

Edited by

Linda Miller & Denise Hevey



# Policy Issues in the Early Years

Critical Issues in the Early Years Series



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# **POLICY ISSUES IN THE EARLY YEARS**

## *The Critical Issues in the Early Years Series*

This series provides both national (UK wide) and international perspectives on critical issues within the field of early years education and care.

The quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has remained a high priority on government agendas in recent years (OECD, 2006). This series reflects this developing early childhood context which includes professionalising, and up skilling, the early childhood workforce. In particular, the series brings a critical perspective to the developing knowledge and understanding of early years practitioners at various stages of their professional development, to encourage reflection on practice and to bring to their attention key themes and issues in field of early childhood.

### **Series Editor**

Linda Miller is Professor Emeritus of Early Years at the Open University. Since 2005 Linda has been co-director of an international project the 'Day in the Life of an Early Years Practitioner' based within the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA). In 2010–11 she was a member of the Expert Advisory Group for an EU study on Competencies in ECE and was co-lead researcher for the England case study. She has been a member of government stakeholder reference groups and working parties concerned with workforce development in the Early Years. Linda has written and co-edited a wide range of books for early years practitioners, and has published in national and international journals.

### **Titles in the series**

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# ABOUT THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

## Editors

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**Linda Miller** was Professor of Early Years at The Open University until 2008, when she became Emeritus Professor, Early Years. She has been involved in national consultations and working groups on the Children's Workforce Strategy at the DfES, National Children's Bureau and Teacher Development Agency. From 2003 to 2008, Linda was Chair of the Sector Endorsed Foundation Degrees in Early Years (SEFDEY) national network and is now an honorary life member. From 2010 to 2011, she was a member of the Expert Advisory Team for a European Commission study on the competence requirements of staff in Early Childhood Education and Care and co-author of the England case study. In 2011, she co-authored an expert report on early years teacher education in England for the University of Bremen, Germany. Linda has published widely in co-edited and single authored books and in national and international journals.

**Denise Hevey** joined the School of Education at The University of Northampton in November 2005 as their first Professor of Early Years. She had previously spent 18 years at the Open University where she produced the first training pack for childminders and courses such as *Working with Children and Young People*, before establishing the Vocational Qualifications Centre to promote vocational and professional training across the University. She joined Ofsted in 2001 as Head of Policy in the Early Years Directorate and two years later was seconded to the DfES. Her experience of public policy making includes the consultation and development of the Childcare Approval Scheme and the government response to the Bichard Inquiry, and subsequent policy

and legislative changes related to the vetting and barring of those unsuitable to work with children. She now teaches on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies and is Director of the Early Years Professional Status programme.

## Contributors

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**Jane Barlow** is Professor of Public Health in the Early Years at the University of Warwick. She is an international expert on the role of early parenting in the aetiology of mental health problems and in particular the evaluation of early interventions aimed at improving parenting practices during infancy. She is Director of the Warwick Infant and Family Wellbeing Unit, which provides training in innovative evidence-based methods of supporting parenting during pregnancy and the early years to a wide range of early years and primary care practitioners. She authored a highly acclaimed research review for Research in Practice on safeguarding (2010), and jointly authored a book (with Schrader-MacMillan) entitled *Safeguarding Children from Emotional Abuse* (DCSF, 2009).

**Mary Crowley** is President of the International Federation for Parenting Education, a worldwide organisation which promotes and supports education for parents around the parent–child relationship ([www.fiep-ifpe.fr](http://www.fiep-ifpe.fr)). She was first Chief Executive of Parenting UK, the UK national umbrella body. She led the development of the National Occupational Standards for Work with Parents which were approved for the UK in April 2005 and revised in 2010. In 2008, she was awarded the OBE for services to children and families.

**Roger Downer** is a professor, author, co-author/editor of five books and 164 scientific papers and has been awarded the honorary degrees of LL.D (Queens University Belfast) and D.Sc. (University of Waterloo). He has been elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Canada and Membership of the Royal Irish Academy. He has held senior academic positions in Canada, Asia and Europe and, upon his retirement, was appointed President Emeritus of the University of Limerick, having served as President from 1998 to 2006. He serves on the boards of a number of corporate and not-for-profit organisations, including Chair of the Advisory Board of MEHRI.

**Naomi Eisenstadt** CB is currently a senior research fellow in the Department of Education, University of Oxford. Naomi's early career was in front-line delivery, working in nurseries and then establishing a Children's Centre in Milton Keynes. In 1999, Naomi joined the UK civil service to become director of the Sure Start Unit at the Department of Education. In this role, she had responsibility for all early years, child-care and family policy for the UK government. From 2006 to 2009, she was Director of the Social Exclusion Task Force in the Cabinet Office. She led the Families at Risk Review, which resulted in policy development on the relationship between adults' and

children's services. In 2002, she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the Open University and in 2005 was made a Companion of the Bath (CB).

