



HRH Diana Princess of Wales at the opening of the Alliance National Centre

Chapter One:

What do we mean by pedagogy?

What is pedagogy?

Pedagogy is the study of being a teacher and refers to the strategies or styles of teaching children. It encompasses the whole context of instruction and learning as well as the activities in which learning happens. Pedagogy refers to the theory of educating - that is about knowledge of the subject and the appropriate means of teaching that subject.

The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL) carried out in 2002 by Janet Moyles and colleagues from the Anglia Polytechnic University described the term 'pedagogy' in a more dynamic way, referring to it as being:

*'... both the behaviour of teaching and being able to talk about and reflect on teaching. Pedagogy encompasses both what practitioners actually DO and THINK and the principles, theories, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape it. It connects the relatively self-contained act of teaching and being an early years educator, with personal, cultural and community values (including care), curriculum structures and external influences. Pedagogy in the early years operates from a shared frame of reference (mutual learning encounter) between the practitioner, the young child and his/her family.'*¹

The SPEEL definition is worthy of reflection from the playgroup worker's perspective. The elements of 'doing and thinking' stemmed directly from experiences shared about, and reflected upon, growing up and attitudes towards parenting as well as children growing and learning. The arena for the dialogue was the playgroup, with 'parents-as-practitioners' being protagonists in that dialogue, extending out into the adult classroom and back into the playgroup. In this way, the playgroup movement created a unique pedagogic

approach over many decades which has not been credited with the recognition it deserves as a viable alternative to the pedagogy of schools. It has been a pedagogy developed in action, rather than a written pedagogy; one that is imbued with personal meaning for those who practise it rather than a pedagogy embedded in theory and research, although it is certainly deeply influenced by both. The trace of the pedagogical approach is visible in PPA leaflets and publications, but most particularly in the content of the courses and training materials for practitioners. The strands most visible in the early days are not only how children develop and learn, but how adults do likewise and both these strands have to be examined side by side.

Those who have been trained as teachers of adults may be familiar with Malcolm Knowlesⁱⁱ term of *androgogy* which refers to the art and science of teaching adults. Pedagogy in the Pre-school Learning Alliance brings these two aspects together as parents and children learned simultaneously in the learning community that was the playgroup and this continues to some extent into the current pre-school or day nursery.

Moyle (et al) identified what they called the '4Ps' of Early Years Pedagogy.ⁱⁱⁱ These include:

- 1 Principles (tacit or embedded) - values, implicit knowledge, common sense knowledge, social knowledge.
- 2 Philosophy - pedagogic theory based on child development models, constructivism, social constructivism and approaches to play or models of provision.
- 3 Perception - thinking, reflecting, metacognition, challenging, evaluating, making sense.
- 4 Practice - resourcing, strategies and tactics.

This is a holistic model with each element influencing, and being influenced by, the others. While this book will not attempt to construct a model based on Moyles' 4Ps it is helpful to look at each element and recognise how the pedagogy of the playgroup movement has combined these elements in very different ways. The playgroup practitioner can identify with the 4Ps as present throughout her or his professional development whether or not she or he feels comfortable using the term pedagogy to describe the art of what they do each day in the playgroup or pre-school.

Terminology that describes types of provision is important to consider here. The term 'playgroup' referred to the original model developed by the Pre-school Playgroups Association where children attended a sessional play provision, staffed by trained supervisors, supported by volunteer parents. In this model, volunteer parents who were interested went on to train as supervisors and had opportunity to further their training, leading to more senior developmental, training and organisational roles within and beyond the organisation. When the Pre-school Playgroups Association changed their name to Pre-school Learning Alliance, the emphasis on the learning community remained, but settings became known as pre-schools rather than playgroups and staff became known as play leaders. Early years policy has developed through government initiatives over the past decade and the emphasis has shifted to providing more flexible all-day provision to enable parents to work, rather than sessional provision. Many pre-schools have become more like day nurseries in the service they offer to parents, and while parents may still be involved on management committees, the role of parents as volunteers has declined.

For the purpose of this book, the model of provision referred to that represents the core of the pedagogical approach of the Pre-school Learning Alliance is the traditional playgroup as described above. However, this model has developed and changed over time giving rise to a refreshed pedagogy which will be discussed later in the book.

The pedagogy of play - the early years pioneers and educational theorists

The influence of Friedrich Froebel

The most prominent of the pioneers of early childhood pedagogy was Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), whose lasting legacy, two centuries later, still shapes our thinking about young children and how they learn. From Froebel we inherit the phrase that *'play is a child's work'* that is familiar to many in the playgroup movement. Froebel believed that play was the highest expression of human development for a child because it was a specific way in which the child freely expressed his or her inner self. When Froebel extended the invitation *'come, let us live with our children'*^{iv} he was addressing parents and families as well as teachers, putting into their hands jointly the task of educating young children through engaging with them in playful activity. The activities and games he suggested, including the songs and finger rhymes, were designed to promote the child's development as well as to help the adults develop an essential playful element of their relationships with their children. This reciprocal dynamic of learning and playing together strengthened the bond of understanding and of love between adult and child.

The activities that were originally designed by Froebel as the 'gifts', such as the soft ball, the cubes and building blocks, and 'occupations', such as weaving and paper folding, were intended to nourish the child's instinctive drive to play with objects as well as nurture their understanding of the natural order of the world. Froebel had studied crystallography and saw in the formation of crystals the basic structures of nature which he replicated in the shapes of the blocks. He believed that by giving these children the basic building blocks of nature they would be learning in harmony with these natural elements as they explored the physical world.

Froebel was also a great naturalist and had a deep understanding of the natural world of plants and living creatures. He believed that as the world was the creation of God, then everything in the world carried with it something of the essence of God in its own creative and regenerative cycles. He believed that human beings, also created by God, were part of this great natural order and believed that through interacting with the natural world, understanding and respecting it, then children would get to understand the nature of God.

The Froebel movement in England gained ground in the late 19th century and became the foundation on which early years and primary education grew and flourished. Many other educational theorists and researchers have influenced the development of an early years pedagogy to create what is known as the *social constructivist* approach to early learning. While some aspects of Froebel have less relevance today, the essential aspects of his philosophy about childhood and about play still sit at the heart of the early years educational traditions in this country.

Dr. Peter Weston, former Principal of Froebel College set out the basic principles that define a Froebelian educational philosophy.^v Weston's principles were later adapted on the Froebel Education Institute website to be more inclusive of the parental role, as set out below:

- Recognition of the uniqueness of each child's capacity and potential.
- An holistic view of each child's development.
- Recognition of the importance of play as a central integrating element in a child's development and learning.
- An ecological view of humankind in the natural world.
- Recognition of the integrity of childhood in its own right.
- Recognition of the child as part of a family and a community.