TOO MUCH, TOO SOON?

EARLY LEARNING AND THE EROSION OF CHILDHOOD

EDITED BY RICHARD HOUSE

Hawthorn Press

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A timely book with a remarkable diversity of contributors. The case is made clearly for the need for change.

Kindling, April 2012

This very readable, but vastly important, book is a must for all who care about our youngest citizens.

Marie Charlton, *Early Years Educator*, December 2011

This is a timely book with a remarkable diversity of contributors. … I finished the book with my arguments against the learning and development goals of the EYFS and their statutory nature deepened and clarified. The case is clearly made here for the wrongness of the current situation and the need for change. The positive suggestions that conclude the book present a way forward that would make a significant and positive difference to early childhood education and care in this country and would be welcomed by many parents and practitioners.

Jill Tina Taplin, *New View* magazine, Autumn 2011

Many chapters in this book would serve well as the basis for professional discussion with colleagues.

Barbara Isaacs, *Montessori International*, April 2012

This book is essential reading for everyone who cares about young children and their development.

Margaret Edgington,
Newsletter for the National Campaign for Nursery Education

Every parent should read it.

Ian Atkey, *Nursery Management Today,* May 2012

Read it for a powerful look at the problems and some inspiring ideas for change.

***Green Parent* magazine,** February 2012

Convincing series of chapters written by very well-informed authors questioning the government's approach to early years education. All educators – and parents – need to read this before it's too late and we lose a generation (or more) of children to the moronic system being imposed on children and their teachers. Essential reading. Should be the basis of government policy.

Susan Norman, Amazon website review

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Sarah Harris, *Daily Mail*, September 2011

The 'schoolification' of early years in England has not improved most children's chances of success in the educational system, and may be doing long term damage.

Sue Palmer, Review, *Times Educational Supplement Scotland*, September 2011

The book has entirely persuaded me that we are getting it wrong. We need to let children be children and I wish the Open EYE campaign success in all its endeavours.

Rachel Hyland, *The Social Crediter*, Summer 2012

Endorsements

'The unprecedented influences of the 21st century are impacting on the young mind with unprecedented results. This timely book offers a wide-ranging collective wisdom on how to optimize the individual potential of the next generation.'

Baroness Susan Greenfield CBE FRCP (Hon), author of *ID: The Quest for Identity in the 21st Century* (Sceptre, 2008)

'The concept of Intergenerational Justice lies at the heart of sustainable development. And where else should that start than in each and every child's early years? We are currently failing in that moral obligation to young people – and this powerful collection of essays reminds us of how important and how urgent it is to put that right.'

Jonathan Porritt, Founding Director, Forum for the Future

'Our early care sets the emotional thermostat for who we are by age six. These essays, taken together, present an overwhelming case for meeting the needs of children in the early years. Personally and nationally, we cannot afford to ignore their message.'

Oliver James, psychologist and writer, author of *They F*** You Up* (Bloomsbury, 2007)

'Since 2007, Open EYE campaigners have critiqued negative aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage and advocated a different conception of childhood than is inscribed within it. This book collates and expands those arguments, and proffers well-reasoned recommendations for policy. It is indispensable reading for all concerned with children in their early years.'

Kevin J. Brehony, Froebel Professor of Early Childhood Studies, Froebel College, Roehampton University

'*Too Much, Too Soon?* is a timely, informative volume which should alert all of those who believe that "earlier is (always) better" that this is by no means the case when it comes to promoting early human development. "Everything in moderation", that sage Aristotelian advice, applies to the fostering of early human development, too.'

Jay Belsky, Robert M. and Natalie Reid Dorn Professor in Human and Community Development, University of California, Davis; editor (with J. Barnes and E. Melhuish) of *The National Evaluation of Sure Start: Does Area-based Early Intervention Work?* (The Policy Press, 2007)

'If print could scream, the words on these pages would be heard as a clarion call for evidence-based educational reform. In *Too Much, Too Soon?*, the authors – teachers, scientists and policy-makers – join together to demonstrate how we might achieve rich curricular aims in a more child-centered playful learning approach to early education.'

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Professor of Psychology, Temple University, author of *Einstein Never Used Flashcards* (Rodale) and *Mandate for Playful Learning* (Oxford)

'The "too much, too soon" mind-set has strongly influenced American education for decades. Many health and education experts now link it to increased stress and strain in children and decreased levels of creativity, curiosity, problem-solving, and social capacity. It is high time for a paradigm shift, and this book can serve as a lever to bring that about.'

Joan Almon, founding director, US Alliance for Childhood, co-author (with Edward Miller) of *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* (Alliance for Childhood, 2009)

'I have watched with dismay as early years education has been caught up in the achievement-oriented values of our market culture. The diverse voices in this book challenge this agenda and affirm the over-riding importance of attachment relationships, experiential learning and emotional development in early childhood.'

Sue Gerhardt, psychotherapist, author of *The Selfish Society* and *Why Love Matters*

'A challenging addition to early childhood literature; its diverse offerings conjure up the riches and complexities of young children's development, learning and well-being. The book is an essential reading, especially for those in the profession who have only worked within the parameters of the English Early Years Foundation Stage.'

Barbara Isaacs, Academic Director for the Montessori Centre International and Senior Accreditation officer, Montessori Accreditation and Evaluation Board

'Childhood should be valued as a golden phase of life which should not be hastened, accelerated, filled with adult timescales or agendas. This book holds treasures of insight, research and information which is enlightening, informative, and most important, child friendly!'

Janni Nicol, Steiner Waldorf early childhood consultant, international representative and trainer, author of *Understanding the Steiner Waldorf Approach: Early Years Education in Practice*, Routledge, 2011

'The imposition of the EYFS by the previous Government on all settings was profoundly wrong. It ignored the views of professionals and abused the rights of parents. I hope that the Coalition Government will respect the fundamental principle of choice and listen to those who truly care about the education and development of children. Read this book.'

David Hanson, CEO, Independent Association of Prep Schools

'The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum is another in a long line of disturbing developments facing children in our society. I urge anyone concerned about the future of childhood to read this book and understand why the EYFS cannot be supported.'

