

The Early Years: Lost in Translation?

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Be the change that you want to see in the world.
(Gandhi)

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Abstract

This thesis asks two questions:

- 1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?**
- 2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?**

Recent years have seen a growing national focus on the Early Years of education, centring on government policy. With this focus has come a wide range of opinion as to what constitutes effective Early Years practice and how successful current policies are in achieving appropriate provision for young children.

This thesis first introduces the central themes of policy and lived experience and sets out the rationale for the study. This is followed by an overview of the contribution of six key historical figures in early childhood education. The thesis moves on to discuss policy developments in England since the Plowden report in 1967.

The thesis outlines and justifies the life historical methods for the study which involved interviews with eight professionals in order to understand how policy had impacted on their lives and work. Analysis of the data includes the stories of all eight participants and my own story as an Early Years teacher. The experiences of the eight participants were analysed to produce five themes: *Personal qualities; Teaching- an art not a process?; Respectful or subversive teachers?; Views of childhood; Resilience.*

These are discussed in the light of the participants' experiences and the literature on effective proactive practice and policy. This discussion

illustrates professional and personal struggles to 'fit' policy to children's needs through appropriate practice.

The thesis concludes with an update on policy since the completion of fieldwork and a conclusion, returning to the research questions, which shows two things: first that – so far as the participants in this study are concerned - there is a mismatch between policy development and lived experience, and second, that some Early Years professionals develop government guidance and policy to contribute to a better understanding of Early Years practice.

Preface:

Early Years policy in the UK: A 'Tower of Babel'?

There seem to be multiple viewpoints as to how working with the youngest children is interpreted. This is manifest in several ways which will become clear. As Brock points out, early years education 'is not and should not' be seen as separate. It is a positive move to see early years education as a subject specialism, just as maths or science are, but not to separate early years pedagogy from the overview of learning and education. It is now eight years since the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) was published and subsequently became a statutory part of the National Curriculum, but the messages nationally and locally are still mixed.

The mixed messages are compounded by the way language is used in policy, guidance and training. This gives rise to the vision of the 'Tower of Babel', as the tower was built in order to unify humanity in a single language to glorify God, but it actually glorified an achievement of humanity, thus annoying God who subsequently gave the world many languages resulting in lack of understanding between races.

Those working in Early Years and education in general, have different languages that control their professional lives.

A 'Tower of Babel' - how language is used

The expression 'top down pressure' has become a familiar one in schools, especially to the teachers of the youngest children. It can be seen to have two levels of meaning. Most obviously it is the pressure felt by those teaching the youngest children that they have to achieve more with them to meet certain targets. But also there is a feeling that those in power,

whether that be within settings, locally or nationally, are more knowledgeable. This often leads to teaching in the Early Years that is not 'appropriate'.

Whilst this is a simple summing up of what is perceived to be happening, one of the aims of this research is to reflect on why this might be. I have quite deliberately repeated the word 'appropriate'. A quick scan through the 'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' (QCA 2000) shows that this word is often used. And, presumably, what is meant by 'appropriate' is deemed to be understood by all those reading it. There is an analogy here with the use of the word 'assumption' in the 'Foundation Stage Profile Handbook' (QCA 2002) (Chapter Three). Before considering what is understood by those working with policy and guidance it is worth reflecting on the type of language used to write it.

In an article entitled 'Eduspeak and the thought police- reclaiming the discourse' (2003), Kelly wrote of his concern that the language we are expected to use to talk about education manipulates the way we think about it. He cites this as one way in which education is controlled centrally. He feels we must give serious attention to:

The control of the language of education and consequent restrictions on the range and scope of the educational debate
(Kelly, 2003. p5)

For me, such words as 'assessment', 'research', 'theory', 'pedagogy', 'evidence', 'reflective', 'appropriate', 'progress', 'expectations', and so on the list is endless, are all used freely and understood differently depending on the background and experience of those using them. They are, in fact, words to be used with caution.

The theme of the use of language will be a consistent one throughout this work.

The way some educationalists and government ministers 'sloganise' things - consider expressions such as 'hard to reach' families, 'parental partnership', 'under achievers'- colours the way people are thought and felt about . This will be true of the way I write this, and ultimately unavoidable to some extent. How this can have profound effects on what we are in life will be considered further in Chapter Seven- The Personal Qualities. In my original research proposal, I included this statement,

The writer cannot control how the reader will read what he or she writes. The best that the writer can do is to write rationally and efficiently, fluently using the resources and capabilities at her or his disposal. (Heap, J.L. In Hester, S. and Francis, D. eds 2000. p 81)

Choice of words

Words, their meanings, what is understood by them and the context in which they are used can be at the root of misunderstandings in the language of teaching and learning, particularly in the Early Years. This point will be examined in more detail in the literature review when how guidance and policy is written, read and understood is discussed.

I need to be clear here how I intend to use words throughout this research.

The Foundation Stage, latterly The Early Years Foundation Stage

I have never been entirely comfortable with the term *Foundation Stage* and when it was introduced I preferred to keep my title as 'Early Years Co-ordinator' even though I was offered the option to change 'Early Years' to 'Foundation Stage'. I was particularly uncomfortable in my situation at the time as I was in a school where there was no Nursery, so therefore not a

complete 'Foundation Stage'. I wanted to keep 'Early Years' to highlight this important age group in a large primary school.

I think that, apart from the fact that the title seemed a little contrived, my discomfort centred on the interpretations and misinterpretations. With this new 'stage' covering two years, it wasn't always going to be easy to implement as not every setting, particularly in schools, catered for the whole group. This would immediately fragment interpretation. The use of the word 'stage' had already become synonymous with assessments and levels as a result of the National Curriculum introduction of 'Key Stages'. Throughout this research, the period between birth and five will be called 'Early Years'.

Practitioner

This term first came into common usage with the introduction of the Foundation Stage (2000). It was defined in the 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage' (QCA 2000) as 'the adults who work with children in the settings, whatever their qualifications' (op cit p1). For me it is a difficult word as it isn't specifically about developing early teaching and learning. It is odd that, with the curriculum emphasis in the Foundation Stage, a more specific term wasn't coined. I have always preferred 'teacher', just as parents are often defined as the child's first teachers. I then wondered if this word may be too loaded with qualifications, and become inappropriate. My favoured term then became Early Years Educator. I discovered that Brock (2001) had also been questioning titles:

However the phrase 'early years educators' is increasingly used to encompass a range of people who educate young children - teachers in schools, in nursery classes and nursery schools, playgroup leaders, private day-care managers and nursery nurses -

this does not mark out 'teacher' professionalism in an early years context as distinct.
(Brock 2001 p 2)

The term 'educator' became more widely known from the Rumbold Report (DES 1990. Outlined above) where it was stated:

Education for the under fives can happen in a wide variety of settings, and can be supplied by a wide range of people. Some will be professional teachers; many will not. This report is not aimed simply at professional teachers; we have therefore used the term 'educator' throughout to describe an adult working with the under fives, unless our meaning is more limited.
(DES 1990 p ii)

After some reflection I decided to use the term 'teacher' in it's widest possible sense, including those who do not have Qualified Teacher Status, as I feel it more realistically reflects the work done by all in the Early Years. Indeed, the more documents we receive that follow the 'curriculum' line, the more 'teaching' is expected of those professionals working with young children. During this research, a new qualification for those working in the Early Years has been developed. The Early Years Professional Status, and the anomalies of it, will be discussed further in Chapter Seven - the Personal Qualities.

Setting

It is clear that early teaching and learning happens in various places other than the conventional school setting. Once the Foundation Stage Curriculum had been introduced this needed to be recognised and the term 'setting' became more common, but also leads to unhelpful divisions. Even within the Curriculum Guidance itself:

Throughout this booklet, we use the term **setting** to mean local authority nurseries, nursery centres, playgroups, pre-schools, accredited childminders in approved childminding networks, or

**schools in the independent, private or voluntary sectors, and maintained schools.
(QCA 2000. p1)**

This sounds all encompassing, but the front cover of the guidance reads that the document is for:

**Early years settings which receive nursery grant funding *and schools with nursery and reception aged children*
(my italics)**

The first statement here would have been enough: the italicised part creates a division.

The use of upper case

I will always use capital letters when referring to the Early Years, the Foundation Stage, Nursery or Reception. This is because these are important as names of stages that children pass through. It is interesting to note that, by and large, the Key Stages are usually given capital letters, whilst the Foundation Stage, though a statutory 'key stage', did not have them on the front of the original guidance (QCA 2000). More recently however, this has been rectified with the publication of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007). Perhaps this will alter perceptions?

The use of the words Nursery and Reception is increasingly problematic as, in theory, the two separate groups have not existed since 2000. With the introduction of the Foundation Stage the two became one. In practice though this was made complicated and for various reasons people either kept the two original words, or started to develop new titles such Foundation Stage One and Foundation Stage Two, or Lower and Upper Foundation Stage. All of which served to undermine the aim towards a cohesive stage.

Now that the stage is from birth to five, the problem is compounded.

Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis addresses two research questions:

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?
2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

I first take an historical perspective, then I consider the development of policy and guidance from 1967 to 2002. Interviews with eight Early Years professionals are then used to reflect on the impact these initiatives have had and whether they have led to better understanding of practice in the Early Years. Three themes are discussed based upon an initial analysis of the personal qualities of the participants: respect and subversion, views of childhood, and the concept of resilience. The thesis ends with an overview of developments to the present day, and returns to the question 'has guidance and policy contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice?'

Positionality

I approach this research with a particular, personal standpoint. The topic of this thesis, the *translation* of policy into practice and the subsequent impact of national policy on Early Years pedagogy and professionalism is something that has always been in the back of my mind, but over the last few years has become increasingly prominent in my thinking. My interest in early education started about half way through my teaching career (around 1988), though I always preferred working with younger children

and I was an Early Years Co-ordinator before I actually found myself teaching the youngest children full time.

It was only after I started working in what we now call the *Early Years Foundation Stage* [EYFS] (DfES 2007) that I began to crystallise my feelings into clear ideas. As a teacher, whatever the age group, I have always believed that children learn better by finding out and being independent - by making their own choices in learning. Throughout my career this view has earned me both praise and criticism, but I have always had satisfying results with the children I taught, in that the children achieved well in all areas of learning. By tracking my classes from Reception through to the end of Key Stage Two I could show the progress they had made in terms of results from what was then baseline assessment, through Key Stage One SATs, to end of Key Stage Two. What I lacked was firm grounding, in theoretical and research terms, for why I felt and worked as I did. I therefore found it difficult to argue and justify my teaching approach.

My quest to ground and clarify my thoughts led me to study for an MA in Early Childhood Education and it is from there that this further enquiry began to take shape in the form of these research questions:

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?
2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

In 2008, those who worked in the Early Years had been experiencing what appears to be unprecedented interest in the quality and standards of education in the early childhood education. This resurgence started with

the 'Desirable Learning Outcomes' in 1996 (SCAA 1996). At that point, after grappling with the National Curriculum (DES 1985) and trying to make it 'fit' the learning needs of young children, many working in Nursery and Reception classes were very excited and empowered. In my own setting we felt glad that we no longer had to reinterpret a curriculum that was designed for older children. And, whilst not a curriculum, the 'Desirable Learning Outcomes' did outline more appropriate targets for young children. But, as subsequent developments fell into place in the following ten years to the present day, what could have been a positive move has seemingly become a double edged sword (Burgess- Macey and Rose. 1997). This claim will be further discussed later in the thesis.

Talking about early childhood education can invoke as much passionate belief in some as might a conversation about religion or politics.

Discussing early childhood education can produce the same missionary zeal with all parties determined to win the argument. I went through the 'zealot' stage before I reached the professional discussion stage and it was a salutary experience. It then became intriguing to me to find out *why* people felt as they did, and *what basis* they had for such definite views.

Early Years became my area of specialism in 1990 and I met more and more people who felt and thought as I did. It became clear to me that there was a great deal of discomfort and a 'rift' seemed to be developing in schools between those who worked in Early Years (ages 3 -5) and those in Key Stages One and Two (ages 5 - 11 (DES 1985). There was fear of 'top down' pressure and concerns that children were to be subject to inappropriate expectations. The effects of the National Curriculum on work in the Early Years have been well documented (David, Curtis and

Siraj- Blatchford 1992; David and Nutbrown 1995; Soler and Miller, 2003; Soler and Paige- Smith, 2005). The anxieties of the time are perhaps best summed up by David *et al.* (1992):

Those of us who have, for many years, worked in the early years field know all too well the effects of the practice and expectations in the junior/ middle phase upon the earlier stages of education.
(David *et al.* 1992, p3)

Setting the scene

Professionals also perceived a lack of support from senior managers or their local authorities. The publication of what became known as 'The Three Wise Men Report' (Alexander *et al.* 1992) gave emphasis to making recommendations for the curriculum organisation and classroom practice for children in Key Stage One and above, but ignored Early Years. This fuelled the perceived lack of support and resulted in David and her colleagues writing what they referred to as a 'complimentary 'sister' guide, to be considered in conjunction with that of the 'three wise men' (David *et al.* 1992, p3) Discomfort around policy was happening in the form of a 'low level rumble', the publication of the National Curriculum (DES 1988, see Chapter Three) caused those in Early Years to make a case for appropriate recognition. The 'Desirable Learning Outcomes' (SCAA 1996) were not perfect, and the campaign continued because:

It was seen by many as an attempt by government to rationalise the early childhood curriculum across a diverse range of settings. As part of the process of creating a cohesive, centralised system, a national inspection scheme for early childhood settings was introduced and linked to funding. A formalised, centralised system of assessment was also introduced (QCA, 1998). These centralised features added to the pressures felt by practitioners in early childhood settings, as many found that it conflicted with their views of childhood and how the early childhood curricula should be conducted. This in turn led to considerable criticism from the early childhood community regarding the prescriptive nature of the

learning outcomes. It also resulted in pressure to make links with the National Curriculum in primary schools.
(Soler and Miller 2003 p. 61)

Somewhat ironically, the rumble increased to what might be called an 'audible roar' with the introduction of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage in 2000 (QCA, 2000). Soler and Miller (2003) summed this up as being for these reasons:

- A stepped sequential approach to learning was reinforced,
- It is organised through externally imposed 'learning areas' linked to the subject areas of the National Curriculum,
- The view of children's development underlying the model is that learning takes place in a straightforward sequential manner, which can be assessed and itemised at predetermined levels,
- In structuring the curriculum and its assessment in this manner, the policy makers have made assumptions about where the levels begin and end for all children,
- Specific skills and knowledge have been determined.

Discomfort arose because, as Soler and Miller put it:

From the early childhood community's viewpoint, the guidance for early childhood stems from a model that has been framed by people who stand outside of children's experiences and the teaching process. They are seen to be concerned more about what education is for rather than what the experience of education might entail.

(Soler and Miller 2003 p61)

What might have been a step forward for work in Early Years teaching and learning caused problems because, 'the early learning goals were shaped by the need for pupils to attain clearly prescribed outcomes' (Soler and Miller 2003 p 62).

The youngest children have remained high profile nationally. During the second half of 2006 the impact of the 'Independent review of the teaching of early reading', also known as *The Rose Review* (DfES 2006), was felt in settings, with the idea that children should be working on a systematic phonics program when they are five years old. This caused a public

debate resulting in letters to the press and a high profile campaign to change the current policy (these will be discussed further in Chapter Eight).

The Childcare Act (HMSO 2006), and The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) have also begun to take hold. Each of these major policy initiatives is still having a profound effect on work in early childhood education. Their reception and interpretation is an integral part of this research.

The opening statement of the Childcare Act states that it is a bill to:

Make provision about the powers and duties of local authorities and other bodies in England in relation to the improvement of the well-being of young children; to make provision about the powers and duties of local authorities in England and Wales in relation to the provision of childcare and the provision of information to parents and other persons; to make provision about the regulation and inspection of childcare provision in England; and for connected purposes.

(HMSO 2006. p1)

This statement gives a very clear and strong governmental recognition of the importance of early childhood and how the provision made for the care and education of the youngest children must be appropriate and supportive of their well being. I will reflect on this statement again in later chapters.

This thesis examines the views of eight experienced teachers who have specialised in Early Years work to see if their perspectives and experiences hold any clues as to why there are such definite standpoints, and why there is a sense of growing professional 'angst' amongst those working with the youngest children. The thesis will expose elements of this concern and how they have been addressed in different ways in other studies. For example, is the fact that the Early Years workforce is made

up mainly of women, a reason why they feel under pressure, or even threatened, (Hargreaves and Hopper, 2006), or is it more a matter of a lack of training in management skills (Rodd 2007)?

Structure of the thesis

This section gives an outline of the structure of the thesis. Chapter Two gives a critical overview of relevant historical events and literature.

Against the background of this, Chapter Three critically examines national policy and guidance from 1967 to 2002. Chapter Four outlines and justifies the Methodology used for the study and Chapter Five describes how these interviews were analysed thus leading to, the case studies of participant's experiences in Chapter Six. Chapters Seven identifies and discusses the personal qualities identified from the analysis of the participants. Finally Chapter Eight examines the current situation, first bringing the policy story up to date and ultimately concluding the thesis by returning to the original research questions. Bearing in mind the impossibility of generalising from the experiences of eight women, the thesis offers the suggestion that despite national investment in Early Years teaching and learning, without a firm underpinning of true understanding and pedagogy, there is a mismatch between policy and good Early Years practice.

This chapter has provided a brief overview and introduction to the thesis.

The next chapter, Chapter Two gives a critical overview of historical developments which set the scene for the study.

Chapter Two

Review of the literature: An Historical Perspective

Introduction

In this chapter I will outline the contribution of key educationalists from the past, whose ideas can still be seen to influence work with young children today. An historical perspective is fundamental to this thesis as, to different degrees, the work of earlier pioneers has had an impact on policy and practice in the Early Years today.

The review

The literature review of this thesis is in two parts- firstly, the historical perspective, and secondly, the development of policy (Chapter Three). In keeping with the title of this thesis, 'The Early Years: Lost in Translation', the historical perspective must be examined first in order to identify those practices and approaches which may have been 'lost in translation' in Early Years policy and practice.

The selection of work by historical figures who have contributed to our understanding of work in the early years was not a difficult task because several are recognised to be influences on modern practice. The Early Years Foundation Stage document (DfES 2007) contains key principles that reflect both historical theory and contemporary thinking. The Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) details these principles as those "which guide the work of all early years practitioners" (DfES 2007 p5). These principles encompass the notions that- every child is a competent learner; children need loving and secure relationships to become strong and independent; the environment is key to development

and learning; and children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates (DfES 2007 p5).

My reason for choosing these six historical figures: Friedrich Froebel, Margaret McMillan, Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, Susan Isaacs and Lev Vygotsky, is that, to an educated eye, their work can be seen reflected in the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007). Also it is these names that are most often heard on current training courses, or in specialist publications. Examples of this are- the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Piaget have influenced 'The Early Years Foundation Stage' (DfES 2007); many Early Years settings use the name 'Montessori' in their title and consider that they use her approach to early learning; the current emphasis on the value of outdoor learning has led to the names of McMillan and Isaacs becoming more familiar. Froebelian traditions are kept alive by the colleges that bear his name in London. That not all Early Years professionals have in depth knowledge of the theorists so that they can see the underpinning connections will be a point made in this work. This literature review, then, focuses primarily on the work of six key figures in the history of early childhood education. It consists of a short resume of the work of each of these figures and is included as background to the thesis as a whole and a foundation for the review of recent policy in Chapter Three. As I see it these great thinkers and practitioners should have had huge influence on the development of policy and strategy in the Early Years because their ideas are still quoted today. I am interested in this thesis in exploring how their influence is manifested in present-day policy.

The timeline in Figure 2.1 shows how the theorists overlapped each other chronologically, and thus the potential for their work to influence others in the group.

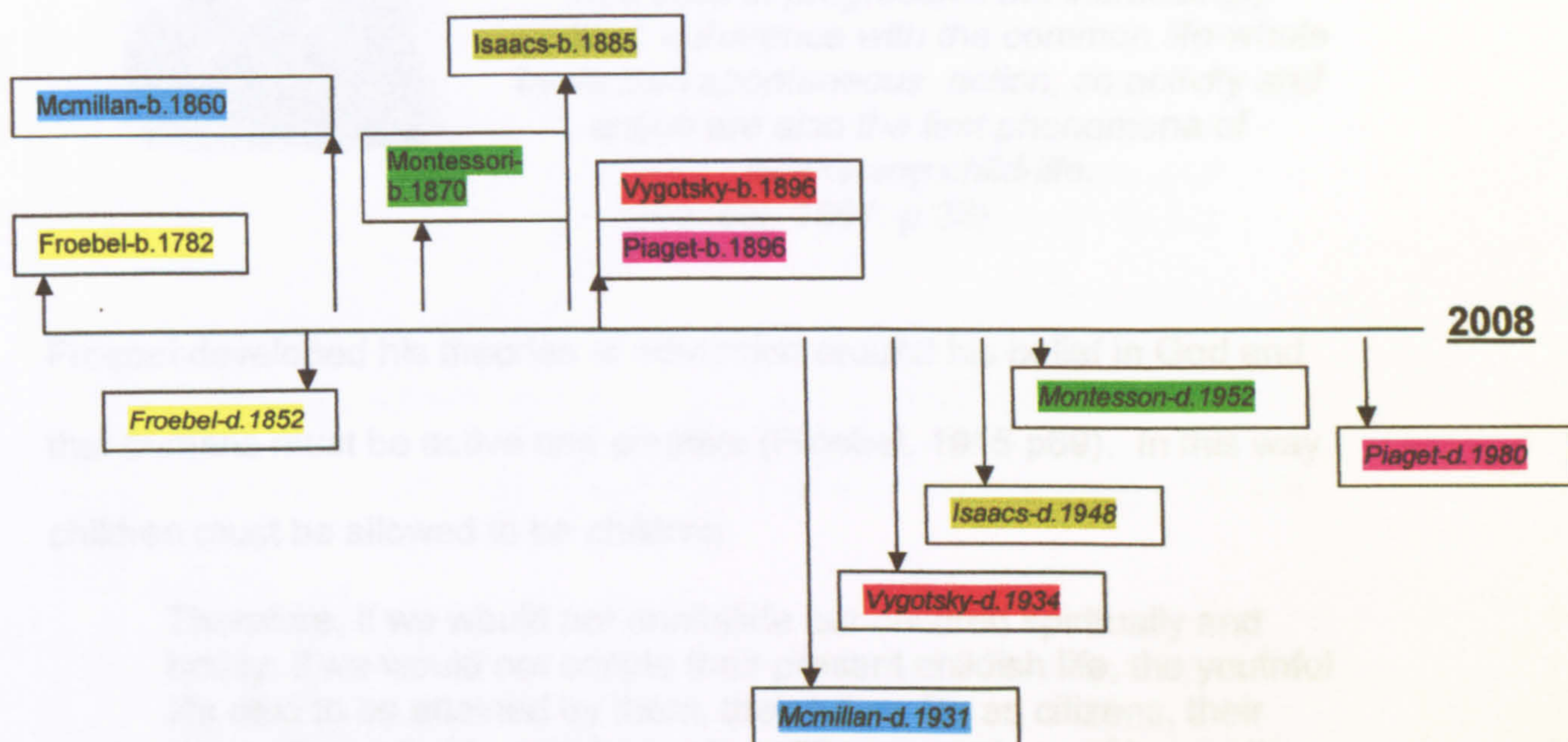


Figure 2.1 Timeline to show the dates of birth (above the line) and death (below the line) of the six key figures featured in this chapter.

With the exception of Froebel, some of the most influential theorists in the world of early education were contemporaries of each other. Froebel was in turn a pupil of and influenced by Pestalozzi (1746-1827) (Froebel, 1915 p54).

This overview does not aim to provide in-depth analysis or discussion of their work, but rather the aim is to identify key points and contributions to early childhood education.



Friedrich Froebel: born 1782- died 1852

As the newborn child, like a ripe kernel of seed corn dropped from the mother plant, has life in itself, and, also like the kernel, develops life from itself in progressive but increasingly spiritual coherence with the common life-whole by its own spontaneous action, so activity and action are also the first phenomena of awakening child-life.

(Froebel, 1897. p 23)

Froebel developed his theories of education around his belief in God and that humans must be active and creative (Froebel, 1915 p69). In this way, children must be allowed to be children:

Therefore, if we would not annihilate our children spiritually and bodily, if we would not cripple their present childish life, the youthful life next to be attained by them, their future life as citizens, their future domestic life, and their whole life as members of humanity, we must in the education and training of our children be faithful to the requirements of their individual nature, as well as in accord and coherence with the present stage of human development, which is conditioned by and proceeds from the development of the whole world, the collective all-life.

(Froebel, 1897. p 16)

Fundamental to this philosophy is the importance of play to education (Froebel 1899), and that the child is central to all. In this way children are not underestimated or considered not yet ready for concepts (Froebel 1899 p4). To encourage the development of concepts, children are encouraged to be creative and practical. Play thus becomes hugely important as it is creative and helps children to understand their place in the world:

Play to man, especially in childhood, is a mirror both of thoughts and feelings, and of surroundings. In childhood it is emphatically a mirror of the innate need for life and occupation.

