

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

History, Philosophy and Experience

SECOND EDITION

CATHY NUTBROWN
and **PETER CLOUGH**

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SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Marianne Lagrange
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Marketing Manager: Catherine Slinn
Cover design: Naomi Robinson
Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed in Great Britain by Henry Ling Limited at
The Dorset Press, Dorchester, DT1 1HD



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First published in 2008
Reprinted in 2009, 2010 (twice) and 2012
This edition © Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough,
2014

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2013943691

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4462-6786-8
ISBN 978-1-4462-6787-5 (pbk)

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About the Authors



Professor Cathy Nutbrown is Head of the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, where she teaches and researches in the field of early childhood education.

Cathy began her career as a teacher of young children and has since worked in a range of settings and roles with children, parents, teachers and other early childhood educators. Cathy is committed to finding ways of working 'with respect' with young children, and sees the concept of quality in the context of what it means to develop curriculum and pedagogy in the early years with the ambition of working in a climate of 'respectful education'.

She established the University of Sheffield MA in Early Childhood Education in 1998 and a Doctoral Programme in Early Childhood Education in 2008. In 2010 she contributed to the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation. In June 2012 she reported on her year-long independent review for government on early years and childcare qualifications (The Nutbrown Review). In May 2013 Cathy won the ESRC prize for Research with Outstanding Impact in Society and in September 2013 she was presented with the NW Lifetime Achievement Award. She is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Early Childhood Research* (Sage) and author of over fifty publications on aspects of early childhood education.



Peter Clough is Honorary Professor of Education at the University of Sheffield. Peter taught English and Drama, in the 1970s, in London and later in a number of special schools. His research interests include the use of narrative and fictional writing in research and research report. Peter has taught Inclusive Education and Early Childhood Education at the University of Sheffield, has been Professor of Inclusive Education at Queen's Belfast and Liverpool Hope, and Research

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Acknowledgements

We should like to thank the many people who wrote to us about the first edition of this book and we thank them for suggestions which have influenced the development of this second edition.

The numerous students and academic colleagues who have shared their ideas with us and allowed us to try out some of the new conversations in this book have been most helpful and we thank them warmly.

Special thanks go to our Undergraduate, Masters and Doctoral students who told us how important it was to bring alive the ideas of past pioneers and commented on our attempts to do this.

The keepers of the archives we consulted have been particularly helpful, as have librarians at The University of Sheffield. We thank Sheffield Local Authority for allowing us to quote from their 1987 Nursery Education Guidelines. We wish to acknowledge the important contributions played by Sage Publications, in particular Marianne Lagrange for inviting us to make this second edition, Rachael Plant for her help with recording four of the conversations, and Jeanette Graham for her care in the production of this book.

Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough

Sheffield

September 2013

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Go to www.sagepub.co.uk/nutbrownclough for a downloadable recording of Conversations 1, 2, 3 and 6.

Introduction

Though history per se does not change, the way we view the events of history, and the political contexts of those events, can lead to re-interpretation and reviewing, resulting in new meanings and insights. Since this book was first published in 2008, we have continued to think about the impacts of many key figures in the history of early childhood education, and have been conscious of living through events that will themselves form a part of the history of early childhood education and care.

This book, whilst maintaining the central feature of imagined dialogues, is considerably different from the first edition. In this edition we have taken the opportunity to update our view of the legacy of early childhood education and, in particular, the last 20 years. As well as adding new detail to the section on pioneers, we have included three more figures whose contribution to early childhood education deserves celebration: Alec Clegg, Loris Malaguzzi and Chris Athey. The imagined dialogues themselves have also changed. Our opening and closing conversations have been revised, reflecting the changing times and our current perspectives on the issues we discuss. Conversations featuring Robert Owen, Susan Isaacs, Johann Pestalozzi, Jean Piaget, Friedrich Froebel and Rudolf Steiner have been revised and updated. Three new conversations have been added: Alec Clegg's work on policy for creativity is highlighted in Conversation 5 with Peter Clough; Susan Isaacs, Maria Montessori and Margaret McMillan are imagined in Conversation 6 discussing aspects of childcare policy which dominated debate in 2012–2013; Conversation 8 sees Charlotte Mason talking with Cathy Nutbrown about children's rights and early education. We chose to add these new conversations because they provide an opportunity to consider the impacts of policy on creativity, children's rights and provision and because we feel that these issues have come more urgently to the fore in the last five years.