Professor Sami Timimi, Lincoln University, author of *Pathological Child Psychiatry and the Medicalization of Childhood* (Routledge, 2002)

'The contributors to this timely book offer us thoughtful ways forward from the disastrous culture of targets, league tables and so on that has recently come to distort early years education.'

Richard Smith, Professor of Education, Durham University, co-author of *The Therapy of Education: Philosophy, Happiness and Personal Growth* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

'How can parents, practitioners, academics and politicians voice their heart-felt opposition to the narrow managerialism of early years policy? This book allows an eclectic, passionate, sometimes (appropriately) strident collective of authors to speak out for children's wider, deeper interests, and to challenge and inform our understanding of what children really need.'

Rod Parker-Rees, Associate Professor, Early Childhood Studies, Plymouth University, editor of *Meeting the Child in Steiner Kindergartens* (Routledge, 2011)

'This is a book which is both passionate and carefully argued – passionate because its subject is of vital importance to our whole society, and carefully argued because its contributors know that well-intentioned policy-makers need to be convinced of the validity of the insights presented so cogently in its pages.'

Brian Thorne, Emeritus Professor of Counselling, University of East Anglia and co-founder of the Norwich Centre; author of *Carl Rogers*, 2nd edition (Sage, 2003)

'This fascinating book incites the reader to speak out, is frequently political and dares to say things which are often at complete odds with received wisdom about what's right for young children. It speaks of love, of the child's right to dream and to be unhurried. Everyone concerned with young children and society's future should read it.'

Linda Pound, early childhood consultant, author of *Influencing Early Childhood Education: Key Figures, Philosophies and Ideas* (Open University Press, 2011)

'*Too Much, Too Soon?* is a timely, erudite and fascinating book. All will celebrate the passion for the well-being of children which is inherent throughout. The contributors, each in their unique way, emphasize the necessity to pay attention to the holistic developmental needs of children and the danger of subjugating those needs to political and/or social ideologies.'

Dr Maria Robinson, Independent Adviser in Early Development, author of *Understanding Behaviour and Development in Early Childhood* (Routledge, 2010)

Foreword

Annette Brooke, mp

As a politician I feel very honoured to be asked to write the foreword to this collection of perspectives on early child development and learning. I don't think that I can claim to be a policy 'maker', given the nature of our parliamentary system, and I certainly cannot claim to have any special expertise in early years. I completed a one-year postgraduate teaching qualification over 40 years ago, and as my subject is economics the amount of time I spent on early years must have been extremely limited. However, the course did spark off an interest in child development for me, and I am very conscious of how important this area of study should be for anybody preparing to work with children and young people. In addition, as a parent and a grandmother I have had some hands-on experience – or maybe hands *off*, in the context of this book!

As a politician I have had the opportunity to visit many early years' settings, to participate in legislation-making relating to children, to contribute to debates on a whole range of child and educational issues and to ask many questions of ministers, civil servants and education professionals. My membership of the Education Select Committee under Barry Sheerman's chairmanship also gave me direct access to the key players and issues in education more generally, including the early years.

I led for the Liberal Democrats on the 2006 Childcare Act. Looking back in Hansard, I see that I was arguing in December 2005, in the context of the Early Years Foundation Stage, that the word 'taught' should not be on the face of the bill. I suggested alternative wording, including 'experiencing' and 'learning'. I said in March 2006 at Report Stage, 'young children learn by being supported to play and by experiencing the world around them.'

'The word "taught", whatever the dictionary definition, has connotations: it implies a group of young people, children or adults

receiving instruction, rather than learning by experience at the right level.' I felt that I won the argument in the parliamentary debate, but the Government would not agree to amend the Bill and hence I cannot describe myself as a policy-maker! Interestingly, Penelope Leach in Chapter 1 singles out the confusion between teaching and learning, and explains what play means.

Consultation on the detail of the Early Years Foundation Stage took place after the debate; and at this stage I attended a presentation from Margaret Edgington on the pitfalls of the proposals, and I learned a great deal – she is indeed an 'Inveterate Early Childhood Campaigner'! (see Chapter 20). When the final document on the EYFS was published, I found I agreed with the principles, but I could see the danger from so many detailed goals, targets or aspirations, and underlying them was the word 'taught'. Many of the contributors to the book discuss the implications of these.

I became acquainted with Open EYE and its members shortly after it was formed, and whilst I haven't supported all of their calls it was clear to me that there must be a transparent exemptions policy, and that the literacy goals, in particular, had to be revisited. Their campaigning led me to question more and more the rationale of the EYFS. As contributors to this book point out, the argument for a structured approach was always expressed in terms of supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, to me this just did not fit in with the need to have an approach which would be appropriate for the development of each individual child. I want all children to be able to have the best start in life, and Open EYE's campaigning was questioning whether the EYFS framework actually did that. They asked the pertinent question about what the research evidence actually showed – as discussed in Chapter 19.

Before the 2010 General Election I was calling for reform of the EYFS, and this was embedded in my Party's policy. The new Government did take this on board with the setting up of the review headed by Clare Tickell. Her conclusions are given applause by some of the contributors to this book, but still questions remain – was she given the right remit, did we need more than just reform? I do have regrets that I wasn't an 'insider' (a true policy-maker) and able to have a say on the remit, or indeed play a minor role in the review.

However, being an 'outsider' to such processes does enable one to speak out, and that is an important role to be able to play. Open EYE

is about 'speaking out', and this book is about 'speaking out'. Change can indeed be brought about by the pressure of 'outsiders', especially when based on evidence and coherent arguments. A review of the Early Years Foundation Stage was a welcome response to the debate generated by Open EYE, but now the Government has published its response to the Tickell Review it is clear that there is much more still to be done to ensure that all children do get the best start in life.

Preface

Steve Biddulph

Hello – my name is Steve Biddulph, and it's great to have this opportunity to write to you and most passionately support this publication of the Open EYE campaign. Some of the most outstanding and capable advocates of children's well-being in the United Kingdom today are represented in these pages. I congratulate Dr Richard House and all the authors and their supporters across the country. My own part is simply to add a word of encouragement.