(Froebel, 1897. p 173)

Although Froebel believed that learning started from the child and centred on the interests of the child, this did not mean that there was not a structure to his methods (Froebel 1899 p1, 1915 p 69). He developed a system of 'Gifts'. The first of these is the ball:

But above all, for the freest exercise of his activity he prefers the ball, which can be shown to be to him the unifying centre and representative of all which he seeks as complementary to the impulses of his nature towards development.
(Froebel 1897, p 172)

From this simple object much learning can be gained including "size, colour, number, material, and degree of hardness and elasticity" (Froebel, 1897. p 174).

The second 'gift' takes the idea of the ball further by presenting the child with "the hard ball or globe" (Froebel, translated by Jarvis, 1897. p 181) because it is the opposite of the original soft ball and will advance the child's thinking. Froebel was very clear that there must be progression through the playthings:

It is clear that this progressive presentation of playthings is in so many ways in accordance with nature, that it gives the true means of development. It is equally clear- and, indeed, is expressed in the phrase "in accordance with nature"- that the progression is not arbitrary, but necessarily determined, as it includes both likeness and contrariety, both progress and constancy.
(Froebel, 1897. p 181)

Each plaything builds upon the qualities of its predecessor, but does not replace it. So, after the globe comes the third gift, the cube with its introduction of surfaces and edges, the cube is then presented as divided into eight equal oblongs (the fourth gift). The fifth gift "consists of twenty-one whole or undivided constituent cubes, of three divided into halves, and three others divided into quarters by the diagonals, and these together

constitute one main cube, consisting of twenty- seven small cubes.”

(Froebel, 1897. p 211)

Although his theories appeared very child centred, this development of a system eventually led to criticisms that Froebel had over formalised teaching and learning. Weston feels that what Froebel actually intended though was to form:

...a bridge between his general and unsystematic philosophical 'theory' and a radical new educational practice, which sensitively but systematically directed the child's activity, thought and imagination onto interaction with the physical world.
(Weston,1998. p 18)

Froebel's Key Contributions

- Play and creativity were fundamental to his philosophy
- The child's imagination should be stimulated in a progressive way that enables links of learning to be made



Margaret Mcmillan: born 1860- died 1931

The child depends on his toys. He depends on his environment. He depends on these because through them the sub-conscious life is nourished. And the important things for him are not the things which concern the conscious life, but the subconscious. The consciousness of any one person is small at any given moment. The word we speak, the thought we have just had is not us. It is a ripple on the top of us.

Below is the self- the dark sea. The child is less conscious than we. As has been already remarked many things escape his notice, but he does not escape them. Impressions flow in on him and form his sub- consciousness. And from this sub-conscious life he draws the materials of his thoughts.

(McMillan 1900, p 23)

Clearly important here is a belief in the importance of understanding child development and how the environment and experiences make an impression on the child.

Fundamental to McMillan's belief was that attention must be paid to physical development. And this must be supported correctly, "So that it is necessary to consider what the sequence of growth is, and to follow it." (McMillan 1900, p 29). She pointed out the disservice done to five year old children when they start school and they no longer have the freedom to "run about nimbly", but have to give their "lower limbs a most unwelcome rest!" (McMillan 1900, p 28). Also noted is that the fine hand control needed for holding a pencil and writing is not always present at five years old (McMillan, 1900. p 29).

Margaret trained as a governess while her sister spent time nursing their sick grandmother. Both women became Christian socialists and this led them to be passionate about the physical and intellectual welfare of children from slum areas (Macmillan 1900). To this end the sisters

opened their first school clinic in 1908 (Macmillan 1917 p 43) and this incorporated an infant clinic in January 1912.

Their experiences of running a clinic showed them that children, “suffered from lack of experience in the open, and of the open” (McMillan 1930, p3). In this they felt like Froebel (1899 p221) that there should be the ‘Nursery Child Garden’ (McMillan 1930, p3). Macmillan also took forward Froebel’s ideas of developing on skills achieved, through the ‘gifts’ in her style of teaching. An example of this would be the teaching of colours (McMillan 1930, p 72). What she saw, in common with Froebel (Froebel 1899 p6), was that in all learning, it is experience that is key and any direct teaching, or ‘instruction’, must be rooted in this:

The successive steps by which children are led on to make new efforts and new achievements have to be planned by adults- since, for very young children as for intelligent animals, this very planning is too advanced a process to be voluntarily undertaken. What is important is not the giving of instruction, but the preparation of a suitable provocative environment, an environment where new chances are made possible.
(McMillan 1930, p 78)

Margaret McMillan’s Key Contributions

- Continuation of the theories of Froebel
- The health and well being of children was important
- Education should be broad and based on the children, not just narrow training



Maria Montessori: born 1870 - died 1952

We know only too well the sorry spectacle of the teacher who, in the ordinary schoolroom, must pour certain cut and dried facts into the heads of the scholars. In order to succeed in this barren task, she finds it necessary to discipline her pupils into immobility and to force their attention. Prizes and punishments are every-ready and efficient aids to the

master who must force into a given attitude of mind and body those who are condemned to be his listeners.

(Montessori 1912, p 22)

Maria Montessori trained as a doctor at a time when women were not expected to study or take up a profession (Kramer 1976). Her specialism was paediatrics and she became interested in children who did not respond to conventional schooling and were sent to asylums. She came to realise that it was not the children that had problems, rather it was the nature of the learning environment and the approaches of the teachers that were inappropriate. She learnt this after spending time observing the children:

Often the education of children consists in pouring into their intelligence the intellectual content of school programmes. And often these programmes have been compiled in the official department of education, and their use is imposed by law upon the teacher and the child.

(Montessori 1912, p 28)

By observing the children, Montessori was able to provide them with the learning and experiences that suited their needs (Montessori 1912, p12). She believed that the best and most effective learning occurred when the senses were used. In this way children were encouraged to feel and understand shapes, or get to know about colours, before they had to learn

the technical names for them. This meant that the children had a need to find out the names, and wanted to.

Montessori was also an early advocate of what is now fashionably called 'assessment for learning' (DfES 2003). She saw that appropriate and interesting learning would inherently reward the child, thus allowing satisfaction and good behaviour, narrow teaching and inappropriate expectations would not work in her opinion:

To-day we hold the pupils in school, restricted by those instruments so degrading to body and spirit, the desk—and material prizes and punishments. Our aim in all this is to reduce them to the discipline of immobility and silence,—to lead them,—where? Far too often toward no definite end.
(Montessori 1912, p 27)

Montessori also saw that narrow, adult led teaching gave way to children being seen as inferior and in some way deficient. This in turn meant that children were subjected to games and 'foolish stories'. Chapter Two of her book (Montessori 1912), describes how she realised through her work with the children in asylums that she was bringing them to a higher academic standard than some 'normal' children

Her understanding that children were not in any way deficient or inferior simply because they were very young (Montessori 1933) showed in the way she developed learning environments. For her it was very important that children had furniture, tools and resources that were suitable and that the children could use in ways that suited and satisfied them, and that they had easy access to the outdoors (Montessori 1912, pp 81-82). This attention to detail included a belief that all equipment and utensils should be child sized which extended to the equipment provided.

Montessori thought that early childhood teachers should:

- Provide real tools that work (sharp knives, good scissors, woodworking and cleaning tools)

Keep materials and equipment accessible to the children, organised so they can find and put away what they need

- Create beauty and order in the classroom
(Mooney, 2000 p25)

Even the most formal of settings today have been influenced by the ideas of Maria Montessori. Many will not realise that, for example, that she pioneered child-sized furniture in Early Years settings. The interpretations of Montessori's work are interesting to note in the light of this thesis because three things have happened. Firstly Montessori's ideas are used so habitually that their origins are often not realised or acknowledged; secondly her name can be applied to any setting as a marketing ploy or simply out of naivety, but what actually happens within may bear little resemblance to Montessori theory or practice, and thirdly 'purist' Montessori settings run by trained staff find it difficult to meet the statutory expectations of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, particularly with regard to the teaching of early reading and writing, and this can meet with criticism.

Montessori's Key Contributions

- A narrow, imposed curriculum does not lead to effective learning.
There is a danger that children can be seen as deficient, whereas it is actually the curriculum that doesn't meet their needs
- Close observation of a child is key to finding out the learning needs

- **The environment, both physical and emotional, inside and out, must be appropriate and set up so that the children can be independent and not held back or restricted. They must be able to explore.**

Dr Susan Isaacs: born 1885- died 1948



In some respects Susan was a pioneer and, as such, encountered some opposition and even enmity, but to most people she appeared a friend. Many pioneers, in their deep concern for a cause, lose sight of the individual; that was something Susan never did and for that reason she made few enemies.

(Gardner, 1969. p11).

Drummond writes that, "Isaacs was in no way a conventional infant school teacher" (Drummond, 1999. p3). For example, her book 'Intellectual Growth in Young Children' (1930) includes many observations of the children that attended the Malting House School from 1924 to 1927. The reason for this was to watch:

...the spontaneous cognitive behaviour of a group of children under conditions designed to further free inquiry and free discussion (Isaacs, 1930. p6)

This may then:

...reveal facts which would scarcely yield to the direct assault of test or experiment (Isaacs, 1930. p6)

The importance of play was central to the work of Isaacs. Experiences with a range of materials and situations were seen as particularly valuable in supporting and developing learning. By observing and promoting this play, Isaacs felt that teachers would be better able to teach (Gardner 1969 p 58).

Her training as a psychoanalyst also meant that she understood the importance of children's emotional needs. Not only was it important to

observe the child in "free enquiry", it was also important to consider "*the meaning of the child's experiences to himself*" (Isaacs, 1948, p. 84). This understanding that any sort of learning is difficult unless emotional needs are met is clear in Isaac's writings about her time at The Malting House School in Cambridge.

Her records show that she was interested in everything that the children did or said even if some of what she saw, or allowed to happen, challenged conventional thinking. Some of it still does today:

What could be more admirable than the courage and decision of the little girl of five and a half who, distressed by the sight of a cat playing with a live mouse, ran to get a chopper, seized the furious cat firmly by the scruff of the neck, killed the mouse with a blow of the chopper, and flung the cat down again saying, "There! You can have it now!" (Isaacs, 1930. p 165)

That children need to live through their own childhood, and not one that is moulded for them by educational constraints and ideas is reminiscent of Montessori's ideals (Montessori 1912, p23). Also like Montessori, Isaacs was a passionate believer in the value of observation. She realised that it was important to apply increasing "psychological knowledge of *how* the child learns" to understand "*what* he needs to learn" and "what experiences the school should bring to him" (Isaacs, 1930. 21). However, she felt that Montessori directed her work too much towards a narrow curriculum. This is interesting as it would seem to contradict what Montessori herself felt. They both agreed young children should learn through real experiences, but Isaacs noted of Montessori:

...unfortunately, she has given her genius for devising technique to the narrow ends of scholastic subjects. In the exercises for practical life her humanity broke through the conventions of the

school; but even so, more for the purposes of practical necessity than for the purpose of knowledge.

To us, the direct interests of the child in the concrete processes in the world around him seem far more significant in themselves, and as a medium of education, than knowledge of the traditional 'subjects' of the school-room.
(Isaacs, 1930. p 21)

The importance of observation to inform teaching and learning is a legacy for present Early Years practice which gained prominence with the development of the Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2002). Interestingly some teachers in the Early Years expressed concern that they could have time to teach if they had to do observations as well (for example, Times Educational Supplement letters pages January 2003).

Isaac's Key Contributions

- Meeting the emotional needs of the individual is key to learning
- Observation as a key to understanding children's learning and planning adult intervention
- It is not appropriate to have a narrow focus on 'scholastic subjects'



Jean Piaget: born 1896- died 1980

If the child partly explains the adult, it can also be said that each period of his development partly explains the periods that follow.
(Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p3)

Piaget's theory was based on 'the child' and the belief that learning must be child centred. In this way he felt that a child must not be asked to do things that were developmentally beyond them at that point. He came to this conclusion from his interest in what 'learning' actually meant and involved and what 'reality' actually meant for the child (Piaget 1929. p1). From this interest Piaget developed stages of cognitive development, concepts still used as a general theory to understand learning today. Piaget did not see learning as something that happened either by the child exploring independently, or by being taught. He felt it was more dynamic than this and must be a combination of both these. There are links here with Froebel (1899 p4) in that education cannot be separated from experience. There are also direct links with Isaacs' work, though she was not completely in agreement with his theories (Isaacs 1930 p4). Isaac's was particularly at odds with Piaget's 'theory of maturation' (Isaacs 1930 p 73) whereby Piaget looked at stages defined by years of age:

During the first stage (5-6) the child supposes that we came to know the names of things simply by looking at them. We need only to look at the sun to know it is called "sun". During the second stage (7-8) the child claims that God told us the names of things. During a third stage (after 9-10) the child finally realises that names have been handed down from father to son since the time they were invented.
(Piaget 1929. p 68)

This, Piaget suggested, is because, to start with, the child's construction of reality is egocentric:

...the child's initial universe is entirely centred on his own body and action in an egocentrism as total as it is unconscious (for lack of consciousness of the self).
(Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p13)

With experience, learning develops. But like Montessori and Isaacs, Piaget was of the opinion that experiences needed to be practical and not abstract :

Play, a zone of interference between cognitive and affective interests, makes its appearance during the sub- period between two and seven or eight with the apogee of symbolic play, which is an assimilation of reality to the self and its desires, and later evolves in the direction of games of construction and games with rules, which mark an objectivization of the symbol and a socialization of the self.
(Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p 129)

Therefore, without the experience of play, development will be affected.

Piaget differs from Isaacs, in that her observations and records show children's awareness and questioning starting before they were five years old :

I would therefore urge, against the view that interest in mechanical causality and ability to appreciate it do not normally develop until the middle years of childhood.
(Isaacs 1930 pp 82-83)

She explained what she saw as flaws in Piaget's research because:

His conclusions apply legitimately only to the particular conditions of his particular experiments; and cannot, therefore, be taken as revealing stages of true maturation.
(Isaacs 1930 p 83)

Piaget's four key concepts of learning have become known as assimilation, accommodation, equilibration, and schemas. These can be applied at any age. In this way a person *assimilates a new concept*,

accommodates it against what is already known, as the new concept may be unsettling *equilibration* must be restored, then *schema* may be developed to better understand the concept. For Piaget the idea of a 'teacher' was someone who facilitated enquiry and investigation and set up problem solving challenges. It was the adult who developed thought processes with the child (Piaget 1929)

For this to work, the teacher must be aware of what Piaget suggested were the stages of cognitive development. Underpinning these is the 'sensori- motor' stage which is an 'essentially practical' stage (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p 4). From there the child moves through the 'pre-operational stage during which an operation may be performed, but it may not be possible to mentally represent it. (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p 94). Next is the 'concrete operational' stage. During this the child understands that the:

...scheme of the permanent object is the constant feature of the practical group of displacements since a displacement does not change the properties of the object that is moved.
(Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p 97)

The final stage is the 'formal operational' stage. Piaget saw the "essential difference" between 'formal' and 'concrete' operations as "the former grasps the possible transformations and assimilates reality only in terms of imagined or deduced events" (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969. p 149). These stages are still useful to consider today and in depth observation of young children will show when they are not yet at the appropriate stage to understand a more formal style of learning. In this way, Piaget advocated that children should have plenty of uninterrupted time to play and ask

questions of their world. As much as possible these questions should be answered by real experiences.

Piaget's Key Contributions

- The importance of play in learning
- First hand experiences are necessary for learning, abstract experiences are not.
- Awareness of cognitive development is important in order to plan appropriate teaching



Lev Vygotsky: born 1896- died 1934

To define play as an activity that gives pleasure to the child is inaccurate for two reasons. First, many activities give the child much keener experiences of pleasure than play, for example, sucking a pacifier, even though the child is not being satiated. And second, there are games in which the activity itself is not pleasurable, for example, games, predominantly at the end of preschool and the beginning of school age, that give pleasure only if the child find the result interesting.

(Vygotsky, 1978. p92)

Close observation of children and their stage of learning is key to the work of both Piaget and Vygotsky. There are however some key differences. For example, whilst Piaget believed that children at a particular stage of development were not intellectually capable to take on a higher level of understanding, Vygotsky felt that with 'scaffolding' a child can always take their learning to higher levels.

The idea of 'scaffolding' is part of the concept Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). For him, as for the other pioneers outlined here, it was clear that "any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history" (Vygotsky, 1978. p 84). He differs from the others in that he goes on to define how 'school learning' is fundamentally different from any learning a child has done before (Vygotsky, 1978. pp 84-85). And that for 'school learning' to be effective it is important to reconsider what is meant by 'developmental levels' as these could be defined in two ways:

...what is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual development level tomorrow- that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow.
(Vygotsky, 1978. p 87)

In order for the concept of 'scaffolding' to be effective the adults need to be open to it. In this way the theory is more open than that of Piaget as there is no need to wait until the child is 'ready' or at a certain developmental stage (Vygotsky 1978 p19). Vygotsky suggested that everything around the child affected what was learnt, including the emotional environment. This meant that he attached value to 'play', not just to give pleasure, but to bring about real learning (Vygotsky 1978 p92). Vygotsky took the theories of Piaget, who was working at the same time, and examined them from a different perspective:

While his contemporaries also addressed the issue of development, Vygotsky's approach differed from theirs in that he focused upon the historically shaped and culturally transmitted psychology of human beings.
(Steiner and Souberman in Vygotsky 1978 p122)

Learning and development are interrelated and are supported by social interaction and imitation which develop language and thought (Vygotsky 1978 p84).

He saw that learning does not develop just from the internalising of personal experiences, social interaction is vital as well. By imitating those around them children extend their capabilities particularly 'in collective activity or under the guidance of adults' (Vygotsky 1978 p 88).

This means that periods of uninterrupted play where ideas can develop is vital. It is important for the teacher to observe and support, but not interrupt or correct in case the thought processes of the children are lost. In this way learning is socially constructed through interaction between the adult and the child (or a child and the child) within the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky's Key Contributions

- Play is important for learning
- Language and talk are vital
- If supported, or 'scaffolded', by adults who see the potential, children can move to levels of learning that may not have seemed likely- The zone of proximal development (ZPD)
- Learning is a social process, and not bound by 'maturation'
(Vygotsky 1978 p88)

Conclusion: the impact of history on present policy

This chapter has outlined the contribution of six historical educationalists whose work has contributed to are Early Years policy and practice and whose names (and some of their ideas) are familiar to teachers today. Present day practice often reflects the influence of all those earlier pioneers, even if many educators do not realise it (perhaps because the roots of present day ideas are not referred to in policy and few teachers in the Early Years have much detail of historical influences in their initial training which has been dominated by National Curriculum practice (David, 1999 p 152).

The summaries of the key contributions of these six people enable us to see how their thinking contributed to present day practice. For example, it is claimed that the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) has been developed around the idea that learning starts with the child and is not a formal subject-based approach but rather, is play-based (DfES Practice Guidance 2007 pp6-7). It is however, also interesting to consider the thoughts of the pioneers that are less obvious in teaching today. For example;

- If supported, or 'scaffolded', by adults who see the potential, children can move to levels of learning that may not have seemed likely
- Awareness of the concept of cognitive development is important in order to plan appropriate teaching
- It is not appropriate to have a narrow focus on 'scholastic subjects'

- The child's imagination should be stimulated in a progressive way that enables links of learning to be made

A dichotomy seems to exist in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) between what is written in policy documents and what is actually promoted. For example, despite claims about a play-based approach to learning, the Early Years Foundation Stage is based on curriculum subjects and targets (Early Learning Goals). Chapter Eight will include a more detailed discussion of this.

The development of policy and guidance, to be discussed in the next chapter, will illustrate how teaching and learning is cast in recent English policy.

Chapter Three

The development of Early Years policy in England, 1967-2002

Introduction

This chapter describes how policy in England has developed over forty years since the Plowden Report of 1967 up to and including the introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile Guidance (QCA 2002).

Taking account of the past and using it means continuity with progression, rather than revolution and stop-start ways of working with different factions rising and falling.
(Bruce et al 1995, p xiii)

This chapter will address this statement and give some background and detail on policy between 1967 and 2002. The Plowden Report of 1967 (CACE) focussed attention on the early years of school, and 2002 saw the beginning of the study reported in this thesis. In this way the stage will be set for subsequent chapters to examine what does happen when:

...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.
(Nutbrown, Clough, and Selbie, 2008 p 1)

Policy since 2002 will be discussed in Chapter Eight to draw the thesis to a close.

Bearing in mind the extensive policy development since the Plowden report in 1967 in this thesis I have selected pivotal policies that relate to the youngest children, including Plowden. My criteria for inclusion in the analysis reported here were that:

- The policy specifically addressed early learning

Or

- The policy content, though not specifically regarding early learning, would have some impact in this area

The list below details some key policies and initiatives that may have influenced the work of my research participants. Also detailed are parliamentary debates and papers pertinent to this chapter. Each policy or report mentioned has to some extent structurally altered the way that the youngest children are viewed and treated in their first experiences of the education system in England.

| Date | Policy documentation | Reference |
|-------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1967 | <i>Children and their Primary Schools (Plowden Report)</i> | CACE 1967 |
| 1972 | <i>Education: a framework for expansion</i> | DES 1972 |
| 1975 | <i>The Bullock Report</i> | DES 1975 |
| 1976 | Ruskin Speech- James Callaghan | guardian.co.uk |
| 1985 | <i>The Curriculum from 5 to 16</i> | DES 1985 |
| 1986 | Education Act | HMSO 1986 |
| 1988 | Education Reform Act | HMSO 1988 |
| 1990 | <i>Starting with Quality (The Rumbold Report)</i> | DES 1990 |
| 1992 | <i>Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice (Three Wise Men Report)</i> | Alexander <i>et al</i> 1992 |
| 1994 | <i>Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning</i> | Ball 1994 |
| 1996 | <u><i>Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning</i></u> <i>London.</i> | SCAA 1996 |
| 1997 | <i>Excellence in Schools</i> | DfEE 1997 |
| 1997 | The National Framework for Baseline Assessment | SCAA 1997 |
| 1998 | Quality in Diversity | Early Childhood Education Forum 1998 |

| | | |
|----------|--|-----------------|
| 1998 | Sure Start | DfES 1998 |
| 2000 | Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage | QCA 2000 |
| Jan 2001 | Education Sub Committee Report on Early Years | HMSO 2001 |
| 2002 | Foundation Stage Profile Handbook | QCA 2002 |
| 2002 | Birth to Three Matters | Sure Start 2002 |
| 2003 | Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools | DfES 2003 |
| 2004 | Every Child Matters | DfES 2004 |
| 2005 | Communicating Matters | DfES 2005 |
| 2006 | Personal, Social and Emotional Development materials | Sure Start 2006 |
| 2006 | The Childcare Act | HMSO 2006 |
| 2006 | The Rose Report on Early Reading | DfES 2006 |
| 2007 | The Early Years Foundation Stage | DfES 2007 |

Figure 3.1 Early years policy documentation from 1967 to 2007

The next section of this chapter will review key policies from the list in Figure 3.1 up to and including the Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2002)

1967- The Plowden Report

Children and their Primary Schools. A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) was published in 1967. The report is more commonly known as 'Plowden' after Lady Plowden who chaired the Council. The title of the document belies the fact that the team reviewed and researched all major influences on children, and not just their primary schools (CACE 1967 pp 1-3). By looking at what was affecting children outside school as well as in, the Council was able to draw conclusions as to what would be effective within schools. Their recommendations were

also supported by research from surveys and questionnaires, and visits to various settings both home and abroad (CACE 1967 p3).

Although now over forty years old, this document is the best starting point for this research into the relationship between policy and practice for two reasons:

- It is a policy document that reflected children's needs and how schools should respond to them
- Many more recent initiatives, most notably the development of the National Curriculum, have been as a direct result of what could be seen as misinterpretation of the recommendations of Plowden (CACE 1967).

The Plowden report begins with a section on the importance of understanding child development before making assumptions about a group of children and their capabilities. Teachers must be "adaptable in their approach to individuals" (CACE 1967. p10). Parents are seen as hugely important to the process of education, but the view taken is one of needing to support children who are "severely handicapped by home conditions" (CACE 1967. p66). This model is one that suggests that preschool education "was regarded as the solution to educational disadvantage" (Clark, 2005 p14) but does not seem to value all parental support to the same degree as it is today (DfES 2007). Plowden recommended that all children should have a part time nursery place, with a minority needing a full time place because they suffer "some kind of social handicap" (CACE 1967. p117). What is important though is how beneficial all types of early learning are considered to be, and how these

should be organised to maximise the potential of all children, "The child must come first" (CACE 1967. p138). It is important to note here that appropriate education in the early years is seen as crucial to later life. The Plowden committee was very concerned that play and creative work was not "sacrificed" to "formal work" (CACE 1967. p139).

