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Teaching Early Years Foundation Stage

Edited by Jo Basford and Elaine Hodson



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Stage**

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Editors
Jo Basford and Elaine Hodson

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Introduction

From September 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is recognised as a distinct and unique age phase, supported by its own statutory framework. It is as a result of consultation (and at the time of writing, contentious debate) with key stakeholders in the field concerning the determinants of effective, high-quality Early Years practice. Interestingly the term 'curriculum' is no longer evident in the framework and there is now a definite commitment to single, play-based framework for early learning and care. Whether those critics, who felt the guidance was introducing the formal elements of education to very young children too soon, will be appeased, remains to be seen. Previously, the Foundation Stage had been the phase of learning concerned with three to five year old children, and trainee teachers had been required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the curriculum guidance which was pertinent to this age phase. However, EYFS takes account of the care, learning and developmental needs of *all* children from birth to the end of the Reception Year. As an Early Years teacher, this has significant implications for the knowledge, skills and understanding you will be required to demonstrate to teach in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Although you may find yourself working mainly with the older children within this phase, those between 30 and 60 months, it is vital that you understand the way that young children learn and develop from birth and the fact that they develop at different rates, and in different ways. Young children do not fit neatly into 'developmental boxes'!

The Early Years Foundation Stage is supported by a series of key principles which are underpinned by research into children's care, learning and developmental needs. The principles are split into four key themes, which each have four corresponding commitments.

A Unique Child – every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Positive Relationships – children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Enabling Environment – the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

Learning and development – children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and development are equally important and interconnected.

(DfES, 2007, Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage)

Chapter 1 of this book outlines the historical context and development of Early Years practice and provides an overview of the range of settings which represent the Early Years Foundation Stage. It then explores the commitments concerned with each of the themes in further depth. This chapter is mainly concerned with standards Q1, Q3, Q14 and Q15.

By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, most children will be expected to reach a number of Early Learning Goals which are linked to six areas of learning and development.

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communicating, Language and Literacy
- Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World
- Physical Development
- Creative Development

By developing your knowledge and understanding of how the principles are translated into practice – you will be in a better position to ensure that all children reach their potential, and achieve their Early Learning Goals. The aim of this book is to support and guide you through your own professional journey to becoming a successful Early Years teacher.

In Chapter 2 we recognise the central importance of each child's personal, social and emotional development, and the significant impact this has on a child's care, learning and developmental needs. (Q18 and Q19). This includes the importance of acknowledging and celebrating each child's unique background.

The next five chapters focus specifically on the other areas of learning and development, and address: Communication, Language and Literacy; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development and Creative Development. These chapters relate specifically to Standards Q14, Q15, Q16 and Q17. The underlying principles, themes and commitments pertinent to each of the areas of learning and development are exemplified in each chapter.

We have dedicated Chapter 8 entirely to ICT. Some readers may feel this is contentious, and there are indeed opposing views regarding the appropriateness of using ICT with very young children. We live in a media and technologically driven society. Information and communications technologies are explicit in the everyday lives of our children. They provide a context and motivation for learning for many children, and this is our rationale for committing a whole chapter to this area.

In Chapter 9 we lead you through the practicalities of documenting children's learning through a consideration of observation, planning and assessment strategies which are a key aspect of your role in tracking children's learning journeys. (Q11, Q12, Q13)

The final two chapters of this book are concerned with partnerships and relationships. Chapter 10 explores the fundamental importance of establishing authentic relationships with a child's parent/carer and family. Chapter 11 looks beyond the relationships you build within your typical classroom, and looks at the issues, challenges and ultimately benefits of working in a wider context with other professionals to ensure every child achieves the five outcomes as outlined in Every Child Matters.

We hope that the structure of this book will help you to make connections between the theory of child development, effective pedagogy, and the reality of working in an Early Years context. A number of tasks and classroom stories have been included in each chapter to help you make these connections. We have also provided you with further reading and

research which will help you learn more about this important phase of a child's learning and development.

