

Chapter 12

Child's Curriculum as a Gift: Opening up the early level curriculum in Scotland

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Abstract

Many countries worldwide benefit from a long tradition of early childhood education, some serving the years from birth to seven or eight years old. Determined to provide out of home experiences for children before school start, this costly exercise has led to review of location, staffing, pedagogical approaches and curriculum, whilst advocating 'the best interests of the child'. Curriculum reform has often been used as an educational policy tool. There have been shifts in the roles and responsibilities of early educators and consequently in early childhood practices nationally and internationally. The long Scottish early childhood tradition provides a context in which to consider how an understanding of the child's curriculum may be a gift to ensure an enlightened early childhood educational policy and curriculum interpretation at the beginning of the 21st century. By looking back we can begin to look forward.

Key Words

Enlightenment, Scottish traditions, relationships, agency, interactions, curriculum, transitions, policy, development and education, child's gift.

Introduction, the nature of education in our community

Accumulated wisdom of past generations provides certain strong threads of thinking about childhood educational practices that transcend time and context. The loss or discarding of this collective history of a pioneering and political early childhood movement risks children's wellbeing and creativity as learners. These strong pedagogical threads may yet be considered innovative, even best practice, but we need to weigh that up, for one thing is certain: children do not stand still and

nor should adult practices or policy do so. We need, as Giroux (2017) suggests, experience that takes a detour through knowledge and theory, so that the formulation and impact of curriculum and forms of pedagogy are questioned. At the same time the preparation of all early educators should aim for thoughtful, creative, responsive and imaginative frames of mind. Relationships and interactions with others form the natural core of children's experience and shape their futures. The way in which children step in and out of the world outside the family, forming new relationships with people, places and in their thinking, is the substance of any child's curriculum. Abiding principles can be re-interpreted for today (Bruce 2015).

At the heart of life lie all the relationships and people with whom our lives have coincided. The primary importance of family must be embraced: as members of a family there is a particular bond, which, when strong and healthy, connects us to others and to the world around us. Working professionally with children also means having relationships at the centre of all we do, but words such as 'love' and 'cherish' are used less professionally, though now we at least talk of nurturing children, but what does 'nurture' mean? Is it the same or different from what families offer, and is it enough? We cannot talk only of nurture, growth and development, we must talk about socio-cultural learning too: children's worlds are defined by the people in them, by their interactions, by the contexts in which they spend their time and by the political and cultural influences at play.

In this chapter the contribution of early childhood curricula is explored and set against what we know from history and from developmental, socio-cultural and philosophical understandings of early childhood. Central to this chapter are the ways in which learning and education are fostered through our worlds of relations – companionships, friendship, joint attention on shared projects, being able to take the perspective of others, being able to regulate our own behaviour for self and in relation to others. Scottish early humanist thinking which emphasised the value and agency of human beings, and their natural virtues (Hutcheson 1729) has relevance for us today to foster choice, autonomy and a sense of both individual and collective agency in early childhood, with a focus on a shared sense of well being and relational pedagogies (Papatheodorou and Moyles 2009).

By using the term 'enlightened' this chapter seeks to explore the extent to which our society is supporting early childhood in ways that are healthy for the being and becoming child: it was Socrates who claimed that a society could be judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable. While not wanting to cast children as 'vulnerable' – terminology that is creeping into the policy field - the state of childhood is open, malleable, new, forming, and therefore affected by what happens around them, and by what others at the daily level, and those at the political level, do. The child is curious, capable, courageous, persevering, contributing and companionable, but powerless to act upon wider systems and to stop the commodification of childhood, which it may be argued leads to developing

children as consumers rather than as contributors (Giroux 2017). People call these essential human attributes ‘dispositions’ – and young children more than anything else are disposed to relate to others, to their shared world and to the possibilities it offers them – or that they manage to find. These are their strengths that should not be either taken for granted or ignored.

Given such understandings about childhood, this chapter of necessity is about how relationships help us to interpret and to shape curriculum together with children, and why this is so important. Without placing learning within relationships, we cannot have an enlightened early childhood curriculum, policy or provision. Early childhood is often discussed in terms of children’s wellbeing and happiness: supporting connectedness in childhood means recognising this is emotion-work for children (Elfer 2012, 2015), and for adults too.

Early childhood in Scotland can be viewed through the lens of past, present and future. By taking account of trends in early years’ policies and practices over time, we can identify values that withstand time and make for a Scottish approach that always puts children and their families first. Drawing on our history and culture is important, potentially dynamic now, and forward-looking. It is worth considering the following:

Yesterday

- *Scottish History and Education*
- *Enlightened Beginnings*
- *Scottish Early Childhood Pioneers*

Today

- *Current Scottish Policy: the Early Level 3-6*
- *Experience taking a detour through theory: developmental, socio-cultural and philosophical understandings of early childhood.*
- *Curriculum as a gift*

Tomorrow

- *A Child's Curriculum*
- *Values and principles*
- *Looking forward*

Yesterday

Scottish history and education

Looking back, the Scottish Enlightenment, Scottish business and philanthropy and the long cultural tradition of Scottish education have all contributed to the place we have staked out in the world, and how we value ourselves. From very early Scotland reaped the intellectual benefits of a highly developed university system (Herman 2001). For many years this small nation had double the number of Universities of its nearest neighbour: only Oxford and Cambridge were older than the four earliest Scottish Universities of St Andrews, 1413; Glasgow, 1451; Aberdeen, 1495, and Edinburgh, 1583.

Hector Boece, appointed in 1500 as the first principal of the newly founded King's College, later Aberdeen University, was influenced by humanist thinking through his studies in Paris, where he met Erasmus and was a committed proponent of humanism (Durkan, 1953) and individual agency: a feature of in the early Scottish enlightenment. The humanist concern with widening education was shared by the protestant reformers, and as early as 1560 there was a plan for a school in every parish, which was finally ratified by the Parliament of Scotland with the Education Act of 1633. With the advent of the industrial revolution came industrial philanthropy: Robert Owen's 1816 infant school in New Lanark is often claimed as the first nursery-infant school in Europe. In a modern interpretation, Owen's initiatives in new Lanark included, "improving social capital and capacity building, social cohesion, healthy living and improved diet and childbirth, raising parental expectations and aspirations for employees and their children, adult training and development, debt counseling, increasing the potential of human resources, establishing patterns for lifelong learning, as well as quality nursery, infant and primary school education and extended care" (Bertram and Pascal, 2010, p.6). This is close to policy ambitions today.

