

Edited by

Linda Miller & Linda Pound



Theories and Approaches to Learning in the Early Years

Critical Issues in the Early Years Series



THEORIES AND APPROACHES TO LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS

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Linda Miller and Linda Pound



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THEORIES AND APPROACHES TO LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS

The Critical Issues in the Early Years Series

This series provides both national (UK wide) and international perspectives on critical issues within the field of early years education and care.

The quality of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has remained a high priority on government agendas in recent years (OECD, 2006). This series reflects this developing early childhood context which includes professionalizing, and up-skilling, the early childhood workforce. In particular, the series brings a critical perspective to the developing knowledge and understanding of early years practitioners at various stages of their professional development, to encourage reflection on practice and to bring to their attention key themes and issues in the field of early childhood.

Series Editor

Linda Miller is Professor Emeritus of Early Years at The Open University. Since 2005 Linda has been co-director of international project 'Day in the Life of an Early Years Practitioner' based within the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA). She is currently on the Expert Advisory Group for an EU study on Competencies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and is co-lead researcher for the England case study. She has been a member of government stakeholder groups and working parties concerned with workforce development in the early years. Linda has written and co-edited a wide range of books for early years practitioners, and has published in national and international journals.

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ABOUT THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

Linda Miller is Professor Emeritus of Early Years at the Open University. Since 2005 Linda has been co-director of international project 'Day in the Life of an Early Years Practitioner' based within the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA). She is currently on the Expert Advisory Group for an EU study on Competencies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and is co-lead researcher for the England case study. She has been a member of government stakeholder groups and working parties concerned with workforce development in the early years. Linda has written and co-edited a wide range of books for early years practitioners and has published in national and international journals.

Linda Pound has worked in universities and was an LEA early years inspector for 10 years. She has been head of a nursery school and deputy head of a primary school. In her current role as an education consultant, she provides training, advice and support for early years practitioners both nationally and internationally. She is also an assessor for the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). Linda has written extensively – her most recent book is the third in a series entitled *How Children Learn* (Step Forward Publishing, 2009). Her major areas of interest are learning and curriculum in the early years.

Contributors

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Sarah Blackwell is the Director of Archimedes Training and has been pioneering Forest Schools programmes and training in the UK for the past 10 years and is both managing director and lead trainer. Sarah was the first practitioner to deliver Forest Schools in urban environments across South Yorkshire in the early 2000s and has worked extensively with children, young people and families, including those with additional needs. Sarah's passion is to provide high quality training and through her work seeks to inspire all learners to take Forest Schools into their own settings with confidence and enthusiasm.

Martin Bradley is currently chair of the Montessori Schools' Association and a member of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. He was one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools for 23 years, for three years of which he was seconded to manage the Department for Education's Early Excellence Programme. Besides continuing to work on inspections, he is a governor of Hereford Steiner Academy.

Tina Bruce, CBE, is an honorary visiting professor at Roehampton University, having originally trained as a teacher at the Froebel Educational Institute. She also trained to teach children with hearing impairments, and taught in both special and mainstream schools. She was head of the Research Nursery School, later becoming Director of the Centre for Early Childhood Studies, both located in what is now Roehampton University. She worked with the British Council in New Zealand and Egypt, and was awarded International Woman Scholar by the University of Virginia Commonwealth. She is involved with training and consultancy for the early childhood phase in the UK and abroad. She has published many books and articles, and her books include *Early Childhood Education* (1987), *Time to Play* (1991), *Cultivating Creativity* (2005), *Developing Learning* (2004), the edited textbook, *Early Childhood: A Student Guide* (2003), and, with Carolyn Meggitt and Julian Grenier, the co-authored *Childcare and Education* (2010).

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Serena Johnson has worked in the field of early years education for over 30 years. Her career has included the headship of a nursery school and work as a Local Authority Early Years Inspector. She is a former director of HighScope UK where she developed training materials and courses. She has published widely, and contributed to the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance. She has worked as an educational consultant in the UK and abroad. Now retired, she is Senior Adviser to HighScope UK and Chair of Governors at an Early Excellence Children's Centre.

