Early years pedagogy into practice
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Introduction
The chapter considers contemporary historical, socio-economic and political perspectives on early years provision, incorporating discussions of key figures who have influenced early years provision. This is explored in reference to the outcomes for children, their wellbeing, learning and progression. The chapter covers the factors involved in devising an appropriate environment for children to flourish, including play-based learning, from the pedagogical basis discussed. It suggests ways in which this stimulating environment can be accommodated and enhanced. The importance of reflective practice to continually review and enhance provision for young children is highlighted, with the inclusion of relevant research findings and governmental initiatives.

Background to early years pedagogy
Early years pedagogy is an evolving phenomenon, responding to influences from numerous areas. The Penguin English Dictionary (Garmonsway and Simpson, 1971) states pedagogy is the ‘art and practice of teaching’. This definition of the term could be open to change as it develops into an awareness of wider perspectives and is impacted by the underpinning beliefs and values of those involved. The document Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002: 27) considers ‘Pedagogy is often referred to as the practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching but in the early years an adequate conception of educative practice must be wide enough to include provision of learning environments for play and exploration’, original emphasis). In this way, what is deemed appropriate practice in the early years is also open to reflection and change. The General Teaching Council (GTC, 2010: 2) suggested pedagogy is

both the means of enhancing student learning and the source of teachers’ professional identity. As professionals, teachers use expert judgement to recognise and resolve the dilemmas in teaching and learning . . . At their best, teachers are also able to reflect on and evaluate their practices, and to make rationally and ethically defensible judgements that go beyond compliance, pragmatic constraints or ideological preferences.
The teaching role is one of many professional roles concerned with children’s progress in an early years setting. The EYFS framework can be used as a basis for provision with professionals using their judgements as to how best to implement this into their practice and provision.

Globalization is a factor in changing views of appropriate provision for early years children. The greater ease of collaboration, networks and sharing ideas supports the development of a broadening outlook of different strategies and approaches, with fresh perspectives facilitating a review of existing ways of working. This will be explored further in Chapter 14 ‘Challenges and convergence’.

The new 2012 EYFS (DfE, 2012), introduced following the Tickell Review, provides a framework and guidance for professionals when working with young children. The framework was produced after gaining the views of those involved in early years learning. Historically, in 1870 members of the Houses of Parliament debated the age for starting school. The importance of earning a living was considered with beginning and leaving statutory schooling early as a solution. Statutory schooling at 5 years old was established. The Hadow Report (Consultative Committee on Education, 1931) encouraged children’s active engagement in activities and experiences, rather than that they should be perceived as empty vessels to be filled with facts. The Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) observed that young children would be best served by an educational system which provided nursery education for all whose parents wished for it. Concerns about standards were followed by the Bullock Report (DES, 1975) which advocated a number of measures to achieve high standards plus monitoring of standards to ensure they were achieved. In PM James Callaghan’s Ruskin speech (Callaghan, 1976) he stated a monitoring of resources should occur to maintain a proper standard of performance. Research focusing on children’s transition from a pre-school unit to a Reception class by Cleave, Jowett and Bate (1982) revealed differences between the two settings in the organization and types of activity provided for the children. In the National Curriculum (1988) the core curriculum covered English, mathematics and science. In 1995 the National Commission for Education developed the notion that investment of taxpayers’ money in increased support for children aged 3–8 years would ensure that all children would achieve a good standard of basic skills at an early age, which would provide a foundation for later learning. Concerns were raised by some professionals over the ‘top-down’ emphasis evident in their settings, where pressure was exerted for children to be encouraged to use skills too early and there was a focus on outcomes to be attained.

Government guidelines such as the reports Starting with Quality (DES, 1990) and Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning on Entering Compulsory Education (DfE, 1998) heralded welcome support for professionals working in early years provision that emphasized the importance of these crucial early years. It helped to promote the esteem of the roles of those working with younger children and began to raise awareness of this important phase in children’s lives. It fostered further discussions of the quality of provision during this time, what this might entail and how it could be resourced and delivered. In 2000 the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000) established the Foundation Stage as a valued aspect of the provision for children and gave credence for the stage as a crucial part of children’s development, identifying it as highly important in its own right. Younger children
were catered for in a separate document, *Birth to Three Matters* (Sure Start, 2002) which gave the foundations of four aspects: the strong child, the skilful communicator, the competent learner and the healthy child. The EYFS (DCSF, 2008) provided a framework for early years provision and covered the underpinning rationale and purpose of the findings with strategies for six areas of learning. It combined the rationale for the youngest age phase with those of 3–5 years to provide a seamless framework for provision. It was underpinned by four areas: a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development. The learning and development aspect incorporated a structure for children’s development in learning from birth to 5 years and included: personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative development and physical development. This was complemented by an assessment strategy, the EYFS profile (QCA, 2008). This sought to bring together a common framework for the delivery of provision and an assessment of children’s progress. It supported enabling children to have smooth transitions when required through this common set of documentation. Following findings from the Tickell Review adjustments were made to respond to views of those working with the framework and those involved with early years provision and possible changing needs. Reflections of appropriate practice have responded to theories of child development and research findings.