Enlightened beginnings

In Scotland we can, and should be, more aware of the healthy roots of our thinking about early childhood education and care. Recently 'education' has been substituted by the word 'learning' in early childhood policy-speak. While this may be well-intentioned to avoid a top-down view of early childhood, it may also indicate a confusion between 'education' and 'schooling' and a need, as teacher numbers drop in early learning and childcare, to re-establish the ways in which care, learning and teaching combine in early childhood before and after school entry. The arguments are not simple, and it is important to insist that appropriate pedagogy in early years before school should be sustained in the early years of school: in policy terms this was the ambition of the Early Level 3-6 of Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*. The concept of education should not be

embargoed for our youngest children, nor in Scottish early childhood policy rhetoric. Education is much more than schooling, and with early childhood firmly in the public sphere what is offered to children before formal schooling becomes and should be, political.

The pursuit of egalitarian goals, “stems from the Reformation belief in the power of education, reinvigorated by Enlightenment faith in the improvability of humanity, together creating a proffered ideal of the educated person and the enlightened society that is more distinctive and possibility more important to Scotland than its tangible attainments.” (Houston 2008, p.64). Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1789), highlighted the ‘greater good’ and claimed that human morality depends on sympathy between the individual and other members of society: our moral ideas and actions are a product of our very nature as social creatures.

Against such background it was believed that the provision of the right environment and experiences would overcome an unequal start in life.

Scottish early childhood pioneers

The inspiration of lady pioneers in Scotland for early childhood education was firmly European, based on the teachings of Froebel, Montessori and Pestalozzi. The first Froebel inspired kindergarten opened in London in 1851 (University of Roehampton), and shortly afterward educated women in Scotland’s major cities began to understand the importance of providing encouragement for small children, adopting Froebel’s view that “play at this stage is not trivial; it is highly serious and of deep significance” (Froebel 1826).

A day nursery was established in East North Street in Aberdeen in 1873 (Voluntary Services Aberdeen Website). The Edinburgh Free Kindergarten opened in 1903. Phoenix Park Kindergarten opened in the densely populated Cowcaddens in 1913, supported by the Glasgow Froebel Society which had formed in the early 1880s, with Karl Froebel giving an introductory lecture. In 1917 Jessie Porter trained under Margaret McMillan in London (at the Deptford nursery school she had opened in 1914) and returned to open the first nursery school in Dundee in 1921, by which time Edinburgh City was home to 5 Nursery Schools. The Edinburgh tradition was to open the early nursery schools in the Old Town where housing was crowded and there were many young children. It was here that the child gardens were seen to be most needed and were expected to have the most impact.

As a young teacher it was my privilege to work firstly at Moray House Nursery School, which was founded originally in 1908 in Gilmore Place and later moved into a purpose built nursery school in the grounds of Moray House College. After that I taught at Milton House, the site to which the Edinburgh Free Kindergarten had moved in 1954. Later I was to hear much from my mother, also a

Froebel trained nursery and infant teacher, of her experiences at the Edinburgh Free Kindergarten and Grassmarket Nursery School.

This section of my chapter draws on these experiences and places, and finishes with reflections on the practice at Westfield Court Nursery School where I became headteacher in 1988. Of these places for early formative experiences, only the nursery at Milton House, now Royal Mile Primary, remains open. Their enlightened practice precedes the advent of a national early years curriculum framework for the early years, and was clearly inspired by the work of Froebel.

Edinburgh Free Kindergarten

In each of these early nursery schools the habit was to keep a diary or day-book, to record work undertaken and make a history of developments. Miss Howden, Infant Mistress of Milton House School in 1881 was concerned that babies came to school with their siblings. She left all her savings so that this free kindergarten could be set up. The Edinburgh Free Kindergarten began in Galloway's Entry in 1903, then moved to Reid's Court in 1906 and finally to Milton House School in the Royal Mile in 1954. From her log as a headteacher, Lileen Hardy wrote *The Diary of a Free Kindergarten*, in which she quoted from her own day-book to say:

“It will be a long time before our schools can accord with these theories in practice, but we will supplement the schools. Let us be the pioneers, and, besides benefiting our own children, help on education generally. All this is a dream. Well, the Kindergarten was once a dream and now it is a fact.”

Lileen Hardy, July 11th 1910, (Hardy 1912, p.146)

Visiting in 1913, the HMI of the day was recorded by Miss Hardy to have observed:

“This school is a bright spot in a rather dark neighbourhood with 2 groups of about 20 children under 5. School lessons are not given: they engage in a variety of kindergarten occupations and they learn to draw and sing. The rest of the time they spend taking care of pets in attempts at gardening and playing at housework. They mostly live in the open air and are obviously happy. Lessons in elementary subjects are given to those children who are aged 5-7”.

The Grassmarket Child Garden

The day book at Grassmarket Child Garden in the Vennel reports that children who had gone to school were welcomed back to what we would now call 'after-school care':

“Two play centres have been carried on for the older children who have left us for the 'big school'. The happy hours spent again in the Vennel do much to maintain the traditions and good habits acquired in the early years with us”.

It also describes a warm dry summer when the children transported water to the sand and the garden using improvised ladders at considerable height and trusted by watchful adults.