I have written simple and readable books for parents that over the years have reached about 3 million families around the world. They have been especially popular in the UK, and I seem to have become to the UK's children what Princess Anne is to the UK's horses; and so I am doing my best to grasp the reins or take the bit in my teeth – which ever is the right metaphor there. As many other psychologists before me have done – such as the wonderful Penelope Leach (see her Chapter 1) or Benjamin Spock – I have moved gradually from working with families in serious trouble to looking at how our society as a whole creates that trouble. I have noticed how, in the modern and hurried world, childhood easily becomes worse if not actively protected and nurtured.

In this context, in 2008 I read the early years policy framework (the Early Years Foundation Stage) with a real sense of horror. It went against everything that I understand about early learning, and I couldn't believe it was being contemplated. It even crossed my mind that although we might have defeated totalitarianism in World War II and the Cold War, with its wish to control and regulate every aspect of life, it still arises again so easily in the bureaucratic process, if we don't see it and speak up against it.

Caring for children well involves a knowledge of how they grow and what they need. Everything that we know about early childhood indicates an awesome capacity to self-educate, to draw in what's

needed and integrate it. If the adults around a child are responsive, calm and loving, and the environment is safe and stimulus-rich, then a child will grow of themselves in cognitive, language and emotional domains. Any attempt to force or structure this actually backfires. It's like ripping open a rosebud to try and get it to blossom. The results are not good. (I often suspect that if we had a government programme to teach children to speak, we would create stammerers and mutes; and if we had a programme to teach them to walk, we would create cripples.)

This isn't just opinion. There are many studies that indicate that structured approaches to early learning, such as early phonics and structured play (which is a contradiction in terms), our attempts to assess or audit a child, or caring itself – any monitoring intrusions into the normal process of care and development – all have an adverse effect. If these factors are the cornerstones that early years policy not only advocates but seeks to force on to children and teachers, then it's no wonder that the child development community in the UK has mobilized against this.

Dr David Weikart, whom some of you will remember as an original researcher of the Perry pre-school project, reported in 2006 on his final large-scale ten-nation study of what makes good pre-primary education. This huge and comprehensive study found two striking outcomes common to all ten nations studied. Weikart's results were crystal clear: children's language performance-gains *decrease* in proportion to the amount of time spent in forced group academic activities. They *increase* in proportion to the amount of time spent in free choice and expressive activities. Likewise, children's cognitive performance increases when children spend less time in regimented whole-group activities and more time in free play.

This won't surprise anyone who works in early childhood. But it must confound those who think that learning can be forced in the early years. Forced learning destroys that learning – it makes children go backwards. Given the fact of early brain wiring, and the durability of attitudes to learning found by people such as Oxford University's Professor Kathy Sylva, the harm might well be lifelong.

I encourage you in your earnest and vigorous efforts to set these bean-counters straight on the facts of how children grow. I hope this book promotes a constructive and thoughtful change of attitude from those in government, who are doubtless well-meaning, but are needing to listen closely to those who know children best. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Putting together a book of this size and complexity requires the co-operative endeavour of a large number of dedicated and generously spirited people, and I want to express my enormous gratitude to: my dear friends and colleagues in the **Open EYE campaign team**; the many esteemed contributors to the book for the efficient and many inspiring ways in which they have contributed; to the eminent endorsers of the book for taking the trouble to read and recommend it; the **Hermes Trust** (Richard Masters) and **Ruskin Mill Educational Trust** (Aonghus Gordon) for their generous financial support; to artist **Alan Paterson** for allowing us to use his magnificent painting for the front cover; to **Sarah Brook** for being a most generous ally in the protection of childhood; and last but by no means least, to **Martin Large** and all at **Hawthorn Press** for supporting this book – and for all they have done over many years to further the cause of holistic perspectives in early childhood learning and development.

Thank you, one and all, for enabling this gift to the world of childhood to come to fruition; we are quite a team!

In the earliest years, valuable though the input of teachers may be, children are not pupils, but apprentices in the business of growing up as human beings.

Penelope Leach

Introduction and Overview

Richard House, Editor

I originally intended to call this introductory chapter 'The Roots and History of the Open EYE Campaign'; yet the more I thought about it, the more I realized that what is far more important is to use this editorially privileged space to introduce the book that you are about to read. An editor needs to make a key decision as to whether a book's editorial introduction should be short and sharp, or lengthy and involved – for a strong case can always be made for either approach. In the event, I have plumped for a lengthy introductory chapter, principally because I wish to show-case the rich feast of contributions you are about to enjoy and/or be challenged by, in order to help you negotiate your way around what is, by early years standards, a long book.

I would like to begin with two revealing anecdotes, which will help set the scene for the book. First, I recently heard a story of an English early years teacher who spends 18 hours a week taken up with the assessment of her 40 4-year-olds, in order to meet the requirements of England's statutory early-years curriculum, the Early Years Foundation Stage – so spending more time with paperwork than in actually being with her children. The second anecdote concerns an 8-year-old boy who was recently heard 'boasting' somewhat about his achievements over the past year with his reading and writing. His little 4-year-old brother soon piped up, 'In the kindergarten, I've been learning to play and to not use my hands for hitting, but for work – and I'm good at it!'

The central purpose of *Too Much, Too Soon?* is to articulate what the book's contributors see as a major and growing problem in modern culture, which has been variously called 'toxic childhood', children growing up too soon, the commercialization of childhood, the 'adultification' of children, the erosion of childhood – or more

simply, and quoting the title of the book itself, 'Too much, too soon'. Readers unacquainted with the early years sphere in Britain may not be aware of England's pre-school 'curriculum', which critical journalists have somewhat irreverently termed 'the nappy curriculum' – namely, the Early Years Foundation Stage (or EYFS), which became statutory in September 2008. Even before the EYFS became law, in late 2007 a group of concerned professionals from various backgrounds formed a campaigning group, the Open EYE campaign, as they shared a number of grave concerns about the EYFS curriculum (outlined in detail in Chapters 2 and 6). The EYFS and its discontents will form a recurrent theme in Part I of the book. There is plenty of information about the Open EYE campaign both on our (rather 'workmanlike') website (at http://openeyecampaign.wordpress.com), and also *en passant* throughout this book (see in particular Chapter 2).

