Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Stirling

Unit of Assessment: C25 Education

Title of case study: Early Years Pedagogy and Practice

1. Summary of the impact

Pedagogical practices, actions and interactions in early years educational settings are of considerable significance for children's subsequent lives. Stephen's research has influenced provision and practice in Ireland, Australia and the USA, as well as in the countries of the UK. Her work on early years Gaelic provision has shaped national policy in Scotland.

2. Underpinning research

Our research has aimed to develop understanding of the pedagogic actions and interactions which support learning in the early years through a critical exploration of practices in preschool and the first years of primary school. Initially developed by Sally Brown (now emeritus) and Peter Cope (retired) during the 1990s, our early years research developed considerably following a major study commissioned by the Scottish Executive immediately following devolution (http://tinyurl.com/msymrxk . It has continued to evolve since then, and is characterised by a strong focus on socio-cultural understandings of children's perspectives and pedagogic practices.

A sustained concern with the impact of implicit and explicit theories of practice on everyday learning has been a characteristic of the empirical work (e.g. our study of the implementation of an 'active learning' pedagogy in primary school - Stephen, Ellis and Martlew, 2010; Martlew, Stephen and Ellis, 2011) and theoretical writing such as Stephen (2012) *Looking for Theory in Preschool Education* which makes up this body of work. A distinctive feature of these studies of learning in the early years is the continuing attention paid to young children's perspectives. This approach has required methodological innovation (e.g. Stephen, 2003 and Stephen et al, 2008) and revealed important differences between adult preconceptions and children's views on what is satisfactory and engaging. Further, there is often a significant gap between the thinking of those who are concerned with policy and curriculum and the approach of practitioners working directly with children.

Stephens has developed this focus on pedagogic practices and the outcomes for children in her more recent work on Gaelic-medium learning. This research on Gaelic pre-school immersion examines the pedagogic issues arising from a predominantly English home environment, identifying factors that inhibit the acquisition of Gaelic as well as developing pedagogic approaches and curricular models that support it.

Our studies of young children's experiences with digital technologies funded by ESRC extended the domains explored but sustained the focus on exploring pedagogy, the influence of context and the perspectives of all involved in learning interactions, including children. The need for proactive support for learning with technologies identified in preliminary studies and in the TLRP *Interplay* project conceptualised and exemplified this support as distal and proximal guided interaction. The ESRC-funded studies of learning and playing with technologies at home identified opportunities for learning at home which are not matched in educational settings. Evidence from these investigations about the pedagogical practices of parents and children's perspectives on and motives for engaging with technology, published by Routledge in its TLRP Gateway series, has extended socio-cultural thinking about children's learning and challenged the assumptions of practitioners.

3. References to the research

Stephen, C & Cope, P (2003) An inclusive perspective on transition to primary school, *European Educational Research Journal*, 2(2): 262-76 (https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/1650) Impact

factor 0.8 (SCOPUS)

Stephen C & Brown S (2004) The culture of practice in Preschool Provision: Outsider and insider perspectives. *Research Papers in Education*, 19(3): 323-344 (https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/1667). Impact factor 0.646 (SSCI)

Stephen C (2010) Pedagogy: The Silent Partner in Early Years Learning. *Early Years*, 30(3): 15-28 (https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/2499).

Plowman L, Stephen C & McPake J (2010) *Growing Up With Technology: Young Children Learning in a Digital World.* London; Routledge.

Stephen, C., Ellis, J. & Martlew, J. (2010) Taking active learning into the primary school: a matter of new practices? *International Journal of Early Years Education,* 18(4): 315-329. (https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/2803) Impact factor 0.56 (SCOPUS)

Stephen, C, McPake, J & McLeod, W (2012) Playing and learning in another language: ensuring good quality early years education in a language revitalisation programme, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 20(1), 21-33 (https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/3164) Impact factor 0.537 (SSCI)

The originality and significance of the research represented in these and other peer reviewed publications by Stephen and colleagues is evidenced by the substantial number of downloads (at present, few early years journals are indexed in SSCI). For example, Stephen & Cope's 2003 paper, based on our study of *All day provision for 3- to 4-year olds,* has been in the journal's top 4 downloads for five years. Stephen (2010) was listed in the Routledge Class of 2011 as the most downloaded paper in Early Years during 2010 and a paper by Martlew, Stephen and Ellis (2011) was in the Routledge Class of 2012.

