

Introduction

Jeni Riley

'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 as they grow up.'

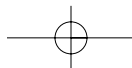
(DfES, 2007:2)

In this Introduction, I explain the purpose of this book, its rationale and its structure. Each of Chapters 2–7 focuses on the curriculum content and pedagogy within an area of learning as identified in *The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007:7). This Introduction deals with the current political and operational context, and it addresses the key issues which affect young children's learning and which are evident in the discussion throughout this book. These issues are:

- the potential of play-based activities;
- the importance of the practitioners' subject knowledge; and
- information and communications technology and learning in the early years of education.

This book takes its structure from the *The Early Years Foundation Stage* document and it aims to support practitioners with an overview of the six areas of learning along with a consideration of the relevant subject knowledge and 'developmentally appropriate' pedagogy. It will help students and practitioners to make useful connections between the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1, and with the traditional body of knowledge which has informed learning in early childhood education. The book provides new insights from recent research that are relevant to teaching and learning within the 3–7 age range and, we believe, this book is highly relevant to early years practitioners in pre-school, reception and Years 1 and 2 classrooms.

Chapter 1 deals with the foundations of early learning and includes a discussion of the following:



Learning in the Early Years 3–7

- The responsibility we have to maximize each child’s astonishing potential as demonstrated by recent scientific studies on the brain.
- The idea of a changing concept of childhood and different views on the child’s place in society today.
- Issues about effective teaching and learning in the early years of education focused on the role of the adult in supporting the child’s development and thinking.

The social and political context for early years education

Since the publication of the first edition of *Learning in the Early Years*, government energy and investment has been directed towards services and provision for the youngest members of society in England. The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (HCESC) report *Every Child Matters* (2005) instigated comprehensive reform for children’s services.

Key underpinning principles – all garnering very broad support in the evidence we have received – include: more closely integrated frontline delivery of education, health, social and specialist services; earlier intervention to provide support before problems become serious; closer working between professionals who might be involved with the same child or young person; more coherent planning and commissioning of services at the combined local level – the establishment of Children’s Trusts (or similar arrangements) to support this; and greater involvement of children, parents and carers in the development of services. (HCESC, 2005: 3)

The catalyst for *Every Child Matters* was a response to the Laming Enquiry into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié through, essentially, a failure in communication between a variety of services. This visionary report proposed long-awaited reform to the patchy, fragmented provision of children’s services across the country. *Every Child Matters* (ECM) has wide-reaching implications for education, health, social services, voluntary and community organizations and other agencies, although to many of the professionals working in these services ECM was long overdue.

The report explored the broad issues of organizational and professional integration, information and management and the needs of parents and children, specifically:

- The place of health, social services and education respectively within the integrated services;
- The practical implications of the ‘duty to collaborate’, including funding streams and location of staff and facilities;
- Staff and management needs: team building, leadership and training;
- Inspection;

- Listening to children; the role of the Children’s Commissioner;
- Working with parents;
- The creation, management and sharing of records, including electronic databases. (HCESC, 2005: 5)

The main principles cited by the ECM report can be found in paragraph 10:

Every Child Matters aims to bring about root-and-branch reform of children’s services at every level to ensure that children and young people achieve five main outcomes. They should:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being. (HCESC, 2005: 8)

It can be seen how these aspirational outcomes feed into and underpin the revision of the *Curriculum Guidance for Foundation Stage* (DfEE/QCA, 2000).

The *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007) will be a single framework for care, learning and development for children in all early years settings from birth to the August after their fifth birthday. Building on the existing *Curriculum Guidance for Foundation Stage* (DfEE/QCA, 2000). The *Birth to Three Matters framework and the National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding*, the framework provides coherence, provide a flexible approach to care and learning and raise quality throughout the Early Years Sector. It is intended to play a key role in improving the life chances of all children, regardless of their family circumstances, by setting clear expectations of the care, [and the provision for their] learning and development they will receive, whatever the setting they attend. (DfES, 2007)

Throughout the book we discuss the recommendations of the documents from the DfES advising on the curriculum for 0–7-year-olds: *The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007a) (0–5 years) and its companion document *The Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007) and the Key Stage 1 (5–7 years) section in the National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999) to explore their relationship with each other in terms of continuity of subject content and the associated ‘developmentally appropriate’ pedagogy.

