: 140) claims ‘There is a powerful top down stream of knowledge presented as relevant for practice. Practitioners at the bottom are required to implement the policies’. This was emphasised in the *Children’s Plan*, which stated: ‘The single most important factor in delivering our aspirations for children is a world class workforce able to provide highly personalised support, so we will continue to drive up quality and capacity of those working in the children’s workforce’ (Balls 2007: 11). Practitioners could find the aspect of implementing the many policies and new initiatives to ‘drive up quality’ challenging. A creative approach is needed where children can respond to changing factors, such as employment and new, developing industries. Lauder et al (2008: 7) state ‘improving early childhood education and childcare is linked to lifelong learning and a number of international policies where the rationales are those of economic development’. As early as 1978 Eyre stressed the need to be literate and have an holistic, creative, knowledge base to survive. Those who were not able to achieve this would have difficulties for ‘a situation exists in which the population continues to increase but where human labour is increasingly dispensable’ (Eyre 1978: 169). Emphasis is placed on transferable skills where children are ‘learning to learn’ rather than receiving formal prescriptive teaching.

The welfare state includes an ageing population who are not working but need to be provided for. In the global credit crisis the cost of early years provision is a concern. Clark and Waller (2007: 27) question ‘Might there be a dichotomy ... between the ideology of improving childhood but without the financial investment to make it a reality?’ Training needs could be incorporated into work-based learning, for example, as demonstrated in the growth of the Early Years Professional Status qualification. Nursery schools could be deemed expensive to maintain, with costs cut through closure and children moved to nursery classes linked to existing schools. The Rose Review of admission policies recommended young children should be admitted to early admission classes in schools. Birth to three provision could then be accessed through private facilities on site. This supports parental employment when the ‘new discourse of policy now tells parents that childcare is not just acceptable but positively to be desired’ (Brannen and Moss 2003: 33). The rationale is that children achieve more when given access to early years provision. However, to further achieve the aim of meeting the needs of working parents, flexible hours are required, which is facilitated through such means as extended schools and Children’s Centres.

ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the means of judging achievements is through results from the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) profiles. Pressure from colleagues teaching classes of older children could also be apparent, through the importance of results and a satisfactory report from Ofsted. The new Ofsted (Office for Standards for Education, Children's Services and Skills) came into being in 2007. It brings together four formerly separate inspectorates. It inspects provision for children and young people and inspects education and training for learners of all ages. This strengthens the remit of the inspectorate and in turn, accentuates the importance of the findings.

Evidence is needed to support the assessments which could lead to practice where documentation can be readily accumulated. When the profiles were initially introduced, John Bangs, head of education at the National Union of Teachers (NUT), was concerned the profiles attempted to 'ride two horses, to provide information for value-added scores and to be diagnostic' (Rodger 1999: 43).

The introduction of Letters and Sounds, following the Rose Review, provides a developmental approach in a pack of information and activities to use while children are in the early years leading through primary school. However, practitioners should be aware of what children need to understand before they can learn to read and write, what they have to do before they become literate and what type of adult support and environment best supports literacy learning. In order to implement the strategies effectively the approach the practitioner uses is personal to them in their daily interactions with children.



Case Study

In a moderation exercise with a group of practitioners from different providers it was found that practice to collate evidence for assessments varied. In some settings assessments formed part of a natural information gathering through on-going activities, while in others specific activities were devised to gain evidence to show children's progression in learning. It was felt at the meeting that the way information gathering for assessments was made had major concerns for the planning of activities and organisation of the learning environment.

AN HOLISTIC APPROACH

In 1994 SureStart used the term 'educare' to describe the way education and care could be combined in early years settings. This was reflected in the development of Children's Centres where early education was integrated with health

and family support services. Flexible timings of the sessions, usually open from 8am to 6pm, supported parents' working patterns. It was proposed that by 2010 there would be 3,500 in England. These Centres could form a competition to ensure children access places available in Centres or local schools. Children's Centres have been given the proviso that they must be self sustaining within three years of opening. This tension heightens the stakes for the provision to gain sufficient funding for the places available. If places are unfilled the Centre could close through lack of funding. Decisions regarding appropriate provision for young children could be influenced by the ramifications of closing existing settings to provide access for children in a setting which incorporates flexible timing and multidisciplinary working. The cost of changing provision could be a factor where an existing add-on to school could be the cheaper option. Early years practitioners involved with the existing provision voiced their concerns about changes, although the closure of nursery schools to place young children in early years settings in schools appears to be continuing.



Questions for Discussion

How has globalisation affected an aspect of provision you are familiar with?
What are the implications for your practice?

THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE FRAMEWORK

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework, which was introduced in 2008, is underpinned by the Every Child Matters agenda. This agenda, introduced in 2003, promotes an holistic approach to learning through specific outcomes identified for children aged birth to 19, that is; be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being.

Legislation in 1989 from the UNCRC highlighted the need for professionals from a range of disciplines to work together to promote the well-being of children. The Children's Act in 2004 sought to increase multidisciplinary working to provide holistic care for children. Multidisciplinary working brings together professionals from differing disciplinary backgrounds to collaborate and co-operate to promote the well-being of the children they are responsible for.

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework, statutory in 2008, developed the holistic approach to learning for young children. It is underpinned by four principles: the unique child; positive relationships; an enabling environment; and learning and development. These broad aims can be implemented by practitioners to meet the needs of the individual children in the settings, providing a play-based

learning environment for children. Within this framework, practitioners can create the environment that best enables children in the setting to construct their understanding of the world around them.

Further Reading

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This book is edited by Tim Waller and contains contributions from many experts in their field. Contents in the book include discussions of children's rights to participation, with consideration of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). It also features a chapter based on international perspectives.

Useful Websites

www.egovmonitor.com
www.portal.unesco
www.unicef.org
www.wsrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

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