

CENTRAL ISSUES IN EARLY YEARS PEDAGOGY IN BRITAIN. AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILD LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Roxana Mares*

mares.roxana@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The pedagogy of the Early Childhood will be explored by referring to different definitions and views, considering mostly how theories and policy requirements have informed and shaped the pedagogical practice in the Early Years development. The article aims to analyze the four major perspectives regarding child learning and development: developmental, social, cultural and rights perspective as well as the levels of child development.*

Keywords: *Early Years, development, social, cultural, human rights.*

Pedagogy of the Early Years

Pedagogy as both a concept and practice has been located with the context of education in Europe for a considerable time, changing continuously since the 17th century. However, outside Europe, the notions of pedagogy and the pedagogue are less well known. In the English context, the term is usually understood as being synonymous with teaching, defined as the act of performance of curricula delivery.¹

Robin Alexander in his article² argues that Pedagogy encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it, while Janet Moyles in 2005³, in Excellence of Play defines pedagogy as encompassing both what practitioners actually do and think and the principles, theories, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape it.

* PhD. candidate, "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Bucharest, Romania.

¹ According to the Family Dictionary of Education Terms, Washington, 2011, page 22, https://www.wastatepta.org/resources/kids_school/dictionary.pdf, accessed on 21st of April, 2014, 09: 15

² Robin Alexander, *Still no Pedagogy Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education*, Cambridge Journal of Education, Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2004, <http://www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CJE-Still-no-pedagogy.pdf>, accessed on May, 8th, 2014, 15:35.

³ Janet Moyles, Excellence of Play, 2005, Open University <http://www.questia.com/read/119503606/the-excellence-of-play>, page 218, accessed on 21st of April, 2014, 09:00

Watkins and Mortimore note that an increased focus on pedagogy (at whatever level of education) reveals both the complexity of the concept and the importance of context. These researchers emphasise a model of pedagogy that incorporates elements of the teacher; classroom or other context; content, the view of learning and learning about learning, with the aim of drawing attention to “*the creation of learning communities in which knowledge is actively co-constructed, and in which the focus of learning is sometimes learning itself*”⁴.

In Siraj-Blatchford’s opinion pedagogy refers to that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive processes between teacher and learner and to the learning environment (which includes the concrete learning environment, the family and community).⁵

Clearly, curriculum and pedagogy are closely linked. Analyzing these definitions we may conclude that teaching is a part of pedagogy. Stephen⁶ (2006) notes that pedagogy will be influenced by the beliefs about learning that underpin curriculum. In turn, curriculum will be influenced by pedagogy.

Perspectives on child development

Considering Woodhead⁷’s approach regarding the four major perspectives (developmental, socio-cultural, policy and rights perspective) on child development it may be concluded that these perspectives have influenced the pedagogical thinking and practice.

The idea of the developmental child appears from the biological and developmental theories seen as a change in a sense of maturation process, during the early years. In Piaget’s view the child is seen as progressing

⁴ Watkins C., Mortimore P., (1999), *Pedagogy: what do we know?* In: Mortimore P (ed.) *Understanding Pedagogy and its Impact on Learning*. Paul Chapman/Sage, London, page 8.

⁵ BERA Academic Review *Early Years Research: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Adult Roles, Training and Professionalism* 2003, Early Years Learning and Curriculum Continuity Project, Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning, Office of Early Childhood and Statewide Services Department of Education and Children's Services, Australia, 2007, page 18

⁶ Stephen, C., (2006), *Early years education: Perspectives from a review of the international literature*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Education Department. Retrieved from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/02/06145130/0>

⁷ Martin Woodhead, 2005, *Early Years Development: a question of rights*. http://www.bernardvanleer.org/files/crc/4%20Martin_Woodhead.pdf, accessed on 6th of May, 2014, 12:17

through a series of developmental stages, demonstrating in his study ⁸ *The origins of intelligence in children* that the child is curious and determined to explore their environment. His theories have been influential in creating learning environments that provide appropriate challenges for investigation, experimentation and hands-on activities.