However, the book is far more than being a critical study of the EYFS; for whilst what follows does certainly serve that purpose, more importantly it sets the EYFS within a far wider cultural context of young children's early development and learning in the modern technological world. Specifically, we are concerned with the many ways in which young children's experiences are being intruded upon by commercial and technological imperatives of the adult world which, we contend, have no place in the psyches of young children. Much of this book is taken up with making the case for such a view.

It is important to put to bed immediately a criticism sometimes heard of the kind of position argued for in this book. Thus, those holding these concerns have been summarily dismissed by some as mere 'conservatives', or uncritical 'moral panickers', or nostalgic commentators romanticizing a non-technological past, or sentimentalists yearning for some fictional golden age of childhood, or naïve technological determinists. Speaking for myself, I take great exception to being so dismissively and condescendingly labelled. What the contributors to this book *are* 'guilty' of is bringing a radical, critically reflective capacity to the breathless momentum of modern technological developments, and their impact on children's lives and consciousness. We also bring a philosophical concern with contextualizing the proper place of technology in the wider evolution of human consciousness, and a passionate wish to protect what is fundamentally human from the march of what Jean-Francois Lyotard has called 'the inhuman' in modern culture. And there is surely no more

important and emotionally charged a place for the unfolding of this paradigmatic battleground than in the realm of early childhood.

Too Much, Too Soon? is being published now for a number of reasons. First, as I write the EYFS is currently being reviewed by the British Government, and this book constitutes a major intervention into those crucial debates for the future well-being of our youngest children. The Open EYE campaign has also very much 'come of age' now, with two highly successful conferences, many high-profile media reports and numerous publications having come out of its campaign team since late 2007. This book showcases in detail the viewpoints about early development and learning to which we passionately hold. But perhaps most important of all, we hope that *Too Much, Too Soon?* will provide a rallying point for a new cultural movement challenging what we call 'the erosion of childhood'; and the chapters that follow make a compelling case for the urgency of such a movement taking hold in late-modern technological culture.

A unique feature of *Too Much, Too Soon?* is that it contains substantive contributions from educators, parents, policy-makers, academics (both lecturers and researchers) and concerned citizens; and in this sense, it attempts to break down the impenetrable barriers that routinely exist between the arguably overly precious world of academia and policy-makers, on the one hand, and parents, concerned citizens and practitioners working at the coal-face, on the other. In these pages, you will see all these viewpoints eloquently and compellingly represented; and the book's key recommendations about early years research, policy-making and the EYFS, as set out in the concluding chapter by Wendy Scott and me (see pp. 323–33), articulate the parameters of an eminently achievable way forward for all open-minded readers who wish to join us in challenging head-on the 'too much, too soon' ideology that is so dominant in modern technological and political culture.

As the editor of this book, and as just intimated, what has perhaps been most gratifying is that the Open EYE campaign has spawned such a richly diverse, pluralistic collection which gives equal value to parental, practitioner, academic, policy-maker and campaigner perspectives. Such diversity is highly unusual, if not unique, in the early-childhood literature – which I see as highly unfortunate, as parents, professionals, academics, campaigners and policy-makers really do need to listen to, and learn from, one another, and to try

to understand each others' multi-faceted viewpoints. Indeed, one way of thinking about what has happened with England's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is that it was government's and policy-makers' chronic and single-minded *failure to listen* that has generated a number of major difficulties with the framework to date.

A few of the contributions in the book are overtly and passionately political in their challenging of government policy, and as editor I make no apology for this. In my view, far too much public discourse around government policy-making is surrounded by bad faith – by a kind of trance-inducing false respect in which no-one (least of all specially appointed government advisors!) dare say anything overtly critical to ministers, not daring to diverge from what they know ministers are wanting to hear. In my view, such phoniness can only lead to bad policy-making; and I think there can be little doubt that this did happen in the case of the original EYFS, and the way in which it was foisted on to the early years field. The very fact that the Open EYE campaign has received such support from across the field since late 2007 indicates that the previous government made no space available for listening openly to the substantial misgivings about aspects of the framework that were undoubtedly around in the field at the time – had ministers and civil servants taken the trouble to find out, and then listen and reflect.

Indeed, I would go as far as saying that *any* consideration of the EYFS, especially academic research, which fails to factor in the political machinations of the framework cannot but gravely misrepresent it and its functioning. In Chapter 5, for example, we read parent-activist Frances Laing writing the following:

> Countless practitioners and teachers had already told me via the blog that they did not feel able to voice their misgivings about the EYFS learning and development requirements for fear of being bullied by their managers, or because they were afraid of losing their jobs. Parents were afraid of making themselves (and their children) unpopular … Many parents are afraid that if they criticize the system they will face sanctions, disapproval, lose their place at nursery or school, and in the current economic climate this will not help them to maintain a job and an income.

So much for the accuracy and objectivity of those 'scientific' (*sic*) surveys that have repeatedly told us how 'universally popular' the EYFS is (cf. Chapter 19).

This book went to press a few days after the government's response to the Tickell Review was announced (on 6 July 2011), and it does appear that at least some of the concerns that Open EYE has undeviatingly pursued since late 2007 have at last been listened to and understood, and may well be acted upon. It seems equally likely, however, that at least some of our ongoing concerns will remain unaddressed after any changes to the existing EYFS are implemented. To the extent that this is so, our campaign will continue to marshal all available evidence and rational argument to challenge, in every way we can, any early years policy-making that we consider to be harmful to the well-being of young children.