Although the language and some of the social ideas can now be seen as somewhat dated, the underlying values and recommendations of the report are strong and are reflected in recent policy. For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007). The Plowden report (CACE 1967) valued the all-round good of the child, not preparation for the world of work alone, stating:

[505]. A school is not merely a teaching shop, it must transmit values and attitudes. It is a community in which children learn to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults. In family life children learn to live with people of all ages. The school sets out deliberately to devise the right environment for children, to allow them to be themselves and to develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them.
(CACE 1967. pp 187)

This can be contrasted with the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) which states:

Every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right, and it provides the foundation for children to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up. When parents choose to use early years services they want to know that provision will keep their children safe and help them to thrive.
(DfES 2007 Statutory Framework p 7)

The recommendations of Plowden may have led to an expectation that there would be a more secure understanding of, and provision for, Early

Years education. This seemed to be confirmed in 1972 with the *White Paper 'Education: a framework for expansion' announced by Margaret Thatcher, the then Secretary of State for Education* which proposed that nursery education be provided for all who wanted it. The promise was made that by 1980 nursery school places would be available to 50% of three-year-olds and 90% of four-year-olds, but economic recession meant this promise was not fulfilled and '*non statutory preschool provision was neglected and undeveloped*' for much of the 1970s and 1980s. (Kwom 2002 pp 3-4)

1975 - The Bullock Report (DES)

The Bullock Report is important to all age ranges as it was the first to recognise that Britain is a multicultural and multilingual society and so forms the platform on which present policy on these issues has been built. It highlighted the need for those working in the Early Years to be skilled and knowledgeable in how to develop learning and how valuable working in partnership with parents is:

5.10 All children should be helped to acquire as wide a range as possible of the uses of language, and there are clearly two ways in which this can be achieved. The first consists in helping parents to understand the process of language development in their children and to take their part in it. The second resides in the skill and knowledge of the nursery and infant teacher, her measured attention to the child's precise language needs, and her inventiveness in creating situations which bring about their fulfilment. We will begin with the role of the parents.
(DES 1975 p 54)

There is a very real emphasis on how a well resourced and thought-out environment can support the language development of very young children. A wonderfully rich account of a child's experience on first entering a setting (DES 1975 pp 62-63 Paragraphs 5.21 and 5.22) leads to

a description of how early writing is developed by the teacher supporting the child as they work alongside each other. None of this would happen in an ad hoc way, and Bullock lists important experiences that teachers must provide and record progress on, including:

The experience of individual children will vary, and this means that the teacher's appraisal of each child's needs and achievement is the key to success. Children from advantaged backgrounds are likely to have plenty of opportunity at home to acquire such forms. It is the disadvantaged child who needs help with them, and through her appraisal the teacher can create the situation in which they are likely to be acquired.
(DES 1975 p 67)

This understanding that there needed to be a clear vision for appropriate work with the youngest children, and that learning started with the child continued.

1976- Ruskin Speech- James Callaghan (Callaghan, 1976)

James Callaghan's Ruskin Speech was seen as a boost for Early Years work. At the time the country was still in the Plowden era, and doubts as to how successfully that policy was being interpreted were beginning to surface. Child centred teaching and learning seemed to be at odds with what it was increasingly felt the nation needed, which was young people to be prepared for the world of work. Callaghan stated that it must be more than this:

The goals of our education, from nursery school through to adult education, are clear enough. They are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive place in society, and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other but both. For many years the accent was simply on fitting a so-called inferior group of children with just enough learning to earn their living in the factory. Labour has attacked that attitude consistently... There is now widespread recognition of the need to cater for a child's personality to let it flower in its fullest possible way.

The balance was wrong in the past. We have a responsibility to see that we do not get it wrong again in the other direction. There is no virtue in producing socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed because they do not have the skills.
(Callaghan, 1976)

Callaghan called for a 'Great Debate' to see how an acceptable balance could be brought about. However, this was not to be, because his government was superseded by that of Margaret Thatcher, who was to be responsible for bringing about the radical 1988 Education Reform Act.

The 1988 Act could be seen as it is a turning point which could be considered as having what could be a permanently detrimental effect on teaching and learning in the Early Years because it introduced the National Curriculum and a more prescribed approach to teaching.

1985- The Curriculum from 5 to 16 (DES)

Concern about standards of learning and the employability of young people leaving school led to the publication of *The Curriculum from 5 to 16 (DES1985)*, which can now be seen as the forerunner to the National Curriculum. It put forward a future vision with the intention of formulating agreed formula for the five to sixteen curriculum. This is summed up in the conclusion:

142. This paper suggests an approach which is designed to ensure a coherent, broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils irrespective of the size, type and location of the schools they attend. While there will be variations from school to school according to the opportunities which the immediate environment affords, for example, and the enthusiasms and strengths of individual teachers, such differences should not lead to the sacrifice of any necessary aspect of the curriculum.
(HMSO 1985 page 54)

The aims here still seem to reflect those of Callaghan (1976) that education aims to prepare children for life *and* work. There is a

recognised need to address common aims, but tensions creep in with the statement that 'necessary aspects' of the curriculum should not be sacrificed. The emphasis on curriculum underpins the document as, whatever else is done at school, teachers are "properly expected to give attention to academic progress" (HMSO 1985 page 6). They are also to bear in mind policy decisions and not exclude "other important experiences" (HMSO 1985 page 6). There does not seem to be a clear vision here of what education is intended to do.

Consistency of intention between schools is a strong vision, if difficult to achieve, and *The Curriculum from 5 to 16 (DES1985)* went on to outline how this vision might happen and the influences there may be upon it, such as: teaching and learning style; the importance of first hand learning, and building on experience.

The White Paper 'Better Schools', also published in 1985 stated the Conservative Government's aim that:

Education at school should promote enterprise and adaptability in order to increase young people's chances of finding employment or creating it for themselves and others.
(Chan, S 2002 p11)

This is a step away from education *for* the child as Callaghan (1976) mooted and removes any doubt as to what education is *for*. It heralded the National Curriculum with the way towards this being paved by The Education Act (1986). Whilst is not directly responsible for any work in the Early Years of education, The Education Act (1986) is perhaps of significance to the future of teaching and learning in the Early Years because it was in this Act that Headteachers were made officially

responsible for 'determining and organising the curriculum in a way compatible with the policy of the governing body' (Chan, 2002 p 12).

1988- Education Reform Act

The Education Reform Act (1988) irrevocably changed the way education is viewed in England. Although it did not specifically mention education in the Early Years, it is of importance in the context of this thesis because it proposed the new Curriculum which was to start at the age of five.

I was a Reception class teacher at the time, and I along with many others felt unsure about the place of four year olds in the National Curriculum.

They were not mentioned – yet there were implications for them and what and how they were taught.

I recollect that many Early Years teams in schools tried to interpret the new National Curriculum documents in order to make them work in Reception classes where four year olds and five year olds were taught together. As Chan (2002) points out, the Act gave schools charge of their own budgets, and required them to admit pupils "to their full capacity".

The effect of this was that younger children started coming into Reception classes (often just four years old rather than a few months off their fifth birthday) because each child entering the school brought an increased budget.

The concerns over the younger children entering Reception classes resulted in the commissioning of the next document -The Rumbold Report (DES 1990)

1990- Starting with Quality (The Rumbold Report, DES)

Angela Rumbold Minister of State for the Department for Education and Science and responsible for education for the under fives was asked to report on the experiences being offered to three and four year olds.

Particular reference was to be paid to "content, continuity and progression in learning, having regard to the Requirements of the National Curriculum" (DES 1990. p1). This report came twenty three years after Plowden and the brief is remarkably similar (CACE 1967 p1).

Importantly the Rumbold Report (1990) recognised the diversity of provision for the under fives which meant that parents and schools are not the sole educators of three and four year olds. All adults who work with young children "have their own distinct and important contribution to make (DES 1990 p1)". This is an important observation, and one to which I will return in Chapter Seven. The Rumbold Report highlighted how the historical distinction between 'care' and 'education' led to the "formulation and implementation by a variety of agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors of their own policies designed to meet specific perceived needs" (DES 1990. p5). It also highlighted a view from Plowden, that nursery provision was widely seen "as existing to provide what the home could not" (DES 1990. p5) with an increasing swing towards an emphasis on education. The overriding concern of the report is the issue of quality of provision for young children, with the stress being on the content of the learning *and*, the way in which learning experiences were offered to children (DES 1990. p9). The Rumbold Report favoured the nine areas of learning outlined in *The Curriculum from 5-16 (DES 1985)* whilst

recognising the need for a curriculum that was not exclusively subject based:

What is of prime importance is that the curriculum should be coherent in terms of the child's existing knowledge, understanding and skills, and that it should be experienced in an environment which fosters the development of social relationships and positive attitudes to learning and behaviour.
(DES 1990. p9)

This sentiment is reminiscent, not only of Plowden (CACE 1967), but also of the thinking of the pioneers discussed in Chapter Two. For example McMillan (1900, p 23) and Isaacs (1948, p. 84) both valued the importance of curriculum coherence and social relationships to positive learning.

The Rumbold Report emphasises some vital components of quality education in the Early Years including: the involvement of parents (DES 1990 p1); the concentration on the needs of very young children (DES 1990 p7), and the importance of *how* children learn as well as *what* they learn.

The present policy of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) also claims to promote a curriculum in an environment of social relationships and positive attitudes (DfES 2007 Practice Guidance p 5). The report ends with a section entitled 'Material to aid practitioners' (DES 1990 p 35).

This usefully outlines policies, skills, concepts and attitudes that must be in place to develop quality within the setting. This last section is important because it is a forerunner of what was to become the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000), then the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007).

1992- Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice ('Three Wise Men Report' DES)

Two years after the Rumbold Report (1990) was published, the National Curriculum was reviewed. *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom*

Practice considered the National Curriculum and questioned the Piagetian notion of 'readiness' as a strategy that depressed learning (DES 1992 p53).

The Three Wise Men (DES 1992) report understood the role that 'Plowdenism' had played in influencing education before the 1988 Education Reform Act, but took issue with the way it had been blamed for poor practice:

[22] It is fashionable to blame the Plowden Report for what are perceived as the current ills of primary education. However, if ill-conceived practices have been justified by reference to Plowden, this reflects far more damagingly on those who have used the report in this way than on Plowden itself. *If 'Plowdenism' has become an ideology to which thousands of teachers have unthinkingly subscribed, then it is necessary to ask why the teachers concerned have stopped thinking for themselves and have apparently become so amenable to indoctrination.* If things have gone wrong - and the word 'if' is important - then scapegoating is not the answer. All those responsible for administering and delivering our system of primary education need to look carefully at the part they may have played.
(DES 1992. My italics)

More recently the Rose Review (DfES 2006) has advocated the teaching of systematic phonics and led to a government drive that effectively dictates how this is to be done (see Chapter Eight). Interesting that Rose (a co-author of the Three Wise Men Report, and Chair of the Rose Review) should, in 1992, criticise teachers who allow themselves to be 'unthinkingly indoctrinated' by policy rather than questioning it, yet some 15 years later, is an architect of a policy for teaching literacy which precisely *requires* teachers to do as they are told – regardless of whether they agree or not (this will be further discussed in Chapter Eight). As central government thinking drifted away from earlier promise of

investment in early education (CACE 1967, Callaghan 1976) there was concern to keep Early Years on the agenda.

1994- Start Right (Ball, RSA)

The *Start Right Report* (Ball 1994) opens with a summary of what the authors describe as 'A broken promise':

It shows how countries benefit which provide good pre-school education for children. It reveals the heavy price we have paid for failing to implement Margaret Thatcher's promise of nursery education for all in her White Paper of 1972. And it offers practical proposals for putting things right.
(Ball, 1994 p6)

The aim of the report was thus to counter claims that the then government had made regarding early learning, specifically that:

- Adequate provision is available
 - There is insufficient research evidence to prove the value of nursery learning
 - It would cost too much to provide it.
- (Ball, C. 1994 p6)

The basic tenets of the Start Right report are that good quality pre-school must be provided because it has 'immediate and lasting' benefits and that government must believe in this and drive it forwards. Using research based evidence, the report suggests that four things are needed to give every child a chance of 'starting right':

- a national system of paid parental leave,
 - effective arrangements for the care of the (pre school) age children of those in employment
 - the education and support of parents, and
 - an entitlement to good early learning for all children from the age of three
- (Ball, 1994 p14)

These recommendations were felt by the authors to be interdependent- none would succeed without the other (Ball, 1994 p 14).

In a commentary on 'Lessons from Abroad' Ball (2004) is clear that:

The integration of care and education should not mean the imposition of an 'academic' curriculum on three-year-olds. Instead, there is a widespread acceptance that the diverse, informally-assessed practice which derives from the principles of active learning and 'purposeful play' should spread upwards, like a beneficial infection, into primary schooling.
(Ball, C. 1994 p29)

Most recently, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007 Statutory Requirements p 37) has defined good assessment practice as 'sensitive' and 'observational'. However the "integration of care and education", which was seen as a positive move here, is open to question and will be examined further in Chapter Seven.

The *Start Right* report concludes by summarising good practice thus:

- quality of early learning depends on a set of principles, not a favoured type of provision;
- twelve principles are fundamental to good practice;
- ten common features exist in good early learning
- essential criteria for high-quality educational provision for young children are: well trained staff led by a graduate teacher; appropriate adult: child ratios; suitable curriculum; adequate resources; participation of parents; diverse peer group; a multi professional approach
(Ball, 1994 p59):

In order to achieve this state for early childhood education, Ball (1994) recommended the need for a national lead, financial backing and high quality training and professional development (Ball 1994 p 60).

Together Rumbold (DES 1990) and Ball (1994) sought to address policy on early learning and provision.

1996- *Desirable Outcomes (SCAA)*

In January 1996 The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority published the first national attempt to support quality early education to be known as the '*Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education*' (SCAA 1996). This was the first step towards

trying to ease the tension between children's learning in the Early Years and the National Curriculum. As this chapter has demonstrated so far, a national drive towards better Early Years provision had government support. Ball (1994 p14) viewed the Prime Minister of 1994 (John Major) as more pro active towards nursery education, suggesting that he might finally deliver on the perceived 'broken promise' of Margaret Thatcher. A nursery voucher system was introduced which gave parents £1100 to use towards nursery education. Inevitably, with government subsidy came inspection and so settings who accepted government vouchers from parents were held to account in how they were offering learning experiences for young children.

For the first time Early Years teachers had six areas of learning to work towards: Personal and social development; Language and literacy; Mathematics; Knowledge and understanding of the world; Physical development; Creativity.

Though the document was short and without detail, it contained information on how the 'Desirable Outcomes' fitted with the National Curriculum dispelling any doubt that early learning is a valuable underpinning. In effect this document became a discussion piece which was clearly furthering the status of early learning in terms of national policy, by developing the areas of learning favoured by the Rumbold Report (DES 1990). It can be seen as a step towards enhanced quality provision for the Early Years whilst it may also be viewed as a move to control early years practice in curriculum and pedagogy.

1997 - White Paper: Excellence in Schools (DfEE)

With the 'Desirable Outcomes' taking root in early years practice, The White Paper of 1997 heralded radical changes to the primary curriculum. *Excellence in Schools (DfEE 1997)* resulted in the development of the *National Literacy Strategy (1998)* and the *National Numeracy Strategy (1999)*. Both strategies strongly promoted a prescribed time to be spent on literacy and numeracy every day. For *Literacy* an hour, and for *Numeracy* fifty minutes. Schools were encouraged to include these sessions in the morning for the whole school.

For Nursery and Reception classes in schools this became a big issue. When the *National Literacy Strategy (1998)* was introduced, teachers had only the *Desirable Learning Outcomes (SCAA 1996)* in place to support them. And because it was 'guidance' it could be disregarded in practice and in law. As a consequence teachers in the Early Years found they were required to do the Literacy Hour on the advice of their Local Authorities. This despite the fact that the *Literacy Strategy* was also not a statutory requirement.

A year later, the *National Numeracy Strategy* was introduced. Consultants were employed for both strategies to work with schools. My own experience in Local Authorities shows that Reception classes, and even some Nurseries in schools, were expected to spend their mornings exclusively on Literacy and Numeracy. For some children the literacy hour was a time when they were puzzled and struggling (Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan 2005 pp 4-5).

Excellence in Schools (DfEE 1997) recognised that quality was an important goal:

Our children are our future as a civilised society and a prosperous nation. If they are to have an education that matches the best in the world, we must start now to lay the foundations by getting integrated early years education and childcare, and primary education, right.
(DfEE 1997, p.15)

A further proposal was that schools should be responsible for achieving their own targets for raising standards – a policy decision which resulted in the development of *The National Framework for Baseline Assessment* (SCAA 1997) itself not without controversy (Nutbrown, 1997, 1998, 1999)

1998- 'Quality in Diversity'- Early Childhood Education Forum

The increasing recognition of the Early Years was a positive move, but there was a feeling that “the needs of young children and their families have been overlooked” (ECEF 1998 p2) this led to the development by, the lobbying group the Early Childhood Education Forum, of *Quality in Diversity*. Though not a policy document, this publication recognised and welcomed a wider recognition of work in the Early Years, it was written in response to developing concern that:

...developments within the wider education system- in relation to curriculum, assessment, inspection and the education of teachers- have not been built either on an understanding of how young children learn or on existing best. (ECEF 1998 p2)

This publication, in itself evidence of growing concerns amongst Early Years professionals that policy and practice did not match and did not address the holistic needs of young children, was intended to be a flexible framework to support quality in the Early Years that could be used as a tool and not as a rigid curriculum. Bearing in mind current approaches at

the time, the document put forward "a way of thinking about learning that will help practitioners shape their own quality curriculum" (ECEF 1998 p9). The terms 'foundation' and 'goals' are introduced as key components of the framework - terms which then entered the vocabulary of national early years policy in the form of *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* (QCA 2000). The word 'curriculum' is also usefully defined, as much more than a programme of study:

Curriculum: although practitioners in primary schools who work with the National Curriculum may associate the word with the statutory programmes of study, in this framework the term is used in a different way. It refers to the whole sum of experiences, activities, interactions, and opportunities that are made available to young children - everything, in short, from which young children learn. All that young children see and hear and do, all that their educators do and say - and do not do or say - all of these experiences are part of the early years curriculum.
(ECEF 1998 p10)

This document along with the *Starting with Quality Report* (DES 1990) forms the underpinning for the Foundation Stage which was to be developed in 2000. There is however, a very clear difference in that the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA 2000) was subject driven, and the 'foundations' and 'goals' in *Quality in diversity* (ECEF 1988) are driven by what is seen to be integral to worthwhile learning. These were based on quality of experience and how this supported learning. Rather than six areas of learning in which the children were to reach goals, the framework put forward: Belonging and connecting; Being and becoming; Contributing and participating; Being active and expressing; Thinking, imagining and understanding. (ECEF 1998 p 11)

Quality in Diversity concludes by placing emphasis on the need for reflective and reflexive practitioners who can use policy and guidance in a critical way:

In this section, some examples have illustrated how early years practitioners can use the Quality in Diversity framework to support their pursuit of excellence as they learn and work together. *The examples given here, and in previous sections, do not, of course exhaust the possibilities for practitioner development using the framework.* In any case, whatever support practitioners are given, whether in material or human form, nothing can alter the fact that practitioner development is essentially in the hands of the practitioners themselves; they shape the purposes and control the focus of their learning. *They modify and adapt published materials, inventing new ways of working and learning- and this framework is no exception to the general rule.*

(Early Childhood Education Forum 1998 p84) (my italics)

This is a theme that will be visited again in this thesis.

1998- Sure Start (DfES 1998)

In the policy drive towards quality, effective Early Years provision continued with the Sure Start initiative which began in 1998, designed to address the needs of children living in areas of disadvantage. There are resonances here of *Plowden* (CACE 1967) which suggested that quality early education would in some way solve problems of deprivation. The aim was “to bring together early education, childcare, health and family support for the benefit of young children (under the age of four) living in disadvantaged areas and their parents” (www.surestart.gov.uk). This reflects the *Rumbold Report's* (DES 1990) recommendation to 'join up' the care and education agenda. This work continues with the development of Children's Centres from the Sure Start initiative to ensure that every area had permanent access to early education and childcare.

2000- Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage

The focus on quality in the Early Years was crystallised in the publication of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA 2000), developed to provide more comprehensive support for Early Years teachers than did the *Desirable Learning Outcomes* (SCAA 1996) . This marked the first specific curriculum guidance for Early Years.

Early Years teachers had, for the first time guidance that they could use to support teaching and learning. Seen at first as empowering, it was to become a “double edged sword” (Hargreaves and Hopper 2006) because it brought with it formalised assessments and target setting (this will be discussed in Chapter Seven). A year later an Education Select Committee was commissioned to look into the effect of the Foundation Stage Curriculum. The Education Select Committee report on Early Years published in January 2001, examined the quality of teaching and learning in the Early Years and made fifty five recommendations. These covered: the role of, and partnership with, parents; how childminders should be trained and behave; practice in schools; professional development and teacher training, and:

[55] We recommend that the advances in knowledge about brain development should be kept under examination by DfEE- funded researchers in the education field so that Early Years policy is kept up to date and consistent with the available scientific evidence. (HMSO 2001p xlili)

This statement is highlighted here because, though neuroscience it is very important, Early Years policy does not, as a rule, keep up with “available scientific evidence” on other issues. For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) suggests that children’s learning can be

tracked against their ages in months, and these are plotted on grids, this goes against the grain of other 'available evidence' that children do not necessarily progress in neat and predictable rates (this will be further discussed in Chapter Eight).

Having established a curriculum for the three to five year olds, national attention turned to those younger. The Birth to Three Matters Framework (Sure Start 2002) stemmed from the Education Sub Committee report of 2001 and was the first national step in understanding that the years from birth are key to learning. It was distributed to every childminder and every setting in the country.

2002- Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2002)

At the time the Foundation Stage was introduced ninety eight different assessment instruments were being used nationally in order to ascertain what children were capable of 'on entry' to school (Lindsay and Desforges 1998 pp 16-17). The nature of these assessments varied greatly between local authorities with some doing practical assessments, whilst others encouraged more formal testing and 'box ticking'. With such a variety of things happening, and the attempts for consistency in early education manifested in the Foundation Stage document, the Foundation Stage Profile was developed as an attempt to rationalise early assessment. This policy on assessment of young children was inline with existing policy on the assessment of pupils in Key Stage One- towards measured targets. *The National Framework for Baseline Assessment (SCAA 1997) was removed and replaced by the Foundation Stage Profile. Schools were to complete a Profile for each child at the end of the Foundation Stage based*

on ongoing observations against all six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage. (QCA 2002)

Having been involved in the consultations, I trialled the new document with my setting before it was released nationally. For us it was not a huge change as we had been used to keeping notes on learning. The biggest change we found was that, for the first few weeks we had the new children in our classes, we could actually work alongside them rather than feeling we had to test them in some way. There was no longer pressure on us to complete a baseline assessment within the first six weeks.

Unfortunately our experience was not mirrored nationally. When the Foundation Stage Profile was published nationally at the beginning of 2003 it was not welcomed by the press and teachers who saw it as '117 boxes to tick' Ted Wragg in his Times Educational Supplement column of January 3rd 2003 saw it as "utterly disgraceful" that teachers "have to complete a 117-item profile on three to five- year-olds".

This disillusionment may well have arisen because the premise of the Foundation Stage Profile was built on a shaky assumption:

The use of the Foundation Stage Profile rests on the assumption that teachers build up their assessments throughout the year on a cumulative basis, from ongoing learning and teaching.
(QCA, 2003. p3)

The use of the Profile 'rests' on an 'assumption' of what is happening in practice. Early Years teachers have a long tradition of observing their children as illustrated in the work of Isaacs (1930) and Montessori (1912) (as discussed in Chapter Two). However, in my experience as a teacher and adviser I have seen that it is quite possible that some teachers in

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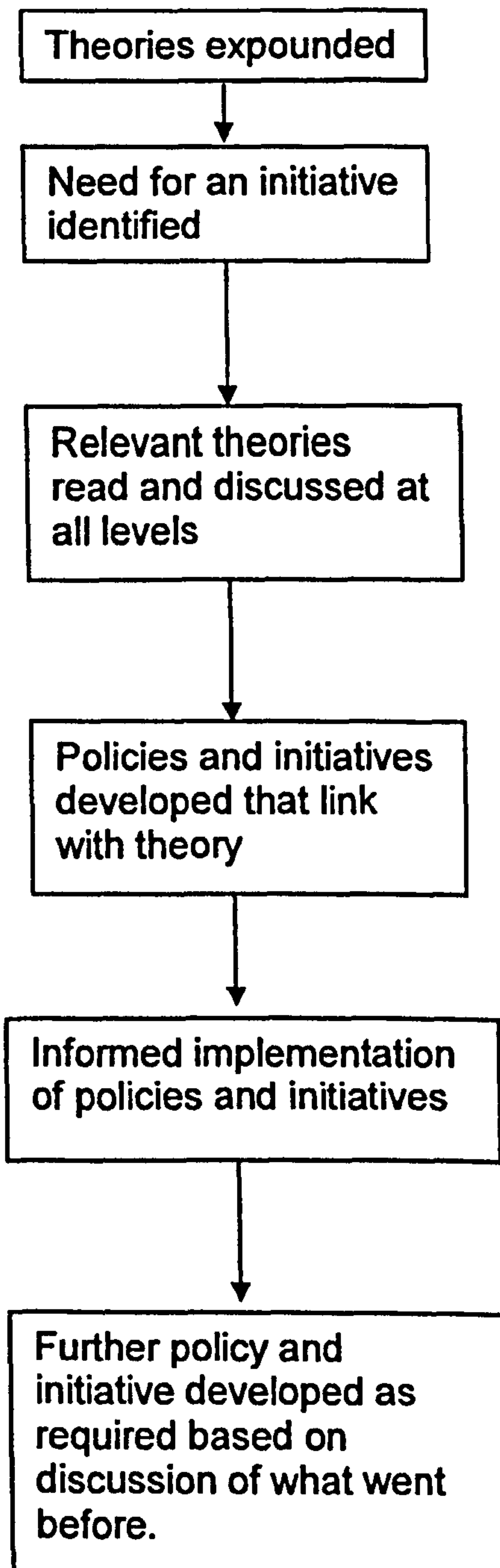
Early Years settings have not trained for, or had experience in teaching, the age. Such teachers, I have found, often do not understand the value of formative observational assessment or, indeed *how* to 'build up their assessments throughout the year on a cumulative basis, from ongoing learning and teaching' (QCA, 2003. p3). Policy is therefore based on a false assumption that all early years teachers develop their teaching from formative assessment.