My own mother spent her nursery placement at Grassmarket and at Edinburgh Free Kindergarten while undertaking her Froebel course. She wrote:

“The main thing was the actual activity with the children – doing things with the children – with Froebel it wasn't about brushing teeth – although of course that was done – it was about making and doing together with children. It was a whole different approach – watching children – what they did and wanted to do and encouraging them rather than sitting them down to do something – more providing what they need and a much more active child-oriented way– not telling them what to do, but talking with them. I was at the Grassmarket Child Garden and what they called the Free Kindergarten. We learned about the history of Froebel, his principles, their application to children and how the movement started. The Froebel approach was much more what you felt about children – you sat back a bit in a way and watched, then you took part.” (Looking back. A 93-year-old Froebel teacher recalled her placement of 1937, Personal conversation).

An entry in the Grassmarket diary matches her experience.

“Then too there are quiet spells when an adult has an opportunity of playing the important parts of observer and learner (1933 Report)”.

Moray House Nursery School

Moray House Nursery School, founded in 1908 in Gilmore Place, was a free kindergarten and a demonstration school set up by the provincial committee for the training of teachers. In 1918 it was moved to basement rooms within Moray House Training College in Holyrood Road and from there to a nursery school building in the College grounds in 1932, where it remained open until 1988. In 1935 an article in *The Weekly Scotsman* reported that

“The specially designed interior included glazed panels in sliding timber door frames. These south and west glazed walls could be pushed back so that the indoors merged into an ‘open air’ environment. A verandah led into the school play area which included the small playhouse. The two large classrooms were fitted out with child-size furnishings.”

This emphasis on the physical surroundings continued to resonate as the demonstration school attached to the college, flourished into the 1970s following ideas of Isaacs, Froebel and Piaget... with intellectual enquiry from associations with lecturer-headteachers of Moray House, Miss A.F. Mackenzie, Miss Isobel Calder and Miss Margaret Cameron.

The Colleges of Education in each of the Scottish cities offered specialist programmes in infant and nursery education from 3 to 8, and until the mid-1970s these year-long courses were endorsed and students were visited by an external examiner from the National Froebel Foundation. Those courses shaped early education in Scotland's nursery schools and classes and in the infant departments of primary schools. Essential reading then and now, Susan Isaacs's 1954 pamphlet endorsed Froebel principles when she so boldly stated,

“We have learnt that above every other source of knowledge about children stands the study of their ordinary spontaneous play, whether in the home, the school playground, the street or the parks. The great educators taught us long ago that the child reveals himself in his play”

(Isaacs, 1954, p.6).

She identified space, appropriate play materials, opportunities for self-assertion and independence, skilled help and companionship as the foundations of professional effort, conceived as an extension of the function of the home and not a substitute for it.

The philosophy of all we did was drawn from a conviction that children's motivations and interests could be trusted, and that responding to them would lead to powerful and deep level learning: in which careful and interested observation was central, for example my own notebook entry at the time:

"After the holidays Gordon continued to talk about fishing boats and his holiday in Oban. He said he had a fishing net he'd found that was very big - he was invited to bring it to school - "It's so very big I'd like to measure it" - it stretched the whole length of the classroom and out into the hall. "It must have come from a huge boat" the others remarked ... we decided to go to Granton Harbour - imaginative play, drawings, models, stories and book making followed, everything was measured and compared - we talked of fish, bollards, jetties, tugs, trawlers, the sea, the weather and searched for more and more information." (Moray House Nursery School 1970)

In those early years of my own teaching, understanding of children's and our shared experiences through a dual lens of Froebelian and Piagetian thinking led me to question the concept of the child as a lone scientist, and the stageist or readiness approach. I came to believe that it must be the interactions, timing, relationships and culture that influenced children's learning and therefore their

development. To subsequently find and read the work of Bruner, Donaldson and Trevarthen, confirmed that a child can learn anything at any age provided it makes what Donaldson called 'human sense', building on what he or she already knows and what happens in joyful companionship. I became convinced that the child can create and should be supported to engage with a spiral curriculum of their own recurring and deepening interests (Bruner 1960). Later I was to discover Vygotsky, too, and the importance he gave to learning in conversation (Vygotsky, 1981).

The Edinburgh Free Kindergarten - Milton House Nursery Class

Over the three years when I worked at Milton House Nursery Class (1971-1974) our situation on the busy thoroughfare of the Royal Mile meant that the children often heard sirens: sharing their own and family stories of emergency services call-outs, they were particularly interested in the local fire station and the happenings that led to fire engines racing past the nursery gates. Working on an observation model to inform our daily practice, we regularly recorded such interest and the ways in which our responses varied according to the visible interests of the children. One such example follows (illustrated in Diagram 1), in which the children's play was scaffolded by responsive adults ready to note persistent interests and see the potential of extending children's existing experiences and thinking through many conversations.

Diagram 1: Fire Engine Interest

Children's Interest	Adult Response	What next?
<p>In the last few days we've heard a lot of fire engines from the Fire Station at Abbeyhill going up and down the Royal Mile and Holyrood Road near Dumbiedykes past where the children live. The boys have been rushing about playing with imaginary hoses. The play became very organized with calls of "There's a fire in the house, get out get out". The children in the house area had to evacuate – they rushed outside and soon the boys started moving the home area furniture out of the area. Before long all the furniture had been carried with the help of most of the other children up the stairs and into the garden. Sam and Billy brought in the water play tubes from outside and a pail of water to put the fire out. This went on for some time until one of the mum's arrived. She was asked to wait until the fire was out so they could bring the furniture back</p>	<p>Having watched this interest for a few days it seems its now taking off and most of the children are interested.</p> <p>Added stories, and Miss B to include some firemen songs at singing time or when children go to music area.</p>	<p>Take interested children out to the school playground for a while to look out for fire engines going up the road.</p>

<p>Thursday - Sam and Billy said there wasn't much point moving the furniture again as the fire was out but they used the big blocks and built a fire engine to play on, going several times to the home area to check the fire was still out. They said to Miss B that the trouble with the blocks was that they couldn't make a big enough fire engine and they would see what they could find outside to add to it. They came back in with a steering wheel but found it too difficult to bring the tyres in so they asked to take the blocks outside.</p> <p>Later Billy made a fire engine from 2 pieces of wood at the woodwork.</p>	<p>Added more fire engine stories into the book corner from upstairs – lots of requests to read these. Plenty of red paint – children to help make it up - and big brushes – see if we can find a large wooden box (maybe at the beach at the weekend – fish crate?)</p> <p>Make sure to pick up some more wood offcuts.</p> <p>Check dressing up and puppets.</p>	<p>Plan a visit to the Fire Station.</p> <p>Look up more songs and rhymes.</p> <p>Check for photos.</p> <p>Make up a book with the children about their play.</p>
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Fire Station visit arranged. This interest continued for 3 weeks as the children planned and built a fire engine and continued to play on it.