The policy and legislation outlined above are derived from theories of child development, and have detailed the optimum conditions for effective child development in various areas, such as social, emotional and cognitive development, and provided detail regarding factors which influence this development both by enhancing or hindering this process. There has been a range of theories put forward to outline the main factors in child development, many of which differ in assigning relative importance to factors influencing development. In light of this, key theorists and their respective recommendations and findings relating to fostering child development are explored throughout this chapter.

The following section notes key theorists who have influenced provision and its pedagogy and practice.

**Key theorists**

Locke (1632–1704)

Locke considered nurture or external forces as routes for development. He believed interactions with people and the environment affected children’s development, and that parents were the first educators.

Locke theorized that people are born with a ‘blank slate’, meaning infants and children learn from experiences rather than being innately provided with skills and knowledge of themselves and the world. He therefore placed great importance on early life experiences, stating should infants and children have negative or unhelpful experiences they would suffer the consequences of this throughout their adult life. In discussing his concept of ‘associations of ideas’, Locke suggested it was crucial for children to be taught positive associations in order to develop effectively. He
suggested early experiences are more important than those later in life, as it is these early experiences that form the first key lessons in learning about the self. In this way he proposed education as key in development, suggesting a good character and intelligence in adulthood is primarily derived from receiving a good education as a child. However he also proposed infants and children are born with some innate talents and capabilities, and following this argument suggested it was necessary for parents to observe their children’s natural abilities and interests, and tailor learning to these rather than imposing their own views on children’s activities and engaging them in activities they dislike.

In his ([1693] 1996) treatise Some Thoughts Concerning Education and of the Conduct of the Understanding, Locke discussed three distinct methods to educate children effectively, namely ensuring the development of a healthy body through maintaining a healthy diet and sleep pattern, the formation of a virtuous character specifically related to a child’s ability to think rationally, and the choice of an appropriate educational curriculum further focused around encouraging critical thinking and an interest in learning and obtaining knowledge.

**Rousseau (1712–1778)**

Rousseau believed that education should not be concerned with particular techniques of imparting information but rather with developing a child’s character and moral sense, to enable them to make their own judgements about what is right or wrong. He proposed educators should enable children to learn moral behaviour through experiencing the consequences of their actions, and ensure children are able to do this in a safe way.

Rousseau proposed the importance of developmentally appropriate education, suggesting child development occurs in stages, namely three different stages of childhood. He suggested that during the first stage of childhood up to 12 years children are governed by their emotions and impulses, followed by the second stage between 12 and 16 years in which reason develops, and the third stage from 16 onwards when the child develops into an adult. He believed that at early stages of development children learn through their interaction with the world, particularly through the senses. He therefore proposed that educators should encourage development through enabling children to explore their environment, and that educators should optimize learning by helping children to explore things through their senses encouraging them to draw inferences based on these. Rousseau placed importance on developing children’s ability to think and reason in younger childhood; however, he also placed importance on teaching children to understand complex human emotions, particularly sympathy, in later developmental stages.

**Freud (1856–1939)**

Freud proposed children develop through a series of stages, highlighting in particular stages of personality and moral development, or the ‘psychosexual stages of development’. In these stages, Freud proposed, children are influenced by differing constructs of the psyche which are both unconscious and conscious to varying degrees, namely the Id, Ego and Super-Ego. Freud suggested infants are initially governed by
the unconscious Id, which seeks to gain immediate gratification and have its needs met, leading infants to seek out experiences based on the ‘pleasure principle’. In this stage, Freud proposed infants have not yet developed ideas of socially appropriate behaviour, and behave in accordance with their wishes and demands.

Freud proposed that as children develop, so does the Ego in order to moderate the demands of the Id in accordance with the child’s outer world or environment. In this way, the Ego aims to find a balance between the Id’s drive for immediate gratification and what is realistic and reasonable; therefore it is a part of the Id modified by the external influence of the outside world.