Nowadays, the importance of the environment in which young children live is fully recognized. Recent research demonstrates that early stimulation and experiences shape the architecture of the brain and determine the future development. While the lack of proper nutrition, health and care un-determine the child's evolution and bad life experiences affect negatively the child's psychological, cognitive and social development. All these theories have influenced the pedagogical practice, for example introducing notions and regulations for child-centered, experiential and hands-on learning.

As for the cultural and social perspectives, Vygotsky⁹ argued that development and learning take place within the social and cultural environment. Children are products of their social and cultural environment, its beliefs, values, customs and practices.

Contemporary theories consider the developmental child from the society's features, its social class, linguistic level, religion and ethnicity) and the power of dominant ideologies and institutions.

Specialists like Cannella¹⁰, Dahlberg and Moss¹¹ argues these notions as stages and ages assume distinct universal features that are applicable to all children , at all times and all societies and ignore the social and cultural influences.

Attempts to change the pedagogy paradigm

A central part of any paradigm is the questions that researchers seek to answer. A major part of proposing a paradigm shift is suggesting that we begin to ask new questions in our research or old questions in different ways. When culture is no longer seen as a passive background upon which development unfolds, but rather as an active part of the changes and

⁸ The origins of intelligence in children. Piaget, Jean; Cook, Margaret (Trans), New York, NY, US: W W Norton & Co, 1952

⁹ Harry Daniels, *Vygotsky and Pedagogy* RoutledgeFarm, London, 2001, page 19, <http://www.questia.com/read/102923945/vygotsky-and-pedagogy>, accessed on 6th of May, 2014, 13:05

¹⁰ Cannella, G.S., (1997), *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social justice and revolution*. New York: Peter Lang. *Early Years Learning and Curriculum Continuity Project Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning* retrieved from pdf, accessed on 5th of March, 2014

¹¹ Ann Farell, *Ethical Research with Children*, Open University Press, Berkshire, page 114-116.

influences on developmental processes, the questions that researchers pose become much more complex. The complexity arises, in part, from the need to operationalise not only the multiple facets of culture, but also the interactions among these multiple facets.

The first thing to be noted is the kind of variables that are included in the analyses. Patterns of mother-infant interaction are not viewed exclusively as the product of individual maternal characteristics. Other variables that are conceptualized as the product of the interactions between the cultural context and the individual, are considered in the analyses. For example, the mothers' report of the number of adults that will be helping her with child care and her previous experience in child care are measured. These two variables can be conceptualized as a function of the extent to which the culture supports mothers regardless of their age in their maternal role and how it permits children to take care of other children, as well as the interests and competencies of the particular individual.

The necessary change from studying developmental outcomes to developmental processes specified within a cultural context results in a major shift in research design. This constitutes a major aspect of the proposed paradigm shift, and is essentially a shift from a cross-cultural comparative research design to a within-culture analysis.

Levels of perspective in Child Development

According to Robert Selman¹², with experience and guidance, children generally move through five levels of perspective-taking following this pattern:

First, at Level 0, “undifferentiated perspective-taking” (ages 3-6), they do not recognize that others have feelings, ideas or views different from their own. At Level 1, “social-informational perspective-taking” (ages 5-9), young children begin to realize that others might have different feelings or views than their own, but can't consider what these might be, especially if those views or feelings are in opposition. At Level 2, “self-reflective perspective-taking” (ages 7-12), children begin to be able to consider the opinions and feelings of someone else as well as their own. Levels 3, “third-party perspective-taking” (ages 10-15) and 4, “societal perspective-taking” (ages 14-adult), which usually do not emerge until adolescence, allow increasing abilities to predict, understand and coordinate various perspectives.