The Lothian Curriculum for the Early Years 3-8 (1992) brought my thinking together. It encapsulated thoughtful practice and experience and benefited from sound theory. It was open to interpretation, and critique and feedback was requested on taking implementation forward. At the time three neighbouring nursery school engaged in dialogue about curriculum planning: Giroux's idea of curriculum as a 'cultural script' whose messages should be subject to critique (Morrison 2001) is important here, as he suggests that such cultural scripts introduce students to 'particular forms of reason that structure specific stories and ways of life' (Giroux, 2005, p.60) and that, "The Enlightenment notion of reason needs to be reformulated within a critical pedagogy" (Giroux 2005, p.59).

This early version of a curriculum framework brought together the ideologies of nursery and primary education and promoted observational approaches that made human sense of children's learning and development. Observations as sources for curriculum action involved looking at the context and process of learning before engaging with and researching the knowledge content that would serve children's curiosities and interests. Although our project generated a single planner, there was no single script: the template would be populated with children's interests and concerns and as such made for a dialogic process (illustrated in Diagram 2): such tools need to be conceived locally, rather than imposed.

Diagram 2: Observations and planning. Westfield Court Nursery School

C was carrying the cat around in the basket “I’m going to the vet – Pepsi’s still lost”	From home into room	Imaginative and recall of own experience	“pets for children” – discussion of animals that can be pets	Reminder of play. Information about household pets and care of them	Continue to foster this discussion towards pet shop or vet visit?
M was given a tool set for his birthday: “Its got everything in it”	Given the birthday card he left on Thursday	Tool using – range of tools - comparison	Crate of tools from cupboard – hammer, saw, drill familiar – what else?	Understanding use of tools	Mastery of skills
Lots of witchy/monster play Use of long blocks as broomsticks		Discussion – imaginative play	On the way home I met a..... and “The Jolly Witch’	Understanding and sharing of what frightens	Feeling emotions
Care of dolls	Home area				Not taken up
Talk of snakes		Making, Fine motor	Snakes and animal shapes at dough	Qualities of snakes – long, thin, supple	B and K enjoyed the press moulds – try at clay?
M and J took over the placing of he goldfish tank I the classroom: added stones previously – a problem – how to get these out? J – “Climb up”, A “Tip it up”	New goldfish tank given		“We got a tank but no fish”. Read ‘a fish out of water’		Lively interest including B. Plan for visit to pet shop/Botanics. Record pets? (J mentioned ‘fish in my toy box’)
C and C with wee pots at gluing. They talked about planting and planting out their seedlings. Discussed what we’d need. C “What’s earth, is it like muck? Where’s nature?”	Gluing – nature area	Creative, imaginative. Observation of growth and change. Learning vocab.	Plant pots, compost, put out a planting instruction book		This interest captured interest of 6 of the children – talk of seeds and seedlings – extend this
M and J “We’ll come to story in a minute, we’re just moving house”	Small world	Managing own time; persevering at task	‘Moving Molly’ into book area or beside small world	Small world toys unloaded; furniture ‘next door’	Carried forward to next day.

Daily observations of individuals and group recorded on facing sheet, decisions made in team chat at end of day about what to ‘draw down’ for next day.

Curriculum development and reform as an educational policy tool

At a time when Scotland was developing a national curriculum and assessment framework (5-14) most of the Regional Councils of the time were involved in local early years curriculum consultation and discussion, examples follow in Box 1.

Start Box

- Lothian - A Curriculum for the Early Years 3-8, (1992)
- Fife - partnership in Early Education: A continuum 3-8 (1994)
- Strathclyde - Partners in Learning 0-5 (1994)
- Borders-Right from the Start 3-8 (1994)
- Grampian - A Framework for the Curriculum 3-5 (1995)
- Stirling Council - Early Years Curriculum (1996)

End Box

Each of these local documents addressed a cycle of observation, identification of interests and needs, resourcing, implementation, recording, reporting and evaluation. Most developed Children's Profiles, which would be shared with the next phase of education, and all espoused a child-centred approach that took account of context and of individual contributions. Some focused on 0-5, some on 3-5 and Lothian's on 3-8 years.

The instigators of these local curricula came together to develop the first *Scottish Curriculum Framework for the Pre-School Year* which was published in draft in 1996 and in a final form in 1997, to coincide with the entitlement of every child in Scotland to a year of nursery education before starting school. In 1999 this became *The Curriculum Framework 3-5*, matching the new offer of two years of nursery education, and alignment between this early childhood guidance and the 5-14 framework emerged. Each could have been used flexibly as part of an educator repertoire to enhance children's experience, but in fact one remained firmly with ECE and the other with Primary Education.

As the early stages of 5-14 became increasingly formalised, the Scottish Executive announced curriculum reform through a Ministerial Statement introducing *A Curriculum for Excellence 3-18* (2004). The then First Minister declared that play-based active learning approaches should move into the early stages of Primary School, and thus *Building the Curriculum 3-18 - Active Learning in the Early Years 3-6* came about in 2007.

Writing at the time about Scottish early years provision and the Curriculum 3-5, for an international seminar, I identified four distinctive elements. These described: the structure of early childhood provision (which by then lay largely with education departments in a coupling with the primary school system); a new approach to curriculum; attention to professional development; and our parental focus. The enthusiasm of this sector for continuing professional development, the importance of teamwork, the desire to collaborate with the next stage of education and the need to develop the confidence to do so, were all evident. There was recognition of the importance of participative approaches with parents, both in the early experience of their children and to promote their engagement with their children's education in the long term.