This review of key Early Years policies concludes in 2002 because the thesis covers experiences up to this point in time. Policy, though, is incessant and much has happened since that time. Subsequent relevant, policies will be considered in Chapter Eight, 'The Current Situation' as a conclusion to, and reflection on the findings of the thesis.

Key Points

Having reviewed the historical perspective on early teaching and learning (in Chapter Two), it might be expected that contemporary policy would reveal its roots in that history. Figure 3.2 shows how one might expect policy to develop.

Figure 3.2- A progression towards policy development might look like this-



This review of recent policy since 1967 indicates that the vast amount of policy currently in existence and the rapid changes in policy year on year have not followed the logical progression for policy development identified in Figure 3.2. In this critical review things can be seen to start to go astray after the second box. The situation from 2002 onwards presents greater departure from the model in Figure 3.2 (to be discussed in Chapter Eight). One aim of policy can be seen to be raising achievement, however there should be another which I see to be - education for life and the development of the individual. A point made frequently in policy discussions until *The Curriculum from 5 to 16 (DES1985)* when curriculum began to be more important than the individual in education- an issue that comes up again throughout this thesis.

This chapter has traced the course of policy which has shaped practice in Early Years from 1967 - 2002. Having reviewed policy the thesis is now positioned to consider my research questions:

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?
2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

The next chapter (Four) will outline methodological issues of the thesis in order to answer both the research questions in full.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will first explain the assumptions about how knowledge is created and transmitted - the ontology and epistemology adopted - and hence how the three arenas (history, policy and life history) are mutually entailed in this thesis. It will also outline and justify the process I went through in order to decide the best way to proceed with this research, and how I decided upon the research questions. First I will outline the ontological and epistemological assumptions at work in this thesis. Second I will discuss how the research questions were developed. This will be followed by a review of the methods chosen a justification of their use and explanation of the practical application of those methods in the study reported here.

In the Introduction (Chapter One) I explained that my growing dissatisfaction with policy expectations leading to Early Years practices becoming more and more formal had led to me starting this research. When I considered this further I saw that there were different strands involved in the dissatisfactions of professionals.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions at work in the thesis

For me this thesis combines three themes. Those of: early childhood history, early childhood policy and life historical enquiry combined in an inextricable way. It is important to see the ontological aspects of the participants – the nature of their 'being' in early childhood education alongside what they know about early childhood education as

professionals and experienced women who have, in effect, lived their lives in and through early childhood education. Thus the nature of scope and sources of their knowledge brings its own validity to the study. It has been impossible (in fact undesirable) to try to separate their lived experiences from their learned 'knowing'. May (2001) states that the 'complex subjects' of ontology and epistemology are, "the ways in which we perceive and know our social world and the theories concerning what 'exists'" (May 2001 p22). As the thesis developed it became clear that living through their lives - learning through their 'being'- and knowledge gained through their various professional encounters, including named awards, had to be seen together as this was how they perceived their world. There is an element of the 'taken for granted' here – but I would argue that the coming together of the three strands- examining the lived experiences reflected against the historical perspective and the documents of policy - offers a new form of knowing which illuminates what 'is' in the personal sense, and what is 'known' in an academic sense. May's statement that, "A woman's biography and experiences become central to the production of unbiased accounts of the social world" (May 2001 p22) is pertinent here. It is worthy of note that all the participants in this study are female. May (2001 p22) points out that traditionally research perspectives have been male which has left an imbalance of view point. Maynard (1994) also says that there is a perceived lack of female views and that there may be a "distinctively feminist mode of enquiry", but that it is unclear what this might mean (Maynard 1994 p10).

However, Maynard argues that surveys and questionnaires have been seen as 'masculinist' whereas:

By contrast, the use of qualitative methods, which focus more on the subjective experiences and meanings of those being researched, was regarded as more appropriate to the kinds of knowledge that feminists wish to make available, as well as being more in keeping with the politics of doing research as a feminist. (Maynard 1994 p11)

In this way my methods, of interviewing and gaining case studies was the ontological underpinning combined with looking into what the subjects knew and how they used their knowledge.

For the purposes of this study I would argue that the three themes of the thesis can be seen both as apart – and together. As figure 4.1 shows - What lies at the heart of this thesis is that territory where all three circles combine (marked x in figure 4.1.)

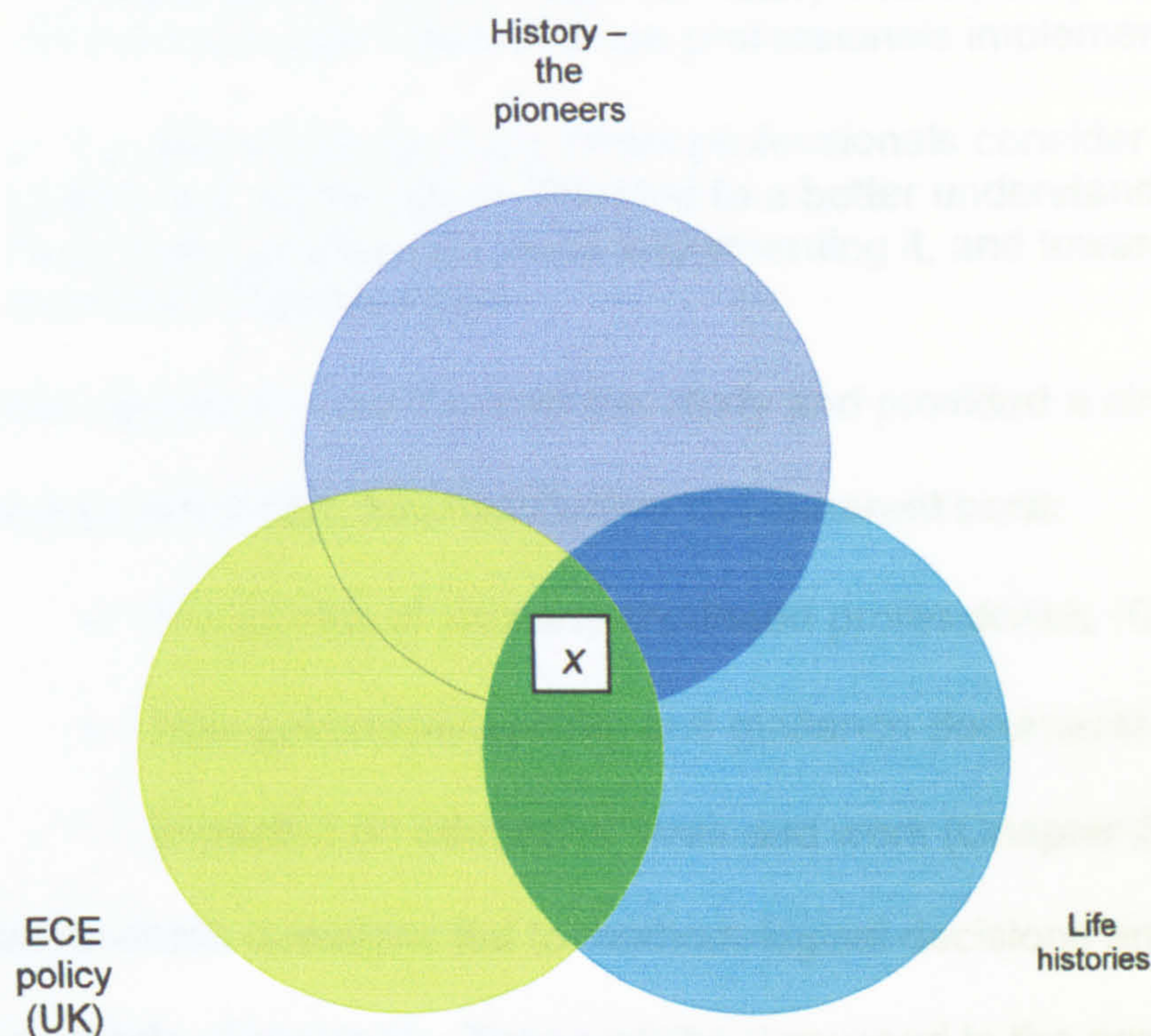


Figure 4.1 Showing how the three themes of the thesis come together in an ontological and epistemological merging.

Given this merging of themes and their mutual entwinement, the methodology adopted is thus justified.

The research questions

The research questions were developed before some of the key policy events discussed in Chapter Three took place, though they remain pertinent; because the central issue of policy being discordant with the ways in which children learn has not changed.

My research questions are:

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?

2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

These two questions have focused the study and provided a structure for the research which falls into two distinct but coherent parts:

- The stories of six early childhood professionals (Chapter Six)
- How government policy and guidance documents have impacted on educators' lives and work (Chapter Seven)

The two research questions led to methodological decisions and choices about methods of research. These will be discussed in the next section.

Documentary analysis

In order to enquire into my first research question: *What is the match between policy development and lived experience?* I needed to decide which policies to include and over how long a time scale. I chose to start with the Plowden Report *Children and their Primary Schools. A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)*, (CACE 1967) for two reasons. Firstly this report made such an impact, and was interpreted so widely and loosely (Alexander *et al* 1992), that it eventually resulted in the perceived need for a 'national curriculum' (DES 1988) as has been discussed in Chapter Three. Secondly, starting with Plowden fitted with the career histories of the participants.

My analysis of policy in relation to my first research question concluded with introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2002), because that was the point where this study began. However, a difficulty that I

encountered during this research was that policy is not static and was modified during the time of writing. This meant that a final chapter (Chapter Eight) was needed to that bring the policy story up to date.

My intention in the documentary analysis was not to analyse each of the policies in depth but rather to point to key issues which in total provided an overview and commentary on how each policy either hindered or furthered work in Early Years.

The professional interviews

The second research question: *How do some Early Years professionals consider government guidance and policy to have contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice?* developed from my feeling that, rather than contributing to a better understanding of Early Years practice, government policy actually stood in the way. Interviews with eight Early Years professionals with varied experience made it possible for me to reflect on this question in a wider context. This led me to a conclusion that differed from my original feeling in that, for those concerned, policy and guidance did not inhibit, but rather, gave them pause to think and reflect, then use if appropriate.

The following section goes on to explain why interviewing was an appropriate method to use in this context.

Interviewing as a research method

The empirical element of the study, asks how government policy and guidance documents have impacted on educators' lives and work.

I chose interviewing over questionnaires because it was important that those involved spoke freely rather than feeling limited by questions and I

wanted to probe their individual experiences and beliefs. However, the process of interviewing, particularly life historical interviews, holds potential pitfalls. Goodson and Sikes point out, the level of intimacy involved in life history research, "increases the potential for harm" (Goodson and Sikes 2001 p90). In this way it became important to closely examine the interviewing process as it applied to this thesis. Maclure (2003) states:

Life- history interviews are tricky, methodologically speaking. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they crystallize some questions that also apply to method more generally. What kind of act is analysis? What do we do - to 'the data', to the interviewees- when we analyse interview transcripts? Does analysis stifle the voice of the subject?
(Maclure, 2003 p119)

At first the idea of interviewing people to use their experiences to illuminate my work with real life examples seemed simple. However there was a danger that, having collected the data, my own standpoint could complicate my analysis of the transcriptions. Maclure suggests that the interviewer's job is to "dig out the nuggets of knowledge or meaning that are obscured by the messy surface of the interview talk" (Maclure, 2003 p119). She goes on to add that in life history interviews such as the ones I was planning, the digging would be into the 'self'. I did not want what I was doing to be interpreted as an aggressive act, or one that was seen as stifling "the voice of the subject" (Maclure, 2003 p119).

In order to reflect on my decision to interview, I considered the following points suggested by Goodson and Sikes (2001):

- Unstructured interviews
- Inevitable bias
- Reflecting on the relationship between researchers and subjects

- 'Dilemmas to do with presentation' (Goodson and Sikes 2001 p109)

Analysing the unstructured interviews

Cohen and Manion (1994 p273) call the type of interview that I carried out, 'unstructured'. My concern then became one of bias even if I planned, as the questions or leads would inevitably be coloured by my standpoint (Cohen and Manion 1994 p274).

I applied the thought that I might lead the answers to the fact that all my interviewees were known to me. We may well 'lead each other on' by being comfortable with each other. I realised that I had unwittingly built in 'controls' (Cohen and Manion 1994 p274). Firstly, although the subjects were all known to me, they are on differing levels of friendship with some of them knowing me very well whilst others only in passing. This meant that they responded to me in different ways. Secondly, the use of e mail in two of the cases meant there was less likelihood of interpersonal influences. The differences shown by e mail evidence will be discussed in Chapter Five (Analysis). With the concern of personal influences in mind I needed to read around the idea of bias. I then needed to consider the use of life historical interviewing. This will be covered in the final three headings.

Inevitable bias

Moser (1951) usefully distinguished what he saw as various types of interview bias. He defined bias as, '...the systematic, non-random, non-cancelling error element' (Moser 1951 p28) that may occur in the interview process. For him there are two types of bias- bias in the sample and bias in the collected data, the latter being more problematic than the former

due to the complexity of the interactions between the interviewer and the respondent. Thus it seems inevitable. Whilst writing I had concerns connected to both types of bias- my selected sample of case studies, and my interactions with them. The small size of the sample meant that whatever findings there are would not be generalisable, however they will be food for thought and I will return to this as suggestions for further study in Chapter Eight. I have made my own bias clear throughout this work so that subjectivity will be transparent. Using Moser's 'components of interview bias' as sub headings in this section I have been able to analyse my own thoughts along with the evidence.

Characteristics of Interviewers

Williams (1964) writes in his study that he sees the question of bias as, "To what extent do the characteristics of interviewers and respondents influence the information that interviewers elicit from respondents?" (Williams, 1964 p 338). This suggests that the interplay of both sides is key. However, he also sees bias as something quite deliberate by either or both the parties to 'falsify a response' (Williams 1964 p 339). I do not believe that it is as clear cut as that. It is better understood as that "...there is clearly something at stake for the tellers" (Maclure 1993 p 375) because in each interview there are particular contexts, feelings and outcomes in the minds of both participants. This emphasises the inevitable bias and subjectivity, but is not deliberate falsification so much as a fitting of the story to the required circumstance. Perhaps emphasising some parts of the story more than others. However, it seems to me that if a particular story is sparked by the questions in an

interview schedule then it must have some relevance and conversation will tease this out meaning that there could not be deliberate falsification. Whilst Moser sees the social class or educational level, opinions and attitudes, expectations, temperament, personality, age and sex of the interviewer as influencing the respondent, I feel that it is more likely that both parties have characteristics that influence the outcome.

Interviewing Techniques

This is the second of Moser's criteria. He sees these techniques as likely to create bias, as human judgement is involved (Moser 1951 p 31). Under this heading he notes these criteria as giving 'the greatest scope to human judgement and discretion' (Moser 1951 p 31) - coding of responses, incomplete recording of responses, reliance on first replies, incorrect reading of responses and re-wording or rephrasing of questions. The next chapter on Analysis will show how I worked with the evidence I gained. By choosing to interview I made a conscious decision to work with *evidence* and not *data*, as a quantitative approach would not have suited this study. Stenhouse discusses the difference between 'data' and 'evidence'. This is relevant here as it supports my stated reasons for why I chose to interview, and also underpins how I eventually chose to use the material. He wrote:

The observer who relies on or gives priority to his own perceptions and the interviewer who gives priority to the perceptions of others both gather evidence. I use the term evidence to contrast with the alternative term data. Data are standardised - and attenuated- at the point at which they are gathered in order to make them comparable: evidences is not comparable except by virtue of a critical process.

The problem of field research in case study is to gather evidence in such a way as to make it accessible to subsequent critical assessment, to internal and external criticism and to triangulation. (Stenhouse, 1979. p5)

He recognised that there will inevitably be biases and distortions in the way an interview is reported, and suggested that there is a need to "establish conventions for the conduct and reporting of fieldwork in case studies". This is important because two important questions must be addressed:

How can the reader verify a case study? How can a reader who is a researcher use another's case study as a contribution to his own work?
(Stenhouse, 1979. p5)

Each transcription I made was sent back to the subject to be verified as accurate and not a misrepresentation. In this way another reader of my work would know that any excerpts they may wish to quote have been verified by the originator.

Reflecting on the relationship between researchers and subjects

To return to the warnings of Maclure's point (2003) about stifling the voice of the subject, Goodson and Sikes (2001) point out that the life history approach is best used by those who "are able to listen attentively" and that the researcher must be someone that people want to talk to (Goodson and Sikes 2001 p20).

They also note that life history, "rarely involves a random sample of informants" (Goodson and Sikes 2001 p24). Thus they classify the method of sampling that I used as 'purposive'. In other words, "The research is concerned with specific characteristics, attributes or experiences and informants are 'selected' because they meet the criteria"

(Goodson and Sikes 2001 p24). Woods (1985) takes the notion of a good listener further:

Empathy is called for, not judgement of people as individuals which would lead to a very biased sample. Part of the researcher's skill is the ability to relate to all kinds.
(Woods, 1985 p 15)

My sample of participants was not random. They were all people that I had met through my work, meaning that I was familiar to them from various situations so it was easy to approach them to be part of this research, and that I believed we could work well together. What I had not realised until I was some way into the interviewing and analysis process, was that the people I had chosen had many similarities, including their success in their field. Indeed some are national names. These became 'elite' interviews, and will be discussed below. What I also could not have predicted was the similarities I found to my own experiences. This allowed me to reflect on my own life history.

Whilst I was beginning to feel more comfortable with my selection of interviewees, I was still concerned about how I would use the evidence. This thinking continues to develop the idea of the relationship between researchers and subjects.

'Dilemmas to do with presentation' (Goodson and Sikes 2001 p109)

Maclure (2003 p 119) writes of the "aggressive act that stifles the voice of the interviewees and sustains the power and pre-eminence of the analyst".

The choice of metaphors such as those from mining, noted by Kvale (1996), she argues, lead to this definition of aggression. She suggests instead a weaving analogy:

... weaving something new, yet assembled out of fragments and recollections of other fabrications such as the interview 'data' and field notes, as well as the scattered traces of innumerable other cultural texts of identity, policy, institutional life, career, curriculum, and so on.

(Maclure 2003 p 127)

I feel that the 'scattered traces of innumerable other cultural texts', particularly of 'identity' as I am acquainted with all my subjects, resonates with my dilemma of biasing my interviews. However, Maclure uses a useful metaphor for me that she attributes to Derrida when she writes that analysis has to involve 'getting a few fingers caught' in the weave if it is to set anything at all in motion' (Maclure 2003 p 127). This metaphor helps me to understand how my life history overlaps and sometimes interplays with those of the subjects.

A further dilemma of presentation was that of how to work with the evidence from the 'elite' interviewees without giving away their identity. This meant that elements had to be removed from evidence and certain themes or reasons that emerged could not be written about as they would be easily attributable. However the use of 'elite' interviews was helpful as:

One of the strongest advantages of elite interviews is that they enable researchers to interview first-hand participants of the processes under investigation, allowing for researchers to obtain accounts from direct witnesses to the events in question.

(Tansey, undated p6)

Ethical issues

As I embarked on this study, I was fully aware that my own 'lived experience' would be an unavoidable element. My own story will inevitably come through, as an important part of the mix. I have been aware that my feelings and beliefs will influence the thesis with the danger

of me only seeing what I wanted to see and only reporting the issues which chimed with my own concerns. However, by letting other people talk I have been able to let the themes emerge themselves. They are not independent of me, nor is this thesis a sanitised version free from any contamination with my own ideas. What exists here is a mingling of objective report with subjective honesty.

I approached each of my subjects to be part of this study personally, either directly or through e mail, and gained their informed consent by outlining my research proposal and giving them the research questions to consider. By 'informed consent' I am using the definition in May (2001 p60) in which he expands the meaning from having a "complete understanding of the aims and processes of the research itself", to the subjects need to also be secure from any "consequences that follow" from any publication in the public domain.

I have outlined the dangers I faced by using the stories of other people to illustrate this work and ethical dilemmas I faced around preserving the anonymity of the interviewees. Each subject adopted a pseudonym of their own choosing in order to preserve anonymity. Transcripts of interviews were checked by them and altered if necessary. They also received the final draft to read and approve. Each participant approved their portrayal in the context of confidentiality. But it is important to acknowledge that the real ethical issue at work throughout this study is the pervasive concern around 'harm' (Sapsford and Evans 1984 p 270). At all points I had to be careful to do all I could to protect the participants and myself as we discussed happenings which were – at times – painful in that

policy events had impacted on our personal (as well as professional) lives: sometimes threatening our well-being. Recalling these was sometimes painful for the participants and for me. This meant the conscious omission of some of the interview evidence from this study. The interview accounts used in this study were used to support themes which arose from the evidence and in Chapter Five - Analysis: The search for themes - I have used them to clarify my own thinking, not to impose my own thoughts upon them. I am as accountable for my own honesty in conveying my account, as I am that of my subjects.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the development of my thinking as I considered how to interrogate my research questions.

Having examined the reasons for my choice of interviewing as the method to gain the evidence I needed, and alluded to some issues with this, the next chapter will look in more detail at how the analysis was done and what the findings were.

Chapter Five

Analysis: The search for themes

Introduction

This chapter further discusses how what I read and heard began to shape how I could illustrate the ways in which policy and guidance have impacted on the lives and work of eight Early Years teachers. It first examines my concerns, then goes on to discuss how I analysed what I found and the themes this led to.

Concerns and reasons

I needed to elicit the thoughts and experiences of others in order to examine and balance my own. As noted in the previous chapter, Maclure (2003) is concerned that, when interview transcripts are analysed, the voice of the subject could be stifled (Maclure, 2003 p119).

As I had interview transcripts to analyse, it is Maclure's notion that analysis can be an "aggressive act that stifles voice" and leaves power with the researcher (Maclure 2003 p 119) that gave me cause for concern. She argues that there is a conflict between trying to "preserve the authentic voice" and the "interventive analytic procedures" that the researcher uses. I became concerned that I would 'do things' to the 'raw data' which would distort it in order to make it fit my own views.

I had my own thoughts about themes arising from my story that I have already begun to touch on in previous chapters. During the development of the study I had been reading about topics such as 'top down pressure' and misunderstandings about the work involved in the Early Years in order to clarify my own thinking about my situation. I wanted to find new points of view – to ensure that the interviewees told their stories with their own

themes. In this way my themes were not premeditated, and were drawn from reading the interview transcripts. Other themes I expected to find and - to an extent – sought out in my questioning. I wanted to use the historical literature review in Chapter Two, and the development of policy and guidance discussed in Chapter Three to underpin the knowledge base from the interviews.

Analysis of the interviews

I chose six experienced early years professionals and interviewed them, developing life-stories which portrayed their careers and the relation of policy to their professional lives and practice. My own story would also weave through this.

My immediate instinct was that I wanted to use all of the material verbatim, with no editing so that the words could tell each individual story one at a time. I then planned to draw out themes after each story. In this way I hoped not to distort the meanings and to draw out the themes without putting my own preconceived position in the picture. By linking the themes together I hoped to gain a broad overview of influences to help me in my understanding. After experimenting with this it became clear that this could not work, not least because I had far more material from the taped interviews than in e mail form and the 'flow' of the piece did not work coherently. It was therefore my responsibility to 'own' the evidence and to make meaning from it, to put my own interpretation on it and to make my version of the story and the transcripts, together, related.

As I began to rationalise my concerns over my perceived biased standpoint (Chapter Four) I realised in transcribing the tapes and reflecting on the e mails, that these Early Years teachers were actually thinking

through critical issues that were important to them as well. This highlights the fact that both parties have “something at stake” (Maclure 1993 p 375). Lave (1995) describes how she always tries to put in her notes what is said, and how it is said. She does not paraphrase, which she recognises as difficult. By reviewing and reflecting on her notes regularly she finds themes developing which she records on cards and files in groups (Lave and Kvale 1995) I found this piece helpful as it outlined processes similar to those I used.

I had a mass of evidence from which I needed to draw conclusions, reading the piece by Lave (1995), particularly when it refers to not paraphrasing and always noting what is said and how, was very supportive. In my original thinking about my research questions I realised that, in interviewing a group of people I would hear things that would be new to me. Hearing new ideas was inevitably going to inform and dictate the way the research progressed.

