

Creativity, Communication and Collaboration: The Identification of Pedagogic Progression in Sustained Shared Thinking

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Abstract

The central purpose of this paper has been to provide a conceptual model that is capable of supporting the development of appropriate early childhood practices for the 21st Century. A strong consensus has emerged regarding the importance of developing Communication, Collaboration and Creativity during the early years. The paper argues that these three principles are related to each other very closely at the level of theory and in some of the very best early childhood education practice. It is argued that, at the level of practice; creativity, communication, and collaboration are all combined in ‘sustained shared thinking’, which has been identified as a particularly effective pedagogic strategy in the qualitative case studies conducted to support the longitudinal study *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* in England (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). These ‘three Cs’ (*Communication, Collaboration and Creativity*) are also explicitly prioritised in each of the five international models of early childhood education (ECE) identified in the 2004 *Starting Strong: Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education and Care Report* (OECD, 2004). But it is extremely important to recognise that the pedagogic form that ‘Sustained Shared Thinking’ takes with children under age two is quite different from that most appropriate for three to five year olds when, in their socio-dramatic play, young children are quite naturally separating objects and actions from their meanings in the real world and giving them new meanings. By around age five, children’s powers of expression and abstraction may also be enhanced when they are encouraged to commu-

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nicate these creative representations in the play room (van Oers, 1999). The paper concludes by identifying some key principles to be applied in developing effective ‘Pedagogic Progression’ in nurseries and kindergartens that often cater for a broad age range of young children. These were illustrated at the PECERA conference with concrete examples of practice drawn from popular training materials¹).

Key words: *pre-school, sustained shared thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, pedagogy, learning to learn*

Introduction

In their identification of key issues for curriculum development in the 2004 OECD *Starting Strong Report*, Pramling *et al* observe that:

“Over the past decade, a global trend towards formulating frameworks/curricula based on societal goals has emerged, yet embracing a philosophy that focuses on the individual child as a subject.” (p26). They argue that these developments have caused professional tensions but that: “A crucial competence for teachers is the ability to simultaneously meet each child and his or her experiences, while directing the child towards the objectives of learning” (p27).

For many of us working in the field of early childhood education (ECE), our motivations include an element of advocacy for children. We are concerned that children should be prepared for the social and emotional processes that they live through now, *and* for the challenges that they will face in future society. In the earliest years it is clearly the transition from dependence to social competence and autonomy that we are most concerned about. This is an important feature of early

1) This paper was first presented as a Keynote Address to the 2007 *Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association* (PECERA) Conference, Hong Kong, China, July 4-7. These materials are fully referenced in this account of the presentation. Key slides have also been reproduced to support the narrative.

childhood but in early childhood education we often fail to acknowledge the significance of it.

The transition to social competence does not happen suddenly, it is very gradual, and psychologists have argued about whether it happens in steps or stages, and about when it is that this or that particular competence emerges. But they all more or less agree on the fundamental dimensions of the continuum, and in the nature of the transition that is involved in these adaptations to society. Yet in ECE practice there remains an open question about how much at any point we should be emphasising the individual child, and any ‘rights’ that we might consider they have to a ‘childhood’, as opposed to focusing our attention on our knowledge and assumptions about their future ‘needs’ in society. The important thing to remember here is that there is no contradiction between these two; we only ever think that there *is* a contradiction when we forget that the transition to adolescence and adulthood is *inevitable*. In fact, young children realise this themselves very quickly. The transition from early childhood, middle childhood, to adolescence and on to adulthood is an inevitable fact of life.

As De Corte (2000) among others has suggested, international concerns to develop the life long learning capabilities of children have been voiced particularly strongly at a number of levels in recent years by industrialists and politicians. In 2004 the UK Minister for School Standards commissioned a report to clarify the concept of ‘learning to learn’. This is a concept that is also increasingly widely accepted to be central to our work in the early years. The working group of leading academics and head teachers argued in their final report that;

“...the core of learning to learn is meta-cognition...Much of what teachers do in helping students to learn how to learn consists of strengthening their meta-cognitive capacity, namely the capacity to monitor, evaluate, control and change how they think and learn. This is a critical feature of personalised learning.” (Hargreaves et al, 2005, p7 and 18)

In educational contexts around the world in recent years we have also seen a clear recognition of the importance of fostering creativity in young people. Creativity

has increasingly been seen to be an important human resource related to social, cultural and economic development. Major initiatives have included the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) global initiative to strengthen arts education in 1999 and in 2003, Portuguese delegates to the United Nations called for a global conference to address the aim, resulting in the first-ever World Conference on Arts Education held in 2006. This was attended by 1,200 artists, educators, policy makers, and researchers from over ninety-seven countries. In the UK the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education's (NACCCE) (1999) report *All Our Futures: Creativity Culture and Education*, and the Government White Paper, *Schools: Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001) have been particularly influential.