Working with young children requires a high degree of passion, enthusiasm and a genuine interest in what young children are about. You may well find yourself at times working in an environment where standards and target setting compete with a principled belief that children are entitled to a play-based framework where active engagement lies at the heart of the way children learn, develop and reach their full potential. We hope that this book will be just the start of your journey.

Jo Basford
Elaine Hodson

Manchester Metropolitan University

June 2008

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1

The Early Years Foundation Stage: principles into practice

Jo Basford

Chapter objectives

By the end of this chapter you should have:

- a working knowledge of the structure and content of the Early Years Foundation Stage;
- an understanding of the underlying principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage;
- an understanding of the aspects and commitments of the framework and how they are integral to effective pedagogy in supporting children to achieve the Early Learning Goals.

This chapter addresses the following Professional Standards for QTS:

Q3, Q18

Introduction

The establishment of the Foundation Stage by the DfEE (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF]) in 1999 was a major landmark in the education of young children. For the first time, the education of children between the ages of three and five years of age was recognised as a distinct and very important stage of education. The general aim of the Foundation Stage was to make a positive contribution to children's early development and learning, by providing children with activities and experiences which would help them make progress and develop in all areas of learning.

As we move towards the end of the first decade in the twenty-first century, the government has continued to demonstrate its commitment to our youngest children through the expansion of policy and initiatives. In 2002, the government published the *Birth to Three Matters* framework – guidance for all practitioners responsible for the care and education of children from birth to three. In 2003, *Every Child Matters* was published. The five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* became law through the Children Act 2004, and promoted the idea that all children should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. For the first time in English history, there is an expectation that a set of commitments, the five outcomes, underpin the work of all professionals working with children and families.

The five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* are:

- be healthy;
- stay safe;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution;
- achieve economic well-being.

In 2003, the *National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding* were also published. These set out the welfare requirements for all children attending sessional daycare, and formed the basis for inspection by Ofsted.

Over the last decade, the groundswell of interest in the field of Early Years has continued to influence policy and practice. The Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading (Rose Review 2006) builds on research concerning the effective teaching of early reading. Research into effective early years practice, such as the Effective Provision of Preschool Education Project (EPPE) and Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL) both provide ethnographic evidence of the factors which contribute to quality teaching and learning experiences for children. Additionally, the growing interest in approaches to Early Years pedagogy beyond the British Isles, such as New Zealand's Early Years framework 'Te Whariki' and the Reggio Emilia approach in northern Italy, have played a key role in forming a new framework which takes account of the care, learning and development needs of children from birth to five years of age – the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The *Early Years Foundation Stage* (2007) builds on and has been developed from the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (2000), *Birth to Three Matters* (2002) and the *National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding* (2003). The general aim of the EYFS is to ensure a 'coherent and flexible approach to care and learning so that whatever setting parents choose, they can be confident that their child will receive a quality experience that supports their development and learning'.

The underlying principles of the EYFS will be explored later in this chapter. It is important, first, to have a good understanding of how the Early Years Foundation Stage is now defined. Although your training and practice opportunities will be mainly focused within the context of a school environment, working with children in the three to five age range, you will need to understand about children's prior Early Years Foundation Stage experiences. This is especially important when you consider Standards Q5, Q18 and Q21 and the importance of understanding about the impact of children's previous experiences on their learning when they enter your class.

The range of Early Years Foundation Stage settings

Today, a large number of children will have attended an early childhood setting, or been cared for by another adult, before they reach the statutory school age.

The type of setting or childcare a parent chooses can depend on a number of factors. Some families require some form of daycare provision if they are working or have other commitments. Other parents may choose to look for part-time or sessional provision in order to provide their child with the experience of being with other children, away from the home environment and as a way of 'getting them ready for school'. There is a wide variety of provision available for young children, each catering for the diverse needs of children and their parents. These include:

- playgroup;
- childminder;
- nanny;
- informal care by family members;
- day nursery;
- local authority maintained nursery;
- children's centre nursery.

The government provides nursery education grant funding for all children in the term after their third birthday. This entitles parents to 15 hours of childcare for 38 weeks of the year. If a child has not experienced any care outside the home, this is traditionally the time that a child begins to attend some form of Early Years setting. Most children will remain in their settings until they enter the Reception class. There is an expectation that, regardless of the nature of the provision, all children are entitled to high-quality Early Years provision. The standards for welfare and learning are outlined in the *Statutory Guidance* for the EYFS.