Freud also proposed the Super-Ego develops later, which works in conflict with the Id, seeking to motivate a child to behave in a socially acceptable manner. Freud suggested this construct controls a child’s sense of right and wrong, leading to feelings of guilt as a punishment in instances of misbehaviour. He suggested the Super-Ego acts as a parental figure, and takes on the influence of individuals in such a role, such as teachers and educators, for example. With the Id and Super-Ego striving for opposing goals, Freud proposed the Ego manages conflicts and discrepancies between the two.

During a child’s stages of development, from infancy into puberty and adulthood, Freud argued the Id, Ego and Super-Ego influence a child to varying degrees, eventually leading to effective management of drives by the Ego and an emotionally well-adjusted adult. However, should conflicts between the constructs occur which are not resolved during each of the stages of development, Freud suggested it may be possible for a child to become stuck, or fixated, at one of the stages. This would lead to maladjustments in personality development, leading to the development of ‘neuroses’ or problems with emotional wellbeing. He therefore suggested it is necessary for caregivers to attend to children’s needs effectively in order to help them move through these developmental stages appropriately.

Dewey (1859–1952)

Dewey argued that social interaction is needed for children to learn. He believed that pupils thrive in an environment where they actively interact with the curriculum and their surroundings. In addition to his views on child development, he also stated his views regarding effective education of children. He stated that effective education would present new information in a way that allows children to relate this to past experiences in order to optimize its meaning, and effective teaching would provide opportunities for hands-on learning and experiential education.

Watson (1878–1958) and Skinner (1904–1990)

Watson and Skinner’s views fall under the heading of Behaviourism, a movement in psychology which highlighted the importance of scientific investigation to further understanding of human behaviour and development through drawing conclusions based on observable behaviours. This was a reaction to previous theories in psychology where the focus was often centered on constructs of the mind, which behaviourists argued could not be helpfully understood as they did not lend themselves to direct observation.
In discussing child development, behaviourist theories proposed children learn through imitation and ‘conditioning’. Bandura’s (1969) Social Learning Theory proposed children’s behaviour can be modified through observation and imitation or modelling of various role models. Research (Bandura et al., 1961) highlighted children observing role models’ aggression are more likely to then act aggressively themselves than when they have observed role models reacting compassionately or indifferently. Skinner also discussed the role of imitation in the development of language, stating children learn language as a result of imitation of language to which they are exposed.

Skinner also discussed the role of ‘conditioning’ in childhood learning, proposing children learn through reward and punishment of certain behaviours. Therefore if behaviour is punished, either through delivering punishment or withdrawal of a pleasurable item, this behaviour reduces. Whereas when behaviour is rewarded or reinforced, either through directly being given a reward, or a negative stimulus being removed, this behaviour is likely to increase in frequency. Therefore, children learn to behave in certain ways through the consequences of their behaviour. In addition to this, behaviour is also influenced through ‘extinction’, which occurs when a previously reinforced behaviour is no longer reinforced, causing the behaviour to become exhibited less frequently.

When considered in the context of child development this has implications for children and their caregivers, in suggesting that to increase the likelihood of a child displaying wanted behaviours, these must be reinforced so that the likelihood a child will engage in these behaviours is increased initially. Their use must also continue to be reinforced otherwise the behaviours may begin to diminish.

Piaget (1896–1980)

Piaget (1929) proposed that children develop through a series of stages. He named them the Sensori-motor (birth–2 years), Pre-operational (2–4 years), Intuitive (4–7 years), Concrete operational (7–11 years) and Formal operational (11–16 years) stages of development. Piaget suggested children learn initially through interaction with objects around them, stating this mode of learning is much more effective for child development than passively listening to information. As a child moves through the proposed stages of development, they become increasingly able to solve problems mentally without the need to deal with objects directly. This allows the child to move away from purely dealing with the actual, to being able to consider the possible.

Piaget also emphasized the importance of social interaction in fostering effective child cognitive development, stating that through this children develop language which enables them to communicate their own ideas and communicate with others, enabling them to learn others’ ideas and perspectives and therefore further their own knowledge.

Kohlberg (1927–1987)

Kohlberg devised a theory of moral development where morality could be viewed in stages from 1–6 in sequence towards higher order reasoning, and proposed that by progressing through these stages of development children become able to deal with
moral dilemmas more effectively. Kohlberg expanded on Piaget’s work, proposing the process of moral development was primarily concerned with justice, and continued throughout an individual’s lifetime.