In the early years there have also been efforts to encourage the development of greater creativity but colleagues have often expressed frustration that their efforts in this direction have been undermined by other initiatives (often seen as imposed 'top-down') that have been focused on teaching young children basic (especially literacy and numeracy) skills. In fact a dichotomy has increasingly been drawn between these two priorities; that is between, on the one hand, providing children with the freedom to express themselves creatively, and on the other hand to learn concrete life skills for the future. This paper looks more closely at this apparent dichotomy and argues that from a Vygotskian perspective it might be seen in fact as a *false* dichotomy – and that a clear understanding of the relationship between 'learning things' and 'learning what can be done with them' may help us understand better both the nature of the learning process, and the most appropriate foundations for curriculum and pedagogical developments for the future.

The influence of socio-cultural, sociolinguistic, and neo-Vygotskian theorists in early childhood education has been particularly strong in recent years and it is argued here that there is enough common ground between these positions to support a shared perspective. This will be productive in supporting greater academic collaboration in the early years, and it will also be of immense value in terms of the development of professional practice and thus, ultimately, in the interests of young children. It is for this reason (for example), and in the interests of supporting these developments of

broad theoretical consensus, that the word ‘thinking’ was adopted, rather than ‘language’ in coining the term ‘Sustained Shared Thinking’. It isn’t actually necessary to accept the dominant role that language may take in the learning processes to accept the general features and consequences of socio-cultural theory for childrens development and learning.

The following argument begins by focusing attention on the areas of ‘creativity’, ‘communication’, and ‘collaboration’, each of which have attracted a good deal of research attention and fieldwork in recent years. The argument draws strongly upon a work only very recently translated into English, this was published as a special issue of the Journal of Russian and East European Psychology in 2004 (L.S. Vygotsky on *Childrens Imagination and Creativity*). It is interesting to note in this context that Vygotsky’s own studies began with his (1925) PhD research on the subject of creativity “*The Psychology of Art*” (1965). The most important thing to be gained from reading this work may be to recognise that the operation of the *imagination* that we more often refer to as fantasy in ECE contexts is much more profoundly implicated in everyday thinking and learning than we generally recognise.

Creativity, Communication and Collaboration

Creative activity was for Vygotsky seen as combinational activity, where the individual brings together recalled images, actions and/or experiences to envisage (or imagine) something new. These processes of imagination are present in all aspects of our day to day life and mental activity. All forms of learning, Science and Technology, just as much as Art, would be impossible without them:

“...in the everyday life that surrounds us, creativity is an essential condition for existence and all that goes beyond the rut of routine and involves innovation, albeit only a tiny amount, owes its existence to the human creative process” (Vygotsky, 2004, p11).

What is crucial in this formulation is that it recognises that:

1. *Creativity is a universal capability* (we all do it not just e.g. artists)
2. *That the acquisition of knowledge, far from being an alternative objective to*

the development of creativity, is actually complementary. Creativity is dependent on prior knowledge, and the more prior knowledge an individual has to draw upon then the more creative they can be, as Vygotsky put it “*All else being equal, the richer the experience, the richer the act of imagination*”... “*The implication for education is that, if we want to build a relatively strong foundation for a child’s creativity, what we must do is broaden the experiences we provide him with*” (op cit p15). This where curriculum is important.

In order to progressively build up a model that shows how these curriculum priorities relate to pedagogic aims we can start with a representation of life long learning leading to an adulthood that is characterised by learning capability and creativity. One of the key questions to be considered here is related to the effort to be made by practitioners in accelerating child progress along this continuum. In very practical terms; should children be left to set their own pace or should practitioners be actively initiating new activities for children and extending existing ones?