The final section of the book examines eight themes, first by reflecting back on history and then by considering current related policy. We have added an additional theme in this edition and so conclude the book with a final discussion on professional development and training for nursery teachers and other professionals working with young children.

'What is early education for?'

This question of what education is 'for' must have been in the minds of many of the figures who feature in this book. At the same time they were probably driven by a profound belief in the capacity of education to bring about change.

So what, then, is early education for? For us, in the spirit of Vygotsky's theory of learning, learning is about relationships, and in the early years relationships are key. This is why the central role of the parent in a child's development and learning is vital, much as Mason described. Young children are full of drive to discover the potential within themselves and the world around them, and relationships support discovery.

In this book we look back at the work of the past and examine present policies, practice and research in order better to understand what is happening now and to be equipped with a better understanding of ideas which may come in the future. It was in 1953 that L.P. Hartley wrote in *The Go-Between* 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there'. The past may well be a foreign country but, as we know, travellers to other countries often learn something new, collect an interesting artefact, a different recipe, a new idea, bring something back which changes their lives, even just a little. Look at the past and we see our present, and perhaps our future, through new lenses and, as Comenius wrote in the 1600s:

We are all citizens of one world, we are all of one blood. To hate a man because he was born in another country, because he speaks a different language, or because he takes a different view on this subject or that, is a great folly. Desist, I implore you, for we are all equally human. ... Let us have but one end in view, the welfare of humanity; and let us put aside all selfishness in considerations of language, nationality, or religion. (Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, 1649)

Different views and practices may be foreign to us, but understanding how they came to be puts us in a position to understand, or to challenge.

As we were writing this book we have constantly asked each other 'What would Susan Isaacs say about that?' or 'How would Pestalozzi have responded to this?' But we suggest that Christian Schiller was right to urge a focus on the future when he said:

... there have been great men and women whose vision and action have inspired a generation: Robert Owen, Friedrich Froebel, in our own time Margaret McMillan and others. But they pass away, and their ideas pass away with them unless these ideas are fashioned into new forms which reflect new circumstances and stand the test of new practices in the contemporary scene.

The pioneers take such ideas and refashion and temper them in their daily work in school. Patiently, day after day, week after week and year after year they make the pathway from the past through the present towards the future.

(Schiller, 1951: xvii)

The important thing in early childhood education is not what Susan Isaacs, or Charlotte Mason, or Katherine Bathurst might have said... Rather, the important thing is what those who live with, or work with and for young children in our present times and settings, actually say and do. The important thing is that the new pioneers, those working in early childhood settings and elsewhere in the pursuit of the best provision for young children's learning and care, take these ideas into the future and make them their own. The task, then, becomes less a question of counting up quotations or learning dates than of each practitioner discovering the meaning and value of historical ideas as they are realised in their own practices. There is no better tribute to those who have gone before than to remould, revisit and revise their ideas for a new today.

'So who needs history?'

We suggest that we need to understand the history of early childhood education because it provides a 'rootedness' to our work. It means we are building our work on solid ground and travelling along well-trodden paths. We can be inspired by some whose ideas came – as it were – before their time but yet were not reticent in articulating or realising their ideas. History can remind us that it is worth working for the things we believe in, and the study of history shows how important it is to record ideas and practices for those who follow to ponder.

With burgeoning development in the field of early childhood education and care, and new interest in alternative approaches to early years provision internationally, there is a danger that an understanding of the histories and legacies on which present-day provision for care and education is built might be allowed to slip away. There is the potential, amidst constant and persistent policy changes, that those whose work involves a concern with early childhood education will have fewer and fewer opportunities to ask where ideas began, how ideas and practices have developed and what roots lie beneath present-day practices and philosophical ideas.