Kohlberg’s stages begin with the pre-conventional stages found in childhood. Stage 1, which he suggested is driven by ideas of obedience and punishment, leads children to be concerned with how to avoid punishment, which is followed by stage 2 in which children become concerned with self-interest or ‘what’s in it for me?’ leading them to consider morality and what is right in terms of what is in their own best interest. Kohlberg suggested the conventional stages occur in adolescence and adulthood, and stages 3 and 4 are concerned with filling certain social roles and adhering to social conventions such as laws. Finally, in the post-conventional level occurring in adulthood, Kohlberg proposed stages 5 and 6 are characterized by individuals developing abstract moral reasoning, being able to view rules and laws as changing and flexible, and being able to develop a moral code outside of that proposed by societal conventions. In these stages, individuals are seen as able to recognize that views about morality vary according to each person and community.

Vygotsky (1896–1934)

Vygotsky stressed the importance of social interactions to promote children’s development. He proposed children learn primarily through social interaction with others in a number of different contexts, and that this active involvement in activities encourages achievement at a higher level. Vygotsky stated children learn and develop through considered interaction with an ‘expert’ individual who is able to guide learning effectively. He suggested children learn most effectively when new information is presented to a level just above their current level of understanding. Should new information be too advanced, the child would struggle to assimilate this with previously understood information. However, should the information not be challenging enough, the child would fail to continue to develop their knowledge further. The difference between what was possible unaided and what was achievable with support is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The adult (expert) has an engineered conversation with the child (novice) in which the adult constructs questions that the child is able to respond to. The questions may develop in complexity in stages, and through the process of reflection and providing answers the child is able to make appropriate learning connections around meanings of the experiences encountered. Vygotsky claimed there was a gap between a child’s actual development and their potential development. This would be followed by internalization where a child could reflect upon what was discovered. Therefore, by providing new information just ahead of a child’s current level of knowledge and enabling a child to take time to reflect on this new information, an ‘expert’ or educator is able to allow a child to reach their potential for development.

Bruner (1915–)

Bruner’s observations of childhood learning lead him to propose children learn new information and master new skills through a process he referred to as ‘scaffolding’.
In this he suggested children, and also adults, are able to learn any skill as long as information is structured appropriately through the learning process, and suggested effective teaching should return to material previously presented at certain intervals, providing more advanced knowledge at every stage. He proposed three stages of learning, or ‘modes of representation’, known as enactive, iconic and symbolic representation. Upon being presented with new information, learners progress through these stages to the deepest level of understanding at symbolic representation.

Bruner also held views regarding children’s cognitive and social development, and similarly to Vygotsky, proposed that social interaction plays a key role in this development and language acquisition. In his view children acquire language in order to communicate with others, and do so primarily through effective and meaningful parent–child interactions. From his social constructivist viewpoint, he suggested the importance of social interaction and communication in child development.

Bowlby (1907–1990)

In his ‘Attachment Theory’ (Bowlby, 1969), Bowlby highlighted the importance for development of an effective mother–child relationship in a child’s early life. Bowlby stated that it is necessary for a mother and infant to form a bond with each other within a short period of time after birth, and proposed that an effective, caring bond ensures the child’s emotional wellbeing. However should the mother not be available during this time, or should the bond developed be less than adaptive and optimal, the child would suffer developmentally later in life and experience difficulties with emotional wellbeing.

Bowlby suggested infants become attached to individuals who are sensitive and responsive in their interactions with them, and who remain as consistent caregivers during a period from around six months to two years after birth. With adaptive attachments, in which caregivers continue to respond to children’s needs sensitively and effectively during this time, children are able to begin to explore their world moving away from their caregivers to develop knowledge and understanding of the world around them, while returning to caregivers as a secure base. In this way, children have the safety and security necessary from which to confidently explore their world.

In cases where children have less than optimal attachments, problems in emotional wellbeing can develop as children do not have a safe and secure base to explore from, and do not have caregivers who are responsive to their needs.

Bowlby described how caregivers’ responses to children and infants can lead to the development of patterns of attachment, therefore influencing an individual in later life as attachment patterns formed early in life can often be replicated with close individuals in adulthood.

Maslow (1908–1970)

Maslow also proposed certain stages of development; however, he argued that these were organized in a ‘hierarchy of needs’ in which humans develop through being motivated to fulfil increasing levels of need.
This hierarchy begins with physiological needs such as food, water, shelter and sleep, moving on to the need for safety including personal and financial security, and health and wellbeing. The next level of need is for love and belonging, for example through intimate relationships, friendships and family relationships. Humans then move on to the need for esteem, including self-esteem and confidence, respect for themselves and others. Maslow termed the final stage ‘self-actualization’, with humans striving to realize their full potential. This can be specific to each individual; however Maslow stated that in order to achieve this, an individual must not just achieve but master the previous needs.

Maslow stated that each stage must be achieved before an individual is able to strive for the next stage, and in cases where any one of the four lower stages (physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem) are not met this results in anxieties and tension.