The message of this book is essentially an optimistic one. Research findings emerging from the most recent studies are providing robust evidence which reaffirms many of the long-held beliefs of early childhood educators. But within this message is a clearer, more rigorous and harder-edged focus relevant to education today.

Why was it important to write this book?

The rationale for the book

The education children experience during the earliest years of their life lays the foundations for all that follows. The nature and quality of the care, the experiences and the learning opportunities that are offered to children, from their birth and then onwards through infancy and early childhood, affect their educational potential and their life chances in a profound and lasting way. The recognition, by both wider public opinion and the government, of the vital importance of the early years has resulted in a massively heightened interest in the quality of early childhood provision and education. Driven by this concern, substantial funding has been allocated to developing early childhood education and services. Considerable energy and effort have been directed into rationalizing, standardizing and improving the many and diverse services which at present cater for children before they reach full-time, mainstream primary education. Additional resources have been made available:

- for the integration of childcare and educational provision;
- for intervention projects with both the babies and their parents in UK's most economically deprived areas (for example the Sure Start initiative); and
- to improve the quality and to upgrade the professional training of the adults working within the early years sector.

The government's introduction of an official Foundation Stage (0–5 years, prior to the statutory National Curriculum), along with its associated document, *The Early Years Foundation Stage* further demonstrates a determination to improve the educational provision and learning opportunities for all children in the 0–5-year age range. This book deals with the way, in practice, this guidance can complement both the National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999) document at Key Stage 1 (5–7 years) and the Primary National Strategy (DfES 2006).

In a situation where there is increasingly tough competition for public funds, what has convinced a government that this immense commitment will be rewarded?

Evidence of the benefits of early childhood education

There have been many studies of interventions in early childhood education (see Ramey and Ramey, 1998) but one particular longitudinal study undertaken in the USA provides convincing evidence on the long-lasting value of pre-school education. The High/Scope Perry Pre-school evaluation (Schweinhart et al., 1993) is a robustly designed intervention programme and associated evaluation with a random sample of

123 participating individuals who at the time were living in deprived circumstances. The evaluation has provided extensive data over a wide variety of real-life measures covering a long time span. Analyses of the data (which were collected annually from children 3–11, and then at 14, 15, 19 and 27) show the indisputable long-term benefits of an early educational intervention for children brought up in poverty and at high risk of school failure. The High/Scope study has also famously shown the impressive cost benefits to society of early intervention. The programme participants were more successful at school compared with those individuals who were living in the same circumstances but who had not received the educational programme. This was demonstrated by the participants:

- being less likely to be placed in programmes for mental impairment;
- having higher average school grades;
- graduating on time from high school more successfully; and
- having higher levels of literacy by the end of secondary education.

At 27 years of age, participants in the High/Scope Programme:

- were earning a higher salary;
- were more likely to own their homes;
- were less likely to receive social service support; and
- had a lower rate of involvement with crime.

Although these findings have been very influential, more precise evidence is needed. For example, are the benefits so striking because this study was conducted on a very deprived group of people? Are all early education programmes equally effective? If not, then what appear to be the key features of an effective pre-school programme?

Features of effective pre-school provision

Ramey and Ramey (1998) suggest that there are six 'developmental priming mechanisms' with a potential role to enhance learning:

- 1 encouragement to explore the environment;
- 2 mentoring basic intellectual and social skills;
- 3 celebrating new skills;
- 4 rehearsing and expanding new skills;
- 5 protection from inappropriate punishment or ridicule for developmental advances; and
- 6 stimulation in language and symbolic communication.