The Book in Summary

Part I of the book, 'Policy-making and the Erosion of Childhood: The Case of the Early Years Foundation Stage', looks in detail at one important example of state-legislated curricula for early childhood – namely, England's controversial Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Although the chapters are closely geared to the detail of the EYFS and its vicissitudes, the arguments raised have much wider applicability to any attempt by government to legislate in this complex sphere of early development and learning. First, in **Chapter 1** the doyenne of childcare wisdom over several decades, *Penelope Leach*, gives us her profoundly insightful take on the Early Years Foundation Stage. Penelope has a number of positive comments to make about the EYFS – which makes her criticisms, when they come, all the more telling. One wonders just how many of the errors made in the original EYFS might have been avoided, and huge amounts of wasted time and resources spared for a great number of people and organizations, if Penny Leach had been one of Beverley Hughes' principal advisors when the EYFS was first devised.

Over the nearly four years of Open EYE's existence, we have individually and collectively written many articles for the professional magazines, letters to the press, and participated in numerous press and media reports – for example, making the lead front-page report in *The Times* newspaper (twice), appearing on Libby Purves' BBC Radio 4 programme 'The Learning Curve' (represented by Graham Kennish) and Kim Simpson's interview on Radio 4's flagship 'Today' programme. In **Chapter 2**, Open EYE reproduces just three of our published articles, which together give a clear scene-setting

perspective on just why the Open EYE campaign was founded, and set out in detail our original objections to key aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Very far from being the crudely 'anti-EYFS' campaign, with which grossly inaccurate label much of the media unfairly saddled us from the outset, it will be seen that our challenges were – and continue to be – thoughtfully nuanced, sober and carefully argued.

Chapter 3, by *John Dougherty***,** then sets out in painstaking detail just how much time and energy was expended (wasted?) by one school in their Odyssean efforts to negotiate principled exemption from the EYFS's early learning 'requirements' – requirements that it now seems very likely the new government will be significantly modifying when they finally revise the framework for 2012. The grotesque irony of all this will no doubt not be lost on the reader. The psychodrama, reminiscent of Kafka, that John meticulously describes – and with remarkable restraint, given its extraordinary content – shines a very revealing light on the way in which the previous Department operated at the time; and it merely adds ballast to the many challenges that Open EYE made of both the content and the procedures pursued by the Department under the previous government. For the political scientist and the policy analyst, perhaps the most interesting and important question is whether this extraordinary government behaviour was specific to the Department and the government in power at the time, or whether it says something far more general about the way institutional bureaucracies function when challenged by the citizenry speaking truth to power. Alas, such a fascinating discussion lies beyond the scope of this book; yet some of the case-study evidence presented in what follows will make fascinating data for anyone wishing to research into governmental decision-making processes, and their sometimes patent absurdity and lack of democratic (or, less charitably, their sometimes quasi-authoritarian) ethos.

In **Chapter 4**, *Pat and Arthur Adams* offer us a dramatically direct and open description of Pat's difficult experience as a childminder in the face of the EYFS, and the ways in which she saw it as impinging on, and unnecessarily interfering with, her childminding practice. Their prescient story will surely resonate with literally thousands of childminders' experiences regarding the incompatibility of a compliance-driven, hyperactive regulatory framework, on the one hand, and on the other, the kind of relaxed, unhurried, 'home-from-home' environments that many if not most childminders strive to create

for the children in their charge – and where the quality of attachment relationships is seen as far more important than measuring and assessing what 'learning goals' the young children are, or are not, 'achieving'.

In **Chapter 5**, *Frances Laing* offers us a parental perspective on the EYFS, illustrating from her own personal experience how the 'too much, too soon' ethos adversely affected her daughter's early learning experience in all kinds of ways, and how she then responded by becoming a 'parent-activist' – founding her own EYFS blog-site and becoming the first parent to seek formal exemption from the EYFS Learning Requirements (or 'targets-in-all-but-name', as she calls them). Officials at all levels of government would do well to read this chastening chapter, for it shows all too clearly the way in which inflexible bureaucratic agendas and processes can all too easily create a stultifying, almost Kafka-esque milieu in which any pretence to so-called 'consumer choice' in the public services becomes little more than a sick joke.

In **Chapter 6**, members of the *Open EYE campaign group* enter into a wide-ranging dialogue about the March 2011 Tickell EYFS Review, in which due acknowledgement is given to where the review seems to be along the right lines, and with extensive discussion of those areas in which the principled concerns raised by Open EYE and by many other critics of aspects of the EYFS seem to have been missed, or remain unaddressed by Dame Clare.

First in **Part II** ('The Foundations of Child Development and Early Learning'), *Sylvie Hétu* shows in **Chapter 7** how what we are calling the 'too much, too soon' syndrome commonly starts right at the beginning of life, around birth and just afterwards, in early babyhood. As a pre-school educator-lecturer, parenting workshop facilitator and infant-massage instructor and trainer of almost three decades' standing, Sylvie brings enormous accumulated experience and wisdom to her observations of early parent–baby relating, being and learning. What is especially interesting is her association's Winnicott-like challenge to the often disempowering ideology of professional 'expertise', and the way in which such impingement into the world of parent and child can so easily disrupt, rather than help, parents in their natural intuitive parenting capacities. For parents of very young children, and for those professionals who work with parents of young children, this is indispensable reading for those who wish to deeply understand and become aware of areas where doing

'too much, too soon' may interfere with the well-being of young children and babies.

In **Chapter 8**, *Lilian G. Katz* provides a goldmine of wisdom for any and every early years practitioner, accumulated over many decades of working in the field, in which she sensitively, and with characteristic humour, outlines those curriculum practices that are unhelpful, and describes with great clarity twelve overarching *principles* of early childhood practice that should inform all practitioners. Lilian also wisely warns campaigners not to make enemies of well-meaning policy-makers, but to find ways of dialoguing with them such that we can all hear each other, and be open to being influenced and changed by each other's viewpoints (cf. Chapter 22).

In **Chapter 9**, *Sally Goddard Blythe* takes us on a journey into the neuro-physiology of child development. Sally's seminal work in this area is enormously important in providing a solid scientific basis to the more intuitive views of 'holistic' developmentalists; and all she writes here about early learning is consistent with the view that very young children need to start their life journey with healthy *physical* development, and not cognitive or intellectual development. Sally's work therefore coheres very closely with what Rudolf Steiner and other holistic theorists have written about early development and learning. Although placed in Part II, Sally's chapter could just as easily have been located in Part I of the book, as it has a lot of vital importance to say about the developmental inappropriateness of aspects of the EYFS learning requirements, based on a deep understanding of the holistic development of the young child.