Within the evolving Scottish early years context of today, what do we hold to now? What have we been led to value, believe in, or understand about children's rights – do they relate to development as the priority that leads to learning; or do they relate to learning that drives development as an alternative discourse of children's rights?

Today

Current Scottish policy: the Early Level 3-6

National Frameworks

Scottish Government Policy has made a strong case for investing in early childhood. The economic case, the social equity case and the human rights case are powerfully scripted in Scottish policy (Dunlop 2015). Three 'building blocks' or pillars continue to be influential: *Early Years Framework* (Parts I and II, SG, 2008a); *Achieving Our Potential: A Framework to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland* (SG, 2008b), *Equally Well: Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Health Inequalities* (SG, 2008c). Each of these is reflected in the policy implementation tool *Getting it Right for Every Child*: which is now enshrined in law through *the Children and Young People Scotland Act 2014*, supported by guidance for the youngest children in *Building the Ambition* (2014).

The policy discourse

Our Scottish policy refers to "the child's world", but for every child there are others in that world who make a difference. Vandenberg (2015) warns of the risks of striving for homogeneity: of homogenising childhood, parenthood and practice.

Approaching policy as discourse involves seeing knowledge and power as intertwined. For example Foucault argues that the act of governing has become interdependent with certain sorts of

institutionalised analyses, reflections and knowledge (Foucault 1991). Discourse encompasses the concepts and ideas relevant for policy formulation, and an interactive process of communication serves to generate and disseminate these ideas (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004): in Scotland such consultation visibly happens. The discursive structures (concepts, metaphors, linguistic codes, rules of logic, etc), often taken for granted, contain cognitive and normative elements that determine what policy-makers can more easily understand and articulate, and hence which policy ideas they are likely to adopt (Campbell 2002).

Our curriculum today, and the debate

We have, on paper, a thoughtful, enabling and creative curriculum: one that was designed to return professional judgment to educators aiming to develop capacities in our children and young people that would ensure their wellbeing, confidence and contribution so equipping them as lifelong learners. However the *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) has incurred criticism. In 2012 Paterson's critique described it as consensus curriculum with a centralising plan for secondary education and later claimed CfE to be responsible for a drop in Scotland's PISA Programme for International Student Assessment) ratings (Paterson 2016). Priestley provided a more balanced view in his blog (Priestley 2016) REFERENCE ADDED in which he refuted Paterson's implication that CfE is the problem, making it clear that, in his view, it is the implementation of curriculum that is the issue, not the curriculum itself. He cites Andreas Schleicher of the OECD, who stated on BBC news on 6 December 2016 that "Scotland needs to move from an *intended* curriculum to an *implemented* curriculum."

For early childhood practice this raises two questions – whose intentions, and whose implementation? Subsequently, in June 2017 Schleicher launched *Starting Strong V* (OECD, 2017), which reports transitions practices much more focused on information-giving than cooperation. In a Webinar presentation Schleicher says "Challenges still remain for making transitions child-centred, guided by pedagogical continuity, managed by trained staff, and well-informed parental and community engagement". To achieve any of these, early years practitioners and teachers need the kind of agency referred to by Priestley in the move towards a 'new curriculum' (Priestley and Drew, 2016). Scotland's curriculum exemplifies international trends in curriculum change. One of its unique features is the bridging opportunities it provides between ELC and primary school, and between primary and secondary education. Despite the early level of our curriculum emphasising the years 3-6 as a whole, there is evidence that the curriculum is enacted in two parts: 'early years' and 'early primary'.

An Early Level 3-6

My experience as a transitions researcher, an early childhood teacher, an early years practitioner educator and a teacher educator, has raised deep concerns about curriculum design that falters in the journey from conception to implementation.

Scottish policy discourse for early childhood has aimed to integrate curriculum advice for 3-6 year olds, up until the age of seven. Valuing the youngest children in their own right is absolutely vital. In *Building the Ambition* (Scottish Government, 2014), there a new emphasis on integrating *Pre-birth to Three* advice with the *Early Level Curriculum 3-6*, which eschews ‘pre-school’ terminology and what it implies for a period of preparation for school. Nevertheless transitions research shows the importance of continuity into school to avoid the separation of the early learning and childcare sector from early primary education.

There is, in both the *Early Level 3- 6* (2007) and the *Building the Ambition* (2014), a certain unity of discourse, embracing a child development model, but each document is distinctive. 'Learning' is foregrounded in both documents, but the route to learning focuses more on teaching in one, and pedagogy in the other. Both speak of the child, of play, of progress, the importance of time, literacy and numeracy, intervention, activities and experiences. The proportion, presence and absence of these words implies a certain policy-collusion in which the substance of guidance, and its relation to the child, too often remains uncontested.

It is time to move away from a fixed developmental model of the child. All practitioners must have knowledge of development but we need to embrace how actual learning in socio-cultural engagement and human interaction, challenges any fixed view of development. In both documents there is mention of transitions, the changes children go through – more acknowledged and visible in *Building the Ambition*, and less in the original *Early Level 3-6*, a period when children and families face some of the most significant changes.

Is it assumed that if guidance covers the period of the transition to school, that it will define the transitions issues? If so, it fails, being in effect split into before and after school start. Ten years on from the publication of the *Early Level*, *Building the Ambition* does not offer guidance on these years as a natural phase of childhood experience, though it addresses a previous disjunction between Pre-birth to Three and the Early Level very well. *Building Curriculum 2 - The Early Level 3-6* called for mutual cooperation and understanding between what we now call Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and Early Primary:

“In the early years of primary school there may be some difficulty with the word ‘play’ itself. Parents often need reassurance that their children will learn effectively through play, because of its association with leisure. What is important is that all staff with responsibility for planning early years learning recognise that active learning, including

purposeful play, has a central role in that process and when necessary can demonstrate this to parents” (SG 2007, p.19).