So what is it that the individual is learning over this period – what is the curriculum? In the earliest years this is focused on learning about (for example) the body and safety, and affection and aggression. Later it is the school curriculum and formal literacy; ultimately it will be about the world of employment and citizenship conducted in communities of practice (What happens in the middle may still be considered a controversial question in many ECE policy contexts right now). Progression here is about developing breadth (of knowledge and understanding) and later a degree of specialisation as well.

A necessary condition towards achieving this is the prior development of a conception of the ‘*self*’, the involvement in *improvised play with partners, collaboration* in increasingly structured activities and games and then finally in more *disciplined collaboration*. The first three of these categories broadly corresponding with Broadhead’s (2001) empirical account of the “social play continuum” levels for ‘Associative Play’, ‘Social Play and Highly Social Play’, and ‘Co-operative Play’²⁾. But arguably these processes don’t end with play, or in school, or even in adult life, there is an

2) Broadheads levels 2 and 3 are collapsing together here only for ease of presentation.

essential continuity between the playful collaboration of the nursery, the more formal collaboration between peers, and between teachers and pupils in schools, in working partnerships, in the provision of apprenticeship and tutorial relationships and even professional mentors and collaborators at the academic and professional level. In terms of competence, progression goes from mastering the very informal and strongly improvised interactions to more highly structured and much more formal interactions in adult life.

We can then map onto this model a representation of emerging progression in competence in terms of communication and collaboration [Fig. 1] the interactive contexts that are identified (horizontal axis) show progression in terms of the child's socio-cultural engagement with society – what the vertical axis adds to this is a representation of the processes that children go through in making sense of the world, in reconciling their day to day interactions and experiences.

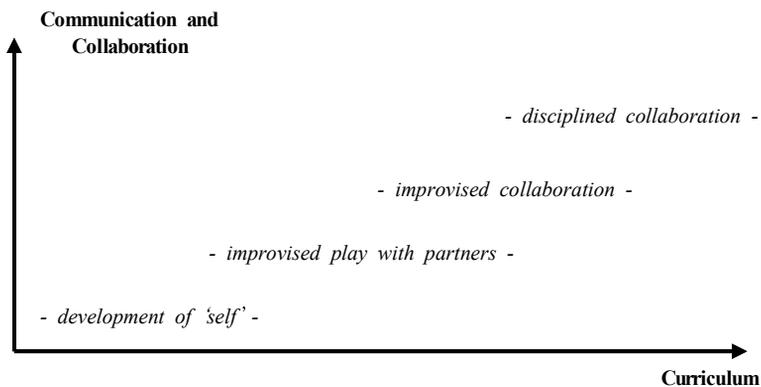


Figure 1. Mapping progression

The model then illustrates how the available evidence suggests, amongst other things, that the learning processes associated with the development of conceptions of the *self* are related at first to those associated with learning about ‘*others*’ and then to the development of some even more sophisticated and challenging intellectual capabilities (mostly through play)... So we will come back to this slide in a moment – first a little more needs to be said about the particular perspective that is being adopted:

Vygotsky's argument is that a false dichotomy has often been drawn between the *imagined* and the *real* and that these may actually be seen to be associated in four important ways:

1. *Everything imagined is constructed from real perceptions, experience, knowledge –only the combinations are fantastic (Vygotsky's 1st Law)*
2. *Second hand knowledge (as opposed to experience) is only ever gained through the operation of creativity and the imagination. (Vygotsky's 2nd Law)*
3. *The imagination is influenced by the emotional impulse to tie together otherwise dissimilar impressions, thoughts and images. (Vygotsky's 3rd Law)*
4. *The relationship between imagination and reality is cyclical (at first inter-nally) and more complex knowledge and experiential environments provide greater potential for creativity than simple ones. (Vygotsky's 4th Law)*

In all of this the early part played by the symbols and signs manipulated in play (and other experiential learning contexts) are considered crucial. In the preparation of this paper a major review of the relevant research was carried out and this suggested that the crucial practice of substituting a real object for a symbol may occur spontaneously in play, but the evidence shows that it is also greatly facilitated in the *playful interaction* with others. The role of primary carriers is paramount in this before the age of two years: peer play is more significant by age four.