Pam Lafferty worked in Nursery and Primary Education, including the Deputy Headship of a Primary School, before becoming a Consultant Trainer and subsequently Director of HighScope UK. She has undertaken training and workshops in many countries. She has written widely and most recently contributed a chapter on 'Child Initiated Learning in the Early Years' to *Like Bees not Butterflies* (A and C Black, 2008).

Trisha Lee is Artistic Director and founder of MakeBelieve Arts, a Theatre and Education Company developing the creative potential of children aged 2–15. She is also a cabinet office appointed Social Enterprise Ambassador. Trisha pioneered the 'Helicopter Technique' based on the work of Vivian Gussin Paley in schools throughout the UK. She has lectured both nationally and internationally and was commissioned by the Childhood Cultural Centre of Qatar to develop creative reading training for teachers. She is currently writing a joint anthology on developing Spiritual Intelligence (Crown House), and *Teaching Mathematics Creatively* (Routledge) with Linda Pound.

Louise Livingston is an Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Montessori Teacher Trainer at the Maria Montessori Institute in London. She has worked for many years with children under 6 in a Montessori Children's House. She is a council member of Montessori Education UK (MEUK) and editor of the Montessori Society AMI (UK) publication *Direction*.

Julia Manning-Morton is Programme Director for Early Childhood Studies at London Metropolitan University. She has also worked as an early years practitioner, manager, adviser and inspector across a range of settings for children aged 0–8 years. Her early experience of working in social care settings where psychodynamic concepts were integral to the support given to children, families and staff, has been highly influential in her subsequent research foci and teaching approach. This includes the Key Times action research project in Camden, London, and her current work with groups of centre heads and practitioners in supporting children's emotional development. In addition, Julia believes that the personal benefit she has gained from the psychotherapeutic process has enabled her to not only grow as a person but has also supported her professional commitment to promoting children's and practitioners' emotional well-being.

Dawn Nasser is Managing Director of Spectrum Montessori Ltd (Rose House Montessori School, www.rose-house-montessori.com). Dawn is actively involved with the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage through consultancy work and the delivery of training. She is an Early Years Lead Inspector for the Independent Schools Inspectorate, and an assessor for the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.

Anne B. Smith was the inaugural Director of the Children's Issues Centre, an interdisciplinary research centre at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, between 1995 and 2006. Now an Emeritus Professor, Anne's interests are in the area of Childhood Studies, with a particular focus on children's rights. She is the author of *Understanding Children's Development* (1998), and co-author of *Advocating for Children* (2000), *Children's Voices* (2000), *Children as Citizens* (2009) and *Learning in the Making* (2009). She has had an ongoing input into policy developments in early childhood education in New Zealand since the mid-1970s. She has a particular interest in young children's learning; quality early childhood environments; family, early childhood centre and school influences on children's development – especially punishment and other forms of family discipline; and international policy and law relating to physical punishment in the home.

Jill Tina Taplin joined a group of parents founding a new Steiner school 26 years ago and soon found herself working in the kindergarten. Over the past five years, she has become increasingly involved in training adults in Steiner early childhood practice. She works as an adviser in Steiner early childhood settings, as a tutor on the training courses, and provides Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for practitioners, in addition to writing articles and kindergarten material.

Anne Marie True has run a Montessori nursery school in south-west London since 1987. She was a governor of a preparatory school for over eight years and since 1998 a governor of a local state primary school. She sits on various Local Authority

education committees and is a member of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. She is a committed Montessorian and sat on the UK Centenary Committee. She currently chairs the Save Our Nurseries Campaign.