Our Scottish curriculum acknowledges such transitions issues when it makes the following statements:

“For nursery schools, partner provider centres and other stand-alone settings, joint planning may present more of a challenge. It will be important for staff in all early education centres and associated primary schools to find ways to work together. Close communication about children’s previous experiences and learning is crucial at the time of transition”. (SG 2007, p.13)

“Overall, however, a move like this from a pre-school setting to Primary 1 too often provides an abrupt transition for children which can prove damaging for some children’s confidence and progress” (SG 2007, p.10)

Why is it so difficult for policy to be holistic even when it acknowledges the rights of the child to the best possible start in life and the nature of lifelong experience? It is unnatural to separate what happens for the 4 or 5 year old in ELC from what happens for 4 or 5 year olds in Primary 1. This chapter calls not for a 'kindergarten stage', but for a realisation that to implement our wise and thoughtful *Early Level 3-6* we need to match resources, staffing ratios, workforce knowledge and experience, shared common knowledge (Edwards 2011), and promote relational play based pedagogy all through ELC and Primary 1. There is ample research to support a holistic view of the early years into and through primary school.

Experience taking a detour through theories: developmental, socio-cultural and philosophical understandings of early childhood.

There is so much theorising on the early childhood story. Here I focus on four creative thinkers whose work has been influential in Scotland: Jean Piaget, Margaret Donaldson, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner.

Piaget’s account of education supplements his study of knowledge – he linked knowledge and development and gave us ideas of the child's autonomy often held and valued in early childhood practice. This explains why we often couple the ideas of autonomy and choice – ‘teaching is necessary but insufficient’ for good learning which kind of fits with Pasi Sahlberg’s paradox of teach less, learn more (Sahlberg 2011). For Piaget too creativity is important, as is agency in taking charge of one’s own learning: he saw the child as an active problem solver.

Donaldson's work has informed my own thinking about the intellectual challenges of the transition to school. She did not think Piaget was entirely right. She redesigned his experiments to discover how the shared purpose of the tasks make sense for children. Donaldson's idea of a sociable 'human sense' is important for us in education. Piaget called early thinking egocentric, while Donaldson in her wonderful book *Children's Minds* (1978), writes of thinking which is embedded in contexts that make common sense and thinking which is disembedded and grows 'beyond the bounds of human sense'. This is exactly the transition children are making as they are expected to move from hands-on activity to symbolic activity – a new way of being and knowing that often fails to make human sense for our youngest children.

For Vygotsky, too, "Culture is the product of social life and human social activity" (1981, p.164). The higher mental functions of logical memory, selective attention, decision making, learning and comprehension of language interested Vygotsky and in particular the relationship of language and speech to thought. His view was that both development and instruction are socially embedded - and that by recognising where children are in their understanding, skilled others may help in developing beyond present capacities. Thus observation and assessment find their importance.

And finally to Bruner, born in 1915 and a regular visitor to Scotland well into his late 90s. He wrote "We begin with the philosophy that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (Bruner, 1960, p.33). Bruner's theory of education has moved over the years from attention to the limitations of cognitive psychology and what he called 'solo intrapsychic' (inside the head) processes of knowing to a cultural psychology. He calls on motivation, affect, creativity, perception, personality, thought, language and intuition. His focus on narratives of learning and interpretive capacities link powerfully with his assertions about human agency, from infancy. He sees agency, collaboration, reflection and culture as part of play and playful learning (Bruner 1996).

Each of my chosen theorists tell us something about capacities, agency, imagination, creativity, and by invoking culture, about companionable learning (Trevathan, 2002). The learning challenge of education in early childhood lies in a dysjunction of culture, and in human sense making. We need to place the vitality of children at the centre of our thinking, and this may mean shunning 'pre-schooling', 'schooling' and 'schoolification' in favour of 'education' where "the child leads the way" (Nuttall 2013). Liam, seen on the book's front cover, and in Figure 1, was used to his own company: he played imaginatively with his small world animals, reflecting his first hand experience of zoo visits, the many shared story readings with his parents and his own lively interest in books.



Figure 1: Journeys of learning take many forms. Here Liam is absorbed in the enticing world of books.

Already an animal expert, his searching in books is something both self-chosen and offered by family for sharing that interest. Now his concentration on any book follows a mandatory 'look through' first of all to take up what it promises. At the time he made homes for animals at nursery school, and then explained what was going on to the rest of the group, recalling what he liked to read. More recently as a 4½ year old he thought of a game that all the children could play together called “Super Cheetah”: with a little adult support first of all Liam taught everyone the rules of the game - you could be your favourite animal but with a special super power so that you could rescue any injured or endangered animals. Everyone joined in!

In education children and adults can jointly create meaning, and groups of children can work together to understand both motivating and self-motivated tasks and their own learning – telling each other about what they have learned links the individual to the collective mind – that children are aware of knowledge and that knowledge can be said in words. It was Bruner who asked “Who is curriculum for?” His answer was, of course, for adults.

Curriculum as a “Gift”

What we have called ‘The Child’s Curriculum’ can be understood as a gift to interpret the Scottish Early Level 3-6, to enlighten policy: it is a gift that has not yet been fully unwrapped. In seeking to

explore the history, the critical elements of an enlightened Scottish curriculum and to understand the extent to which the early level is implemented as a 'through' curriculum (Dunlop 2013) embracing continuous experiences embedded in what has gone before, it is proposed that interactions and relationships must work in harmony with understandings of children's creativity, learning and development if we are to make the most of this gift-giving between children and those who enact curriculum.

Vaughan and Estola (2008) suggest that children and young people in education are required to acquire the kind of knowledge that is sought by the economy, resulting in social inequalities, forefronting of an 'exchange' paradigm (non-nurturing, fostering competition, acquisition and self-interest), rather than a 'gift' paradigm that respects the views of others, and has empathy or affection for them. In my view gifts need to be reciprocal: on the one hand children give so much if we are open to receive, while a well-conceived and implemented curriculum can also be just that, a receiving and responsive gift for children.