¹² Robert L. Selman, *Taking Another's Perspective: Role-Taking Development in Early Childhood* in *Child Development*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (Dec., 1971), pp. 1721-1734, Published by: [WileyArticle Stable URL](#):

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1127580><http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1127580?uid=3738920&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103750431091>

As children mature, they take more information into account. They realize that different people can react differently to the same situation. They develop the ability to analyze the perspectives of several people involved in a situation from the viewpoint of an objective bystander, and they can even imagine how different cultural or social values would influence the perceptions of the bystander. Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to age eight, is a time of rapid and extensive change in all areas of development and learning. Hence, it is not surprising that there is no one best or most effective pedagogy that covers this entire period. Within early childhood, there is often reference to 'under threes', 'preschoolers' and 'children in the early years of school'. Effective pedagogy tends to refer to each of these groups. Yet again, however, there is no consistent agreement that one particular pedagogy is the most appropriate for all children in all contexts. Despite this, some general recommendations have been made, in reference to children of different ages. For example, in 1999, the UK Department for Education and Employment recommended that the first five years of life should be considered a time when education and care were indistinguishable and when the involvement of families was critical to effective education. Further, this department stressed the importance of pedagogy based on informal teaching during these years, with a gradual move to more formal educational approaches by the end of the first year at school (BERA Academic Review Early Years Research: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Adult Roles, Training and Professionalism 2003).¹³

Conclusions

Pedagogy offers a broad framework that informs the ways Early Years practitioners engage with children and the planning of learning activities. Pedagogy offers the basis by which theoretical perspectives, policy requirements and established good practices and critique and questioned in order to act in the best interest of the children and in safeguarding best outcomes for them.

¹³ BERA Academic Review *Early Years Research: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Adult Roles, Training and Professionalism* 2003, Early Years Learning and Curriculum Continuity Project, Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning, Office of Early Childhood and Statewide Services Department of Education and Children's Services, Australia, 2007, page 19.

References

Early Years Learning and Curriculum Continuity Project, Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning, Office of Early Childhood and Statewide Services Department of Education and Children's Services, Australia, 2007.

PALAIOLOUGOU, Ioanna, *The Early Years Foundation Stage. Theory and Practice*, Sage, London, 2013

PIAGET, Jean, *The origins of intelligence in children*. Cook, Margaret (Trans), New York, NY, US: W W Norton & Co, 1952.

WOODHEAD, Martin, (2005), *Early Years Development: a question of rights*.

http://www.bernardvanleer.org/files/crc/4%20Martin_Woodhead.pdf, accessed on May, 8th, 2014, 15:30.

WATKINS C, MORTIMORE P., (1999), *Pedagogy: what do we know?* In: Mortimore P., (ed.), *Understanding Pedagogy and its Impact on Learning*. Paul Chapman/Sage, London, page 8

Cultural Processes in Child Development: The Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology, Volume 29 (Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology Series) Paperback – August 17, 2014 by Ann S. Masten (Editor) ISBN-13: 978-1138002586 ISBN-10: 1138002585 Edition: 1st

FARELL, Ann *Ethical Research with Children*, Open University Press, Berkshire

Secondary sources

https://www.wastatepta.org/resources/kids_school/dictionary.pdf, accessed on 21st of April, 2014, 09: 15

<http://www.robinaalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CJE-Still-no-pedagogy.pdf>, accessed on May, 8th, 2014, 15:35.

<http://www.questia.com/read/119503606/the-excellence-of-play>, page 218, accessed on 21st of April, 2014, 09:00

Martin Woodhead, 2005, *Early Years Development: a question of rights*.

http://www.bernardvanleer.org/files/crc/4%20Martin_Woodhead.pdf, accessed on 6th of May, 2014, 12:17

<http://www.questia.com/read/102923945/vygotsky-and-pedagogy>, accessed on 6th of May, 2014, 13:05

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1127580?uid=3738920&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103750431091>, accessed on May, 7th, 13:40

http://www.bernardvanleer.org/files/crc/4%20Martin_Woodhead.pdf, accessed on May, 8th, 2014, 15:30.