Learning in the Early Years 3–7

Evidence emerging from the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) supports the dual emphasis described above and the value of encouraging equally both cognitive and social development. Findings from the REPEY study, derived from both quantitative and qualitative data, suggest that the greater than expected levels of development in children in the most effective settings were associated with:

- adult–child interactions that involve open-ended questioning to extend children’s thinking and, very importantly, through what the researchers describe as ‘sustained shared thinking’;
- practitioners possessing high levels of subject knowledge of the curriculum as well as knowledge and understanding of child development;
- formative feedback to children during activities;
- shared educational aims with parents; and
- behaviour policies in which staff support children in being assertive, at the same time as rationalizing and talking through conflicts.

The findings of this important study and their implications for practice are discussed in more depth in Chapter 1.

Research evidence on the attainment and progress of children starting school

As every reception class teacher knows, there is a very wide range of development shown by each class of new school entrants. Extensive evidence of pupils’ social, intellectual and behavioural attainment assessed in a variety of ways when they enter school confirms that this is so (Tymms, 2002). The wide range in the functioning of children is influenced by the type of home background, particularly their socio-economic status, ethnic origin and gender, and is affected by whether the child is a singleton or a twin.

The aim of the Performance Indicators of Primary Schools Project (PIPS) (Tymms, 1999) is to provide high-quality data on the attainments, attitudes and progress of children throughout their primary school careers. In addition, the findings offer reliable and up-to-date demographic information, which is useful for teachers concerning the context within which they work.

Demographic information on pupils’ start to school

The PIPS data indicate that, in English schools:

- it is common practice now for children to go to mainstream school when they are 4 years old. In 2000–01 only 13 per cent started school at 5;

- 85 per cent of these pupils start in the September of the academic year of school entry;
- 7 per cent of school entrants do not have English as their first language;
- the vast majority will have attended pre-school with an average of two terms at a nursery and just over a term at a playgroup;
- approximately 0.7 per cent have been identified already as having special educational needs; and
- 17 per cent are eligible for free school meals.

The range of attainment shown at school entry

Details of the span of attainment at school entry across and within the different groups of children are discussed fully by Tymms (1999; 2002) and make compulsive reading. To take a few examples, in spoken language, some children starting school do not know or use basic and commonly used household words, while others have in their vocabulary such words as saxophone, jewellery and cosmetics. Some children have a very limited understanding of how books and print work, while one child in 500 is able to read a long passage fluently. In mathematics, one child in five cannot recognize the number 4 but one in a hundred knows the number 164.

The particular and long-lasting importance of the reception year

The design of the PIPS research project measured the reception pupils' progress and found that it is very rapid. Not only that, but the progress made in the first year of school is the greatest that pupils achieve over the entire seven years of primary school. In addition to this, some schools and their teachers have a greater effect on the progress made over and above what might be expected from the children's entry scores. In other words, in terms of a 'value-added' effect (that is, the influence of a school or a teacher which exceeds that which might be expected from a class of pupils' beginning-of-school-year scores) there is as much as a 40 per cent variance in the relative progress made. This percentage is extremely high. In comparison with this figure of 40 per cent, school effectiveness research at secondary level indicates that a positive school/teacher effect is approximately only 10–15 per cent of the variance.

The important point to make is that the school and the teacher have the single and greatest influence on the progress made by classes of pupils. And the most progress occurs during the first year of school. Therefore reception teachers have an awesome responsibility: they need to build sensitively and knowledgeably upon the foundations that pre-school and home have laid, while also taking into account the wide individual differences in young pupils. Two smaller studies (compared with the PIPS project) investigating the progress made during the reception year in literacy (Riley, 1996) and mathematics (Aubrey, 1994) provide detail on some of the factors and processes which appear to lead to positive learning outcomes for new school pupils. The quality of the

Learning in the Early Years 3–7

training and experience of the teacher is key. Children arrive in school with a vast store of knowledge but it is highly idiosyncratic and individual. Capitalizing on that knowledge is the key for children to make sound progress. Teachers need strong subject knowledge across the curriculum and to be aware of the appropriate pedagogy for teaching it. Early years teachers have to be skilled assessors of the children's levels of development so that they can offer a close match of teaching with children's levels of understanding. The findings of these studies described in this section support those from the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). They also confirm the ideology and theories of early childhood education held for over a century.

Which type of curriculum is the most effective?