It is important, at this stage, to acknowledge the range of experiences children will have had before they come into your care. As an Early Years teacher, you must be very sensitive to the way in which those experiences may have differed. This can consequently affect the way in which each child may settle into your setting. Factors such as adult-to-child ratios, the organisation of the learning environment and the daily routine can all have a huge impact on a child's personal, social and emotional well-being. Further reference to this is made in Chapter 2.

CLASSROOM STORY

The following classroom story illustrates the range of settings one child encountered in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Try to identify the factors which may have contributed to the way in which he settled in each new provision.

Tom had attended playgroup group for two morning sessions per week from the age of two and a half. The playgroup was situated in the local village hall. There was usually a ratio of at least four children to one adult. These consisted of the employed playgroup staff and parents who helped out on a rota basis. During the session, the children were free to play with any of the toys which the adults had selected. The adults planned a specific practical activity each day. Groups of four children at a time were invited to join in with the activity, under the careful direction of the supervising adult.

At the age of three years and eight months, Tom was eligible for a place at the local authority Nursery, which was attached to the school he would later be attending. Tom was allocated five afternoon sessions. The Nursery was a purpose-built building, and had its own outside play area, which was shared with the Reception class. The staff consisted of a teacher in charge, and two fully qualified nursery practitioners, equating to a ratio of one adult to 12 children. The Nursery was organised using a specific daily routine. Time was allocated for separate adult-directed and child-initiated activities, where the children were engaged in a plan-do-review process in which they made decisions about what they wished to play with.

When Tom first joined the Nursery, staff were concerned that he seemed tired and somewhat tearful – especially near the end of the week. During the child-initiated activities, Tom also needed a lot of encouragement to select his own toys. Through sensitive intervention with his key worker, and regular opportunities to share information with his parents, Tom soon became an active member of the nursery class.

Tom joined the Reception class the following year. He remained happy and settled, and particularly enjoyed helping the new nursery children to find a bicycle to play on, during the outside play sessions. Tom's parents were delighted with the apparent ease of his transition from the nursery to the Reception class.

The principles for the Early Years Foundation Stage

The underlying principles of effective, high-quality practice have been debated, documented, amended and supplemented over the past 20 years by a number of authoritative people in the Early Years field (see Rumbold, 1990; Ball, 1994 and Bruce, 1997, for example). These principles look beyond the content of what children learn. They are concerned with the factors which contribute to a child's emotional, social, physical and of course cognitive development – in other words, children's 'holistic' development.

They are concerned with our beliefs and values about the way young children learn and the skills needed to be an effective teacher. These beliefs and values include a consideration of the uniqueness of each individual child; the central role of authentic relationships between adults and children; the importance of the environment; and the significance of the interactions which occur between the child and his environment.

PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK

Look at the 'Principles for EYFS' (Figure 1.1). What examples of Early Years practice have you seen that illustrate any of these principles?

A unique child – every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Positive relationships – children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Enabling environment – the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

Learning and development – children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected.

(DfES, 2007, *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*)

Figure 1.1 Principles for EYFS

The principles which guide the work of all Early Years practitioners are grouped into four themes, and four interrelated commitments. Thinking about these principles in relation to your own beliefs and practice will help you develop your own philosophy of learning and teaching, or pedagogical beliefs. It is important that you begin to develop your own philosophy. This may change either subtly or dramatically as you gain more experience and develop your own understanding of teaching in the Foundation Stage. By the time you become a fully qualified teacher, your philosophy should be evident in everything you do.

By exploring these four themes in more depth, you will begin to see how they, and their associated commitments, support you in your work within the EYFS. It is important that you spend time familiarising yourself with all the documents contained in the EYFS framework. The principles-into-practice cards and the associated EYFS CD-ROM in particular will provide

you with in-depth support, and outline further academic theory which will underpin your practice.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the four themes and commitments in more depth.