In **Chapter 10**, Open EYE's *Kim Simpson* offers a deeply moving chapter on the unfolding 'self' and its relationship to self-esteem, drawing in the process on the thinking of such towering figures as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Jung and Carl Rogers. Kim seems to embrace a quite explicitly *transpersonal* cosmology, in which terms like 'soul' and 'spirit' feature strongly, and she also draws upon extensive experience and knowledge of psychotherapeutic thinking, especially psychosynthesis. Particularly notable features of Kim's chapter are her emphasis on the way in which young children are brilliant natural learners, if only adults would have the mature discernment to enable rather than over-impinge upon their experience, and would intuitively know when *not* to get in the way; and the important idea that deprivation and disadvantage can manifest in all

kinds of ways in young children's lives, and not at all necessarily just in the *economic* sense. The term 'love' is very rarely used in the early childhood literature, which I think is a tragedy and a great oversight; and love seems to me to be at the heart of what Kim is writing of so eloquently in her chapter. You certainly won't find this kind of deep thinking in any audit-driven 'early learning goals' discourse; yet this kind of mature sensibility might well be infinitely more important in helping to facilitate young children's healthy and empowering development than any number of programmatic 'learning outcomes' could possibly capture.

In **Chapter 11**, Open EYE's *Wendy Ellyatt* provides us with a beautifully articulated philosophy of learning, with her wide-ranging argument convincingly showing how the taking of a managerialist 'audit culture' mentality into the education system can be catastrophic for the quality of learning, and for the *subjective experience* of learning as an empowering, personal developmental journey for the child. For Wendy, *creativity and the imagination* should be at the centre of any educational experience, being essential pre-requisites for creating rounded, balanced citizens; yet genuine creativity is so easily damaged by a regime of targets, outcome-obsessiveness and programmatic competencies. Wendy Ellyatt argues that the position of Britain's children at the bottom of international league tables on well-being, together with our deteriorating comparative *academic* performance, is due, at least in part, to the alien curricular regimes that now increasingly dominate education systems in the Anglo-Saxon West; and she is surely right in arguing that government needs to be commissioning independent research that searchingly examines the longer-term impact upon children's consciousness and being of the current educational regimes to which they are relentlessly subject (cf. Chapter 19).

In **Chapter 12**, another Open EYE stalwart, *Lynne Oldfield*, introduces us to the Steiner Waldorf approach to creating a developmentally fitting 'foundation' for early learning, grounded in the holistic pedagogical thinking of the great seer Rudolf Steiner. The carefully unhurried Waldorf approach contains so many of the principles and practices that recur throughout this book, that one is left in awe at Steiner's remarkable holistic thinking, which he annunciated in such detail a century ago. In this chapter we find eloquently described the principles of free play, rhythm, repetition, physical development and the 'movement-based curriculum', a culture of 'oracy' and care of the

senses, all couched within a language-rich, *genuinely* 'developmentally appropriate' milieu which minimizes pro-active adult impingement into the child's world, and makes a very strong case against over-intellectual early learning, and the long-term harm it can do to the child. As Lynne so evocatively puts it – and many psychoanalytic theorists would strongly concur – 'The Rights of the Child should include the right to be a dreamer'. Young children in a Waldorf setting, then, learn emotional self-regulation in a quite unselfconscious way, which approach coheres closely with Guy Claxton's work on the key importance of *un*conscious learning (cf. Chapter 21).

In **Chapter 13**, the celebrated American child psychologist *David Elkind*, who 30 years ago wrote his classic book *The Hurried Child*, lays out the reasons why play is so important in children's lives. In his chapter, David sets out clearly and compellingly the harm that is done to children in a play-impoverished environment, and he also begins to explore just what we can do to set right this chronic and worsening imbalance in children's lives. Surely every contributor to this book would agree with David Elkind's statement that 'Play … is instinctive and part of the maturational process. We cannot prevent children from self-initiated play; they will engage in it whenever they can. The problem is that we have curtailed the time and opportunities for such play.'

Then, in **Chapter 14**, *Tricia David* continues with the theme of play, with a sophisticated analysis that both acknowledges the central importance of play, and yet by no means adopts the kind of uncritical attitude to play of which some 'holistic' commentators are arguably culpable. Tricia also focuses on the neglected theme of the *politics* of play, looking at what she terms the 'highjacking' of play (e.g. by policy-makers), and the ways in which this can and does occur. Tricia usefully reminds us, then (contrary, perhaps, to many other of this book's contributors), that play is not necessarily a universal, culturally transcending phenomenon, and there are, perhaps, risks in uncritically eulogizing about play without any reference to its cultural and discursive specificities. Such a quasi 'postmodern' argument clashes head-on with the kind of view annunciated by the likes of Carl Jung and Rudolf Steiner, who argued that there *do* exist 'universal' human archetypal experiences, and that there therefore exists a complex dynamic tension between the universal, on the one hand, and the particular and the unique, on the other.

The final chapter in Part II, *Hillevi Lenz Taguchi*'s **Chapter 15**, offers a challenging critical perspective on Reggio Emilia, developing what she terms a 'relational materialist analysis'. Hillevi illustrates just how easy it is for us to be caught up in constraining 'modernist' thinking, just when we are convinced that we've transcended it! A chapter informed by post-structuralist, post-Cartesian and post-humanist thinking (as developed by thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari) is very important in a collection such as this, as it is from this body of ideas that perhaps the most incisive challenges to 'modernist' approaches to development, learning and education will emerge in the future. Hillevi leaves us with much food for thought, for example, when she writes that Reggio Emilia *'still* doesn't manage to transgress the dominant binary divides that haunt modern liberal humanist education; that is, human/non-human; discourse/matter; culture/nature; mind/body'; and when she challenges just where *learning itself* is located: 'A relational materialist approach to learning is critical of the idea of learning in terms of inner mental activities inside a separated human being … Thinking and learning take place *in-between* heterogeneous actors, rather than being something localized inside a human superior mind separated and located above the material world and other organisms.' Her vision of 'an ethics of immanence and potentiality', which 'is about opening yourself up to the endless possibilities of what children do, are capable of, and can become', is certainly one which the contributors to this book would subscribe to.