Figure 2. The development of self

Now if we return to the model [Fig. 2]: If we consider how these processes develop over time in progressively more sophisticated interactive contexts (what Leont'ev, (1978) calls 'moments of activity') we can begin by drawing upon Mead's account of the processes involved and see that as gestural symbols are at first recognised by the child as communicative acts, some of these become especially significant.

To paraphrase Morris (1962):

“The 'significant gesture', itself a part of a social process, internalises and makes available to the [child] the means which have themselves emerged in earlier, non-significant, stages of gestural communication” (op cit pxxii).

'Significant gestures' thus provide the means by which the child is able to at first objectify the behaviour (or role) of the other, and control their own behaviour in response to these roles. It is also in these processes that the child first develops a conscious awareness of the 'self'.

van Oers (1998), refers to the cyclical creative process as one of '*progressive continuous re-contextualisation*' where it seems that as soon as the individual recognises the potential of achieving a recalled (and motivating) object (or outcome) they are able to re-contextualise that object, transforming (or 'transferring') their (structure and meaning) of the activity to that end. The 'object' of the activity for the baby shown in the video is to receive a smile and a gentle shake from the adult. The symbolic tools applied to achieve this are eye contact and a smile³). The creative process here may therefore be one in which: (1) The 'smile' from the adult is first 'objectified' (2) The child recontextualises the adult behaviour that leads to smile (eye contact). (3)

3) *Otherwise referred to in the social and communications development literature as a script, in Piaget as a scheme or schema. Piaget considered the action to be internalised as an operation. Vygotsky, by contrast, saw every action to exist simultaneously at both the external social and internal mental level.*



Figure 3. Improvised play with partners

The child (creatively) makes eye contact to encourage the adult to smile ⁴).

The second video sequence⁵) [Fig. 3] demonstrates the importance of symbolic representations that are reciprocally accepted by play partners. In this short video sequence Francesca's communication with the adult is informed by her construction of the adult's view of her own role. At this stage there is clear co-operation which will lead to more sophisticated collaborations and ultimately to the collaborative planning and negotiation (through metacognition) of the drama itself. The teacher (Lisa) is scaffolding sustained shared thinking using open ended questioning, a technique that was found to be associated with the most effective nurseries in the EPPE (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2008). In the video Francesca is shown losing her 'dinner' ('on' the blue plate) and it must be found before the improvised drama can continue. For there to be reciprocal acceptance of this common pretend symbol, the symbol must be 'second hand' for one partner; they have creatively reconstructed it in this new context. Of course this doesn't just apply to 'pretend' symbols – it applies to any sign or symbol we take on 'second hand' and the next video provided a good example of this:

4) The process is illustrated here with a video sequence drawn from a (1999) High/Scope UK video: *The High/Scope Approach for Under Threes, The High/Scope Institute, Copperfield House, 190-192 Maple Road, London, SE20 8HT. Available on DVD format:*