Debate exists about the type and content of an early years curriculum. What should be the main focus of education during the years 3–7? Clearly there will be a change of emphasis during this time span. But in which direction should educators place most of their energy? Should adults working with young children be encouraging them to become autonomous learners, or should they be concerned mostly with developing socially competent young pupils to enable them to cope and integrate into the community of the setting? Or should greatest emphasis be put upon offering learning opportunities in the subjects of a curriculum? These aims are not mutually exclusive, naturally, but research evidence is providing answers here too.

'Play is the work of the child' (Froebel, 1876). Play-based activities as an effective vehicle for learning appear to meet all three of the above educational aims. Traditionally, play has a place at the heart of early childhood education as the recognized way that young children learn most effectively. It is argued that play offers opportunities from which children will benefit hugely, both cognitively and socially. On the intellectual side, play-based learning – because of its highly motivating, self-directing qualities – encourages engagement, concentration, task completion and the development of problem-solving abilities. Social and communication skills of negotiation and collaboration with peers are also demanded in many play situations.

Play has its critics, however. Studies (for example, Bennett et al., 1997) have shown that play activities can be low in intellectual challenge and often repetitive and time-wasting for children, particularly in Key Stage 1. Researchers have found that infant teachers have an idealized, somewhat sentimental view of play, considering it to have educational validity at all times and in all circumstances but without a clear sense of how or why. It appears that some teachers under-exploit its learning potential. Debate whether play is as educationally valuable as early years teachers would like to believe comes from a lack of clarity about what is and what is not play. This despite many attempts at precise and comprehensive definitions! One way forward is a categorization of play-based activities developed in order to assess the educational value of play. How can activities which can be described as 'playful' be categorized?

Play-based activities

Widely used criteria for evaluating play events

Researchers have developed frameworks which take into account the nature of play and its complexity by categorizing the way in which it can cover a variety of dimensions. Brooker (2002) has summarized the research evidence on the learning outcomes of play. Parten (1932) described the developmental changes that occur in the social groupings that arise when children are playing and noted that, as they grow older, children engage in more associative and co-operative play and play less on their own. Her categories are as follows:

- *unoccupied and onlooker*, which describe a child who is observing but not participating in an activity;
- *parallel* – in this category the child plays alongside others but not *with* other children;
- *associative* – the child plays and shares the action with others; and
- *co-operative* – describes the child who displays a higher level of social behaviour and there is a defined division of labour and role.

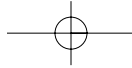
Evidence from observational studies

Smilansky (1968; 1990) investigated the frequency and complexity of children's 'socio-dramatic' or 'fantasy' play and she suggests that socio-dramatic play in pre-school and school settings is a valuable stimulus for emotional, social and intellectual growth. Smilansky claims that 'it is the make-believe process ... that is pivotal' (1990: 35). She developed the following criteria with the potential to develop children's intellectual capacity:

- functional play;
- constructive play;
- symbolic play; and
- games with rules.

Research evidence from the Oxford Preschool Research Project

Sylva et al. (1980) developed criteria which were used in the most informative research studies designed to undertake detailed 'target child' observations on 3–5-year-olds. The researchers coded the behaviour of each 'target child' on action codes, social codes and



Learning in the Early Years 3–7

play bouts, using children in different forms of pre-school provision (120 children aged 3.6 and 5.6). They looked for the ‘task settings’ and ‘social settings’ associated with a high level (‘yield’) of cognitively challenging and complex play.

Their main findings lead them to recommend that:

- activities should have a clear goal structure;
- children should work in pairs; and
- adults should have a tutorial role.

The most beneficial situations in terms of the level of the cognitive demand on the child and which led to intellectual gains include construction materials of all kinds, structured tasks and art activities, as well as pretend play and small-world play; and settings in which a child interacts with a peer or adult.

The categories Sylva and colleagues developed aimed to take account of the complexity within both social and cognitive dimensions in the following way:

The context for observation – the social setting

- child alone;
- child parallel;
- child–child pair;
- child in child group;
- child in child group plus adult; and
- child–adult pair.