Part III, **'**Advocacy, Research and Policy-making for Children's Early Years' Learning', is launched in **Chapter 16** by another of Open EYE's founder-members, writer and campaigner *Sue Palmer*. Sue draws upon her extensive background in the teaching of phonics, spelling and grammar and her work for the government's National Literacy Strategy, to show how a mechanistic, programmatic approach to literacy learning not only does not work, but probably leads to a decline in 'standards' – and a possibly life-long impact on young children's self-esteem and love of learning. In the process, Sue also draws upon her first-hand experience of the highly successful Finnish education system to show how a language-rich, music- and story-oriented approach in an unhurried kindergarten environment provides a highly effective, 'bottom-up' foundation for later learning that the 'top-down' literacy strategy has been unable to achieve. Sue Palmer ends with a passionate call for the government's

revision of the Early Years Foundation Stage to do much more than mere 'tinkering'; for as she writes, 'we need root and branch reform. I now believe the only way to change the culture is to raise the school starting age to six (or preferably seven), and institute a separate Foundation Phase with a totally different ethos, similar to those Finnish kindergartens.' Whatever the Realpolitik of such a proposal might be, Sue Palmer certainly makes a compelling and persuasive pedagogical case for such a change.

In **Chapter 17**, *Sebastian P. Suggate* presents the results of his doctoral journey into the highly complex field of empirical research into literacy. He shows all too clearly how the field is fraught with methodological specification difficulties – and perhaps most important, how empirical results can be turned on their head, depending on the controls involved and the time-scales over which effects are measured. In his own doctoral research, Sebastian made the extremely important discovery that, all things being equal, children who are introduced to quasi-formal literacy learning at a relatively early age show no significant enhanced reading abilities by the age of 10 or 11, compared with a control group of children in the Steiner system who were not introduced to formal literacy learning until the age of 6 or 7. He then outlines six aspects of reading that he believes account for why earlier readers lose their advantage in the longer run. These findings add considerable empirical ballast to the intuitive and practice-based views of many of the other contributors to this book regarding early literacy learning (goals); and in any rational world, these findings would lead educational policy-makers to think long and hard before supporting any policies that impose quasi-formal literacy learning on to young children under the age of 6. For Sebastian, '*ableness is not readiness*'; and 'Being able to learn to read is not the same as readiness – if we view readiness in terms of what is the long-term benefit from learning to read early'.

In **Chapter 18**, Open EYE's *Richard House* continues the critical research theme with a chapter that casts severe doubt on the veracity of allegedly respectable educational research in/on the early years. In a close analysis of EYFS-relevant research commissioned by the Department for Education, he shows how such research findings are easily politicized and misleadingly manipulated for political purposes. The difficulties are compounded when one factors in the major methodological problems with 'positivistic' research, which includes the self-fulfilling way in which the unarticulated

metaphysical assumptions that are made about 'reality' at the outset of any research project can so easily determine, or at least constrain, any conclusions that can be reached; and the way in which unquantifiable 'intangibles' can be more important than what is measurable and quantifiable (cf. Chapter 21). Associated problems with the Millennium Cohort Study and the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research project are highlighted, and it is argued that longitudinal research into the long-term societal impact of educational policies can yield disturbing findings. Adopting a more 'postmodern' approach to research which takes explicit account of issues of power might be one effective way of responding to these methodological difficulties.

Chapter 19, by *Aric Sigman*, presents a very different research-based chapter, being a *tour de force* of the extensive scientific research evidence on the effects of televisual and ICT technologies on young children. In a long and relentlessly engaging review of the evidence, Aric draws upon his extensive knowledge of this specialist scientific literature to paint a disturbing picture of the mounting evidence of harm that these technologies perpetrate in a plethora of ways on young children – including amounts of screen time, language acquisition, the highly questionable value of so-called 'educational computers', brain function and computer use, effects on reading, effects on learning, brain development, and social disengagement. A key argument is that it is *the medium itself* that should concern us, and not merely the content of young children's experiences with these technologies.

With evidence showing overwhelmingly that 'Exposure to screen technology during key stages of child development may have counterproductive effects on cognitive processes and learning', and that 'Even moderate levels of screen viewing are increasingly associated with a wide range of health risks', Aric Sigman proposes what he calls an 'Educational Buffer Zone' be introduced, through which the early years of education would be 'cordoned off' from these technologies, thus 'providing a buffer zone where a child's cognitive and social skills can develop without the distortion that may occur through premature use of ICT'. It is indeed difficult to imagine that anyone reading, and really taking in, the avalanche of negative evidence on early ICT could conceivably still think it appropriate to statutorily impose these technologies on to young children – which, despite repeated challenges from both Aric and Open EYE, is still the case

with England's Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. At the very least, there is an increasingly overwhelming case for education authorities explicitly to reconsider the role of screen technologies in nurseries and schools.

In **Chapter 20** the tireless early childhood campaigner and founder-member of Open EYE, *Margaret Edgington*, is interviewed by the book's editor, Richard House. In a reflectively wide-ranging and refreshingly frank chapter, Margaret covers a wide canvas of themes, including her early training experience; the auspicious tradition of Britain's specialist nursery schools and the dangers posed to them by the Single Funding Formula; the short-termism of policy-making and the possibility of early years being taken out of the hands of 'party politics'; the appropriate balance between statutory intervention and professional autonomy in the early childhood sphere; the limitations of current early years training, and the tension between academic and experiential learning in teacher training; the history of the Open EYE early childhood campaign, and the lessons that can be drawn from its many successes; and a detailed consideration of her hopes and fears for the future of the early years in Britain. Fittingly, Richard concludes the chapter by writing, 'Were I the Early Years minister, you would most definitely be my chief advisor; and if the current minister, Sarah Teather, or her successor(s) or advisors, happen to read this, there is still time! … '

In **Part IV**, 'Ways Ahead to Achievable Futures', Open EYE's *Grethe Hooper Hansen* lifts the discussion in **Chapter 21** to a quite new level, offering us a perspective on the 'paradigm shift' which the so-called 'new science' is increasingly embracing, and which is fundamentally challenging so many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the conventional 'modernist' learning paradigm which, for the most part, we uncritically take for granted. 'New paradigm', 'new science' thinking, supported by many prominent academic and professional authorities, is open to embracing new ways of thinking about 'reality', and is often informed by an explicitly *spiritual* cosmology (broadly defined).