http://www.high-scope.org.uk/hs_code/publications/e-y_dvds.asp

5) Also drawn from High/Scope (1999) *op cit*

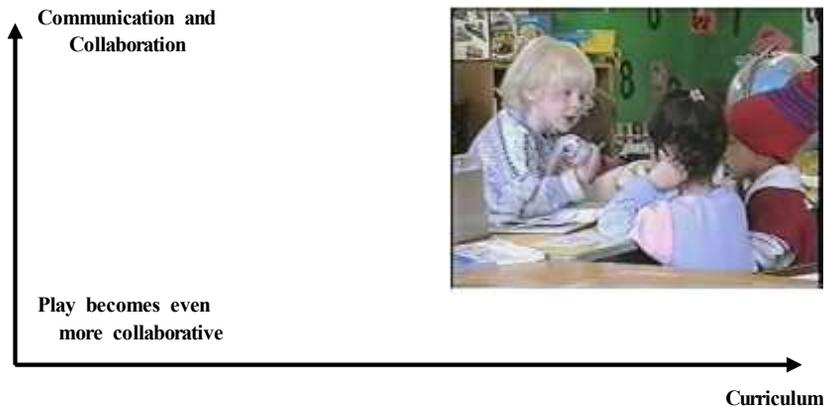


Figure 4. Improvised collaboration

In the context of the third video sequence⁶⁾ [Fig. 4] involving children playing in a sophisticated socio-dramatic play environment (a *pretend* Travel Agency), we see that progressively, as each child continues to communicate with the adults and other children, the meanings that they are constructing together are mediated by all their previous historical moments of significant activity. Increasingly we can see that the child's *socio-dramatic play becomes more collaborative*. It is particularly interesting to note here that the symbols the children manipulate in their socio-dramatic play are not always the same symbols that adults apply. The children are still learning which to apply. A slip of paper in the video is referred to as a 'cheque' but it is 'read' at the till as a credit card. What is amazing is the level of involvement and engagement shown by the child in this play sequence and the sophisticated knowledge shown of this highly specialised aspect of adult life. The children were taken on a visit to a travel agency in preparation for this activity but the level of understanding that they show is still very impressive. The 'point of sale' use of the 'credit card' may, of course, have been creatively 'recontextualised from the numerous other shop/ supermarket interactive contexts the child will have observed.

Whenever play partners communicate they do so from their own historically

6) From: Abbott *et al*, (1996) Firm Foundations: Quality Education in the Early Years, A Video Resource Pack, Manchester Metropolitan University: Available from Macmillan Distribution on (0)1256 302 699

constructed perspectives, which includes their understanding of the perspective of themselves constructed by the other participant in the communication. This has important implications for development as:

“...the child’s position towards the external world changes...and the ability to co-ordinate his point of view with other possible points of view develops” (Elkonin, 1978, p282).

Forman and Cazdan’s (1998) research suggests that children’s problem solving improves in collaboration, as the partners alternately provide scaffolding for each other within the partners ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD). That is, the ‘zone of capability’ that extends beyond what the partner is capable of doing on their own to include those activities they may successfully do with the support of their peer.

The development of these sophisticated levels of abstraction (and metaconsciousness) also facilitate the development of a wider *Metacognition* (*the knowledge and awareness that children come to develop of their own cognitive processes*). The metacognition that is so important in learning to learn, also develops as the child finds it necessary to describe, explain and justify their thinking about different aspects of the world to others.



Figure 5. Disciplined (more structured) collaborations

The final video sequence⁷⁾ [Fig. 5] shows how, following a child initiated investigation of Ladybird's, the nursery staff provided resources for the children to make their own *model* Ladybird's using play dough. As this point it is much clearer that 'pedagogy' may be substituted for the 'communication and collaboration' axis and that the model has as much relevance to informing scaffolding in learning for all ages as it does for children's learning. In fact this term could have been substituted at either of the earlier stages. As I have argued elsewhere (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999) any adequate definition of pedagogy for early childhood education must include the indirect scaffolding provided by adults in e.g. providing the stimulating learning environments for socio-dramatic-play. The video sequence begins when a child sees a Ladybird when they are playing outside and asks one of the practitioners where they live. The nursery staff respond by drawing together all the resources that they can find in the Nursery library that refer to the insects, and they ask the children what they think the answer to the question might be. The picture books show particular plants that might be worth looking at, and the children go out into the garden to carry out a 'ladybird hunt'. The nursery teachers thus provide significant structure to the investigation, very much as van Oers (1999) describes a *language game*⁸⁾. Some Ladybirds are also brought into the Nursery for observation. The practitioners then provide coloured play dough so that the children can model their own Ladybirds. Amongst other things, this provided the children with an opportunity to demonstrate ('document') what they had learnt about Ladybird's in the context of their investigations (e.g. related to the number of spots/wings etc).

As van Oers (1999) has suggested: "...when children consciously reflect upon the relationship between their 'pretend' signs and 'real' meanings in play they are engaged in a form of semiotic activity that is a valuable precursor to new learning activities" (p278).

Carpay and van Oers (1993) argue that:

7) Also drawn from: Abbott *et al.*, (1996) *op cit*

8) The children are encouraged to 'play' out the role of scientists. See: Siraj-Blatchford & MacLeod-Brudenell (1999).

“...learning activity must be fostered as a new special form of play activity. As a new quality emerging from play activity, it can be argued that learning activity has to be conceived as a **language game** in which negotiation about meanings in a community of learners is the basic strategy for the acquisition of knowledge and abilities” (cited in van Oers 1999, p273 author’s emphasis).

This approach is also implicit in emergent literacy and numeracy practices where educators specifically encourage children to recognise the value of using symbols to represent and quantify.