Transforming the narrative of curriculum to embrace it as a gift, and avoiding metaphors of curriculum as something packaged to be 'delivered' to children, "...the gift paradigm in early childhood will not only allow children to develop better values in their individual lives but will help to validate those values in the society at large so that choices and policies can become more consciously life-affirming." (Vaughan and Estola, 2008, p.27).

The idea of early childhood experience as a gift can also be found in the work of Froebel, which focuses on early years of childhood as a special period of life. Teachers and early educators could populate the spaces between early childhood and primary with a developing discourse of gift-giving, to ensure that curriculum policy in fact works well in practice

The metaphor of curriculum as a gift arose from thinking about what children contribute and what adults may give in return. If, as Giroux says, curriculum is a cultural script then this metaphor allows us to embrace the many gifts, the many scripts that children offer in relation to their creativity, their hope, their dispositions, their working theories, their communicativeness, their imagination and their possible worlds. The adult world has to be aware of, and open to, those gifts, and if it is, only then can we begin to understand what the child's curriculum is, and what children offer to us and to each other. For me the concept of curriculum as a gift is a joyful one if we embrace the reciprocity of giving and are able to interpret curriculum as a gift that opens and opens and opens some more. Interpreting curriculum as a gift we can understand it as a relationship between children, between children and the adults in their lives, and between adults within and between the administrative sectors that are together tasked with implementing the Scottish Early

Level 3-6 curriculum. The risk of course is that gift-giving may not be reciprocal, and so raise issues of power and control.

The well-connected child

The positioning of parents and families, and parenting

The aspirations of Scottish policy have two dominant discourses when analysed through the perspective of the workforce and what it should do. An economic discourse that speaks of inclusion, and an aspiration that every child should grow up in a supportive and interested family (Dunlop et al. 2011). However there is a strong alternative discourse of parenting, of disadvantage, of adverse childhoods, of early years and what it should be, culturally, historically and politically, and an unease about the language of ‘services’, of ‘provision’ and of ‘workforce’.

The relationships with out-of-home adults and with other children are unknown elements for children as they enter early childhood settings. The vast majority of children in our country now go to at least one early years group setting before they start school. An increasing number attend under-threes settings so they are often veterans of change, but what normally sustains them is the connection they make between their already established relationships to the new. The central role of supportive and interested families and the continuity they provide is visible in the following examples of transitions, told with the parent's voice.

Timing when to let go

Liam has a loving home experience, and I know he feels and is respected in his decisions, has been to many different places with both of us and to a variety of early childhood arts, music and play opportunities in my company, the choice of nursery centre was important to all the family. I had consistently said “I don’t want him going anywhere until he has the language to tell me about it”: at 3½ that time has arrived and a place has been offered at a nearby nursery school. After a number of different visits we found somewhere that understood we would like consecutive days, a steady peer group, a named teacher who would look out for our boy, an interesting environment indoors and out and a staff team that could articulate their early childhood philosophy. Isn’t that what all families should expect of the places where they entrust their children? In turn as Liam’s family we were keen to make a contribution and after visiting a couple of times, asked if we could give the nursery a hen – so Cloudy arrived to join the chickens already in the hen coop. Before his starting date, Liam and I agreed he would tell me when he was ok about my leaving. On Liam’s first day he tried out various things to do, then after a while he went over to the outside sandpit where some bigger children were playing – a boy looked up at him and said “This is how you do it”. Liam joined the other children and said to me mother “You can go now” and so I did (feeling both proud and

devastated). On the second day Cloudy had laid an egg and Liam was able to bring this home – we made breakfast pancakes with banana in them – a two-way connection between home and nursery had begun.

I've been speaking with Liam about nursery school on his days away. He speaks of Hilary frequently, relays stories of things she's said and has quite the giggle. He said, she's very funny and also that he loves her. This morning upon arrival, he ran to Hilary to say good morning. She outstretched her arms, asked him for a cuddle and he didn't hesitate. Hilary has reported back that Liam is quietly observing and taking his time to explore and play with the different areas around the room. He is exploring each area section by section and enjoying the detail. As a result, he's been quite immersed and hasn't really embarked on the social aspect of Nursery school yet. That will come (and now has: see Figure 1).

Moving on from childminder to nursery

Amber is excited that she's going to the "big girl's nursery". She's told her Granny that she would see the babies there – she is very much into baby dolls – feeding, dressing, bathing and telling stories to them. At 2¾ she is about to start at the private nursery where her older brothers spent their pre-school years. With working parents Amber is already well established at her childminder's where she has been going since she was 10 months. Margie was a known adult as her brother Will had also spent a couple of years in Margie's care. Amber is used to change and takes the new in her stride.

Her home, childminder, new nursery and her brothers' school are all in the same area and Margie takes her out and about to playgroup, the wildlife garden and the park often. She is in a small group of other children as her childminder works in partnership with another childminder. This network of relationships is fluent and easy and will sustain beyond a change of setting. Amber speaks often about the fact she is soon to start nursery and regularly seeks confirmation that she is now a "big girl". She is very pleased when we agree she is, and a little cross with her brothers when they tease her for still being a baby. She tells Will and Eddie that the nursery had a garden "with a squirrel in it" which she spotted on the tree when she visited with her mother. She knows that it is "next to the boys' school" and that she can "hang up my coat" on a peg like Maisie Mouse in her story book. On her one visit to the nursery so far, she opened drawers and cupboards to see what was inside them.

Most mornings Amber asks where she will be going that day, nodding sagely when they tell her that she has some more days left at Margie's house. "I'm going to play with my friends," she announces before telling them what plans she has in store.

The manager of her new nursery, her room leader and her named carer are all coming to visit before

she starts, and she will have a short settling in period. Amber firmly declares that Margie can come to visit her home too and is pleased when this is confirmed. I feel emotional about her leaving such a loving childminder, but am confident that Amber will take it all in her stride and will flourish. She is very interested in the world around her, and we think this will help her get through the initial change.