In her chapter, Grethe refers to how – in line with both psychoanalytic and Steinerean (Rudolf Steiner's) thinking – we are only conscious of a very small proportion (perhaps 5 per cent) of our mental processes; and if this is indeed the case, it surely has revolutionary consequences for how we work with young children in their early formative years – for at present, the implicit assumption is that

'the 5 per cent' with which practitioners work constitutes the whole. Grethe goes on to show how the much-neglected research of Bulgarian scientist Georgi Lozanov throws considerable light on how human beings learn. For Lozanov, the richest and most effective learning is acquired *indirectly* (through unconscious parallel processing, as in the example of children learning to read); and Lozanov 'provides a myriad ingenious ways of distracting the conscious mind from the target material' (with the latter kind of approach being the *polar opposite* of the conventional educational approach to teaching and learning). Thus, when the conscious mind takes over, unconscious quantum learning grinds to a halt (an insight that Rudolf Steiner clearly had himself in relation to young children's consciousness); and 'This is the most common mistake that teachers make, since it is very difficult to adjust pedagogical practice to absolute faith in the enormous capability of the unconscious'. Carl Rogers' important thinking around the notion of 'freedom to learn' is also surely relevant here; and there is also a rich potential for cross-fertilization between these 'new paradigm' perspectives and the kinds of deconstructive, post-structuralist thinking exemplified in Hillevi Lenz Taguchi's Chapter 15.

In **Chapter 22**, and in what we believe to be a unique 'first' in the early years literature, the ex chair of the Education Select Committee, *Barry Sheerman*, has laid out in detail an insightful policy-making perspective, from the vantage-point of his key position over many years as chairman of the parliamentary Select Committee. Barry shows the extent to which early childhood has become a key aspect of policy-making over the past decade or so, and describes the role his committee had in this process. At a number of points, he touches on the 'too much, too soon' theme – writing, for example, of how his committee became 'convinced … that formal learning should not be thrust upon children too early'; that 'we worried that some schools would transform the reception class into the first part of Key Stage 1'; and that 'the Select Committee in March 2009 … did recommend that the [EYFS] Early Learning Goals should apply to slightly older children, so that they are genuinely something that children at the end of the fifth year would be able to achieve rather than having unrealistic expectations for younger children'.

Barry Sheerman also interestingly concedes that 'Ministers might have been persuaded that a prescriptive early year's curriculum that even the less well-trained could deliver, alongside more inspection

and assessment, could be the quickest and cheapest way of transforming the system' – a concern to which Open EYE has consistently referred since 2007. His hope that 'the Education Committee will play a part in the restoration of balance between trusting parents, families and professionals instead of allowing too much interference from central government – a softer and more flexible policy stance' is certainly one which the contributors to this book will share.

Not wishing to spare Barry's blushes, Open EYE had a wonderful experience of meeting with him at Westminster, and of really being listened to thoughtfully and open-mindedly; and as pointed out in Chapter 20, it seems ironic that the very qualities that we believe a really effective education Secretary of State should possess seem to occur in abundance in those very parliamentarians who are not in government itself, like Barry and Annette Brooke. Perhaps there are lessons for government here regarding the kinds of qualities that currently seem to dominate the choosing of 'Cabinet material'.

Finally, in their concluding chapter *Wendy Scott and Richard House* draw together the central themes of the book and propose several eminently achievable *recommendations for early years policy-making*. They suggest that the necessarily oppositional stance taken by the Open EYE campaign needs to evolve into constructive engagement with policy-makers and more mainstream educationalists. The recommendations constitute a first but substantial step in this direction. Significantly, only one of the co-authors (Richard) is a member of Open EYE, so this collaborative chapter illustrates how it is possible for activist campaigners and respected authorities in the field to work constructively together to produce a set of proposals which, if implemented, would be of inestimable benefit to young children's healthy development and well-being.

This 'recommendations' section, closely informed by theory, research and practitioner experience, is the one that politicians, journalists and perhaps academics may wish to go to first, as it provides pointers to the practical policy changes behind which all these interests can unite in the cause of arresting premature pressures on young children – a concern which lies at the very heart of this book. Indeed, this concluding chapter locates the concerns explored in the book within the wider cultural context of *the erosion of childhood*, heralding what Wendy Ellyatt has termed 'moving *from awareness to action*', through the anticipated development of a new grass-roots cultural movement centred on the overarching theme of the erosion

of childhood, which is now of such concern to so many people (see www.savechildhood.net).

Picking up, finally, on the theme of Grethe Hooper Hansen's provocative chapter, one of the defining features of 'the modern mind' is the arrogance that the conscious, control-fixated ego demonstrates in assuming, first, that human learning is overwhelmingly conscious, and so it is at the conscious level that we need to focus in order to construct effective pedagogical practices. But if this is just plain wrong – which Steiner, Montessori, Lozanov, Guy Claxton and a host of psychoanalytic thinkers believe it to be – then *we will almost certainly have to quite fundamentally re-think our whole approach to working with young children*. There are many clues in this book to the way in which this 'paradigm shift' might appropriately begin to take form; and at the very least, we can begin by teasing out, and making explicit, just what the metaphysical assumptions are about learning, the 'mind' and intersubjective experience that frameworks like the Early Years Foundation Stage might be making – and I venture that in the process, we might well be very surprised, and healthily and appropriately disturbed, by what we discover.

But now over to you, the reader, to take this important thinking forward.