The development of these early (birth to age 6) ‘Sustained Shared Thinking’ activities (they all have this in common) are considered by many, and particularly by Russian neo-Vygotskian writers, to mark the transition at first to show a progression in *learning activities*⁹⁾ that are characterised by a transition from those focused upon “*emotional communication with caregivers*” (Lisina, 1986), then to “*object-centred joint activity*” (Elkonin, 1989) where the child begins object substitutions, and then on to *Sociodramatic play* (Lieontiev, 1964), and finally activities that reflect the child’s desire to learn more formally and embrace *learning* (or schooling) (van Oers 1999) as the dominant learning activity.

When describing these periods of particularly favourable (or favourite) shared activities as ‘leading activities’, it is being suggested that they should be seen as a driving force in children’s development. The transitions are also considered ‘emergent’ in the sense that each development involves a series or continuous process of irreducible restructurings of the mind. As Vygotsky (2004) puts it:

“A child’s play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired” (p11).

The major features of progression in terms of Creativity, communications and collaboration are thus identified in the literature review as follows:

1. *The child initially manipulates symbols/signs in their emotional communica-*

9) Which might also be considered to be social life phases’ (see Higgins and Parson’s, 1983).

- tions with adults and peers and engages in significant gestures*
- 2. They begin using symbols and signs in pretend play (a practice that may be initially introduced to the child by an adult or peer)*
 - 3. Pretend role play and object substitution become internalised (as imagination) and as inner speech develops.*
 - 4. The child is first able to be another to herself, develops the capability of 'interacting' with pretend others (increasingly acknowledging 'their' perspective), and then 'switches' freely between roles (Fein, 1991).*
 - 5. Socio-dramatic play becomes more collaborative as partners at first share symbols and then reciprocally negotiate roles.*
 - 6. Conceptual knowledge and understanding of the 'other', and of the 'self', develop further and learning 'dispositions' become more significant (e.g. probably most clearly identified in gender studies).*
 - 7. Most children become oriented increasingly towards more formal learning and school.*

The implications of this for Early Childhood Education are quite clear. The imagination is stimulated by the child's needs, motives and desires which early years practitioners can influence by:

- 1. Providing progressively more experience, knowledge, and stimulus (through the provision of challenging play environments and guided or direct intervention (Within the ZPD)*
- 2. They can also Scaffold the creative 'cycles' by progressively encouraging more sophisticated communication and collaboration (within the ZPD).*

As previously suggested, it is not just in small-scale qualitative and quantitative studies that we can look towards in justifying the assertion that these approaches are to be especially recommended. Our work with the EPPE 3-11 project also provides important additional evidence of its effectiveness (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).

Sustained Shared Thinking

The EPPE Qualitative analysis revealed a general pattern of high cognitive

outcomes associated with sustained adult-child verbal interaction along with a paucity of such interactions in those ECE settings achieving less. ‘Sustained shared thinking’ (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003) thus came to be defined as:

“...an effective pedagogic interaction, where two or more individuals ‘work together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative¹⁰).

Each of the ‘shared activities’ described in the discussions of child development earlier may be seen as instances of *Sustained Shared Thinking*. In fact this may be considered the feature that most closely draws them together. The term may also be usefully employed to describe a particularly strong feature of many of our most highly promoted (and regarded) ECE models. These may also be summarised under the following headings:

1. Teacher initiating activity - effective pedagogues model appropriate language, values and practices, encourage socio-dramatic play, praise, encourage, ask questions, and interact verbally with children. Excellent settings tended to achieve an equal balance between teacher-led and child-initiated interactions, play and activities.

2. Teacher’s extending activities - a particular form of teacher initiation that may also be applied in cases where the child initiated activity. The most effective settings actively provide both teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities. In EPPE ‘Extension’ was included in the operational definition of ‘sustained shared thinking’ (above), and one of the implications clearly identified in the research was that effective pedagogues therefore require a good knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, and of child development.

3. The provisions of differentiation and Formative Assessment - effective pedagogues assess children’s performance to ensure the provision of challenging yet achievable experiences (i.e. within the ZPD) and provide formative feedback. The

10) ‘Sustained shared thinking’ was subsequently found to most commonly occur in 1:1 adult/child interactions. An early association was also recognised between sustained shared thinking and questioning (see Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2008).

most effective EPPE settings have shared educational day-to-day aims with parents supported by regular communication.