Activities which meet the criteria potentially offer valuable learning opportunities for children to develop in a variety of ways and across a range of dimensions. However, progress depends upon the level of intellectual and social maturity of the children, and the relationship between it and the activity in which they are engaged.

The context for observation – the task setting

- structured materials;
- pretend;
- small construction;
- art;
- large construction;
- manipulation;
- gross motor play;
- informal games;
- scale-version toys;
- games with rules; and
- rough-and-tumble play.

The importance of play

We return to the issue of the importance and nature of play throughout the 3–7 age phase in Chapter 1 of this book, with a particular focus on the research findings of the REPEY project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). This study shows that the children who made the most progress had been offered play-based learning opportunities which had both curriculum and social learning objectives and which were also intended to develop positive learning dispositions and communication skills. These children had developed best in effective learning environments and alongside adults who engaged with them in mutually enjoyable ‘sustained shared thinking’.

The Department for Education and Skills is convinced that play is an appropriate way for valuable learning to occur in the Foundation Stage, so much so that play is in place within the official advice given to practitioners, which states that:

Through play children can:

- explore and represent learning experiences that help them make sense of the world;
- practise and build up ideas, concepts and skills;
- learn how to understand the need for rules;
- be alone, be alongside others or co-operate as they talk or rehearse their feelings;
- take risks and make mistakes;
- think creatively and imaginatively;
- communicate with others as they investigate and solve problems;
- express fears or relive anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.

(DfES, 2007: 8)

And this probably understates the case; no mention is made here of the many opportunities that play offers for children to acquire knowledge and understanding across the entire curriculum. Play has the potential to be the major, unifying pedagogical approach for the child’s transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. When playing, children are able to engage at a level which is best suited to them given the self-chosen, ‘differentiated by outcome’ and flexible nature of the activities. It is the practitioner’s responsibility to be aware of the range and possibilities of the learning potential of a particular activity. Adults must also observe and monitor the play, with individual children’s learning needs in mind, in order to ensure that sufficient cognitive and social challenge is present. The well-known saying of early years education ‘observe, support and extend’ holds true today. Let us take as an example children’s ‘socio-dramatic’, ‘fantasy’, ‘pretence’, ‘make believe’ or ‘symbolic’ play in both pre-school and school settings. Smilansky has showed that there are genuine gains for cognitive development in socio-dramatic play. She claims that it ‘activates resources that stimulate emotional, social and intellectual growth in the child, which in turn affects the child’s success in school’ (1990: 25). Role-play areas are an essential part of the learning environment in all pre-school settings and can and should be an effective and staple offering for Years 1 and 2 pupils. A travel agent’s shop, for example, offers

Learning in the Early Years 3–7

active, authentic, enjoyable learning experiences in communication, language, literacy, mathematics and knowledge and understanding about the world, to mention only some curriculum areas of learning.

The structure of this book

This book considers the curriculum and the associated ‘developmentally appropriate pedagogy’ in the age phase 3–7 from the perspective of the six areas of learning identified in *The Statutory Framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007). It aims to support practitioners in their understanding of how the framework for the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum work together in practice. It shows how educators can use this structure of intellectual, social, aesthetic, spiritual and physical development for 3–7-year-olds as they meet the requirements of all documents. The issues particularly associated with the curriculum and ‘developmentally appropriate’ teaching approaches in both the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are discussed in depth in Chapters 2–7. The book is organized in this way as an effective education for 3–7-year-olds demands an underpinning and unifying framework which spans the whole curriculum. A rigorous and comprehensive grasp of the curriculum is required of practitioners and teachers working in all early years settings, in reception and Years 1 and 2 classrooms, so that ‘developmentally appropriate’ learning experiences and teaching can be offered across all the curriculum subjects.