The first interview transcribed was that from Harriet. It was when reading through this that I started to frame the themes. For example, she spoke a great deal about ‘pivotal moments’ and how reflecting on these altered the way she worked or thought about what she knew. I then used the theme of self reflection as I coded each subsequent interview. It was the particular vocabulary used by each participant that first struck me and then I began to look for similar or contrasting scenarios in each career. It was this that led to the theme of resilience. I have listed below examples of the words that showed this strength of character in each participant. Each time a word describing a personal trait appeared I added it to a list. The theme of resilience arose when it became obvious that each story was

reflecting a struggle and each teacher was frustrated, but determined. At this early stage of analysis, I also made tentative notes towards other themes. These included- the Early Years as a specialism; bullying; the role of women; seeming lack of understanding of Early Years work at strategic levels locally and nationally; and the changes of role that each participant had taken on. However, these became distilled into the five main themes listed below.

That there were more similarities than contrasts was striking, and they were not hard to find thus not requiring me to be aggressive with the text in the way described by Maclure (2003).

Apart from the interviews which were conducted exclusively by e mail, the interviews were taped and transcribed by me. The transcriptions were then verified by the subjects. Their approval and occasional adaptation meant that the evidence used in this research is not reworded or rephrased by me. It also means that they are not incomplete records. The e mails by their very nature were already verified by their subjects. How these differed will be discussed below. My coding system was a simple one of reading each piece and using colours to highlight similar themes. These themes became clear after an initial reading when certain words kept recurring throughout the evidence. These words related to the personal qualities of each participant. For example- 'passion', 'tenacity', 'rebellious', 'determined', 'principled', 'belief', 'enthusiasm', 'frustration', 'committed', 'brave' and 'strong'. In Chapter Seven I will look more closely at the personal qualities of the subjects, but once I started to look at the evidence in this way I found I could draw out the following themes -

- *Personal qualities*- examining what the evidence showed me about the experiences of the subjects and how they dealt with situations and people was the basis for the rest of the themes
- *Teaching- an art not a process?* - examining the term 'pedagogy' and how it applies in the context of this research
- *Respectful or subversive teachers?* - looking at how the teachers interviewed for this work consider and develop policy
- *Views of childhood*- considering how opinions on childhood affect teaching and interpretation of policy
- *Resilience*- considering how the teachers in this study developed their careers against their varying backgrounds

Chapter Seven takes each of these themes and uses evidence from the interviews to show how they emerged.

'E-mail interviewing as a qualitative method of inquiry' (James, 2007)

The difference between the e-mail evidence and that gained from interview might also be considered a 'dilemma to do with presentation' (Goodson and Sikes 2001 p109). The point here is that the participants may have presented themselves differently because of the different method of interview.

The two interviews carried out by e- mail differed from the other six not only in their style of writing, which may be discernibly clear to the reader in the examples used throughout this thesis, but they also differed from each other in the quantity that was written. Whilst both gave interesting and

pertinent information, one went into more detail than the other even when I used the same prompts and questions. It is worth considering how the situation may have been different if these interviews had taken place face to face. E- mails allow subjects to present themselves differently from how they might in person as they give time for a considered response which can then be edited and revised before being sent. By sending me their exact words, I could paste them into this document therefore doing the same as using extracts from my approved interview transcriptions. In this thesis I still remain faithful to their voices (MacLure 1993 p312) and they are still 'speaking' in their own words, but those words have had a birth different from those spoken spontaneously in conversation. It could be that the use of e- mail gave the subjects a chance to examine their thinking in a different way. It was in a comment from James (2007), that I found clarity. In writing about e- mail interviewing she states that it gives "academics a voice, and a context in which they could begin to explore how they saw themselves" (James, 2007 p 967). I was then able to draw a comparison between the thinking that goes into the preparation of an e- mail, and the process that each of my subjects went through when they proof read the transcripts of their interviews. Each participant was thus able to review, edit and approve what they had said. One difference remained in that I would not be "caught up in the weave" (Maclure, M. 2003 p119) in the same way with the e- mail interviews as I was in the face to face ones. Correspondence goes some way towards this, but it was inevitably going to be different and may have made a difference to the amount of evidence collected in this way as it is a more formal way to proceed.

Also missing in electronic communication is the ability to see facial or other non verbal communication in order to judge meaning. In common with James, I already knew my subjects which allowed me to relate their 'representation on line' to our 'pre-existing relationships' (James 2007 p 969). Thus being able to accept what they typed as representative of their thinking.

Conclusion

Before interviewing each participant about their careers I could not have predicted the themes that would emerge. These illuminate the research in a way that I had not expected and it has become far more than a simple discussion of the match between policy and lived experiences.

In this chapter I have described how I analysed my evidence, the difficulties this caused, and what I was presented with. In the next chapter I will give a brief outline of each subject's story in order to give a personal background to the themes as they unfold. Chapter Seven will then continue developing the evidence by discussing the themes that emerged from the process of analysis which has been described in this chapter.

Chapter Six

Case Studies

Introduction

This chapter gives brief, anonymised, outlines of the career of each of the professionals who participated in the study derived from their submitted curriculum vitae. It is important to provide insight into the professional development and experience of the participants so that the findings of subsequent analysis of their interviews can be viewed in their career contexts.

Setting the scene- 'a prescribed curriculum raises standards...'

Since hearing opening quote said by a professional colleague, I subsequently heard it said by Lord Adonis (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools 2005-2008) about phonics as a required part of the curriculum (March 2006).

Kelly (2003) listed what he felt were the controlling aspects of the English education system. His concern about the use of language has been touched on throughout this thesis? A further concern of Kelly's was not that the National Curriculum itself that was a threat to professionalism, but more 'the apparatus set up to enforce it' (Kelly 2003 p4). In summary his concerns related to: the replacement of a politically independent HMI; the heading of this body by someone who was not politically independent; the bureaucratic evaluations of Ofsted; the political dictation of teacher training; the suppression of open discussion; the control of the publication of the findings of government funded research; Ofsted inspections as an alternative form of 'research' (" 'findings' are used selectively to support

policies already established on other grounds”); “the forbidding (in some places) of advisers to share their doubts on new policies with teachers”; and- of teachers or headteachers (in some places) being forbidden to share concerns about policy with parents (Kelly 2003 p5).

The analysis of policy in Chapter Three shows the rapid movement towards a prescribed curriculum. The subtitle of this section, ‘a prescribed curriculum raises standards...’ paraphrases a public comment made at a training day for education advisers and consultants in 2006 and reflects the background against which these case studies were written. The aim of the interviews in this study is to see how a group of experienced professionals have interpreted policy documents that relate to education in the Early Years. In this way I want to reflect on policy development and its relationship to lived experience. The opinions of Kelly, given above, whilst very forthright, resonate with my own experience as a teacher and an adviser, and for this reason it is important that my own story is included here – so that my positionality is clear (Clough and Nutbrown 2002). One of the reasons behind my embarking on this research was to try to understand my experience in relation to the experiences of others and to see whether my experiences had similarities with others’.

This chapter first presents a brief account of my own story, followed by similar stories for each of the eight people I interviewed. The stories are taken from the information gathered during the interview process, sometimes supported by the curriculum vitae of the participants. The stories vary in length depending because, as explained in Chapter Five (Analysis) interviews yielded more information than e mail evidence. The

words quoted in these stories are as they were given to me, and the only changes made have been to protect anonymity. Each participant chose her own pseudonym. Subsequent chapters use the interview material to address the research questions -

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?
2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

My Story - Sue

*...the forbidding (in some places) of advisers to share their doubts on new policies with teachers.
(Kelly 2003 p5)*

My own story begins with a burning desire to be a teacher. I cannot remember a time when I didn't have that feeling. This was odd because I was never clever at school work, and didn't do well in exams if I passed at all. I enjoyed school however, until I was a top junior. This was a defining moment, and one that decided my career path despite the odds.

My weakest subject was, and is, maths. From top juniors on, this was picked on by teachers who either refused to see or didn't understand my problems. Either way, I was bullied and humiliated. The fact that I managed to get a low level pass in maths eventually is thanks to my parents who managed to get me moved into a lower group, and a teacher who finally realised that I didn't understand and who took time to teach me.

My mind was set to be a teacher and not allow the children in my care to have those negative experiences. Even then I knew that bullying and shouting did not help children learn, but it was only much later that I began to reflect on what would actually make a situation conducive to learning.

I left school in 1977 and went into teacher training. As I did not have maths 'O' level I could not do a degree so I did a three year Certificate in Education training me to teach children from the ages of three to nine. My three teaching practices were all in Reception or Year One (then Middle Infants) classes. I was fortunate each time to work with teachers who loved their work and allowed the children time to experiment and learn through experience. I did well in all my practices and came out of training knowing I'd made the right decision.

When I left college in 1980, I didn't have a teaching job to go to so I worked in an office until the following Easter. Then I was fortunate to get a job for a term in a nursery, then full time work in the school where I had done my final teaching practice.

Returning to this school was another defining moment as it had a supportive head who understood the needs of the staff and the children. Even though this predated the National Curriculum by some eight years, the school had its own detailed plans of developmentally progressive steps in maths and English. Unlike the National Curriculum, these steps were not defined by year groups, and children could work their way through as appropriate and move on when ready.

Not only was this very helpful for a new teacher, it also set in motion my way of thinking and teaching. That is, teaching is not a dictated process, there are many and various ways for children to learn a concept or skill, but they don't all learn it in the same way, at the same time.

The National Curriculum arrived while I was teaching part time around having my first two children. But because I was working in Nursery and Reception, I didn't really notice the arrival of it until I went back full time in 1991 – those age groups at the time being relatively unaffected by the momentous policy change to the statutory education system. I moved to teach Year One, but was also Early Years Co-ordinator. I could see the point of a consistency of curriculum nationally, but immediately noticed that the children I had in this age group now were not at the same level as those I had taught when I had had my first 'middle infants' before the National Curriculum. This puzzled me as the schools had very similar catchment areas. The children I now had were not at the same level of independence or skill as those I had recently left in Reception.

I reflected on this and saw two reasons, one was to do with the low expectations of the previous teachers, but these had been compounded by the expectations of the curriculum. Those working in Early Years at the time were unsure how to proceed as the National Curriculum didn't start for the child until the age of five. With many children in Reception classes still being four for at least two terms, teachers were wary of touching on things that didn't seem to be theirs to teach any more. Thus children weren't counting above ten, or writing by themselves, even though some were clearly capable of doing so.

I could not understand why a core curriculum meant that learning in each year group needed to be 'capped', so continued to teach using the style I had adopted in my probationary year. In other words, working with the stages of the children, and moving forward when they were ready.

As my interest in Early Years work grew, I started to research it and the discrepancies between how children develop and learn, and what was expected of them in schools became clear. A curriculum 'void' for under fives had been identified and had started to be filled - by developing national policies. Whilst this was reasonably helpful, the structures imposed by prescribed teaching, and later the strategies, took their toll. Young children were being expected to take part in formal, discrete learning that was, to my mind, quite inappropriate.

I moved to teach a Reception class in 1996 and gained Ofsted approval for my way of working. This, however, did not prevent my eventually deciding that I had no choice but to leave the school because of increasing expectations to adopt formal teaching methods which, I felt, were inappropriate (this despite my successes with less formal and more child centred approaches).

Since 2003, I have been an Early Years Adviser. This has been intriguing as in this role I have seen many people in similar situations to the one I left. However, I find my role uncomfortable and full of tensions. I understand what Kelly means about advisers being forbidden to share their doubts. I find the title 'adviser' a difficult one to manage as I see my role more as a facilitator. I cannot offer 'quick fixes' to problems as some of my colleagues feel they can, but I can listen and discuss and develop mutual understanding, thinking and reflection.

It is clear that, for me at least, guidance and policy have not contributed to a better understanding of education in the Early Years.

The Freelance Consultant's Story - 'Harriet'

Active pleasure in looking at these things, and eager curiosity about them, is one of the most striking features of the minds of intelligent children of two years and more. It has quite as large a place in their spontaneous behaviour as their delight in stories and "make-believe", in song and dance, and in all forms of "self-expression". And yet it has been largely shut out of the tradition of schools for young children, even of progressive schools.

(Isaacs, S. 1930. p 17)

Harriet's story starts in 1979 when she completed a four year Bachelor of Education (Hons) at Bath. She wanted to study botany, and the course was in rural science. Her fourth year, however, was spent studying psychology. This she now describes as 'pivotal'. 'Pivotal' is an oft repeated word in the story as Harriet recounts her career.

In 1992 the degree was followed up an Advanced Diploma in Language and Literacy. For this Harriet gained a distinction, and was asked by those who ran the course to publish her work. This she subsequently did. Continuing her academic progress, in 1996 Harriet completed an MA with the Open University, researching assessment and planning as her main focus.

Despite the variety of her studies, Harriet feels that everything she now does is based upon her learning from the Diploma and the MA. A background of botany, psychology, literacy, assessment and planning is an interesting one and these influences show in her career.

From training, Harriet's first job was as a Reception class teacher in an 'impoverished area'. This lasted for a year, after which the nature of the staffing at the school required she should be redeployed. Her second job was also in a Reception class from 1980 to 1985. By the time she left this to have her daughter, she had gained a scale two post for Art. At that time teachers started their careers at scale one and were then awarded up to a scale three for specific responsibilities.

When her daughter started school, Harriet went back to teaching part time. The head at her new school had introduced the 'real books' approach to reading (of particular interest here is Waterland's book 'The Apprenticeship approach to Reading'). This was to become significant in the way Harriet thought about reading.

Harriet found that her baby and her new colleagues moved her thinking forward. This made her reflect on some of the 'truly awful' resources she was making to teach reading. She began to think that there was 'no way' these would teach the children 'how to work out words'. The 'real books' approach of the Headteacher, and the comments of a concerned parent showed her that bingo type games using words such as 'because, of, the, to, with, by, said, and from' were not helpful. Despite this reflection and understanding, Harriet and her Headteacher met with some resistance. Working with this Headteacher was one of Harriet's pivotal moments. With her thinking changed she moved schools.

Working with a new colleague as a study partner, Harriet gradually found that she was not alone in the way she had been thinking about the teaching of reading.

She went to Saturday conferences where there were people telling her 'why I was doing what I knew to be good'. It was here that she first started hearing about Liz Waterland (1985), Margaret Meek, Vygotsky and Bruner *. These 'really, really significant things' started to give Harriet the professional knowledge and theoretical background she wanted to look properly at the teaching of reading.

Having a supportive Headteacher, who allowed six members out of a staff of nine do advanced diplomas in language and literacy was a very valuable experience.

In this way, every one at the school had a shared framework and a united notion

of what progress is. In this way none of them could understand how it was still thought that a published reading scheme could teach a child to read.

As Harriet was working out her understanding of teaching reading, the National Curriculum was taking hold. She did not feel this to be a problem because she felt the original National Curriculum was useful and supportive if it was implemented properly.

Harriet felt fortunate that the school was a very 'research based school' where there were always at least two of the staff doing some sort of research. They also had a great deal of input from language and drama advisers. The Headteacher was very proactive in this and would buy in as much use of various advisory staff as she could to develop her staff not just to support the weakest staff. This meant that all training was powerful because it influenced everyone.

Harriet went on to become a Deputy Head, and then an Advisory Teacher for English before going to work at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). She is now a Freelance Education Consultant focusing on effective teaching and learning of language and literacy.

** Margaret Meek is a member of the Executive Committee of the National Literacy Trust. An outline of Vygotsky's work appears in Chapter Two. Bruner is an American psychologist famous for learning theory*

The Teacher's Story - 'Sarah'

*The essential point, as Dr Isaacs saw it, was that if you did not get these things right with the babes, you would never get them right later on.
(Gardner, D. 1969. p58)*

Sarah has a BA in English and a PGCE. When she started the BA, Sarah did not know what she wanted to be professionally, and studying English gave her 'time to think'. She started teaching in September 1985.

After working for three years in an Inner London Education Authority primary school where she taught children in Reception and Year One, Sarah moved to Hounslow in 1988. Since then she has taught in Nursery, Reception, Year One and Year Two with one year spent in a centre for children with physical disabilities.

In 2000 she became Reception Co-ordinator in a three form entry infants school, and she was subsequently Acting Deputy for a term. In 2004 she gained a Certificate in Early Years Education and is now working towards an MA in Early Childhood.

After sixteen years in the same school, Sarah decided to move schools. There were two reasons for this. The first is that she had been there a long time, and the second that she wanted to co-ordinate the whole Early Years Department including Nursery. She became an Early Years Co-ordinator in another, smaller, infants school in 2004. However, just after Sarah started in her new role, the Headteacher of her new school retired. The new Headteacher did not seem to understand Early Years work and so tensions and difficulties arose, as well as what Sarah felt were inappropriate expectations of the children and staff. Sarah felt that she had no choice but to leave the school and got a job as an Early Years Consultant in a different local authority.

Understanding child development is key to what underpins Sarah's work. In the early stages of her career she didn't feel she had that knowledge, but her reading and professional development have 'opened her eyes'.

Her developing interest in Early Years Education has highlighted to her that there is much in schools that is inappropriate. For her, the prescribed curriculum has taken the passion out of teaching

The Senior Lecturer's Story- 'Emily'

People who work with young children must themselves continue to learn. If they do not continue to read, discuss and to think, to keep up to date with current issues, with theory and practice, they show a disrespect for the people they work with, the children and their parents.
(Nutbrown 1996. p53)

In 1978 Emily qualified as Nursery Nurse (NNEB). She then went on to do a Certificate in Education which transferred into a degree. She gained a Bachelor of Education (Hons) degree after four years. It was when she was at university that she started to develop a real passion for Early Years and became known as the 'Nursery Woman'. She puts this passion down to the fact that she had been a Nursery Nurse. She felt so strongly that she stood as vice president of The Students Union, but wasn't elected. Unusually, Emily was allowed to do two of her three teaching practices in nurseries as she was so interested in that work. During this time Emily also set up a branch of the National Campaign for Nursery Education as she was concerned about the number of nursery schools that were threatened with closure at that time.

Although Emily gained a great deal from her practices, when she started working she didn't feel very confident. This she put down to the attitudes of Headteachers 'who were completely absolutely awful at nurturing new blood or new strengths of people coming in'. She saw as the reason that 'as soon as they saw somebody who was enthusiastic, who was knowledgeable, who was energetic and achieving and all that, they seemed to just want to put you down'.

Emily's second job was setting up a new nursery unit in an inner city school. The Headteacher there was very supportive and facilitated a lot of things. Emily stayed there for nine years.

Over the years Emily became an avid reader and, what she called, 'a compulsive conference goer'. This, and her membership of the British Association of Early Childhood Education, have both shaped her thinking, and developed her confidence to articulate her beliefs.

Emily's reading led her to reflect on different philosophies of education and at the time of the interview in 2006, she felt that after her twenty three years teaching and campaigning for appropriate teaching and learning on the Early Years things were finally coming 'full circle', and that there was 'light at the end of the tunnel'. Her opinion was that, although interpretation of guidance had been 'extremely poor', things would improve because the value of observing children had been reinstated and people were beginning to see it more positively.

In 1996 Emily started part time lecturing whilst still teaching. This was an important experience because she still had a strong evidence base to build upon which to build her parallel work in the classroom. She feels that it is very important for all lecturers to work 'in the field' in order to relate to students better.

In 1999 Emily became a full time lecturer. This got her away from 'bullying Headteachers' and also gave her the chance to say what she wanted to say. And she is still doing this today. During her time in this role, she has also been seconded as an Early Years Adviser.

Also during 1999, Emily started an MA in Early Childhood Education and went on a study tour to Reggio Emilia. In her own words she feels that this is when her 'real bolshiness' started. The two experiences compounded her feelings, 'what the hell are we doing, it's just not the best way forward for children'.

Subsequently Emily has written for publication and been the keynote speaker at conferences. It is appropriate to end this overview of Emily's story in her own words:

'I think the more I do this the stronger I get. You wouldn't believe this, but on my reports when I was training to be a Nursery Nurse, it said things like I worked really hard and worked well with children, but she's also really shy and needs to have more confidence'

The Early Years Adviser's Story- 'Jane Dudley'

At the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him.
(Plowden Report 1967. p7)

Jane's story starts when she did teacher training from 1965-1968. From this she gained a Teacher's Certificate. She felt her training to be 'very Piagetian' and was subsequently very influenced in her early career by the newly published Plowden Report. Although she started the newly instigated, Bachelor of Education degree, she decided, after two years that she wanted some teaching experience before continuing work at degree level. In 1968 she became a class teacher in a junior school in the Inner London Education Authority. Until 1970 Jane taught first year junior classes during which time she established links with the adjoining infant's school.

Jane sees herself as:

'A qualified primary teacher with a varied career offering experience and expertise, especially in child development and special educational needs'.

This varied experience includes: Seven years experience as headteacher of a maintained nursery school leading change; the development of services for young children and their families; recent post offering complementary involvement in central strategic activities and responsibility for developing quality early years provision across all early years settings in Local Education Authorities; Considerable experience of working within and leading staff teams; involvement with the EEL project and links with Ferre Laevers * and work on wellbeing and involvement

** The Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project is a professional development programme of supported self-evaluation. It was developed by Professor Christine Pascal and Dr Tony Bertram at University College Worcester. Professor Ferre Laevers of Leuven University developed the observation methods upon which this programme is based.*

The Early Years Adviser's Story - 'Maureen Scott'

*Whenever I think about the children's differences, my sense of the excitement of teaching mounts. Without the uniqueness of each child, teaching would be a dull, repetitive exercise for me.
(Paley, 1990. p 47)*

Maureen also has also had varied experiences in different roles working with children. These include- Ofsted Inspector of Schools; Ofsted Nursery Education Inspector; Head of Infants; Deputy Headteacher; Lecturer in Early Childhood Education; Early Years Adviser; Author of many publications; independent consultant.

When asked what her motivation in her career has been, Maureen said:

'Children! From the first moment I set foot in a private nursery in ... over 30 years ago and realised that I wanted to teach, the joy of working with young children has never left me. I have had such pleasure from working with the children and those who work with them over the years and each job – teacher, head, lecturer, and adviser – has given me fresh knowledge, experiences and pleasure. The people with whom I have worked have also been tremendously motivating. The passion and commitment to the task of educating young children seems to attract an extraordinary array of talented, enthusiastic and committed people. When I look back at the teams with whom I've worked they have all offered more than could ever reasonably be expected to their work. In addition, I have friends and colleagues all over the country – and in different parts of the world and we all share this passion for the work we do and it's like having an extended family. Finally it has to be said that I am, by nature, a campaigner and I have enjoyed fighting on behalf of children and practitioners to make experiences better. I believe so strongly that young children are remarkable and have always wanted to protect them from the onslaught of initiatives that have treated them – and their practitioners – so often, as inept and limited'.

Maureen has noticed significant changes during her career, but she feels the most dramatic was the introduction of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage in 2000:

'The most dramatic change to my professional life came post 2000 with the introduction of the Foundation Stage and the support needed for settings in the non-maintained sector. Our county is very rural and also – in places – very rich, and we have more FS children in the voluntary and

private sectors than in schools. When I began as early years adviser in 1996 my team was 2.5 strong and I shared a secretary with other advisers. Post the introduction of the Foundation Stage the team increased to 50, eight of whom were full time admin staff. This shows, of course, a commitment to and a willingness to invest in early years by the local authority’.

Maureen now works part time as an independent consultant. She feels this gives her different opportunities:

‘Working part-time has given me renewed energy to focus on children and learning once more...rather than policy and strategy. I am building up a great balance between working with local authorities, individual settings and doing training. In addition I have become a governor and am working with the local university. I have more time to read and reflect and I think I may have more to offer now that I can focus on fewer things – and maybe do them better. The hardest thing is keeping up with the plethora of initiatives. As a local authority adviser these things passed in front of me daily – but now I have to find out about them, and I spend a lot of (unpaid) time reading papers, journals and attending conferences. It will be interesting to see if I remain as valuable to others now I don’t have the title of ‘inspector’ or ‘adviser’.....’

The Early Year's Consultant's story- 'Margaret Grant'

The child, the boy, the man, indeed, should know no other endeavour but to be at every stage of development wholly what this stage calls for. Then will each successive stage spring like a new shoot from a healthy bud; and, at each successive stage, he will with the same endeavour again accomplish the requirements of this stage: for only the adequate development of man at each preceding stage can effect and bring about adequate development at each succeeding later stage.
(Froebel, 1887. p30)

Margaret says of herself:

'I guess I am best described as an early years consultant these days, but I am essentially a nursery teacher. I was deeply influenced by the Froebelian training I enjoyed between 1958 and 1961.

Molly Brearley and some of her colleagues were powerful role models. She went on to work on the Plowden Committee, and in policy terms, that was a seminal influence. Its publication coincided exactly with the time I went on maternity leave, and I had 7 years out of teaching, but ran a private nursery at home until I moved, and then did voluntary PPA (Preschool Playgroups Association) work. When I went back to work in 1974, I opened a new nursery class in an Education Priority Area, at a time when there looked as though there would be an expansion of Nursery Education. If we'd continued that consistently, we'd have full provision by now.'

Margaret's experience includes- OFSTED Registered Inspector; OFSTED Registered Nursery Inspector and trainer; policy consultant to Local Authorities and the British Council; specialist early years adviser, DfES; Local evaluator, Early Excellence Programme; The British Association for Early Childhood Education; London University Institute of Education Tutor, advanced diploma in early years education; External Examiner, B.Ed. University of Hertfordshire; OFSTED early years inspections: Registered Inspector for twenty nursery schools and centres in nineteen Local Authorities; team member for twelve primary schools in ten Local Authorities; devised and led joint inspection of City of London Early Years Centre; devised and led joint inspections of Islington's

combined centres; Key Stage 1 SATs moderator; Primary and Early Years inspector: District inspector, Early Years; Assessor, NNEB; Tutor, early years and literacy at Froebel College; Course Tutor, multi-professional advanced diploma; Headteacher of demonstration nursery school; Early Years teacher

This is combined with project work and voluntary work on policy and practice both at home and abroad. Margaret continues to participate in a wide range of courses and conferences, including DfES updates.