4. Attention to the relationships between children - EPPE found that effective settings view cognitive and social development as complementary and they support children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts.

In the UK context, such findings challenge entrenched beliefs about the value of exclusively encouraging free play, and promoting a non-interventionist role for practitioners.

ECE MODELS

The term ‘ECE model’ is applied here to refer to any educational system that combines theory with practice. A number of such models may be identified that combine a theoretical and knowledge base (that may reflect different philosophical orientations) with an ongoing commitment to child development research and educational evaluation.

The ‘qualities’ of several particularly popular and ‘successful’ ECE models were identified in the *Start Strong Report* (OECD, 2004). As Pramling *et al* (2004) (and Siraj-Blatchford, 1999) observed, a number of interesting commonalities can be found between these successful ECE models developed in different country’s, yet they also (quite appropriately) differ from each other in many ways. As these authors suggest, this in itself, demonstrates the potential for developing culturally specific models that simultaneously address and respond to the knowledge that we gain from evidence based early childhood educational research.

Similarly, if we consider the accounts of the three ECE models most clearly identifying their pedagogy in the Starting Strong Report (OECD, 2004), we can see that the particular strategies applied (according accounts provided by Ferre Leavers, David Weikart and Carla Rinaldi) match very closely both the EPPE and Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) findings where in each case positive correlations were found (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004), and in the developmental analysis below (see Table 1).

Table 1. *OECD Curriculum Outlines*

	Teacher's initiating activities	Teacher's extending activities	Differentiation and Formative Assessment	Relationships and conflict between children	<i>Sustained Shared Thinking</i>
EEL ¹¹⁾	“Introducing new activities”	“Enriching interventions”	“Observe children”	“Work out sustaining relations”	“Engagement”
High Scope	“Sharing Control”	“Participation as partners”	“Plan- do- review”	“Adopt a problem solving approach”	“Authentic dialogue”
Reggio Emilia	“Development of short and long-term projects”	“Sustaining the cognitive and social dynamics”	“Teachers first listen don t talk”	“Warm reciprocal relationships”	“Reciprocity of interactions”
EPPE/ REPEY	<i>Correlations found with effective practice</i>	<i>Correlations found with effective practice</i>	<i>Correlations found with effective practice</i>	<i>Correlations found with effective practice</i>	<i>Correlations found with effective practice</i>

Conclusions: The Need for Continuity and Progression in Pedagogy

A major challenge in our development of an appropriate ECE for the 21st Century must be to convince policy makers that many of their ‘top-down’ assumptions regarding best practice in the early years are often simply wrong. The popular assumption amongst policy makers has been that the task of pedagogy is to serve the curriculum; to provide the most effective teaching and learning strategies for teachers to apply in providing children with curriculum content (whether they be attitudes, skills, knowledge or understandings). What is now required is a recognition that the primary goal of early childhood education is to develop children’s own creative competence, and that the ultimate test of any particular curriculum choice should be made on the basis of whether or not it maximises the children’s engagement in the processes of *learning*

11) ‘Effective Early Learning’ (EEL) (Pascal & Bertram, 1995), referred to as ‘Experiential Education’ (EXE) in Pramling *et al* (2004).

to learn, this is not to disregard education for the basics. There have been notable successes in shifting policy in this direction in recent years. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) guidance (DfES 2007), that is to be applied by all registered early years providers and schools in England from September 2008 does (implicitly) include an account of progression in many areas that broadly matches that described above, and ‘Sustained Shared thinking’ has now been included as one of the core ‘Principles of Learning and Development’ of (Sect. 4.3c). The EYFS guidance also explicitly refers to ‘Language for Thinking’ and illustrations of effective practice are included under each area of the foundation stage curriculum.

Both pedagogy and the curriculum are important, in fact they might be best understood as two side of the same coin. But the practical and theoretical implications of accepting the reversal of policy perspectives that is being suggested above (i.e. *putting pedagogy first*) may be profound, but only because policy makers have tended to put curriculum first and subjugated pedagogy, with the assumption that pedagogy as an ‘art’ is well understood. This might be the case if early years educators were highly qualified, however this is not the case and it remains an area of contention which we should be engaging with in all countries.

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