**Reflections**

Which theories do you feel influence your philosophy of early years learning?

How are they demonstrated in practice?

Are there a combination of theories underpinning your philosophy and practice?

**Factors affecting child development: research**

In addition to these theories of child development, research can also inform us of factors influencing children and their cognitive, social and emotional development. Bowlby ([1953] 1969) developed his ‘maternal deprivation hypothesis’ in which he proposed that children suffer cognitively, socially and emotionally without an effective, warm and caring bond with their mother. Research (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Goldfarb, 1947; Spitz, 1946) has indicated support for this, identifying how infants who did not have a secure maternal attachment, or were raised in foster care/institutions with poor attachments to caregivers showed poor development in all areas. Research (van Ijzendoorn et al., 1992) indicates that secure attachments to multiple caregivers, including fathers, siblings and wider family members, encourages effective child development. Peer relationships are also considered important for children’s development, as is indicated through research (Cowen et al., 1973; Gilmartin, 1987; Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996) which has demonstrated that rejection and bullying by peers leads to poor social and emotional development, and problems in later life with confidence and self-esteem.

**Early experiences and influence on later life**

In considering factors contributing to effective child development, in which the benefits can be seen through effective social, emotional and cognitive development of
a child, it is also important to consider the impact of this early experience on the individual throughout their lifespan. We have seen how theorists have identified important conditions enabling children to achieve their full potential during childhood, and factors which can hinder this. This is important in itself; however, what is also greatly important is an understanding of how such early experiences influence an individual in adulthood, as a key aim of education is to ensure a child is given the opportunity to develop into a successfully functioning adult.

With this in mind, let us consider theory identifying the relationship between early experiences and functioning in later life; in particular, a theory proposed by Beck (1976) regarding early experiences and the development of emotional disorders. In his Cognitive Model of Emotional Disorders (1976), Beck proposed that early experiences lead an individual to develop beliefs about themselves, others and the world around them. He proposed that these beliefs are absolute, such as ‘I am worthy’, ‘Others are critical’, or ‘The world is an unsafe place’. He suggested that individuals develop a number of beliefs, and that these can be either helpful or unhelpful. When beliefs develop which are unhelpful, or negative, they lead an individual to experience emotional distress; therefore to alleviate or protect against this an individual develops rules or assumptions, which guide their behaviour to ensure these beliefs do not impact negatively upon them. For example, if an individual receives messages as a child from caregivers that it is selfish to ask for things they want, they may develop beliefs such as ‘I am bad’ or ‘I am selfish’. Rules in this instance would prompt the individual to put others first, or deny themselves of things they want or need, and appear as statements such as ‘I should always put others’ needs before my own’ or ‘I ought not to express my own needs’. In this way, these rules are often rigid and inflexible standards a person feels they must adhere to. Such a rule could be seen to influence behaviour in that a person who believes they should not assert their own needs may seek to please others and deny themselves the things they need. When considering the impact of this it is possible to see that through developing unhelpful beliefs, an individual may become vulnerable to difficulties with emotional wellbeing in later life. For example, this individual may feel happy while meeting others’ needs, but may be prone to depression and feelings of guilt when it is necessary to take care of themselves. Also the long-term consequences of this behaviour may lead the individual to develop problems in relationships, for example due to difficulty expressing their own needs they may not have their own needs met by others, which may lead to resentment and tension in relationships.

In accordance with this model, psychological vulnerability is linked to situations which may occur in an individual’s life leading to a person’s rules being threatened or broken, for example when this individual asks for their needs to be met or does something to please themselves. In the event of this event or trigger occurring, an individual would then experience emotional distress, for example anxiety or depression.

This theory falls under the Cognitive Movement in psychology, and later contributed to the formation of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy through convergence with Behaviourism as a treatment for emotional disorder, and targets an individual’s faulty thinking patterns or cognitive distortions, and maladaptive coping patterns or behaviours to alleviate distress.
**Conclusion**

In light of the above discussion, it is very important not to underestimate the impact of childhood experiences and development on an individual throughout their life, both in terms of their social and emotional wellbeing, but also for their cognitive development, and academic and professional achievement. It is therefore essential for caregivers and educators to find out about relevant theory and research highlighting ways of fostering effective child development in all areas, and to ensure their own practice is informed by this wealth of information.

Some individuals have developed their own approaches to working with young children, using their pedagogical perspective to implement their perceptions of appropriate practice. The new EYFS provides a framework in which to work with young children. It is the professional who uses that information and incorporates this into the context of service provision, the partnerships fostered, the community involved around the setting, resources and, of course, the experiences and needs of the children in their care.

**References**


Further reading