With all this experience, she is clear about the best thing she ever did:

‘Well, it’s interesting isn’t it? When I was a head, and I think that was the best job I did really in terms of effective impact, because you’re working with children. As I was a teaching head, I worked directly with the children so I knew them very well and was therefore much more use to their parents actually because when we were talking I had direct experience. I remember talking to a social worker who was attached to a school in America. I realised that the structure there meant there were 3 people doing the work that I was doing when I was a head. But then I thought on yes, it was very busy and no doubt there were things that were done in this other place that I couldn’t get round to, but I think I was more use because I was embodying all of those aspects in terms of staff development and management and setting the policy in terms of directly teaching and relating to parents and the kind of social worker aspect. I could do it more effectively because I had all of those immediately in my experience’.

Margaret’s work and involvement with different groups mean that she has had some involvement at first hand with policy development over the years.

The Nursery Headteacher's story- 'Kay Isaacs'

We shared all the children's interests actively, joining in their making and doing, their digging and painting, their experiments and discoveries; as well as in their games of "engines" and "firemen", or "father and mother". Together we and they explored the outer world, and together we devised ways of expressing the inner world of phantasy. We were fellow-workers and play-mates, rather than teachers and pupils.
(Isaacs, 1930. p 35)

Kay, the Nursery Headteacher has had a very diverse career. Her reasons are summed up here:

'I suppose I'm a refugee in Early Years. Motivation, where does the motivation to fight what's wrong and put things right come from? Having been a secondary teacher and seen the disasters and then gone into primary and worked in a very unusual school with wild fowl and crocodiles and what have you, you won't see that in the CV. I have had an unorthodox career which has gone with my will and passion. The only common denominator is there is an element of the outdoors and gardening throughout'.

Her 'will and passion' are clear from what she said throughout her interview, and she sees herself as:

'A versatile, multiskilled educator with professional experience in four Local Authorities and foreign schools. Having taught all ages between three and twenty five, retrained and has specialised in Early Years Education for the majority of her career'.

In 1976 Kay was a VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) Teacher. She taught a wide range of subjects to an age range of nine up to twenty five year olds as well as being in charge of the agriculture department, which helped to feed the school with a roll of six hundred. In 1979 (until 1984) Kay was a Combined School teacher teaching a class of six –seven year olds, and was responsible for the care and budgeting for two hundred and fifty animals and wildfowl kept on site. In 1984 she had her first child and whilst not in paid work and being Mother to two boys, she ran the crèche at a College until 1988. She then worked for a year as a

part-time Lecturer in an Environmental Studies Centre.

From 1989 until 1992 Kay was Senior teacher in a Nursery School and in charge of the garden re-development project there. Between 1993 and 1996 Kay was Deputy Headteacher of a large nursery school on a housing estate with numerous social and physical problems. She was SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) nursery link teacher and community liaison representative and also created a link with an Albanian nursery school through the local charity Feed the Children, and in 1997 visited that school.

Kay is now a successful Headteacher of an, Ofsted graded, 'outstanding' Nursery school. She is also in demand nationally as a speaker on training courses.

The Primary Headteacher's story- 'Sarah Newell'

As a way of thinking, practical reasoning may indeed involve drawing on resources of what those authors call 'professional practice knowledge', but it involves drawing on more than that 'store' of knowledge. It also involves drawing on understandings about one's own and others' intentions, understandings, meanings, values and interests, and on one's own and others' reflexive, unfolding understandings of the situation in which one is practising at any given moment.
(Kemmis 2005. p 392)

Sarah is Headteacher of a primary school in the middle of an estate of high and low rise flats. She has a very firm belief that guidance and policy must be read and understood before being used:

'I think that is a lot about the influence of policy as well. When people have got a really sound understanding or belief in what early years is they will read the policies that come out and relate them to their experience, their beliefs, their understanding. I think when policy comes out that people haven't got that background on, that's when it goes wrong. And, if I'm going to be honest, that's come from the local authority as well where policies have come out, or something's been introduced, and it's been read and because the person delivering it to the big wide world doesn't have that background in early years and that understanding in early years, what's come across has not been what's in the document'.

Sarah's work as a teacher has been influenced by theories of child development.

In this way she realises that it is quality of experience that is important. A good example given of this is one she gave of covering a Year Three class at her school. She had been asked to work on volcanoes so, rather than work from sheets, they made models that erupted so that they could discuss the effects.

A clear influence on Sarah has been people she has worked alongside. A nursery practice demonstrated to her what she didn't want. The relationships between adults were not good. There was competitiveness between adults which couldn't have had a positive impact on the children

This experience has left a lasting effect on Sarah. She feels:

‘Underlying belief is important. You may not have the same beliefs, but you can have a professional discussion. If you are secure you can modify, if you are insecure you can’t’.

Her experiences have been: Bachelor of Education Honours with a specialism in the first years of schooling and science; 1986 –1987 Newly Qualified Teacher; Class teacher across infant school including reception, reception team leader; Various curriculum responsibilities including Design and Technology and Information and Communication Technology; 1994 Acting Deputy Headteacher; 1991- 1995 Home/school/Community Liaison, Senior Management Team; 1995 - present day- Headteacher.

Sarah is a respected Headteacher in her local authority and, as such, is a mentor to others and a member of steering groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced me and the eight participants of the study, our career stories and influences. The interviews have also been analysed (as discussed in Chapter Five (Analysis) to identify key themes.

Up to this point, the thesis has been creating the policy and personal backdrop to the study against which the themes arising from my analysis of the interviews will be developed and discussed. In the following chapters the strands of history, philosophy and policy will weave together with the stories and evidence from the interviews to produce new strands of thinking in a way reminiscent of Maclure’s statement:

...weaving something new, yet assembled out of fragments and recollections of other fabrications such as the interview ‘data’ and field notes, as well as the scattered traces of innumerable other cultural texts of identity, policy, institutional life, career, curriculum, and so on.

(Maclure, M. 2003 p119)

Chapter Seven

The Personal Qualities

Introduction

Having presented the individual case studies in Chapter Six, this thesis continues with a discussion of the themes drawn out of the interviews as described in Chapter Five (Analysis: the search for themes). Of key interest, because this work is based on life history, are the personal qualities of each interviewee as shown through their own words.

This chapter begins with a consideration of research and central government policy about the personal qualities of Early Years Teachers, it goes on to look at the qualities exemplified by the subjects interviewed, specifically how the evidence exemplified: i) teaching and use of policy.

This section covers two themes: *Teaching- an art not a process? And Respectful or subversive teachers?*; ii) views of childhood and iii) resilience.

National interest

The increasing focus on the Early Years as an important stage of learning that started with the development of the Desirable Learning Outcomes (SCAA 1996) brought with it a focussing on those who worked within it, for example Moyles, J. et al (2002) and Sylva (2004).

This focus on the qualities, expectations and respect within the profession was not new. As far back as 1965, Gardner and Cass noted:

There is still considerable misunderstanding about the teacher's function in the modern Infant School and even in the Nursery School, though, in the latter, the young child's obvious need for physical care and good mothering relieves the teacher to some extent both from outside criticism and from any doubts she may herself feel. The Infant School teacher, except perhaps in the reception class, has less of such protection. Parents, for example,

may accuse her of doing nothing but just letting the children play, and extremists for ideas of freedom may make her very diffident about whether she ought to intervene.
(Gardner and Cass 1965, p7)

Hargreaves and Hopper (2006) emphasised this when they reported that, even with the introduction of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000), and the "establishment of Foundation Stage assessment (despite its double-edged impact) and the recent unprecedented expansion of initiatives and investment in early years education", those who teach three to five year olds still feel marginalised. They further comment that the increasing integration of education in the Early Years alongside care services in the 'Ten Year Strategy' (HM Treasury 2004) "threatens to exacerbate the current low occupational prestige experienced by early years practitioners" (Hargreaves and Hopper 2006, p 172)

This chapter is in two sections:

1. An examination of recent research and policy on the qualities, expectations and qualifications of Early Years teachers
2. A discussion of the qualities reflected in the interviews of research participants

1. An examination of recent research and policy on the qualities, expectations and qualifications of Early Years teachers

In this section I will outline two policy developments that aim to address the qualities, expectations and qualifications of Early Years teachers, I will consider how they reflect or are supported by research. The first of these

came a year after the publication of the 'Ten Year Strategy' (HMSO 2004) and aims to define qualities and expectations.

1a. Key Elements of Effective Practice (KEEP) (DfES 2005)

*It is important that there is an agreed view within and across the sector about the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes practitioners need to effectively support young children's learning.
(DfES 2005. p6)*

This statement begs the question why it is felt that there is a need to publish guidance on the qualities and requirements of those who work in Early Years education, and the implications of this. It could be interpreted to mean that there is no clear understanding at central policy making level of what working with the youngest children means and involves. This is borne out by the fact that there is no comparable guidance for teachers working with older children. This suggests that such a list of qualities is not necessary if people are working with older children.

With the recent emphasis on the Foundation Stage, Early Years teachers have found themselves in the spotlight. An example of this is the requirement of the Childcare Act 2006 that the wellbeing of children in the Early Years is to be measured by the outcomes of the Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2002), now called the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2008). This expectation put pressure on Early Years teachers, through their Local Authorities, to raise achievement so the focus was on their work. This focus has been exemplified by the development of the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* document that aims to define an agreed understanding of what is meant by expertise in the Early Years and what qualities would make a 'good' Early Years teacher. This self evaluation tool aims to inform training and job descriptions.

This is a broad remit and assumes an equal start point for all staff. However, the document is not just talking about 'teachers' as defined by Qualified Teacher Status. This is where the confusion lies, and perhaps why central government tried to define the role. In this eagerness to define roles and reach some sort of clarity there arises further confusion because the Early Years 'curriculum' had been developed for all staff in settings to work with, and 'settings' referred, in this instance, to anywhere where there were three to five year olds. 'Settings' now refers to provision for children from birth to five (DfES 2007) this definition therefore includes practitioners with a range of qualifications- and none (Nutbrown and Page 2008 p 47). The 'KEEP' document states that:

Effective practice in the early years requires committed, enthusiastic and reflective practitioners with a breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and understanding.

Effective practitioners use their learning to improve their work with young children and their families in ways which are sensitive, positive and non-judgemental.
(DfES 2005 p3)

These statements are relevant to the lived experience of the participants in this study, and arguably to teachers of all age ranges.

1b. Early Years Professional Status

Early Years Professionals (EYPs) work in many of the diverse range of settings that make up the early years sector. They lead practice and are central to delivering a quality service to children and their parents. Whilst EYPs hold a variety of job titles, what is common amongst them is the process by which they have been awarded EYPS.

<http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/eyps/what-is-an-eyp>

The next development outlined here also arises from the 'Ten Year Strategy' (HMSO 2004), and aims to address the need to gain appropriate qualifications to work in the Early Years.

Early Years Professional Status was first mooted in 2004 (HMSO 2004) and the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) (Sylva, 2004) project was cited by the government as evidence that quality preschool provision is beneficial for social, emotional and cognitive development. To provide this quality preschool the strategy document (HMSO 2004) puts forward the plan for the developing Early Years Professional Status. Again the EPPE project is cited by the government in support of this development because it states that a, "strong impact" is made on children when "practice is led by a *qualified teacher*" (Sylva, 2004 p46. My italics). Perhaps this is another example of a lack of clarity, for whilst it is the clear recommendation of the EPPE work to, 'Aim at a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff' (Sylva 2004 p vii) that is acknowledged, it seems that this aspect of the recommendation is subsequently ignored by the strategy. Instead an interpretation that carries through the view that quality is provided by staff with higher qualifications, not necessarily Qualified Teacher Status, is preferred. Sylva et al (2004) remind the reader on several occasions that:

Settings that have staff with higher qualifications, *especially with a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff*, show higher quality and their children make more progress and better social/ behavioural gains.
(Sylva, 2004 p56. My italics)

It is also important to note that "Less qualified staff were significantly better at supporting learning when they worked with qualified teachers" (Sylva, 2004 p56), and that it is important that "staff have both curriculum knowledge as well as knowledge and understanding of child development" (Sylva, 2004 p vi). The emphasis is on the need for a qualified teacher in settings.

There is a discrepancy appearing between the requirements of the Early Years Practitioner Status and that of the researched need for a Qualified Teacher in every setting (Sylva 2004). Whilst the new status goes some way towards agreeing with the recommendations of the EPPE research that practitioners must be well qualified, and supports the qualities required by the KEEP document, it dilutes the importance of the presence of a Qualified Teacher in the Early Years. Edgington (2006) has commented in an article that Early Years Professionals will be used as “a cheaper alternative to teachers”. She continues “the early years will be seen as quite separate from the rest of the education system. This will inevitably lower the status of early years work”:

Instead of inventing a new role, teacher training should be reviewed and developed so the standards better reflect the current role of the early years specialist. The government should then introduce more flexible access for practitioners with graduate status so they can achieve qualified teacher status while working.
(Edgington, 2006)

Thus there are two documents proposing to support the work of those in the Early Years. The KEEP document states that the key elements can be improved, “through initial and on-going training and development” (DfES 2005. p 3). This depends on having the right, “committed, enthusiastic and reflective practitioners with a breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and understanding” (DfES 2005. p 3). The Early Years Professional Status qualification aims to provide knowledge and skills, but confuses evidence from research by ignoring the value of Qualified Teacher Status. Both documents have the potential to cause confusion as they threaten “to exacerbate the current low occupational prestige experienced by early years practitioners” (Hargreaves and Hopper 2006, p

172). They do this by attempting to put all practitioners at the same level, thus ignoring important differences such as differing settings and types of provision. There is a seeming lack of understanding centrally as to what is required to support and develop the role of education in Early Years work. Despite evidence from EPPE that a qualified teacher is integral to quality, there is a move to dilute this idea with Early Years Practitioner Status. The qualities outlined in KEEP are an attempt to recognise the many and various practitioners who work in the field. There is an underpinning belief that those who do this work must be “committed, enthusiastic and reflective practitioners” (DfES 2005. p 3). These are not qualities that can be taught, they are developed over years. That personal qualities are important in a teacher, can be seen in the need felt by government to define them in the KEEP document (DfES 2005). The rest of this chapter will examine the qualities of the interviewees as evidenced from their interviews.

Having outlined key policy issues in relation to the qualities of early years teachers – the next section will look at the qualities of the research participants as reflected in the interviews

2. A discussion of the qualities reflected in the interviews of research participants

Analysing the evidence, Chapter Five, I was struck by the similarity of qualities displayed by the participants, and of a commonality in the language they used. For example, words such as ‘passion’, ‘tenacity’, ‘rebellious’, ‘determined’, ‘principled’, ‘belief’, ‘enthusiasm’, ‘frustration’, ‘committed’, ‘brave’ and ‘strong’ were used as a matter of course. The focus for this section is on the first research question:

What is the match between policy development and lived experience?

The 'lived experience' of the Early Years professionals, as will be seen through the evidence, has not always been easy. The terms listed above suggest this.

In the abstract to her paper 'Passion, Paradox and Professionalism in Early Years Education' (2001), Moyles wrote:

Early Years practitioners frequently use words like 'passionate' to describe themselves and their attitudes to working and playing with young children. But how is this emotive and emotional word to be interpreted by others? Given any evidence of real political influence or strength, this mainly female workforce cannot perhaps be said to be sufficiently passionate or forceful in justifying and promoting their beliefs and ideologies. Herein lies one of many paradoxes in early childhood: it seems impossible to work effectively with very young children without the deep and sound commitment signified by the use of words like 'passionate'.
(Moyles, 2001 p 81)

The 'paradox' of the 'passion' not being strong enough to be, "forceful in justifying and promoting their beliefs" in the face of political influence, is compounded by another issue. I increasingly feel that the passion displayed by those working in the Early Years can do them a disservice.

Moyles touched on this when she stated:

...this very symbolisation gives a very particular emotional slant to the work of early childhood practitioners which can work for or against them in their everyday roles and practices, bringing into question what constitutes professionalism and what being a 'teacher' means in such diversified contexts.
(Moyles, 2001 p 81)

The passion and emotion can be seen as an irritant and consequently disregarded. My story, outlined in Chapter Six, touched on how difficult I found working in the way I had researched, was at my school. I struggled to get an Early Years 'voice' into school policy and practice. Not only was

this frustrating; it was also annoying to those hearing it. My more recent experience, as an Early Years Adviser, shows this happening in staff rooms and at Local Authority level. There is also evidence that it is happening at national level as well. Interesting examples of this are the reactions to the Rose Report (DfES 2006), for example articles and letters in the Times Educational Supplement (from December 2006), and, in a slightly different way, the 'Open Eye' campaign which will be discussed in Chapter Eight. This is a campaign against the statutory elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Evidence of passion and the negative effects it can produce also came through the interviews.

Whilst reviewing the interview evidence four clear themes emerged that can be used to exemplify the personal qualities of the subjects which are: Teaching- an art not a process: respect and subversion; views of childhood and the concept of resilience.

I will now discuss each of these.

i) Teaching and use of policy

The title of this section is used to sum up two of the themes that I have outlined in Chapter Five- *Respectful or subversive teachers? And teaching- an art not a process?*

The first of these themes appears contradictory, but I have put the two words together because, as will be illustrated in this section, the subjects interviewed are all respectful teachers who have sometimes subverted policy, or the accepted practice of their setting in order to create a situation that they felt appropriate for the children. Nutbrown illustrates how the evidence in this research can show both traits. She wrote:

Children must have time, freedom, space, lack of pressure, as well as real challenge, using the 'stuff' of which the world is made - clay, sand, water - and they must have interaction, observation and conversation, from and with respectful educators.
(Nutbrown. 1996 p102)

These 'respectful educators' can operate in different ways within their role:

Many early childhood teachers use different vocabularies depending on the context. They read official documentation, record required assessments and communicate in some spheres in the imposed language of the National Curriculum and its assessments. Simultaneously, they may work, think, worry and discuss with colleagues and parents using a language more fitting to cherishing the growth and development of young children.
(Nutbrown, 1998. p17)

If to 'subvert' means to undermine, then the imposed use of language that is centrally governed can do this to practice, perhaps unwittingly. Such words as 'deliver', 'pedagogue', 'aspiration', 'curriculum', 'assessment', even 'teaching' and 'learning' have become imposed, overused, and as a consequence misunderstood- they do not carry any depth of meaning and understanding anymore. The loss of a general understanding of the term 'pedagogy' has led to the undermining of the other words on the list. This in turn results in a subversion of teaching and learning as it becomes purely curriculum based. An analysis of the term 'pedagogy' is included here as, for me in this study, the term in its purest sense underpins the qualities of the participants.

Over the recent years the word 'pedagogy' has been increasingly used. For example, the *Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (2007)* states that effective practitioners are those who, "Review challenge and improve their own pedagogy through critical and informed reflection" (Moyle, 2002 p 57). The Primary National Strategy *Excellence and Enjoyment (DfES 2003)*, suggested that the initiative would "focus on

building up teachers' own professionalism and capacity to teach better and better, with bespoke support they can draw on to meet their particular needs" (DfES 2003, p27). Its introductory guide to the package states its aim for: "staff to have the appropriate subject and pedagogical knowledge" (DfES 2004. p 19).

Although it is an increasingly popular word on training courses and in documents, pedagogy is not always clearly understood. Particularly as current policy and guidance points towards curriculum content (Carr 1998 p 325).

The difficulty of such documents as the *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2004) package is that, despite its intention to provide teachers with pedagogical knowledge, it focuses only on process- the 'how to' and not the 'why?' The quality of 'pedagogy' that sets it apart from teaching content is that of being able to interpret and reflect, asking questions of the curriculum and developing it against life experience. Alexander (2003) discussed his fears that education is getting further away from pedagogy. His critique of the 'Excellence and Enjoyment' (DfES 2004) stated that it is far too prescriptive and the teacher must engage certain ideas and values. He lists these in sets that are interrelated; children, learning, teaching and curriculum- but all of these are affected by a context which has requirements and expectations. This context comprises the school and policy, but these also have a context. He argues that even if we are compliant to prescriptive policy we are not immune from the contexts of culture, self and history. Kemmis (2005) calls this 'searching for saliences'. This is more than reflecting on methods of delivery alone, it involves understanding others, situations, intentions and meanings.

A survey conducted by the Times Educational Supplement in October 2006 and reported on November 17 2006, shows that teachers are reacting against prescriptive policy. It carried the headline 'Your verdict: It must be less prescriptive' and expressed teachers' worries that the youngest children are to, "absorb letters and numbers". This suggests that teachers are not able to be the, "respectful educators" Nutbrown describes, because teaching is becoming a process and not an art. It also highlights how far away from the Plowden report (CACE 1967) teaching has moved:

The future will depend upon the extent to which we can produce teachers with the necessary knowledge and understanding to use and improve upon the material made available to them, and keep themselves up to date.
(CACE 1967 p239)

In this way teachers would be, "respectful educators".

The professionals in this research show examples of this respect in their interviews, they also show subversion. 'Subversive' in the context of this research does not mean anything negative, it is better defined as how each of the teachers attempted to use their work to develop the children and not just implement policy.

As seen in Chapter Six, Harriet's story contains examples of how she came to realise that the way she taught reading, and the way it was done in the schools in which she worked, was failing children:

The other thing we did which was truly awful was we sent home a tin of words. Children wouldn't have a book until they knew the words in the tins. (Harriet- interview)

Her thinking was based on watching her own baby's responses to books.

What she learnt gradually enabled her to ignore school methods and develop her own in the form of games and resources:

I just ignored these books. The most I did was to tokenistically let them have one in their book bag if the parents really wanted one. But I didn't use them to teach reading in there.

She was also supported in her learning process by her own desire to develop professionally and tie up what she felt instinctively with professional knowledge. By developing her own thinking through reading and research, she was able to critique policy and guidance to use it appropriately. She helps others to do the same:

There's a lot of people out there doing stuff that they don't really want to do and they're not quite sure why they're doing it. And I'd say *Playing with Sounds* is another good example of that- 'Well I must deliver this training, but I don't agree with what's in this ring binder'. Well why are you delivering the training then? If you don't agree with what's in there! (Harriet- interview)

Playing with Sounds (DfES 2004) was produced to supplement the teaching of phonics in the Early Years and Key Stage One.

Reading and research empowered Sarah in the same way as it contributed to Harriet's development. It enabled Sarah to reflect on her practice and underpin it. However, putting her ideas into practice meant that Sarah had to be subversive because her school was not supportive:

It keeps me awake at night, I come home in tears. It's exhausting and you feel you're constantly fighting a battle with yourself, with your team, with your Headteacher. Yes, it's great to be aware of all this, but it's exhausting and frustrating. (Sarah- interview)

For Sarah, subversion seems to be almost a necessary by product or even an expectation when faced with new guidance:

But I think the tension between all these documents and the research side of things, and not using research, I think that's really interesting. (Sarah- interview)

Sarah found strength in her research:

That's where I find things like the MA are helping because I actually feel it's giving me a voice. (Sarah- interview)

Sometime after her interview, Sarah felt that she had to move jobs. She left the classroom to become an Adviser. She told me:

How do I see myself now?

A lot more knowledgeable about what I do and why and how. The only problem is that if you work in early years in a primary school this can be a dangerous thing and my increasing knowledge and understanding of what I did made it impossible for me to continue in the classroom. (Sarah- e- mail)

Emily also found that working in the ways she knew to be appropriate was difficult, and she too met with antagonism from those who had different understandings:

I think what held me back a lot was Headteachers who were completely absolutely awful at nurturing new blood or new strengths of people coming in. For some reason I always used to get their backs up. Or I used to just end up at schools where the heads were so, well bullies basically. (Emily- interview)

Emily felt that training has let people down. It is interesting to compare Emily's thoughts with Harriet's suggestion that well informed trainers can make all the difference to understanding and commitment:

I think that the interpretation of the curriculum guidance has been extremely poor, and obviously that goes right back to the training. The training was terrifically poor. I did the training and it was poor. And that got me thinking a lot. Doing that training really has made me form a lot of ideas about the curriculum guidance and I think we could really simplify it greatly. (Emily- interview)

Emily had to struggle, but remained passionate. This 'passion', however, bothered people:

And as soon as they saw somebody who was enthusiastic, who was knowledgeable, who was energetic and achieving and all that, they seemed to just want to put you down. (Emily- interview)

It is interesting that Emily sees her passion as 'militant' and 'bolshiness', because it gives an impression that she still feels as if others disapprove:

I think my real bolshiness started when I started the MA and when I went to Reggio because until you've actually gone outside of a country and you've looked at what other people do, particularly in

Reggio where there isn't a curriculum and it's completely child led and you can see the fantastic depth of thinking the children get to and the fantastic amount of learning that goes on, that you actually come back and think 'what the hell are we doing?' because it's just not the best way forward for children. And I think that's the scary thing. (Emily- interview)

Jane's career has led her into roles where she has had some influence over the way that policy and guidance is interpreted. She has been in a position to offer support:

From my perspective I am delighted that we are following Europe and investing in quality provision for our youngest children at the most important time in their lives. However, we are so far behind that I do not feel obliged by all the recent funding to give numeric outcomes. This sort of investment should have been made years ago - a maintained nursery school in every community would have put us in a very different position. (Jane- interview)

Since the interview, Jane has retired and is now an independent consultant. As an Adviser she was able to give informed advice that was well grounded in theory. In this way she could see how best to use initiatives.