Grants awarded by ESRC and the British Academy were subject to peer review, user and expert scrutiny; the work funded by the Scottish Executive (now the Scottish Government) was awarded following competitive tendering and evaluation by government research analysts.

- Interplay: Play, Learning and ICT in Pre-school Education. ESRC/TLRP, £88,600, 2003-2005. RES 139-25-0006
- Entering e-Society: Young Children's Development of e-Literacy. ESRC/e-Society Programme, £142,800, 2005-2007. RES 341-25-0034
- ESRC Seminar Series: Critical Issues for Preschool Education: Towards a Research Agenda, ESRC, £11, 058, 2007- 2008. RES 451-26-0367
- Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home. ESRC, £420,500, 2008-2011. RES -062-23-0507
- Quality Pre-school Education Provision: Staffing and Staff Development. Scottish Executive, £10,500 , 1997-1998
- All Day Provision for 3- and 4-Year olds Scottish Executive. £74,300, 1999-2000 and extension study 2000-2001
- Review of Gaelic Medium Early Years and Childcare Provision, Scottish Government, £45,729, 2009
- Young Children Learning Gaelic: towards an effective pedagogy. British Academy Small Grant, £7,496, 2010-11

4. Details of the impact

Early years policy

Stephen's research on pedagogy as a neglected dimension of early years teaching, and particularly her notions of proximal and distal guided interaction in play and learning, influenced the early years policies of the Irish Department of Education and Science (2010, http://tinyurl.com/mgotmkj). Stephen's definition of curriculum, and emphasis on understanding children's engagement in experiences, has shaped the Government of South Australia's approach to early years policies. In particular, it influenced their 'Reconceptualising Reception' initiative, established in 2008 as a practitioner inquiry project (http://tinyurl.com/mnzc9nd).

Stephen's research on children's learning and play with digital technologies has influenced policy and practice guidance and strategies for technology use in early years settings in Scotland and beyond. A report on guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage in England by Aubrey and

Dahl for BECTA (2008) adopted Plowman and Stephen's concept of guided interaction to denote the ways in which adults can support children's encounters with technology and has made use of their examples of distal and proximal guided interaction. A White Paper on the Digital World of the Child for the Pearson Foundation (2010) uses findings from Entering e-Society (Stephen et al, 2008) on children's varying reactions to digital resources to support policies that recognise age-appropriate processing speed. In the USA the 2012 joint position statement on digital technologies from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center cites the work of Plowman and Stephen (2005, 2007) on the mediating role of teachers and the need for developmentally appropriate practice. The 2012 UNESCO report on ICT and early childhood education summarises the perceived risks based on the work of Stephen and Plowman (2003) and draws on Stephen and Plowman (2006) to explain how practitioner actions can enhance children's encounters with technologies.

Gaelic language learning: policy
The research on Gaelic learning in family and other pre-school settings has influenced national policies for language development. Màiri Nic Ille Mhaoil, Head of Education and Learning at Bòrd na Gàidhlig, wrote in October 2013 that: *Your research has influenced our thinking about the developments that are needed if we are to ensure high quality early years education and effective language learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool settings. As a result of the research we incorporated an intention to 'coordinate, support and develop all aspects of Gaelic learning for 0-5 years' and to act on the findings of the Early Years research into The Gaelic-medium Early Years Strategy 2013-17. The research findings are reflected in the strategic priority in the National Plan (2012-17) to improve the quality and availability of voluntary-led Gaelic pre-school activities and statutory early years education and in the specific intentions mentioned regarding the supply of resources, encouraging children's engagement with Gaelic beyond the preschool setting and professional development opportunities.*
Furthermore, the Scottish Government selected Stephen and colleagues to present the Scottish input at the 2012 seminar organised by the British-Irish Council Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages Group to share best practice and inform future policy (http://tinyurl.com/d87r59o).