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CHAPTER 1

TAKING A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Linda Miller and Linda Pound

Overview

The chapters in this book explore both contemporary and historical perspectives relating to some of the theories and approaches which have influenced Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) today. This chapter gives an overview of the structure of the book and its rationale. In the chapter, we signpost some key themes raised in the ensuing chapters and invite you to take a critical stance in relation to the identified themes and to reflect on these in the light of present day issues. The book is divided into three parts: Theoretical and Analytical Positions; Foundational Theories; and Contemporary Theories. In Parts 2 and 3 of the book, the chapters are written by 'advocates' of distinctive approaches to ECEC. One dictionary definition of an advocate is, 'a person who supports or speaks in favour of' (our italics) (Allen, 1991). Each of the chapter authors are 'champions' of, and passionate about, a particular and distinctive approach to learning and pedagogy, and each approach is underpinned by particular theoretical frameworks. However, theories are not a truth but an explanation and will

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influence practice depending on the views and beliefs (based on these theories) held by the practitioner, or perhaps the ethos and philosophy of the setting in which she works. The chapters also consider change, transformation and continuity within each approach and its relevance to current policy and practice.

The purpose of this book is to encourage you to examine the different theories and approaches presented and to consider the implications for your own practice. In this first chapter, we invite you to critically reflect upon and consider your own individual position and perspective and to take a critical stance in relation to each chapter. Questions and discussion points at the end of this chapter (and also within each chapter) encourage you to examine each approach through your own particular lens. We hope that in using the framework we offer, you will have the opportunity to ‘step back’ and develop a critical perspective in relation to each chapter – so that you see what may be familiar with a new and critical eye. We have no doubt that some ideas you will ‘throw away’; other ideas you will take with you. We hope that as a result of reading this book, new meanings will emerge and it will help you to look at practice in a different way.

In this book, we take the view that the terms early years and early years education and care should be seen as encompassing ‘education’ but with a care component and that it should be impossible to educate without caring, nor care without developing and promoting children’s learning. We also use the term *she* when referring to individuals of both genders.

Organization of the book

We have inevitably been selective in choosing the theories and approaches included in this book. The history of ECEC is both fascinating and convoluted and to do that rich history full justice is beyond the scope of any one single book. We have, for example, *not* included a chapter on constructivism – either Piagetian or Vygotskian – since their theories are widely discussed elsewhere (Donaldson, 1976; Rogoff, 1990) and underpin so much current thinking about young children (Johnson, 2010). Constructivist theories are key to, and explicit within, for example, HighScope, Reggio Emilia and Te Whāriki (see this chapter and Chapters 7 and 10). In other perhaps less developed initiatives, such as the work of Vivian Gussin Paley (Chapter 8) and the development of Forest Schools (Chapter 9), constructivism is less explicit but equally influential.

Nor have we included anything on highly influential thinkers such as John Dewey or Susan Isaacs. Both deserve a special place in the history and philosophy of early childhood education – but neither approach is explicit in current practice in the United Kingdom, so have been omitted from this book. In much the same way as Julia Manning-Morton (see Chapter 2) suggests that psychoanalytical theories are implicit

within high-quality care and education for young children, so the work of Dewey and Isaacs are implicit in much current practice. With their different but related emphases on empowerment and supporting children in making the connections that enable learning, their influence continues to be felt.

The interrelatedness of the theories and approaches is an interesting aspect of the chapters. For example, Froebel's theory, as Tina Bruce points out in Chapter 4, continues to have great influence but owed much to the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Owen. We hope that these common threads and shared histories will become apparent as you read this book. As we note above, each chapter represents the views of individuals committed to a particular approach and set of theories, although each chapter offers a critique. Therefore, the views represented are not impartial but they *are* informed and knowledgeable. It is for you as the reader to consider the views presented and to reflect upon what they say to you and to form your own views.