Deciding to wait a year before starting school

When our February baby was born I knew that four years later I would be given the choice to either send her to school at 4 ½ years old or 5 ½ years old. We spoke to many of our friends and family about the decision and had a mixed response. Many suggested that our child would do well either way (she had excellent verbal skills and was a good team player) however one comment stuck in my memory most of all “some people regret sending their children to school early but you will never find someone who regrets sending their kid later”. I also found it interesting to talk to a secondary school teacher who commented that parents almost always focused their decision on their child’s ability to settle into primary one but she had noticed teenagers struggling to be the youngest (in a variety of ways) in the upper years of their secondary schooling.

As the enrolment date drew nearer I found my decision all the more easier as I could see Sacha lagging behind her friends in confidence and in toilet training (my daughter had several minor medical reasons to delay continence). As a mother who was affected by bullying at school I grew concerned that my child was trying so desperately to fit into the girl group at nursery, worrying about how she looked and acted, not showing confidence to ever take the lead she was striving at the tender age of four to be what everyone else wanted her to be!

So the decision was made and my daughter was prepared for not joining her friends in going to school. She began another fully funded year at nursery with the additional activities of a weekly dance class and one full day a week at the local outdoor woodland nursery to supplement her routine.

Now with only 5 months to go before she finally starts primary one we have absolutely no doubts that we made the right decision. She remains a strong team player but has increased exponentially in confidence and has recently even approached the headmistress with an idea for a charity campaign, which has been implemented across the whole nursery! I have also loved seeing her compassion and care for the new younger children at nursery whilst she engages in a lovely new group of friends all the while maintaining her previous relationships.

What she has achieved in this extra year she has passed on to her siblings and to us, for that I am greatly thankful!

Island Life

Living on a remote Scottish island allows my children to experience a freedom that not many mainland locations can offer. The beach and fields are the playgrounds and family hikes and bonfires with neighbours and friends are the norm. With a small population most people know each other either intimately or at least the family gossip. For the most part houses and cars are left unlocked and with such a tight knit community the 'old values' of looking out for every child, whoever they belong to, plays a part in island community living. Children know each other from babies, through nursery and into school as well as socialising outwith. Relationships therefore with nursery and school staff are close, they have been developed not only on site but at social occasions and day to day living. Continuity of relationships are most definitely advantageous in knowing the child, their family and circumstances. Most of the teachers are of a similar age and part of my social life, some being close friends. Professional and personal boundaries can become blurry and relationships tested. With others I have seen trust destroyed and a sour taste left, parents almost scared to bring up any problems for fear of community and social retribution. On the whole it is a wonderful thing being part of something close. This year the community came together to fundraise for school trips and the target was smashed leaving a small amount to be raised by families. As a family we are also involved in developing a community garden where people of all ages and skills are coming together, such a richness of relationships is becoming part of each of my children's lives and sense of belonging to the island.

In conclusion: Tomorrow

The Child's Curriculum

Human babies have a far more prolonged growing up period and arrive in the world much more vulnerable than other species, but the baby should not be underestimated for what he or she brings to making sense of the world. In this book we have been looking at what we have called the 'child's curriculum' - at how children respond to the world, how the child makes meaning, how the child shows us not only what they need, but what they are capable of and how they can instigate new learning and take their development forward: not alone but in the company and in relationship with others in their world.

It can be seen that for more than 200 years there has been a strong commitment to appropriate and relevant experience for the youngest of children here in Scotland. The focus was on their day-to-day experiences, and yes, too, upon how these early experiences would open up a world of later opportunities for them. The focus was firmly on what the 'here and now' looked like, with a

recognition of what small children needed from adults in their world, but also a respect for the meaning making of children.

This built on the principles of the Scottish Enlightenment, the early recognition of the importance of a ‘school in every parish’ in Scotland, and fed into the primary school system of the day, where ‘infant’ classrooms were very often also staffed by Froebel trained teachers.

Values and principles

These traditions which can so inform current practice, have been swallowed up in the banking model of early childhood, in curriculum definition which by its very nature risks being curriculum stricture with increasingly narrow aims, and with a pressing need to revisit first principles, to embrace the complete necessity of an enlightened approach to children’s early experiences, valuing the bedrock of the past but at the same time questioning tradition.

In early childhood people talk about their principles of practice, my early experiences in the Edinburgh Child Gardens and Nursery and Infant classes laid the values for a career. They taught me about the importance of relationships, the innate capacity of children, the importance not just of educational culture but primarily of home culture, the tools to do a good job that theory provides us with, the importance of evidence to inform teaching, the curiosity, motivation and drive of nearly all children to find out, experience and learn so driving their development; the central importance of children’s interests and curiosities and how to capture the interest of children who are less able to focus and delve deep into exciting and interesting discoveries, and the very important skill of ‘following ahead’ of children as we pay attention to transitions, so that they too may be a tool.

Looking forward

In this chapter I have tried to weave in the values I hold and share with others in the early childhood enterprise into a kind of colourful tartan or celebratory narrative of childhood, informed by experience, taking a detour through theory and real family experience to bringing a critical eye when looking at policy and practice. To conclude with what this means for practice this is not about ‘improving children’s readiness for learning’ – the title of a talk I was recently asked to give – but about children being learners from the very start of life and considering how we might ensure that capacity was fostered rather than inhibited. We need to ask not whether children have agency, but what happens when that is denied.

Returning to what makes an enlightened early childhood educational policy at the beginning of the 21st century we need not go much further than Froebel’s words

“But I will protect childhood, that it may not, as in earlier generations, be pinioned, as in a strait-jacket, in garments of custom and ancient prescription that have become too narrow

for the new time. I shall show the way and shape the means, that every human soul may grow of itself out of its own individuality". (Weston, 2000, p.23)

In drawing from our rich heritage and questioning its relevance today we can use it as a contemporary springboard to ensure a full implementation of the Scottish Early Level 3-6 in both Early Learning and Childcare and in school. For children this is a glorious time in their lives when they have so many gifts to bring and we have a curriculum that is a complete gift to the profession. It is a time of real opportunity.

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