Gaelic language learning: teaching
The research has also impacted on teaching. As a result of the research, Stòrlann, the national Gaelic educational resource agency, funded the localisation of a multimedia app for mobile devices (Ar stòiridh) to help children in Gaelic-medium nurseries tell their story in Gaelic (http://tinyurl.com/qflvac). Stòrlann then invited Stephen and McPake to train practitioners at their annual professional development conference. Education Scotland publishes staff development resources based on the findings from the British Academy funded study on its website.

Initial teacher education
Finally, the research has influenced initial teacher education and professional development in early years education. This influence stretches way beyond Stirling. Stephen's 2006 literature review, commissioned by the Scottish Executive to inform the development of the early years element of the new national curriculum in Scotland (http://tinyurl.com/4krnqnd), has been widely used as a resource for students of childhood practice and early years education. Stephen and Plowman authored invited chapters on young children's use of technologies for international handbooks (e.g. the forthcoming *Routledge International Handbook of Play*) and for books for practitioners and students in Norway and the UK. Stephen's writing on the value of articulating pedagogic practices is cited and discussed in standard textbooks for students on Early Years Foundation Degrees and Childhood Studies degrees by Whalley and Allen (2010) and Rogers (2011). A book chapter by Stephen about children's experiences with technology, originally published in Clark and Tucker (2010), was reprinted in an Open University course reader (*Extending Professional Practice in the Early Years*, Miller et al, 2012) aimed at those undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate training in early years, and practitioners involved in continuing their professional development.

Wider public engagement
Stephens' research has been communicated more widely, informing debate among professional practitioners and improving understanding of educational research among a wider public. She was a

co-ordinator of and contributor to the Digital Childhoods programme of events, mounted in 2011 with support from the Scottish Universities' Insight Institute to inform the policy, commercial and practitioner agendas for the next decade. She also authored the Digital Childhoods Research Briefing on 'Playing and Learning with Technologies'. In addition, she has spoken to a wide variety of professional and policy groups, including Learning and Teaching Scotland's early years conference on Curriculum for Excellence (2009) and presented the 2012 Annual Public Lecture of the Northern Ireland Branch of the British Psychological Society**.** Her research has also been cited in the media (eg BBC Scotland, 19/4/2013).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

'Key Evidence to Inform the Essence of Integrated Early Childhood Pedagogy', in *Professional Development for Early Childhood Professionals: Examining Pedagogy in Early Childhood*, Walsh, G. et al., Department of Education and Science, Republic of Ireland, 2010
http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/eye_exam_pedagogy.pdf

EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND CURRICULUM, Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning published by Office of Early Childhood and Statewide Services, Department of Education and Children's Services, government of South Australia.
http://www.earlyyears.sa.edu.au/files/links/final_lit_review.pdf

A review of the evidence on the use of ICT in the Early Years Foundation Stage Professor Carol Aubrey & Sarah Dahl, Early Childhood Research Unit, University of Warwick.
http://e- learningcentre.ascensioninternet.co.uk/Resource/CMS/Assets/5c10130e-6a9f-102c-a0be-003005bbceb4/form_uploads/review_early_years_foundation.pdf

Gaelic Language Action Plan http://www.gaidhlig.org.uk/Downloads/Ginealach_Ur_na_Gaidhlig_B.pdf
National Plan for Gaelic Language 2012-2017
http://www.gaidhlig.org.uk/Downloads/National%20Gaelic%20Langauge%20Plan%202012%20-%202017.pdf

Position Statement 2012 Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, NAEYC/Fred Rogers Center
http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PS_technology_WEB2.pdf

UNESCO: Recognizing the potential of ICT in early childhood education, Ivan Kalaš, 2010
http://iite.unesco.org/pics/publications/en/files/3214673.pdf

A White Paper: The digital world of young children
http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/downloads/EmergentLiteracy-WhitePaper.pdf

Digital Childhoods Seminar Series http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/research/digitalchildhoods/

'Veiledet samspill I barnehagen: undersøkelse av hvordan voksne kan støtte barns læring med digitaler medien' by Stephen & Plowman in *Medialisert barndom. Digital kultur i barnehagen* (Mediatized childhood. Digital culture in preschool) 2012, eds. H. Jæger & J. K. Torgersen, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget. This collection is intended for students in early years education
http://www.universitetsforlaget.no/nettbutikk/medialisert-barndom.html