Jane has been fortunate not to have met the blocks to her career that have been noted for others. She has been able to follow her thinking and her interests and, at the same time, support others.

Maureen has also had a career in which she has been able to have some influence over interpretation of policy and guidance. As with all the other stories here, she has been increasingly clear about what is, and is not, appropriate and she has stuck by her principles. Why Maureen feels that teachers in the Early Years need to subvert what they are given is best explained in her own words:

I feel that Early Years professionals have to subvert because the messages that we have consistently and universally sent to ministers over the years continue to be challenged and undermined. (Maureen- interview)

Maureen has been fortunate to have worked in a supportive environment. Like Jane her career was varied. Throughout she shows passion, commitment and reflection:

So the early years team were included, respected and involved in the establishing of the EYDCP and its local networks from the beginning and, although we remained in separate services – I line managed by the adviser, she by the officer in community education - we worked highly effectively alongside each other and even Ofsted were very complementary about our work! (Maureen-interview)

Her commitment to her work meant that she and her team could take on new challenges.

Maureen has made it a point of principle to develop support and guidance that fills a need. She does not agree with 'one size fits all training' -

"However, like all good early years educators we subverted where we could and made the material our own".

Maureen believes that everyone that works in Early Years is passionate, and that they have to be:

I DO believe EY people are passionate and that it is this passion that keeps many of us going. Why is it that almost every Early Years expert you can name in this country – even though most are now retired, or are of retirement age – continue to campaign? We have such good practice in this country. Why doesn't the government look to its strengths and fund the excellence that is under its nose? (Maureen- interview)

Margaret's experience is also one where she has developed a position of influence based on her informed background. Over the years she has seen why people have to subvert what they have been directed to do:

The National Curriculum gained a strong foothold because, in this country, Early Years teaching is not seen as a specialist area. (Margaret- interview)

Froebelian training led Margaret to realise that experience now is fundamentally different. When she was training it was taken for granted that learning started from the child and this would always be the case. This meant that nobody felt there was a need to keep up the work and analysing of the pioneers, as it seemed to go without saying:

We didn't analyse enough. We're talking about teachers from a previous generation, who felt that because we were starting from the children and because what's happening in primary was quite consistent with that at the time it was big excitement. But what we didn't do was explain clearly what we were doing. The best experience I still go back to is Susan Isaacs and the analysis that she did of her work. (Margaret- interview)

Margaret's interview is threaded through with thoughtful statements about the situation as she sees it now. She is very clear that what is happening with guidance and policy is inappropriate:

The curriculum development that we've had imposed upon us, I think it would have been more secure if it was emerging from the field and the people who were doing it were very committed and the people who were ready to learn about it were reading about it. (Margaret- interview)

For her the point is to analyse and understand the content of a document and use it appropriately:

But if you don't do it to the extent of proper recognition of what the learner brings and principled respect for those people and where they come from then it's a waste of time really and I think there's a very pragmatic aspect to Early Years teaching. (Margaret- interview)

Each subject so far has been passionate and principled, but also committed to reflecting on whatever is introduced in order to make it work.

Kay has had more of an international perspective than the other interviewees, and this gives her thoughts a different resonance as she applies her international background to them.

Her thinking is, however, firmly grounded in the work of the pioneers,

If you compare this to the era of Montessori, Steiner, Froebel, Isaacs, McMillan, there was a society change about moving on other things. There were either wars where women had to go to work, or there was something going on in the world that meant that something had to change otherwise. I don't think that is the same now. (Kay- interview)

She is happy to read policy and guidance, but then make up her own mind:

I'm not big on reading these documents. I read them and then I just go and get back on with what I was doing. If somebody actually tested me and said this that and the other, I'm not very good on things like that. But I know what's 'good practice', I hate that word, but I know what good learning looks like when a child is making progress. I don't need a brain surgeon to understand this.
(Kay- interview)

Having come to the Early Years through a circuitous route, Kay has learnt a great deal upon which to base her thinking. She feels that people in Early Years have to be brave, 'It's actually about having the courage to break the rules and do it thoughtfully'. This is an important summing up of Kay's qualities.

As with the other interviewees Sarah Newell is very reflective and uses her previous experiences to develop her thoughts and work. She is also supportive of colleagues and believes firmly in professional discussion, and developing a real understanding of the needs of the children:

I know this is going to sound a bit twee but the schools where I have worked have always been those in fairly deprived areas, and I think it has been the openness and enthusiasm of the children that has been the really important thing. Also the knowledge that maybe, as part of a successful school, I can make a difference to the lives of those children, perhaps giving them opportunities and experiences that they might otherwise not have. Apart from this it has been the expertise and commitment of colleagues.
(Sarah Newell- interview)

For Sarah, strong, clear principles are key, and she has consolidated these over the years basing them on experience and working with other

people. This experience also helped her to refine her principles about children:

I think I do have a better understanding now and am clear on my own principals which underpin how I see schools, education, learning, children etc. I think the biggest contribution to this has been working with very experienced and successful colleagues who again have strong principles underpinning their work. (Sarah Newell- interview)

Sarah feels that there is a particular quality about those who work in Early Years that cannot simply be taught:

When people have got a really sound understanding or belief in what early years is they will read the policies that come out and relate them to their experience, their beliefs, their understanding. I think when policy comes out that people haven't got that background on, that's when it goes wrong. (Sarah Newell- interview)

Sarah reflects what Kay has called 'courage', and she has been brave enough to stand by her principles "And it's been really hard". She adds "Sometimes you need to put yourself in the firing line. Conformity is safe". It is clear from the evidence that in order to be respectful educators there is a need to respect the rights of the children and families we work with. This may mean subverting what is given at times. To know what is appropriate for children an informed view of childhood is important.

ii) Views of childhood

By this heading I mean how childhood is viewed by the participants in this study, as how children are viewed has an effect on how they are taught, and how this view coincides with the current national interest in what childhood should look like.

I was once told that "The only way to teach infants is like little juniors...".

This by the deputy head of the primary school where I worked at the time.

She compared me to my colleague in the parallel class who worked in the

more formal way of which she approved because it reflected her own experience. A subjective viewpoint about what childhood should be is unavoidable, but can be mediated by reflexive and reflective thinking:

If the curriculum is infested with values, so too must be those who plan, implement and evaluate it. These conclusions are not confined to pre-school contexts... Understanding children implies understanding ourselves.
(Drummond, 2000. p103)

The professionals interviewed for this research have recognised difficulties with the curriculum and some of those that are asked to “implement and evaluate it”. They have taken steps through their own professional development to understand themselves and in this way, they have views on childhood. There is much contemporary, passionate, debate around what is an appropriate childhood with appropriate experiences. This is exemplified both in research, for example that by James, Jenks and Prout (1998), Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), and in the media with the debates around what might be defined as a ‘Toxic Childhood’ (Palmer, 2006).

As I stated in Chapter Four, I do not regard children as apprentice adults that we are to support with the development of that role, empty vessels that we have to shape (Dahlberg *et al* 1999 p 49). I believe that children need to develop as children in whichever route that takes them. The ‘toxic childhood debate’ takes the view that adults are almost in a censorial role to dissuade children from doing things of which the adults, disapprove (Palmer 2006).

Teachers have been quick to blame this ‘toxic childhood’ for the lack of learning that they perceive in their classes. But there is one element of the argument that stands out as different in the ‘toxic childhood’ debate and it

is this that requires reflection here. This element is different because it is the one thing that is experienced by all children and it is the one thing that is put forward as being for the greater good. The drive for success and achievement. The implementation of an adult driven curriculum makes adult assumptions of what children should learn. What seems to be ignored is the fact that policy makers, and some teachers, are using their own childhood experiences as a basis for their practice:

A colonizing power is created by linking some form of official knowledge to a belief in linearity and the acceptance that children (students, learners) can be known and their learning predetermined. (Cannella, 1999 p 41).

Whereas what needs to be recognised is that there is a “wilfulness, even an anarchy, that the agency of childhood emits which resists containment and control through intelligibility” (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998 p9)

If children are understood to operate in a linear way that can be tested and moved on, then they must follow a certain path. This is how the National Curriculum works, and what many Early Years specialists have been fighting against. However, Cannella (1999 p 38) describes Foucault's understanding of 'education' and points out that there are certain questions that cannot be asked about education and certain values that cannot be questioned. This applies to certain sets of people as there is an inferiority of particular people, especially children. It is easy to see that the ranks of female Early Years teachers might be one such.

I would argue that those interviewed for this research have gone some way to recognising and addressing the view that some are inferior, and that they also question whether we can understand, even assume, what is

in the minds of the youngest children. There is a good example of this in

Emily's story:

But you do still get a lot of people who like to be in control and that's when you get these awful scenarios of learning intentions hanging from the ceiling and popping out from everywhere and children wandering round. The horror story that I always tell is when we were doing that research in London. We were in this Foundation Unit and 'R' was observing and she saw this little boy in the home corner looking a bit lost and she went over to him and said 'what are you going to do today?' just to engage him in some conversation. And he said to her 'I don't know, I don't know what my learning outcome is'. And this is a four and a half year old! What the hell is going on? (Emily- interview)

There is no room for anarchy and wilfulness in this situation. There are, "issues of control within the social space of childhood" (James et al 1998 p 42).

There is a realisation that children have a wealth of knowledge that they are not always given credit for. Particularly if it is something that they are not deemed old enough to know. Early in my career I was told that children in Reception Classes should not count above ten as they are not ready to. However, I have subsequently had children in that group wanting to learn how to add hundreds, tens and units. Harriet describes a situation where a child has entered school already able to read:

And people just think that children who can already read are a nuisance. And I still talk to people, and I can't believe we're in the twenty first century, who know that their children are capable of more than the books that the school is giving them. My niece is a case in point. She is nine. At home she reads 'Harry Potter', at school she reads these really terribly turgid things. I don't get that one at all. (Harriet- interview)

Cannella notes that, "Certainly, knowledge is not accepted from particular groups, especially children who have not reached adolescence." (Cannella 1999 p39). The child is thus viewed by society as a deficit model, and it is

assumed that everyone sees the same thing (Drummond, 2000 p 98). It is this view point that results in policy and guidance that purports to enable all children to succeed (DfES, 2003. p 3). The fact that 'good practice' is defined and decided by those with 'the poorest understanding of it' (Alexander, 2003. p18) and of children is concerning.

Those interviewed for this research see an understanding of child development as key working appropriately in the Early Years. But this does not equate with a view that children will be and do the same things as they did as children. Emily says:

If you really want to know what drives me it's actually to make sure we don't pressurise our children, we actually let them have their childhood. Let four year olds be four, three year olds be three etc. And that we nurture that, that we stop turning out kids at seven and eight who actually hate learning.

The trouble with the National Curriculum is that it's a 'one size fits all' and children just aren't like that. (Emily- interview)

Jane takes this a step further and is critical of those who underestimate of what young children are capable:

To an untrained eye all that is happening in an effective early years setting is lots of active play - with adults in there as well - in bright surroundings - not so easy to understand what is going on pedagogically as in say a maths lesson! (Jane- e mail)

Maureen agrees:

I believe so strongly that young children are remarkable and have always wanted to protect them from the onslaught of initiatives that have treated them – and their practitioners – so often, as inept and limited

My personal view is that childhood is a unique period when there is – or should be – more time and no pressure. As adults this comes all too quickly and relentlessly. I want children to have childhoods. Not to be mini-adults – either in their looks or their responsibilities or in their pressures. (Maureen's story)

Kay and Margaret both note the injustice done to children by those who see them as insignificant:

There's an inbuilt expectation in this country, culturally I think we're one of the worst, in thinking that little children are very mere, and we certainly don't need people who are very highly qualified to work with them. (Margaret- interview)

There's an attitude that you are the bottom, the earliest, the youngest children. Bear of little brain. It's simple because they are only little children, it doesn't take much brains or initiative to do that. Whereas my high priority is the total reverse of that. (Kay- interview)

Sarah Newell feels this too she sees young children and childhood as 'very complex'. Young children are 'incredibly perceptive, very open, so very aware'. They are aware of the roles of adults and they 'pick up things very quickly'. In this way she feels we underestimate children. Questions need to be asked about what is happening to childhood (Moss 2002 p 437).

All those interviewed for this study constantly questioned and analysed what they did, and what they saw. Whilst this is a good thing, it is important, in the struggle to achieve appropriate work in the Early Years, that the child is remembered. The two themes already discussed have a thread of struggle and difficulty running through them. This leads to my third theme, that of 'resilience'.

iii) The concept of resilience as applied to the subjects of this research

Sumsion (2003) points out that studies of resilience have generally focused on 'children and adolescents considered 'at risk' because of their social, cultural or economic circumstances' (Sumsion, 2003 p 143). This resonated so strongly with what I had been hearing, and with the idea of

what it means to succeed or fail in Early Years work, that it was clear I needed to look further at the concept of resilience. Like Sumsion, I see the concept as extending to fit the adults who 'continue to find deep and sustaining personal and professional satisfaction' in working as an Early Years teacher 'despite the presence of multiple adverse factors and circumstances that have *lead many to leave the field*' (Sumsion, 2003 p 143 My italics)

Sumsion's work concerns an adult who left working with children altogether, and one who was clear what she wanted in her career with children. Sumsion wanted to understand why one person gave up, but another kept going. The teacher who stayed in her career developed her role so that she kept some direct some contact with children, but at the same time increasing her responsibilities as a manager. This is directly reflected in my study where all involved are still in the field, but have left direct work with children behind.

My discovery of the theme of resilience prompted me to problematise the characteristics listed at the beginning of section two of this chapter- passion, tenacity, rebellious, determined, principled, belief, enthusiasm, frustration, committed, brave and strong in order to understand them a little better. In doing this I was reminded that I was once told that my passion and commitment to what I do is intimidating and can make people feel threatened. Since then I have worked at not letting this happen through professional discussions. By facilitating, not dictating. Looking at the list of qualities, if passion can be seen as negative, then this could be even more true of the others. That I continued to develop and clarify my 'passion' by gaining a Masters degree, then embarking upon a Doctoral

degree, could have been perceived as even more intimidating if I had not revised my attitude. When I was told that my passion was intimidating, I was a teacher fighting for the youngest children in the school. I then left the classroom to become an Early Years Adviser. At that point I felt that my new role would allow me to use my recently developed research in a more effective way. To begin with this seemed to be what was happening, and it was very exciting. I felt I had done something brave and committed. If I had known of the concept of resilience then, I may have said I was resilient. Further reading (for example of Sumsion 2003, Schoon 2006) on the subject now has led me to question this. Had I actually just left a situation that was very uncomfortable for me because my commitment was not shared? Was I in fact not resilient at all, but ducking out of my responsibilities to the children?

Does 'resilience' mean having to fight? If this is the case then it can be seen as a negative and perhaps not even effective quality. It has been seen that there are strong personal qualities displayed in each study, and there are instances of having to '*fight the cause*' of Early Years. In Chapter One I likened talking about practice in the Early Years to conversing about religion- it can invoke as much passionate belief and produce the same missionary zeal. This does not always reflect Early Years teachers in a good light as has been seen in this study.

Harriet's story is one of 'pivotal moments' she learnt from each of these 'moments' and they influenced her career, she is passionate about her beliefs. Attending courses and finding out more theory of education, 'really, really significant things' started to give Harriet the professional knowledge and theoretical background she wanted in order to look

properly at the teaching of reading. This knowledge then gave her the strength to do things her own way

There has been an interesting event in Harriet's career since her interview:

Amusingly, I was also asked to send my CV to Ruth Pimentel*. I was flattered (this has always been my downfall!) and sent it, thinking they might want me to consult on some documents or write some training materials. Oh dear me no. She wanted me to apply for a job as a Foundation Stage Regional Adviser - or something. Needless to say, I didn't. They would have just put a chip in my head, and I would have had to toe the Capita party line. I think it was a clever way of trying to 'take me out!' (Harriet- e mail)
**At that point, National Director of the Foundation Stage*

Security in her beliefs allowed Harriet to turn this offer down.

Sarah felt that:

I think it's fairly easy for teachers to get their principles completely knocked about. I do, I think we let it happen to us time and time again and it's what makes it so exhausting. Constantly standing up and saying 'no'. But often people I think do just give up. (Sarah-interview)

Sarah is one of my participants who is no longer in the classroom. She got a new job as an Adviser the year after her interview with me. She did not benefit from a supportive environment.

This can be seen in the type of language that she uses:

The strategies were the bug bear of my life. Especially when I was in Reception. Desperately fighting not to have to do the whole hour. And that's one of my concerns for the Reception, to see how much pressure is put on them. (Sarah- interview)

Becoming involved in long term training for professional development meant that Sarah became increasingly discontented with what she saw in Early Years work.

Eventually Sarah decided to carry on the fight from a different position:

Lots of things made me want to come out of the classroom and become an adviser. I was becoming bored and frustrated! I think after 20 years I had really had enough and the job that I loved was

disappearing before my eyes because of head teacher's visions of the future and their lack of understanding about early years. I was constantly in conflict with senior management because I refused to do anything that went against my principles. (Sarah-e-mail)

Emily's story shows that she negotiated difficulties. She acknowledges

that lack of confidence may be a trait of those working in Early Years:

I don't know whether it's the fact that as early years workers maybe we have to grow our confidence. If somebody had said to me at that point, 'Yes (name), in ten or fifteen years time you will end up as a Senior Lecturer at (name) University and you will get a Masters degree and people will want to come and listen to you and so on. And also you will be very strong in campaigning for appropriate provision for children I would have said 'don't be daft'. No way at that time would I have thought I could have done this. Academic wise I didn't think I could do this. (Emily-interview)

She is now proud of what she has done, and how she overcame earlier

bullying:

I feel really chuffed, I mean I know one of my head teachers isn't alive now, but I know others are, and I would just feel so chuffed because they made my life hell. (Emily-interview)

Gaining several perspectives in different roles has allowed Jane to

critically reflect so that she can then make decisions as to what to do next.

Her most recent role as an adviser took her too far away from working with

children:

My post continues to be a privilege but in my circumstances I need to move closer to practitioners and providers - to children and families even. (Jane-interview)

A lack of clear understandings at national level resulted in Maureen

leaving work in school:

I left headship because of the National Curriculum and LMS. In my second headship I was in charge of a school where the children needed all our energy and attention on their wellbeing and personal and social development and I felt so distracted by the external agenda that I was unable to focus sufficient attention on the needs of children. (Maureen-interview)

Maureen is now an independent consultant.

It may be that it is Margaret's background that has helped her negotiate difficulties:

I grew up quite rebellious really, not in a particularly well functioning family, so I had the character which made me fight. Probably looking back, especially now I've been a parent, I'm much better prepared. There are things about life that need to be challenged.

I certainly know that one of the things that keeps me going back is my own experience as a child, and looking at other tragedies in my life as well, so as I get older the more important I think it is.

(Margaret- interview)

Margaret's position enables her to be involved in national work. In this way she has been asked for, and given, advice and comments on key initiatives such as the Rose Review (DfES 2006):

Actually, it's really interesting, I think it's made a big difference even to the point where he's quoted the EU convention on human rights protocol 2, in terms of disapplication that what's offered should accord with parents' philosophy.

I think we may have made a difference. There's a big difference between the interim and the final report.

(Margaret- interview)

Margaret sees being able to negotiate difficulties will be a key skill for those working in Early Years:

We are on a tectonic plate. It's very uncomfortable just now, very dangerous. (Margaret- interview)

During the period of this study Kay was offered another job and was about to move out of teaching:

I may have some news on the job front too as I feel that the situation of no funding with children's centres is becoming intolerable & the borough now wants one point of entry...they have offered me a secondment for a year as Early Years School Improvement Advisor. I somehow feel I could be joining the enemy but the govs here are so cautious I feel I can no longer achieve what I feel should be done....perhaps the bigger picture will provide more challenge & perhaps I have been here too long! (Kay- interview)

Kay only did the job for a very short while. Her e- mail recounting what happened is a sad indictment of a situation badly dealt with. After a difficult start, the role ended thus:

Two days into the new role creating a different sort of magic she had been told off twice for laughing in a public area where she was working with 2 heads on a presentation about leadership, had realised through discussions that her dreams for extending high quality throughout the EY in (Local Authority) were not to be as there was no vision to set the highest standards, no desire to do things differently i.e. no risk taking & any new challenges in order to gain new rewards as I suggested were quickly & firmly put into jail. (Kay- e mail)

Kay went back to her role as Headteacher.

Sarah Newell has strong principles which enable her to overcome difficulties. Her way is to coach and lead by example:

It's quite interesting working with staff at the moment. Trying to work through a more creative approach to the curriculum. And the more newly qualified staff, apart from one whose practice is really good, the more newly qualified staff just can't do it. It's really scary. (Sarah Newell- interview)

A quality that Sarah shares with all those interviewed is her ability to support and develop her colleagues:

People who are insecure in their own beliefs and in the way in which their school's operating will implement things to the letter, or what they think is the letter, and not necessarily consider the impact it will have on the children, the impact on practice. (Sarah Newell- interview)

She can do this because, as with the others, she has an informed standpoint.

Each of these professionals has reflected on their role in Early Years and found a position that suits what they feel needs to be done based on their

experiences of local and national work. Schoon (2006) defines resilience as a:

two-dimensional construct defined by the constellations of exposure to adversity and the manifestation of successful adaptation in the face of that risk. (Schoon 2006 p7)

I would argue that this is slightly different from that of Sumsion (2003) and more fitting to the stories here. Sumsion's understanding of leaving the 'field' seems to mean moving away from direct work with children in settings. In this way her 'resilient' case study had not left the field as she became a manager whilst still maintaining contact with children. By this definition, my participants would, for the most part, not be seen as resilient as they do not all work directly with children any more. They do, however, fit Schoon's definition of 'adaptive functioning' as even if they have moved out of the classroom, they still work for children.

This idea of 'adaptive functioning' is reinforced by the fact that it is expected that people working in the Early Years will take on what is in fact a very diverse, and multi agency role. They are not just 'teachers', but also family workers, carers, managers and almost social workers (Ball,1994 p 60, Rodd , 2007).

Teachers in the Early Years need a double competency (Ball,1994), but for Margaret they also need to be emotionally literate:

Some of the best Headteachers I know have been nursery teachers. It's to do with being conscious of the whole range of issues, and recognising properly the emotional aspect and the social side. Paying attention to where people really are instead of where they think they ought to be. (Margaret- interview)

The participants in this study achieved various managerial or leading positions because of their skills, derived from experience. They negotiated

the difficulties' by 'adaptive functioning'. Thus showing resilience and being successful. Each of them functions positively and effectively in the 'adverse circumstances' of the lack of local and national understanding of Early Years teaching. They continue adapting their roles in order to best promote appropriate work. They could have left the field, or bowed to 'top down' pressure:

A central assumption in the study of resilience is that some individuals are doing well, despite being exposed to an adverse risk situation, while others fail to adapt.
(Schoon 2006. p7)

Throughout the interviews I often felt a sense of exasperation from participants that things were happening within settings, policies and guidance that were not supported by (and sometimes even ignored) research, leading sometimes to a feeling of negativity. However, for my participants the negative seemed to become a dynamic catalyst to get things done. This attitude is what I have seen in both my roles, as teacher and adviser, as perceived by Headteachers or Local Authority Advisers, as 'fighting the corner' for Early Years and as such is not always popular. Participants in this study were not negative or ineffective, thus I see the negative view of policy as a strength, and those who possess such strength as informed campaigners who often empower others.

Conclusion

Bown and Sumsion (2007) suggest that Early Years teachers define themselves by the 'regulatory requirements on their teaching' as this affects their 'perceptions of themselves as professionals'

Using their idea of whether Early Years teachers are trustworthy or not, and the notion that it is the ways in which governments perceive them that

dictates policy, throws a new light on policy development since Plowden (CACE 1967). It also suggests a reason why there is a perceived need at policy level to define the skills and qualities of those who work in Early Years. It could be seen that documents such as Key Elements of Effective Practice (KEEP) (DfES 2005) and the development of the Early Years Professional Status (HMSO 2004) were developed as a way of controlling Early Years Teachers because their work is not easily understood by those in power. Attempts at central definition give a particular role and status that does not necessarily fit the diverse range of people to whom it is meant to apply.

Burgess- Macey and Rose (1997) wrote that teachers in the early years have felt a 'wearing away of their sense of professionalism'. Some teachers of other age ranges have felt this since the National Curriculum (1988), but the problem is compounded for those in Early Years by 'their general lack of status in the minds of society at large' (Burgess- Macey and Rose. 1997 p 56). This feeling still persists, despite a national emphasis on building quality and training for Early Years teachers. It can be felt in the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (HMSO 2004) for example. Despite research stating that there should be qualified teachers in settings (Sylva *et al* 2003) this lesser qualification is being promoted.

The teachers described in this study have all made a point of continuing their professional development. They are what Kemmis (2005) would describe as 'expert practitioners' whose whole life experience appertains to their work.