**Eva Lloyd** is Reader in Early Childhood at the Cass School of Education, University of East London, where she is co-director of the International Centre for the Study of the Mixed Economy of Childcare (ICMEC). She is a Visiting Fellow at Bristol University's School for Policy Studies, where she previously held a Senior Lectureship. Her research focuses on UK and international early childhood policies and child poverty strategies. As part of her career, she also spent 15 years working for children's NGOs.

**Ulviyya Mikailova** PhD is Executive Director of the Centre for Innovations in Education in Baku, Azerbaijan, which is a member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). Her experience in public service started in 1998 when she became the Step by Step Program Director at the Open Society Institute – Azerbaijan National Foundation. She has also taught courses on gender and politics and education policy at a leading national university in Azerbaijan. In 2006, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship Award and spent three months researching at the International and Comparative Education Department at Columbia University, New York. She is a member of the Azerbaijani National Society of Physiologists, and of the Child Protection Network in Azerbaijan. In 2002–2006, she was an ISSA Board Member, and in 2008–2011 was a member of the ISSA Program Committee.

**Peter Moss** is Professor of Early Childhood Provision at the Institute of Education, University of London. He is a coordinator of the international network on leave policies and research, and co-editor of the book series *Contesting Early Childhood*. His latest book is *Radical Education and the Common School: A Democratic Alternative*, written with Michael Fielding (Routledge, 2010).

**Sue Owen** PhD is currently Director of Practice Improvement at the National Children's Bureau and a member of the Senior Management Team; prior to that, she was Director of the Early Childhood Unit there. In the past, Sue has held a number of posts in the early childhood field, including Early Years Lead Officer for Humberside County Council, Information Officer for the National Childminding Association, Playgroup Adviser for Manchester City Council, and Deputy Director of the Early Years National Training Organisation. Sue's latest book is *Authentic Relationships in Group Care for Infants and Toddlers – RIE Principles into Practice* (co-edited with Stephanie Petrie, Jessica Kingsley, 2005). Her doctoral dissertation was on the development of professionalism in childminding.

**Wendy Rose** was a Senior Research Fellow at The Open University from 1999 until 2010. Previously, for 11 years she was a senior civil servant in England advising on children's policy. Recently, with Professor Jane Aldgate, she has been a professional adviser to the Scottish Government for five years on the development of its policy, *Getting it right for every child*. She works on national and international child welfare

research and development projects, has published widely on policy and practice issues concerned with improving outcomes for children and families, and has been closely associated for many years with the voluntary organisation, Home-Start UK. She is currently contributing to the Welsh government's programme of child protection improvement and reform, including the development of a new approach to multi-agency learning and reviewing. She was awarded the OBE in 2009 for services to children and families.

**Caroline Sharp** BSc is an experienced researcher and research manager and is a Research Director at the National Foundation for Educational Research. Caroline has worked on a wide range of educational research projects, but has specialised in the early years and primary education. Her research into early childhood includes studies of children starting school, season of birth and transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. She is currently directing a study of Children's Centres targeting services for the most needy families. Caroline was Reviews Coordinator for the Early Years theme at the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO).

**Stuart Shanker** is Research Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at York University and Director of the Milton and Ethel Harris Research Initiative at York University, Canada. Among his awards are the Walter L. Gordon Fellowship at York University and his research grants include, most recently, a \$7,000,000 grant from the Harris Steel Foundation to establish MEHRI, a state-of-the-art cognitive and social neuroscience centre. Dr Shanker is Director of EPIC: an international initiative created to promote the educational potential in children by enhancing their self-regulation. Over the past decade, he has served as Director of the Council of Human Development and Director of the Canada-Cuba Research Alliance; he was the first President of the Council of Early Child Development in Canada. He has served as an advisor on early child development to government organisations across Canada and the USA and countries around the world. Recent publications include *Human Development in the Twenty-first Century* (co-edited with Alan Fogel and Barbara King, Cambridge University Press, 2008).

**Gerda Sula** is the Executive Director of Qendra Hap pas Hapi (the Step by Step Center) in Tirana, Albania, a member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). Her main interest is in applying child-centered philosophy in Albania's traditional teaching environment in early childhood. She is involved as a lecturer in teacher preparation programmes at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana. Gerda has served as a consultant for several government and international organisations, including UNICEF Kosovo, UNICEF Albania, the World Bank, the Ministry of Education and Sciences in Albania and Plan International. She has published articles in national and international professional journals and is editor-in-chief of *Femija ne Qender*. She has been involved in training at local, national, regional and international levels and has presented at national and international conferences. She has served as a member of national and international organisations, committees and scientific conferences.