A unique child

Within this theme, your commitment will be concerned with appreciating that every child is unique and brings along his/her own unique experiences, interests, skills and knowledge. It is then your responsibility to provide for each child's well-being within a safe, secure and inclusive environment.

The four commitments are as follows.

- 1.1 Child development** Babies and children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional – is of equal importance.
- 1.2 Inclusive practice** The diversity of individuals and of their communities is valued and respected. No child or family is discriminated against.
- 1.3 Keeping safe** Young children are vulnerable. They develop resilience when their physical and psychological well-being is protected by adults.
- 1.4 Health and well-being** Children's health is an integral part of their emotional, mental, social, and spiritual well-being.

Child Development

Exploring the commitments to this theme, you may find that they raise some important questions. Understanding that every area of development is equally important, and that children develop at different rates and in different ways, means that your practice needs to be developmentally appropriate. This is a term which is used frequently by Early Years practitioners – but what does it actually mean? It is useful to define development in terms of the way a child's brain, body, abilities and behaviours become more complex as s/he grows and matures (DfES, 2007).

The EYFS categorisation of children within six broad developmental stages is based on the notion that development usually follows a predictable pattern. The children you will be working with will normally fall within the final two stages, 30–50 months and 40–60 months +. However, when you are planning learning experiences for children you will need to refer to both earlier and later stages of learning to take into account the individual needs of all the children in your care. The EYFS guidance outlines a broad expectation of typical patterns of development. Therefore, before you begin to plan learning experiences for the children in your class, it is important that you understand their developmental needs. You may find it useful to consider a child's development in relation to four specific aspects, namely:

- physical and mental well-being;
- responses to experiences on offer;
- relationships with family members, practitioners and other children;
- communication skills.

A child who experiences difficulties in any of these aspects may not be best placed to meet their full learning potential, and may not necessarily be performing at the final two stages of development. For example, a child who regularly misses breakfast may well be feeling hungry by snack time. You could see dips in energy levels and concentration which then have an impact on how they may respond to the experiences planned for them. Likewise, if a child has experienced a change in family circumstances, then she may well seem preoccupied, unhappy and perhaps react more extremely to conflict situations. It is your responsibility to ensure individual children are supported appropriately and sensitively during difficult times. If you know each child well, and have an understanding of their 'personal story', then you will be in a much better place to intervene as early as possible in supporting their needs. It also is very important that you share your concerns with other staff with whom you work and with parents/carers,. In a busy classroom, it is easy to miss small, but significant things. Several sets of eyes and ears are always better than one.

Inclusive practice

The EYFS represents a child – and family – centred, egalitarian, anti-discriminatory and inclusive approach to meeting children's needs and interests that promotes their learning and development. Inclusion is important because it promotes a culture of equality of opportunity and high achievement for all children, by encouraging the development of more flexible attitudes, policies and every day practices. It also promotes community cohesion and integration through understanding of and respect for others.

(DfES, 2007)

It is a significant part of your role as an EYFS practitioner to act as an advocate for the rights of the child as set out above, by meeting their diverse needs, and ensuring that the best possible progress is made by each individual.

However, meeting the diverse needs of all children can sometimes pose challenges for teachers, for a variety of reasons. For example, you may feel you have very limited knowledge and understanding about Islam and don't know how to communicate with a parent who does not speak very much English. Similarly, you may not be aware of the strategies to employ in order to ensure a hearing impaired child is able to engage in role play. You may be aware that there is a very able child in your setting who has exceeded the Early Learning Goals, and you are not sure how to differentiate the activities you plan to meet his/her needs. These are just a few of the varied and sometimes complex situations you may encounter. There will always be a number of outside agencies and specialist professionals who you will be able to contact for support (see Chapter 11). Your role is to think about the needs of all young children in your class, and reflect on the way you might begin to meet them.

REFLECTIVE TASK

Think about the most recent class you have worked with. Consider the following questions in relation to what happens on a daily basis in your classroom.

- When planning children's learning experiences, have I taken account of each child's rich and varied background?
- What range of teaching strategies can I use which are most suitable for children's learning needs?