This study focused on eight women who have risen through their successful careers to various senior positions. They have faced setbacks, but they have continued to pursue their beliefs in appropriate experiences for the youngest children.

This chapter has responded to the research questions around which this thesis is constructed in that all educators are the sum total of their lived experience and therefore can only be expected to interpret policy accordingly.

Despite research and guidance being produced outlining the key elements of effective practice and practitioners, the participants in this study seem to possess an underlying self reflection and self awareness that is not something that can be taught or learnt. Each participant has shown strength of will and tenacity, in some cases against the odds, to pursue their belief in appropriate educational experiences for the youngest children.

In this chapter I have discussed the qualities of the participants using evidence from their interviews. I have also shown how these qualities reflected in their 'lived experience' of policy. In the next, and final, chapter I will bring the consideration of policy up to date and then reflect on the research questions.

Good techniques alone will not make a good teacher, but good teachers tend to value good techniques and to appreciate studying these in the work of other good teachers and to discover them afresh in their own work when they see them illustrated by other teachers under different conditions.

(Gardner and Cass 1965, p150)

Chapter Eight

The Current Situation

So now if you want teachers to be innovative and think for themselves, I think they're going to struggle with that. I don't think teachers have been trained to be innovative and think for themselves. With things like the National Curriculum people need time to reflect on it. And to talk together and to do some shared thinking together on it. You see that's not happening in schools, the shared thinking because there's not enough time to do it.

(Emily - interview)

Introduction

Since this research first began, the pace of policy development affecting work in the Early Years has quickened. This chapter aims to bring the policy context of the study up to date and reflect on the original research questions-

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?
2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

This reflection includes first, a resume of relevant policy issued since the study began in 2002. Secondly, and in conclusion, I return to the title of this thesis and reflect on the findings of the study asking how the Early Years has been 'lost in translation'

Chapter Three reviewed policy up to 2002 with the introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile in 2002 (QCA). This chapter takes up from this point and discussed what has happened from 2003 onwards.

Policy Based Training Materials for teachers

In 2003 the strategy document - *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools (DfES)* began to show a new approach from the government in relation to teaching and learning. This is relevant to this thesis because the professional development materials (DfES 2004) promoted breadth in the curriculum and appeared to hold much more of an 'Early Years' way of thinking, by which I mean the documents promote the idea of cross curricula teaching and learning in a more creative way. The thrust of the *Excellence and Enjoyment* initiative was to help children to become "effective and enthusiastic" learners (DfES 0344-2004 G 2004 p 3). *Excellence and Enjoyment* materials included: books and videos, to be used for 'professional development' in schools. The themes echo an Early Years philosophy of, for example cross curricula learning, the use of enquiry, problem solving, creative thinking, reasoning, the importance of personal, social and emotional awareness, the importance of the context and environment (situated learning), appropriate planning and assessment, and assessment for learning (formative assessment). It is a paradox that such ideas that are common practice, and have a well researched historical background, in Early Years work, were hailed as the new way forward throughout primary school. There are echoes here of the National Curriculum (HMSO 1988) being seen as a reaction to Plowden (CACE 1967) and I am led to wonder whether eventually the National curriculum might eventually lead back to Plowden.

Following *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2004)), a further professional development package was distributed to settings in 2005. *Continuing the*

Learning Journey (QCA 2005) was designed to encourage teachers in Key Stage One to take on and develop the work done in the Foundation Stage. This meant training would be required to gain some understanding, and Year One classroom environments would have to change. Although *Continuing the Learning Journey* (QCA 2005) was sent to all schools, and it is an increasing expectation that Key Stage One reflects the Early Years, anecdotal evidence from training courses that I run suggests that many schools do not know of its existence, even though it was intended as a training package for the Early Years Co-ordinator to promote to staff, Senior Management Teams and Governors.

During this time, the government also published what is known as *The Ten Year Plan 2004- Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten-year strategy for childcare* (HM Treasury Office). Although it has no direct impact on teaching and learning in the Early Years, it is worth mentioning here because on completion it will change the way Early Childhood Education and Childcare will look. Hargreaves and Hopper comment:

The suggestion is that the integration of early years education and care services in the ten year strategy (HM Treasury 2004) 'threatens to exacerbate the current low occupational prestige experienced by early years practitioners' (Hargreaves and Hopper 2006, p 172)

The agenda was becoming one of quality and standards both in care and education, and in this way interest started to centre on curriculum content and how it promotes quality.

The emphasis on every child 'achieving' lent an urgency to supporting every child in the skills of speaking and listening. This then led to the publication of a training pack called *Communicating Matters* (DfES 2005).

This consisted of three modules to be worked through to support the

teacher to develop skills in the child. This was the first set of training materials for teachers working with children from birth to five - thus beginning to pave the way for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007). This was followed by Sure Start training materials on personal, social and emotional development (2006) again in the form of modules to be worked through, designed to underpin the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL DfES 2007) materials that were already in use in primary schools. These two initiatives were perceived by professionals as the right place to start thinking of a new stage from birth to five.

Policy on pedagogy

If everything that came after Plowden is a reaction to it, it is possible to chart the gradual shift away from the child's needs as central to policy. Increasingly there is a drive for academic standards. The sea change seems to begin with the Excellence and Enjoyment initiative (DfES 2003), but it still remains unclear how effective that initiative will be against the pressures on schools to perform in tests. The most recent example of this drive for standards was the *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* known as the *Rose Report* (DfES 2006). The apparent emphasis on teaching of discreet phonics to four year olds caused unease (TES November 2006- see below). Though the Rose Report actually suggested the discrete teaching of phonics as part of a wider approach (DfES 2006 p4), the emphasis on the method was open to misinterpretation and this caused widespread discomfort (see below).

In previous chapters I have mentioned the zeal with which positions are defended in relation to what is and is not appropriate for Early Years work. The reactions to the Rose Report are a good example because throughout

the report the term 'research' is used to support points made, but this is rarely backed with references to follow up. Clark writes that the term 'research' is used in many different ways (Clark, 2005. p4) and expresses concern that research is often ignored by policy makers or cited as supportive of the policy.

The Rose Report suffers, in my opinion, from a lack of grounding in recognised Early Years pedagogy and research hence it was met with discomfort. In November 2006 a letter, signed by many Early Years educationalists, was sent to the Times Educational Supplement expressing the concerns held by many over the recommendations in the Rose Review. These concerns included the: emphasis on prescriptive teaching; limitations of phonic work; suggestion that phonic teaching starts for four year olds; "enforcement of "approved" phonics programmes on four year olds" ;lack of a well researched evidence base; English cannot be taught in a phonics based way.

The main thrust of the Rose Report, that daily systematic phonic work should be undertaken with children 'by the age of five', was derived from a study done over seven years in Clackmannanshire (DfES 2006 p61) and the effects of the over reliance of this one study and of the Rose Report are now being felt in schools as the youngest children are being taken systematically through the *Letters and Sounds* package (DfES 2007).

The development of interest nationally in Early Years should have been hugely empowering. However, when the Early Years Foundation Stage came out for consultation in 2006 in first draft the response was a mix of negative and positive (DfES 2006). For example, the response sent in by

the British Association for Early Childhood Education in July 2006 was developed from a combination of views from individual members, the organisation and other interested parties. It detailed such points as: approval of the new document, but wanting the stage extended to six years of age; the processes of learning from the Birth to Three Matters document were lost and practitioners were only just getting used to them; there are principles, but they are not as strong as those in the original Foundation Stage ; 'Early Education welcomes the statement that *there must be no tests for children at any stage of EYFS*'; the 'grids' that set out the Areas of Learning come in for criticism as they suggest an approach 'which is age-related and sequential'; there was no recognition that some goals were already set too high for most children to achieve. The goals should be reviewed.

After the consultation closed one of my interviewees (Emily) said to me that really the best thing that could happen now would be for the whole idea to be thoroughly researched, tried and tested for a few years before being published as a finished product. The results of the consultation were published but few points from the consultation were incorporated. The summary of concerns from British Association for Early Childhood Education detailed above still stand and the literacy goals for learning phonics have been made harder. The policy also no longer says there will be no testing at any stage rather that: "Providers must undertake sensitive observational assessment in order to plan to meet young children's individual needs" (DfES 2007 Statutory Framework p 38)

Policy on children's well-being

The Childcare Act 2006 is important because it was focused directly on the education and well being of young children. Two things are relevant to this thesis: the concentration on the wellbeing of young children and that the Act states that all Early Years providers have a duty to implement the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is very empowering, but it is subsequently let down by the learning and development requirements which state what children 'are expected to have' when they are five. Legal enforcement of Early Years practice is very important, if there is consistent and well informed development of practice. The learning and development requirements contain the statement that there is no requirement for timetables or the teaching of any "educational programmes", process or skill in particular periods (Childcare Act 2006 p 21). The Rose Report and the 'Letters and Sounds' initiative however, contradict this.

The Early Years: Lost in translation?

Hoyle (2001) regarded the main status for teachers in the Early Years to lie in their 'occupational esteem' which is defined as "the regard in which an occupation is held by the general public by virtue of the personal qualities which members are perceived as bringing to their core task" (Hoyle, 2001 p147). In Chapter Seven I expressed my worry over this because of an increasing impression that people working in Early Years are somehow an issue, annoyance or irritant, this has been shown through the bullying that some of the subjects suffered.

Analysis of the interviews conducted in this study – and discussed in Chapter Seven - leads me to suggest that Early Years teachers are not

always held in particularly high regard by other staff, particularly 'higher up' the school, or senior teams.

Hargreaves and Hopper suggest that:

'recent policies and investment may have enhanced the status of early years education in the eyes of the public through its formal recognition as a key stage, and the establishment of Curriculum Guidance' (DfEE/QCA 2000).

The use of the word 'may' is interesting here because it is not a categorical statement of enhanced status. Chapter Three discussed the view in the Rumbold Report (DES 1990) that:

Schools and parents are not, therefore, the sole educators of 3- and 4-year-olds. It is the Committee's view that all adults who spend time with the under fives- whether they be parents, teachers, playgroup workers, nursery nurses or other staff in day nurseries, childminders or nannies- have their own distinct and important contribution to make to the education of young children. (DES 1990. p1)

As this thesis has shown there is not always positive recognition of those who work in Early Years even though its status is in the public eye. The Rumbold Report (DES 1990) was right to point out that there were many with a 'distinct' contribution to make, I am increasingly concerned that this distinction is now too blurred as everyone working with the youngest children has to follow the same guidance what ever their background, setting or qualifications. If Early Years professionals are all trying to work from one policy when they have so many different start points- for example childminders, playgroup leaders, nursery managers, teachers, teaching assistants- then there are going to be difficulties. This thesis highlights factors which underpin these difficulties. Soler and Miller (2003) write:

Instrumental views of the curriculum put an emphasis upon its serving an extrinsic aim or external purposes such as producing

citizens who will benefit society. This can be contrasted with the view that the curriculum should serve the intrinsic aim of providing a value in its own right, so that it is seen as self-fulfilling and providing experiences that are worthwhile.
(Soler and Miller. 2003 p 58)

The issue that the participants in this study have is, as Chapter Seven has shown, that learning is seen in the intrinsic way described by Soler and Miller (2003). This can be seen, for example, in the way the participants viewed and respected childhood. However, the curriculum for the Early Years as it stands is much more an instrumental one. An example of this is, despite the 'Excellence and Enjoyment' agenda (DfES 2003), there is still more weight given to literacy and maths with these areas being driven through training and guidance. This is where lived experience begins to separate off from policy development as skilled Early Years teachers want to see the curriculum as 'providing a value in its own right, so that it is seen as self-fulfilling and providing experiences that are worthwhile' (Soler and Miller. 2003 p 58). This conflict has taken the development of education away from Callaghan's 1976 proposal (as discussed in Chapter Three) that:

The goals of our education, from nursery school through to adult education, are clear enough. They are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive place in society, and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other but both

It is clear that policy aims are confused, because government maintains high interest in the Early Years (indicated by the intense policy investment over recent years), but the roots of policy appear weak because, although there references to believing in 'child initiated' learning (EYFS 2007), the whole stage is based on Literacy and Numeracy and is target driven. The flaws in policy centre around: i) Literacy, ii) target setting, iii) lack of

understanding of early learning and iv) ignoring expert advice. I will discuss each in turn.

i) Literacy

In the drive to improve standards the teaching of reading and writing is increasingly in the spotlight. Examples of this can be seen in the development of the Literacy Strategy (1997), and more recently the emphasis on phonics (Rose 2006). The Childcare Act 2006 for all its emphasis on well-being, also lays emphasis on literacy with its requirement for Local Authorities to measure its progress on the Foundation Stage Profile to assess improves outcomes for children. The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) accepts the need to be able to use spoken language creatively before an enjoyment of reading and writing can develop. But even here, in the order in which the Communication, Language and Literacy section has been put together, gives emphasis to a more formal interpretation of literacy. Miller writes of a setting she observed where she gained the impression that:

...the only literacy which counts is that which is under the control and direction of the adult. This appeared to have implications for what was noted and valued in relation to the child's literacy development...
(Miller, 2001. p112)

ii) Target setting and target driven teaching

Whilst literacy is, of course, important, the over-formalising of the teaching of literacy is a clear indicator of the value put upon target setting and the achievement of quantifiable results which fuels another struggle between

Early Years specialists and central government. The expectations of the Childcare Act 2006 have compounded this by the requirement for Local Authorities to monitor children's progress in Communication, Language and Literacy, and Personal, Social and Emotional development using scores from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (formerly the Foundation Stage Profile). Each Authority has targets to achieve.

iii) Lack of understanding of early learning

A sense of continued unease, nationally, can be summed in two statements made seven years apart:

...there is a notion that the learning achieved in the first five years is not 'real education' and that the purpose of nursery provision is to prepare children, to lick them into shape in a number of ways, so that 'the reception class can begin the proper process of education' (David, 1999 p 83. Abbott and Moylett eds)

This feeling continues with this from Ruth Kelly, then Secretary of State for Education:

By 2008 we want to have seen improvements across the country in children's readiness for school at age 5. I'm acutely aware that parents don't want their toddlers sitting exams or undergoing any form of formal assessment. Nor do I. This will not happen. Instead teachers and childcare professionals simply observe children- looking, for example, for enthusiasm for learning and good communication skills. We want to see increase from 48% of children reaching a good level of development at age 5 to 53% by 2008. It may not sound much but like that but it means an extra 30,000 more children ready to learn at age 5 every year.
(Kelly, R. 2006)

If this is how early learning, before the age of five, is perceived then two things are not surprising. Firstly that Early Years professionals are not seen as that important and have to fight their corner, and secondly that early learning is not valued unless it is geared to number accountable tests and curricula, the 'proper process of education'. As one of the interviewees said, we see little children as 'very mere' (Margaret).

Page (2005) writes that in 1986 she took up a place as a nursery nurse in a work place day nursery and, although she was working with the three to five year olds, she became increasingly interested in the under threes. It was suggested to her that this was easy work and she was over qualified for it. Page is concerned that work with babies under three is being neglected despite research showing that there is, "strong evidence to suggest that highly skilled staff are required to care for babies and to cope with the highly complex triangular relationships between staff, children and parents (Page. 2005 p93). There is a fear now that the recently developed Early Years Professional Status will undermine the need for a knowledgeable and qualified teacher in each setting (Edgington 2006).

iv) Ignoring expert advice

This thesis suggests that what is missing is well grounded research and advice upon which to base policy. As Jane pointed out, "there is too much political interference in detail. They employ 'experts' they should listen to them".

The participants in the research reported here demonstrate that they made a conscious effort to research their area, either for award bearing qualifications or informally to keep their knowledge current. In this way, each of them was able to make informed decisions and give grounded arguments for why they acted in particular ways. This is where policy fails: it is not always based on respected research. For example, there is much supported reference and research included in the Plowden report (1967) because the committee studied education in the UK and internationally. Forty years later another key policy document, the Rose Review (2006) was based on one study done in Scotland. The contradictions and mixed

messages of the Rose Report (DfES 2006) and the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 would not happen if policy and guidance had a sound research background.

When these flaws are compounded by the fact that the people obliged to work with the guidance (EYFS 2007) have various qualifications, or none in some instances, the possibility that problems will arise is inevitable.

This is why the participants in this study agreed that every Early Years initiative becomes a battle to implement appropriately. These tensions were exacerbated by the statutory implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage in September 2008. A campaign was launched to challenge the EYFS because the focus on the learning and development requirements was thought to have the potential to: harm children's development; restrict parents' freedom of choice in childcare and education; place an unnecessary bureaucratic burden of assessment on those who care for young children. The OpenEYE campaign (The campaign for an Open Early Years Education) began in 2008 and raised the above in a petition to government along with the view that recent evidence suggests that government interventions in education generally may not be driving standards up and may be putting too much pressure on children (OpenEYE petition 2008).

The participants in this study have not always agreed with policy. It could be said that, by deconstructing policy that is given to them and becoming involved in professional discussions with their colleagues, or those that attend their courses, better understandings are developed.

Reflecting on the pioneers

This thesis began with an overview of the work of some early childhood pioneers (Chapter Two). From their work it is clear that: Play is important for learning (Piaget and Inhelder 1969); Language and talk are vital (Isaacs 1930); Looking at pictures and being told information is no substitute for experiencing the real thing (Froebel 1897); Awareness of the concept of cognitive development is important in order to plan appropriate teaching (Vygotsky 1978); Meeting the emotional needs of the individual is key to learning (Montessori 1912); Close observation of a child is key to finding out the learning needs (Isaacs 1930).

This thesis has shown how the eight professionals maintain and promote these key features of early childhood education. The review of policy in Chapter Three showed that the development of these has gradually diverged from the lessons of history. But now it almost seems as if history is repeating itself with contemporary agendas seemingly acknowledging the value of play and 'The Unique Child' (DfES 2007). A key lesson from this thesis is that those who work in the Early Years must keep reflecting on and questioning policy and in so doing drawing on and developing lessons from earlier. However, this is not without difficulty for as, Kay said:

In terms of my own research about leadership, when I asked people who they saw as a leader, there were about half a dozen people who gave a half hearted response to, you know, people like Tina Bruce, Margy Whalley, Gillian Pugh those sort of names, but they're all of an age where their careers are, not on a down hill slope, but they're coming to the end of their careers. There are no shining stars who are coming behind them. There is a feeling that we've been led down a garden path.
(Kay's story)

Her concern is shared by Margaret:

I think our generation let down future generations by not recognising the need to find a way of articulating what we were doing. I think we were quite strong on why we were doing it, but it

was too easy when the National Curriculum came in for people to just take over, and I think your generation and people who do the work you're doing are paying the price now because we haven't got respect and it is very complex work.
(Margaret's story)

Without strong research-informed leaders and pioneers in the future, good quality Early Years work may be further lost in translation.

Areas for future study

This thesis has led to the identification of areas for future research which can be summed up in the following questions:

- Can anyone be an Early Years teacher?
- Can training and courses make an Early Years teacher if that is not where they started?
- What type of person takes on a role in Early Years education that is of a consultancy, advisory or lecturer nature
- Do teachers in other age ranges feel the same about the mismatch of policy and practice?
- Will the problems highlighted by participants in this study perpetuate, or will the Early Years Foundation Stage help?
- What other influences are there on Early Years practice?

Conclusion: 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing'. Or 'Keeping up the fight'

In conclusion I want to return to the title of this thesis. I am left with a feeling that it should have the subtitle of 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing'. This is because the process of developing this study and writing this thesis has left me with the overwhelming impression that the lack of appropriate knowledge undermines Early Years work. Nationally there is a strong tradition of research and work in the field of early education.

Examples of this were given in Chapter Two. Now it seems through the evidence collected that time and energy is spent fighting to get this recognised and understood. Our society is a very different one from those inhabited by any of the pioneers outlined in Chapter Two. There are, however, fundamental principles underlying these ideals that should not waver wherever we are historically or geographically.

If we think about the pioneers discussed in Chapter Two we see that their names and work are still mentioned and pertinence in the present day.

However, when thinking about what is seen by many 'specialists' in early learning to be 'good practice' the ideas of those pioneers can seem very far away. This may make them seem less relevant to work today. Those working with the youngest children need to be able to refer to more recent work in order to support their decisions and arguments. This more recent work would need to key in to lessons learnt from past research, then bring it forward.

The EPPE report (2003) is often quoted but I suggest that few people really know the work and findings of the project in detail. Though there are key things that everyone has heard of, for example the concept of sustained shared thinking or the value of a qualified teacher in early learning. Whilst even a vague knowledge of research can be a positive thing, it is also an indicator that people are only skimming the surface.

This vague knowledge of research leads to the second reason for understanding being lost in translation, the 'quick fix':

So we constantly fight those who know little and presume much; who insist on a quick fix to what are complex, multi-layered issues.... Rose is a case in point. One small piece of research, a quick fix to the standards 'problem' of 'underachievement' in CLL. No understanding that the goals have been set developmentally too

high and need to be changed. Instead we have government policy incorporated into the EYFS which flies in the face of pretty much all known ey experts advising to the contrary. (Maureen's story)

We seem to be living in a 'quick fix' society. When discussing my 'quick fix' idea with a colleague, she said that actually it's not a fix, rather it's a 'quick patch' in that initiatives may show short term gain, but eventually the patch drops off and all gain is lost. Each 'new' idea in education is promoted with almost missionary zeal and taken on as the answer to all problems. Consider for example:

- Synthetic phonics
- The Excellence and Enjoyment agenda

It is yet to be seen if these have made any long term impact.

So, have the principles of work in the Early Years been lost in translation through too many 'quick fixes'? The answer, so far as this thesis is concerned, would appear to be 'yes'. The interviewees have held onto their informed principles through their own hard work and determination to reflect and research. They have been 'keeping up the fight'. This allows them to reject 'quick patching' ideas like the insistence on synthetic phonics. What we must avoid at all costs is a 'band wagon' mentality.

This is seen clearly in postings about Early Years topics on sites such as the TES Staffroom*. The questions asked, and the responses given, can show an alarming ignorance of fundamental facts of work in the Early Years. Particular 'posters' mount campaigns against aspects of Early Years policy which are not always well informed, but others join in.

[*http://www.tes.co.uk/section/staffroom](http://www.tes.co.uk/section/staffroom).

One of the interviewees said:

...but there will be a lot of people who won't be able to do that and they need to be helped to see that what's happening could be very dangerous in the hands of *so many practitioners, and indeed advisers, who are not experienced enough, not principled enough, not aware enough to be able to do it.*

We are on a tectonic plate. It's very uncomfortable just now, very dangerous.

(Margaret's story. My italics)

What can be done about this? Whist being cautious about generalising from interview data from eight women, this thesis can only suggest that there is a need for central government to:

- Accept and develop research and historical perspective
- Take longer over policy development and accept research over time
- Consider the needs of the children, rather than prioritise the curriculum

If we deconstruct what is happening to work in the Early Years of education is there really any need for tensions? There need not be a contradiction, because what we are actually talking about is the sound basis of all teaching. In talking about research Clark says that, "it is a continuous process where we ignore past insights at our peril; that it is, or should be, relevant to policy and practice." (Clark, 2005. p1).

I have heard it said that rather than really analysing a situation in education and researching what is working, what is not and why, it has become easier for policy makers to come up with a new plan rather than reflect.

To return to the research questions:

1. What is the connection between Early Years policy development and the lived experience of those professionals implementing it?
2. To what extent do Early Years professionals consider that government policy has contributed to a better understanding of Early Years practice for those implementing it, and towards a consistent national view?

In respect of question one, this thesis has shown that so far as the participants in this study are concerned, there is no secure match between policy development and the lived experience of early years teaching.

With regard to the second research question, the participants in this study suggest that on one level there may be a better understanding of early years practice portrayed in government policy, in that more people are now apparently aware of the importance of good Early Years practice, but that there is a missing link of an underpinning, pedagogical understanding.

This thesis has been developed from sample of eight Early Years professionals and thus cannot be generalised. However, what the thesis offers is the understanding that the experience of these women illuminates causes for concern. It suggests that further research on the issue of policy development and its match with research and with practice is needed.

There is a danger that research into the Early Years can be lost in translation and lack of understanding. It seems there is a need for 'translators' in the form of informed and respected leaders that can use a research background to develop shared understanding. The key to this commonality should really be the Childcare Act 2006. Its emphasis on quality and standards for our youngest children could open the door to

increased understanding. And in the words of a delegate who raised an issue at a recent conference: 'It's difficult, but it's key times'

The challenge to find good translators remains. However, the emphasis must be on the fact that we are in 'key times' as there is a high profile for work in the Early Years- this is a positive thing. This thesis has shown that there are teachers, in the sense used in this research, who make it their life work to maintain their current knowledge and understanding, then sharing it with others. They are the 'translators' of our time. The participants in this work are but a small group, there are many more out there making sure that the *informed* Early Years voice is heard in response to each initiative or piece of news. The evidence of this work suggests that this will continue as long as there are resilient teachers prepared to continue their professional development and disseminate this knowledge to their colleagues. The last word is from Emily's story and supports the idea that work in Early Years is moving in the 'right' direction:

There is light at the end of the tunnel. We've gone back to an observation-based approach, we've got a lot of influence from other international perspectives like New Zealand Te Whariki and Reggio so I think we've lots of thinking there.

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