Issues of difficulty and confusion

There are two areas of potential difficulty with the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* documents, and the Practice Guidance EYFS, which has otherwise been widely welcomed. A high level of practitioner’s subject knowledge has been assumed by the documents and it does not provide a useful support for planning. The ‘Stepping Stones’ of the ‘Early Learning Goals’ are not a curriculum framework but suggest rather an ideal place on a ladder of learning which needs to be reached by the end of the reception year on entry to Year 1. Research evidence suggests that ‘the requirements for the Foundation Stage’ presume levels of curriculum subject knowledge from early years practitioners that are over-optimistic (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). While at Key Stage 1 the issue appears to be reversed; through the recent initiatives in initial teacher education, primary teachers have stronger subject knowledge but they are less confident concerning child development and how to employ ‘developmentally appropriate’ teaching approaches, particularly through play-based activities.

In addition to this, advice early in the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (DfEE, 1998; 1999) was prescriptive: it was too whole-class-teaching focused and inappropriate for many children in reception and some Year 1 classrooms.

The content of the revised *National Primary Strategy: Framework for Literacy and Numeracy* (DfEE, 2006) is relevant and broadly in line with current research evidence and thinking. The Framework for Literacy and Numeracy are helpful to the adults working with children at these ages, particularly in terms of planning for continuity and progression.

Recognition of the need for primary teachers to be well equipped with a sound understanding of the curriculum now requires no defence. An extensive subject knowledge enables a teacher to select content, to identify key points and to offer multiple exemplars more appropriately. Such a practitioner is more accurate in assessing the level of the child's understanding. Research shows that this type of teacher is able, also, to interest the children to a greater extent and to teach in a more engaging fashion. Teachers with strong subject knowledge ask more appropriate questions and are able to incorporate the pupils' contributions into the lesson. Aubrey (1994) made a strong case that educators supporting the earliest years of schooling need to be equally well informed. She suggests that:

Those who teach children in the early years may, however regard other criteria such as the way young children learn and develop at a particular stage as more important. Clearly taking account of young children's interests, preferred activities and out of school experiences as these relate to teaching subject matter is vitally important. Early years teachers may have different orientations to different subjects, as well as different knowledge bases, adopting a child centred approach to, for instance, children's literature and history and a fact-centred approach to mathematics and science. (Aubrey, 1994: 5)

Research evidence is highlighting further the vital importance for early years practitioners to be well qualified and with high levels of subject knowledge and expertise. This was recognized in the *Every Child Matters* report also. This ensures that practitioners are able to plan rich learning opportunities for children in the 3–7 age range and to engage and support the learners through discussion and skilful, open-ended questioning (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Research evidence has shown that children taught by adults of this quality make more progress than those who are not.

■ ICT and education in the early years

Children are early adopters of new technology. They always have been. (Kinnes, 2002: 50, cited by Mallett, 2003: 138)

The debate regarding the effects of information and communication technology (ICT) on young children's development and learning is being resolved. Convincing evidence is emerging from studies being undertaken by Developmentally Appropriate Technology in Early Childhood (DATEC) regarding the nature and the role of ICT for nursery children. The studies are providing examples of exceptionally strong practice. One study (Brooker and Siraj-Blatchford, 2002) cites many instances where children are delighting in and benefiting across a variety of subject domains and dimensions of

Learning in the Early Years 3–7

learning. Software packages, such as *Henry's Party* (Marshall Media, 1995) and *Tizzy's Toybox* (Sherston Software, 1997), appear to have been particularly valuable. The first program offers a series of locations to visit, in which clicking on items produces a huge range of effects and interactions, based on 'helping' characters (such as farm animals) to find and sort objects.

From the findings from the DATEC research project, Iram and John Siraj-Blatchford suggest that the applications with the greatest potential to support leaning in the early years of education:

- Were educational- applications employed in the early years should be educational in nature and this effectively excludes all applications where clear learning aims cannot be identified. For example, it was found that, however entertaining, most arcade type games provided little encouragement of creativity, or indeed any other worthwhile learning outcome
- Encouraged collaboration – in the early years we know that activities which provide contexts for collaboration are especially important
- Supported integration – with an integrated approach to ICT we present ICT products as tools
- Supported play – play and imitation are primary contexts for representational and symbolic behaviour, and role-play is therefore central to the processes of learning in the early years
- Left the child in control – ICT should be controlled by the child, not control the child through programmed learning
- Were transparent and intuitive – applications should be selected that provide transparency: their functions clearly defined and intuitive
- Avoided violence and stereotyping – where applications fail to meet these criteria it would be difficult to justify their use in any educational context
- Supported the awareness of health and safety issues – where the use of a computer is integrated with other activities e.g. in socio-dramatic play, modeling, painting, etc. children benefit from greater movement and exercise away from the computer
- Supported the involvement of parents – studies have shown that when parents, teachers and children collaborate towards the same goals it leads to improved performance. (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2006: 9)