**Jenny Spratt** is Head of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Children's Centre Services in an English Local Authority where she has led the Early Years and Childcare Strategy since 1998. She has a background in Early Childhood Education and was head teacher of a nursery school for nine years. Jenny represents the Local Authority Early Years Network on the Early Childhood Forum, which is co-ordinated through the National Children's Bureau, and is an early years sector specialist for the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO). She co-authored *Essentials of Literacy from 0–7* with Tina Bruce (Sage, 2011).

**Lesley Staggs** has worked as an early childhood consultant since 2006, acting as strategic adviser to a number of local authorities. She is an external examiner at two higher education institutions, trustee for a national early years charity and vice chair of the Board of the Learning Trust, which runs education in Hackney. Lesley has worked in early years education as a teacher, head teacher and early years inspector. She led the work on developing the Early Learning Goals and Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage in England, was a senior adviser within the DfES and the first National Director for the Foundation Stage.

**Dawn Tankersley** has worked as a Program Specialist for the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and the Open Society Institute since 1999. She has worked on several international Roma early childhood education initiatives as the lead pedagogical expert and has been the lead author of those ISSA publications connected with ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy. In addition, she is the author of ISSA's *Educating for Diversity: Education for Social Justice Activities for Children* programme and *Teacher Guidebook*, *Speaking for Diversity: Effective Teaching and Learning of Minority-Language Children in Pre-school* and *Opening Magic Doors: Reading and Learning Together with Children* (2009).

**Angela Underdown** PhD is an Associate Professor of Public Health in Early Years at the University of Warwick Medical School. She is also deputy director of the Warwick Infant and Family Wellbeing Unit (WIFWU) which brings together expertise with the goal of providing research, training and innovation in effective evidence-based ways of supporting parenting during pregnancy and the first two years of life. Angela's research interests are in the effectiveness of early interventions to promote infant and family well-being. She is particularly interested in the evaluation of interventions that are directed at promoting early infant–parent relationships. She has evaluated the processes and effects of infant massage and is currently exploring community support for parents with infants born pre-term. Angela teaches on a wide range of post-graduate courses aimed at promoting healthy development within early relationships.



# CHAPTER 1

# CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY YEARS POLICY

Linda Miller and Denise Hevey

## **Overview**

The aim of this book is to explore early years policy and the ways in which policy is formulated and in turn impacts on services, practitioners and their practice, from predominantly an England perspective but informed, where relevant, by wider international perspectives. In this, the first chapter, we describe the structure and rationale of the book and we signal some of the key themes and issues that are developed in the ensuing chapters.

We begin by considering what policy is and why it should matter to early years practitioners. We then introduce the four parts of the book which link to key overarching themes: Part 1: Poverty and social disadvantage; Part 2: The evidence

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

base for early intervention; Part 3: Marketisation and democracy; and Part 4: Frameworks, regulations and guidelines. Some chapters give an account of how policy is conceived, developed and implemented; others review the evidence base for current policy directions and initiatives. Some chapters are written by academics and researchers and others by those directly involved in policy development and implementation.

In this book, and in all the books in this series, we use the terms early years and early childhood education and care (ECEC) interchangeably. 'Early years' is a term more commonly used in the United Kingdom (UK) to reflect the bringing together of both care and education under one policy umbrella. However, both terms embrace the view that it is impossible to educate without caring, nor care without developing and promoting children's learning (Owen and Haynes, 2008). We also use the term *she* when referring to individuals to reflect the feminised nature of the early years workforce.



## What is policy and why does it matter?

The study of early childhood is quintessentially multi- and inter-disciplinary, because young children's lives and experience can't easily be partitioned into health, education and care; therefore, any study of early years policy will contain elements of health, education and social care/social welfare policy, which themselves have different traditions and exponents and have been linked historically with different departmental responsibilities at national government level in the UK.

National policy often seems remote to early years practitioners and other professionals working directly with children and families; it is not always recognised as affecting our services and lives. At most, it provides a framework that we are required to work within and is often considered uncontestable because both the public and practitioners feel powerless to challenge. Policy initiatives are increasingly supported by guidelines and training through which ideas are communicated and legitimized as the best way forward. In this book, we take the view that it is essential for all practitioners and others committed to early years services to achieve not just an awareness of policy and its implications for practice, but what Simpson and Connor have termed 'policy literacy': 'Policy literacy aims to make recipients and practitioners of social welfare more critical and discriminating readers, performers and producers of policies' (2011: 2).

They describe three phases in the achievement of policy literacy:

- 1 Understanding policies and their impact on the lives of children and families.
- 2 Learning to analyse and question the basis, construction and coverage of policies, including what is missed out.