This book traces the work of some pioneers of early childhood education. It provides brief biographies and critical insights into their work and compares their principles and practices to those of others past and present. The book takes an innovative and accessible approach to the histories, philosophies and experiences of early childhood education over the years, and gives necessary, meaningful detail about individual educators

and contributors to the field in order to help readers understand how contributions and developments in the past have created routes to present thinking and practice. We then work with these pioneers' ideas and hold them up to interrogation in the light of twenty-first-century life, testing them to see what such thinkers and practitioners might still have to offer the field of early childhood education and care today.

In this way, the book offers four things:

- An historical overview of the development of some key ideas and practices in early childhood education
- A series of biographical accounts of 27 key contributors to the field, with brief summaries of their major achievements and key texts
- An exploration of the ways in which their individual ideas compare with others through imagined conversations based on their writings and our own interpretations of their work
- An analysis of ways in which certain common themes can be seen in both early writings and current practices, and an exploration of how the ideas of key pioneers of the past might be interpreted and incorporated in modern-day early childhood provision.

Part 1

A Short History of Early Childhood Education

The legacy of history

We begin this book with a short chronology of the developments in thinking and practice which have taken place in the history of early childhood education in the UK. We have identified key moments and key international figures in history who have, in different ways, influenced thinking, research, policy and practice in the development of education and care for the youngest children. In beginning with an overview of early years developments from the 1600s to present day we have created a foundation for the rest of the book with our view of the contributions of individual women and men who, in one way or another, made their distinctive mark on the development of early childhood education in the UK.

History is what humanity creates, and policy itself is *realised* by people; as Hesse (1939) reminds us, history helps to generate a concept of humanity. In the sense that people *are* the history-makers, early childhood educators make both history and policy, though in another sense the inheritance of history is something from which they stand apart and the impact of policy is something over which they may feel they have no control. But, as Merleau-Ponty (1962: ix) has it, 'although we are born into a [pre-existing] world, we [yet] have the task of creating it...'

One of the aims of this book is to help readers to consider current policies and practices in early childhood education through the lens of history; it seeks to use history as a means of understanding present states and challenges of early childhood education, and as a tool for informing the shape of early childhood education in the future – that is, in our *own* lives and careers.

Of course, we could say that nothing is new, and ideas simply recur; perhaps most topical at the end of the twentieth century was the example of the planned re-introduction of 'Payment by Results', signalled in a DfEE Green Paper (DfEE, 1999), and, again, a trial of a new policy of Payment by Results was introduced in 2012¹ whereby Children's Centres were to be rewarded for the results they achieved in effective early intervention programmes and family support. This policy echoed the 'Payment by Results' in the Revised Code of 1862, where the notion of raising standards through the use of testing was introduced and teachers' pay was linked to the achievements of their pupils. This is not so much a case of history repeating itself but perhaps more of an example of how events, developments and ideas can rhyme, or chime, or echo over time.

This book is structured to encourage critical engagement with historical ideas and developments, reflecting on influences on early childhood education, issues of policy development and implementation, and the impact of research on policy. The development of early childhood education provision, and the key figures in that development, form the starting points for considering where early childhood education has come from and where present policies 'fit', or do not fit, with the lessons of history. The ways in which childhood has been constructed throughout recent history is also a topic which helps to inform the critique of policy which has moved from the central aim of 'nurturing childhood' to a situation where 'raising educational achievement' is the main goal. Central to this argument about the shift in priorities of policy in early childhood education and care is the change in language and the new terminologies imposed year after year upon early years provision.

Finally, we are aware that there is no single history; it needs always to be seen from multiple perspectives, viewed through different lenses. In understanding what has happened in the UK, it is important, too, to look at international developments in early childhood education and the many influences from figures throughout history working around the world.

Early childhood education in the UK: a brief history

During the mid-1700s there were moves in political and social spheres to provide some form of education for young children. 'Monitorial' schools were set up from the end of the 1700s by the Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, and the New Lanark worksite elementary school was set up by Robert Owen in the early 1800s. The National Society was founded on 16 October 1811, its aim

¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/delivery/surestart/a0076712/sure-start-children's-centres>