Brooker and Siraj-Blatchford give enchanting examples of groups of children (aged 3 and 4) interacting as they work with the computer. The interaction, in turn, supports language development, promotes pro-social behaviour and assists the performance of less experienced peers. Also, the researchers found that the interaction aids collaboration and stimulates play behaviours. Just two examples are included here (Learning stories I.1 and I.2).

The principle which appears to underpin this valuable learning is the type of software package itself. Open-ended and interactive programs which encourage collaboration rather than those which are single-answer, drill-and-skill based, offer far more potential benefit with regard to the cognitive, social and linguistic gains listed above. The knowledge base of the practitioner and her sensitive balance between support at the appropriate point and non-intervention is another important factor. As we have discussed with traditional play-based opportunities, the nature of the adult's support is key to the child's sustained involvement and the progress made.

Learning story I.1 Afternoon nursery interaction

It is 1.55 p.m. Three children are working with Tizzy's Toybox. Two not very skilled children (Khaleda and Sabena) are working with a more skilled child (Khanderley). Khaleda doesn't know how to mouse-point at all; when I tell her to point to the game she wants to play, she puts her finger on the screen and is totally surprised to be told to move the mouse to point! But Sabena stands and instructs her ('Click'); she becomes frustrated by Khaleda's inability to point and to click, and makes her take her finger off the screen, points to her hand on the mouse, and insists (in Bengali) that she uses the mouse to point with (all this despite her own difficulty in pointing accurately). Khaleda makes steady progress. Sabena and Khanderley collaborate choosing letters with her, pointing to the screen to show her where to click. Khaleda has very little English but practises it whenever she recognizes an object she knows: 'ball, ball', 'baby, baby' and repeats words after the computer has named the objects.

Learning story I.2 Morning nursery interaction

It is 9.50 a.m. Amy, Annabelle, Tabitha, Ziaur and Jubed are working with Henry's Party. Amy gets stuck on matching numbers to sets (cheeses with holes in) and Annabelle helps her to select the right match. All the girls continue to co-operate on finding the missing kittens, which requires skilful anticipation and well-judged timing as well as manual dexterity. The whole group enjoys the special effects obtained by clicking in the kitchen, which prompt group glee (singing and dancing). Amy returns to the number-matching to practise and perfect this task. She asks Annabelle for help once again, and she obliges. Alice arrives to watch.

The six areas of learning: Chapters 2–7

As stated earlier, this book has taken the areas of learning as described in the document *The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007) as the organizing framework in order to give ideas coherence. All organizing structures are open to

Learning in the Early Years 3–7

debate, and the areas of learning and their relationship with the subject areas of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1 (DfEE, 1999) are not straightforward or tidy. Some curriculum subjects might have been placed in two or even three of the Foundation Stage areas of learning – design and technology is one of these, ‘dance’ is another. Others are integral to the whole curriculum, such as communication and language. The authors of Chapter 7, when considering opportunities for creative development, acknowledge that creativity is not exclusively developed through the arts and design and technology. The purpose of this book, therefore, is to address the particular and potential contribution which certain subjects offer to the overall development of children and their education. The view of learning which has been adopted is a consideration of the development of the whole child through the lenses of subject specialists with expertise in the early years of education.

Finally, what emerges from this book is the complex relationship between a practitioner’s expertise across the curriculum and the quality of the learning experience that is offered to the children in the setting or class. We have aimed to inform, to delight and to inspire so that professionals can ensure that all children are given every opportunity to maximize their potential through access to the diverse ways of knowing and being intelligent.

Further Reading

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