- 3 Exploring underlying issues and principles behind policy formation, including: whose interests a particular policy ultimately serves? Whose viewpoints are represented (or ignored)? What are the alternatives? And, how can existing policy be challenged?

Through consideration of the development and implementation of recent policies across the education, health and social care/social welfare spectrum, in England and elsewhere, this book attempts to lead readers through phase 1 and phase 2 above and to start to raise some of the questions that constitute phase 3. In other words, it highlights the relevance of policy and policy making to all those involved with early years and supports the trajectory of thinking from the personal to the political.

## **Part 1: Poverty and social disadvantage**

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A key aim of most governments is to reduce and preferably eliminate poverty and social disadvantage in young children and to ensure their well-being. In 1997–2010, under the Labour government in the UK, early years became the target of widespread reform aimed at supporting families in combining work and caring responsibilities and thus addressing the high level of child poverty (OECD, 2011). Before the current financial crisis, child poverty fell in the UK more than in any other OECD country but this is now predicted to increase because of cuts to, for example, child and family benefits – regardless of the fact that the OECD (2011) report *Doing Better for Families* argues for social spending as a long-term solution to poverty issues. In Chapter 2, Naomi Eisenstadt describes the policy background in Britain and explores the challenges of establishing a new model of service provision for young children and families, aimed at reducing child poverty through ‘progressive universalism’; that is, designing public services to ensure maximum support for the most disadvantaged, while avoiding stigma and ensuring a minimum service base for all. Sure Start was targeted at poor areas in the UK and aimed to ameliorate the negative impact of living in poverty for very young children and their families. Eisenstadt discusses the origins and development of the programme as grounded in local communities and designed to respond to local needs. The chapter considers the lessons learned as Sure Start moved towards a more standardised universal model based on Children’s Centres and considers implications for future policy.

Sue Owen, Caroline Sharp and Jenny Spratt continue the theme of universal versus targeted provision in Chapter 3, when they focus on policies and practice change aimed at: (a) improving developmental outcomes for all young children entering school; and (b) narrowing the gap between the poorest, most disadvantaged children and the rest (see also Chapter 10). Through an illustrative case study, they explore the issues and problems which can arise when policy objectives such as these appear in practice to be difficult to achieve simultaneously. They argue for specific, targeted interventions, within a universal framework, in order to address the challenge of narrowing the gap of disadvantage.

## Part 2: The evidence base for early intervention

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The chapters in this section contribute to our understanding of the evidence that can be used to support and justify early years policies and practice initiatives, particularly by exploring the more scientific/medical aspects around brain development and psychophysiological regulation with which many early years practitioners are less familiar. This evidence complements and adds to the now considerable weight of evidence to emerge from a series of important reviews commissioned by successive governments and undertaken in England between February 2010 and May 2011. These include: Frank Field's (November 2010) review of poverty and life chances, *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults*; Graham Allen's (2011) review *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*; Michael Marmot's review of health inequalities, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, originally published in February 2010 and updated on its anniversary in 2011; Dame Claire Tickell's review of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, *The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning* (March 2011); *The Munro Review of Child Protection Report: A Child-centred System* (May 2011). All of these reviews have emphasised the critical importance of the early years for development and well-being throughout the life span and called for greater investment in early years services and better training of personnel. At the time of writing, the government has yet to publish a definitive response to all of the above. A revised Workforce Strategy for the early years sector is also anticipated in order to meet the challenges of implementing any recommendations arising from the reviews.

The main purpose of such reviews has been to create the evidence base on which future government policy can be formulated. This follows on from a decade or more in which 'evidence-based practice' has been espoused for the development of professional areas such as nursing, teaching and social work. Adopting an evidence-based approach implies that policy making is a rational process of evaluating the evidence and applying that knowledge to formulate policy within budgetary constraints. However, as we shall see through this book, fundamentally policy making is as much about values, moral and political judgements as it is about evidence. Core values and political ideologies underpin the direction of travel in policy because they determine the end point in terms of what sort of society we want to live in, what sort of childhood we want for our children and what sort of people we want those children to become.

Angela Underdown and Jane Barlow in Chapter 4 argue that evidence from brain research and observational data demonstrates the particular importance of the first and second years of life, in terms of infants' brain development and emotional attachments as the foundation for good developmental outcomes and later mental health. They make a strong case for intervening at the earliest stages of life through a partnership approach to working with parents, as enshrined in the Healthy Child Programme (HCP). Based on a model of progressive universalism (see above), the HCP promotes services that begin during pregnancy through to the first year of life to help parents to provide sensitive, responsive parenting and so to promote brain growth and strong,