The first part of the book is dedicated to *Theoretical and Analytical Positions*. The two chapters focus, not on a single approach or theory, but on sets of ideas which support a reflective and analytical view of work with young children. In Chapter 2, Julia Manning-Morton considers the way in which the broad raft of psychoanalytical theories underpins all practice in ECEC (or perhaps all practice in life). The chapter has particular importance for two key reasons. The first is that, aside from attachment, the full impact of psychoanalytical theories on adult interactions with young children is not always fully understood. The second reason for its importance is in inviting critical reflection on the way in which our own feelings and emotions shape the psychological well-being of the children with whom we work. The other chapter in this section, by Deb Albon, focuses on postmodern theories and offers an invitation to 'deconstruct' other approaches and theories. Albon raises interesting and challenging questions which may help you to bring a critical edge to your reading and thinking.

Part 2 focuses on what we have termed 'Foundational Theories' and begins with an overview of the work of Froebel by Tina Bruce. The remaining two chapters consider the specific approaches and clear theoretical underpinning of Steiner Waldorf schools and Montessori schools. Both have a long history but are being reviewed in the light of current thinking. Conroy et al. (2008: 16) suggest that their contribution might lie in the now 'stronger emphasis on individual capabilities and a more significant focus on the affective'. These three chapters together serve to remind us of the pioneering practice which continues to contribute much to ECEC throughout the world. The approaches have much in common and yet, at the same time, many differences (Bruce, 2005). However, in all three, the child is placed firmly at the centre of thinking and practice.

In Part 3, 'Contemporary Theories', the chapters are concerned with more recent approaches to ECEC. Chapter 7 focuses on HighScope which, although highly influential, has, when compared to the foundational theories explored in Part 2, a relatively short history. HighScope was established around 50 years ago in the United States and the longitudinal research findings which have emerged from it were the rationale for setting up Sure Start in England. In Chapter 8, Trisha Lee offers a personal account of the impact the work of Vivian Gussin Paley has had on her thinking and practice through a story-telling and story-acting approach. Sarah Blackwell and

Linda Pound in Chapter 9 provide an historical overview of the development of outdoor provision and the place of Forest Schools within that development. They describe the work of Forest Schools and discuss the benefits of outdoor experiences and risk taking in what they see as a current risk-adverse culture. The roles of culture and community are explored in Chapter 10 where Anne B. Smith describes Te Whāriki, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, which reflects a holistic and bicultural vision for childhood. She describes a curriculum developed by Māori and Pākehā partners and which included wide consultation with a bi-cultural community and key stakeholders, and which emphasizes children's participation in shared meaningful activities.

The final chapter in the book draws together what we see as the critical issues raised by the chapters in this book.

Historical context

Early childhood care and education has a long and interesting history. Writers and thinkers from even before the 17th century onwards have influenced the way in which education, including early education, has been shaped and developed in more recent times. Although it is with the work of Froebel that the exploration of specific theories and approaches to early childhood care and education begins in this book (see Chapter 4), we should be aware of the precedents which shaped his thinking. Pestalozzi's belief that love, work and social interaction were the foundations of development shaped both his work and that of Froebel. Despite this formative and fascinating early work, it is within the 20th century that the history of early childhood care and education really begins to burgeon – but again this has older historical roots. Robert Owen's work in New Lanark is not explored in this book but it was he who established what has been described as the first workplace nursery in the early part of the 19th century. He and Froebel held different perspectives and their work had different roots but the ideals of both were to influence developments in the early part of the 20th century. The work of the McMillan sisters in England, looking at the needs of severely socio-economically disadvantaged children and communities, held the same compassion as Owen's pioneering work. Their emphasis on nature drew on Froebel's theories and approaches, as Tina Bruce points out in Chapter 4.

The interrelatedness of theories is something to be borne in mind as you read this book. Theories have roots and precedents and they go on to spark new theories and ideas. Theories are also shaped by the contemporary social context and these influence popular views of childhood, curriculum and pedagogy.

Themes and threads

In this section, we highlight some of the key themes and interrelated threads which permeate and link the chapters. We have added questions at the end of the chapter as a framework for your thinking and reflection. The themes explored are: