

right from the **start**

early years education: policy and practice

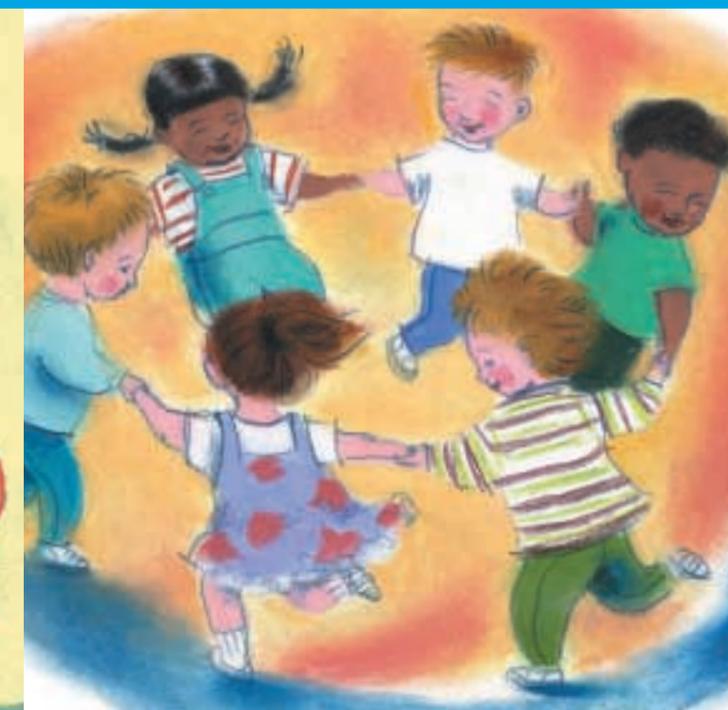


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ATL Product Code: PED05
Date: 1991, updated 1999 and 2003
ISBN: 1 902466 18 7
Price: Free (ATL members)
£9.99 (non-members)

Association of Teachers and Lecturers





ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication has been written for readers with an interest in early years education. It provides information about developments in early years services and sets out the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' priorities and goals for early years policy and practice.

The term *early years education* is often used to describe non-statutory pre-school provision. The introduction of a foundation stage in England is an acknowledgement that early years education also takes place in school and with children of statutory school age. In England, foundation stage education is provided to the end of the reception year. It is likely to include children to the end of Key Stage 1 in Wales and the end of Year 2 in Northern Ireland. Therefore, for the purposes of this publication the term *early years education* describes publicly-funded education for children between three and approximately six years old.

The term *early years services* includes both education and childcare. Although education and care are firmly intertwined in the early years, this publication is concerned first and foremost with policy and practice with respect to education.

Early years policy is under review in both Wales and Northern Ireland and it is not possible to describe statutory provision in any great detail. Some terms used in *Right from the start* may also not apply to Wales or Northern Ireland. However, the underlying principles of good early years practice highlighted here are applicable throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Right from the start was first published in 1991, it was updated in 1999. This third edition has been produced to take into account the changes that have occurred in early years education over the past three years.

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BACKGROUND

Developments in early years services from 1997

In the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (1997), the Government recognised that children benefit from early years education and laid down plans for its expansion in England through Early Years Development Partnerships and Plans. In the same year, the Welsh Office published the White Paper *Building Excellent Schools Together*, which set out plans for Wales. At that time, early years provision was planned in each local authority area through an Early Years Development Plan by a body representing all the relevant early years interests in the area – the Early Years Development Partnership.

The proposals acknowledged the need to develop services that respond to changes in society and meet the needs of families and the community. Their long-term aim was to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to early years education and childcare where providers work in partnership with one another to enhance opportunities for young children.

In the 1998 Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge*, the Government acknowledged the links between education and care, and Early Years Development Plans in England were extended to cover childcare. It proposed that Early Years Development Plans should be extended to cover childcare, becoming *Early Years Development and Childcare Plans*. There is now an approved Early Years Development and Childcare Plan for every local authority. The Green Paper also acknowledged that the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were responsible for policy relating to the development of childcare in these parts of the UK. Accordingly, the Green Paper *National Childcare Strategy in Wales* was issued in June 1998. A consequence of this consultation was that the National Assembly expanded the remit and membership of Early Years Development Partnerships (which exist in each LEA in Wales), which became Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

In September 1998, it became necessary for Early Years Development Partnerships to ensure a free part-time education place for all four-year-olds whose parents wanted it. [The Government plans to ensure part-time provision for all three-year-olds by September 2004.] Providers must now fall into one of the following categories:

- maintained schools, including foundation schools
- institutions registered by Local Authority Social Services under Part 10 (or by Ofsted's Early Years Directorate under Part 10A from September 2001) of the Children Act 1989 or a day care provider which is otherwise exempt from registration
- independent schools finally registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools at the DfES
- independent schools provisionally registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools at the DfES (in the case of schools for children with statements of special educational needs, with the consent of the Secretary of State or with the approval of the authority which maintains the statement)
- non-maintained special schools
- portage schemes registered with the National Portage Association

- childminders registered under section 71(1)(a) of the Children Act, and working in an NCMA Approved Childminding Network and accredited through the Network as promoting the Early Learning Goals.¹

In Wales, the establishment of Early Years Development Plans was first addressed in the White Paper *Building Excellent Schools Together* (1997). *Guidance on Early Years Education*, issued by the Welsh Office in January 1998, set out the framework. An Early Years Development Plan was established in each LEA by the academic year 1998-99. Further advice, *Guidance for Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in Wales* (Circular 7/99), was issued in 1999 to extend the role of the Plans in taking forward the national childcare strategy in Wales and drawing up local childcare plans. Early Years Development Plans were renamed *Early Years Development and Childcare Plans*. These partnerships involve colleagues from all sectors in working together to co-ordinate service provision. Such an initiative inevitably means cutting across departmental boundaries, where well-established territories can sometimes be closely guarded.

In September 2000, the foundation stage, for children from three years old to the end of the reception year, was introduced in England. All early years providers offering Government-funded places are part of the foundation stage. This has not changed the statutory age at which children must begin school, which remains the term after a child's fifth birthday.

In September 2001, Ofsted became responsible through its Early Years Directorate for the regulation of childminding and day care in England. Estyn has been responsible for the inspection of early years settings in the non-maintained sector in Wales since 1999. The document *The Inspection of Educational Provision for Children Before Compulsory School Age* (1999) defines these settings as 'those day nurseries, play groups and day centres in the independent, private or voluntary sectors that provide education and are eligible for funding by the local authorities under Early Years Development Plans'.



¹ DfEE Requirements of Nursery Education Grant 2001-2002

Funding arrangements

Early years services in England are funded mainly through a combination of the Childcare Grant, the Nursery Education Grant, the Standard Spending Assessment and the New Opportunities Fund.

As part of the programme for the expansion of early years services, Government funding will be made available in England to ensure a free part-time education place to all three-year-olds by September 2004. By the same date, it has also pledged to create 1.6 million new childcare places, 70,000 of which will be for pre-school children in disadvantaged areas. Money is also now available to help playgroups move to day care or 'wrap around care' provision.

The National Assembly for Wales funds (via Local Authorities) the early years sector, but money for education is not safeguarded. In order to upgrade early years provision, the National Assembly has estimated that an extra investment of £12m annually from 2003 is required. This increase has been incorporated into forward budget plans. 'Objective 1' and other European funding is being considered for the establishment of Early Years Centres in Wales. Ministers aim to provide a place for every three-year-old in the setting of parental choice by 2004, and funding is being provided to achieve this.



Quality

The Planning Guidance for Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (2001-2002) has set a number of strategic targets aimed at raising the quality of early years provision:

- to provide affordable, accessible, good quality childcare in every neighbourhood
- to ensure a good quality free education place for every three and four-year-old
- to extend the network of qualified teachers with early years specialist knowledge
- to improve childcare services for children with special needs
- to identify and train SENCOs
- to increase the number of young people and sector workers achieving a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification in early years education, childcare and playwork
- to better integrate childcare and early education, in particular to meet family needs in a wider way
- to ensure that 94 per cent of early years settings inspected by Ofsted are making satisfactory or better progress in delivering the early learning goals by September 2004.

Guidance for Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in Wales (1999), covers strategies in Wales.

ATL'S CHARTER FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

Everyone benefits from early years education – the child (who is more likely to succeed at primary school), the family, the school, and society in general. It is during the early years that children begin forming attitudes about themselves and the world in which they live. Access to good-quality education at this important stage in their lives helps to ensure that these attitudes are positive and that they have firm foundations upon which to base the rest of their education.

This section sets out the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' key priorities for good early years education.

Valuing early years teachers

The knowledge and skills of the professional early years teacher are too often under-estimated or misunderstood – perhaps because effective early years teachers make their work look easy! Qualified early years teachers are often believed to be 'just minding' the children – despite the fact that they have successfully completed a demanding four-year training course at the same level as that of all other teachers, and have obtained an appropriate PGCE/BEd degree. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that the DfES and LEAs need to examine ways of giving stronger emphasis to the value and status of early years teachers and, in fact, that school governors and headteachers should recognise and value publicly the role that early years departments play in the success of schools.

Early years teachers are increasingly being called upon to take responsibility for supporting practitioners in settings outside school. While it is vital that early years practitioners work together and support each other in developing good quality practice, this is an additional role which needs careful monitoring to ensure that it is an effective means of support, both for practitioners and teachers.

Early years practitioners – qualifications and continuing professional development

Early years education is provided in many different types of settings, and early years practitioners have a wide range of qualifications. Early years education is not an easy option, and although diversity is welcome, high quality is not negotiable. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that it is vital for all staff who are involved in the education of young children to hold a relevant qualification at NVQ level 3 or above.

Early years teaching is a complex skill based on an understanding of children's development and learning, and knowledge of curriculum requirements. In order to provide the best environment for young children's learning, early years specialist teachers and qualified nursery nurses are needed in all settings. All early years staff should have opportunities for continued professional development that do not necessarily take them out of the early years.

Staffing – ratios and responsibilities

Non-school settings have different requirements for the ratio of staff to children, depending on the age of the children. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that early years/foundation stage classes in schools, whether of nursery or reception-aged children, should be staffed so that:

- there are never fewer than two adults working in a foundation stage class or unit at any one time. One should be a trained teacher, the other a trained and qualified nursery nurse. The maximum group size should be 26
- no nursery nurse ever has sole responsibility for an early years/foundation stage class
- all early years practitioners have the non-contact time and support they need to fulfil their many responsibilities. In particular, early years teachers should be given the same opportunities as other members of the school staff to work towards senior management level without having to move 'up' to an older age group.

Early years practice in reception classes

Reception classes should provide good quality early years experiences for all children. Reception teachers should provide a curriculum based on established early years principles and practices – in England, this will mean a curriculum based on QCA's *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.² This, in turn, will demand extra resources, including additional staff, equipment and space.

A curriculum for the early years

The early years curriculum should be based on the strengths and needs of each individual child. Continuity and progression are important at every stage of education, but early years education should not become a forcing ground for later key stages or any national strategy. Good early years practice existed long before any 'national' curriculum, and early years education is important in its own right, building on children's interests and appetite for learning through play in order to achieve educational objectives.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers supports the foundation stage – as exemplified in the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* (QCA, 2000) – although there is an urgent need for discussion about the age at which it ends. Aiming towards the goals, rather than forcing them through formal teaching, will help very young children access later educational opportunities when they reach the appropriate point in their development.

Early years expertise – in each LEA

Every LEA should employ an appropriately-trained and experienced adviser with specific responsibility for early years education. Too often, this responsibility is 'bolted on' to the job of over-worked primary advisers, many of whom have little relevant training or first-hand experience of early years education.

Early years expertise – in the inspection process

When inspecting any early years setting, infant or primary school, Ofsted/Estyn teams should always include at least one inspector with expertise and/or training in the early years. Lack of this expertise should be challenged and reported.

In the drive to create coherent services for young children and their families, it is right that a single body should be responsible for inspecting early years education and childcare. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers fully supports the recommendations from the Education Select Committee³ that there should be a strong element of early years experience in both education and care present in any Ofsted team.

Coordination of early years services

If there is effective and creative liaison between early years educational provision and other services (including health, social services, infant and primary schools and the voluntary and private sectors), expertise and skills can be pooled and continuity of practice achieved.

Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships offer a way forward towards enhanced coordination, which could afford the teaching profession a much-needed opportunity to articulate and promote a wider understanding of the principles and practice that underpin the best of early years education. However, many Partnerships have little representation from the maintained sector, continuing the split between maintained provision on the one hand and private and voluntary provision on the other. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers urges early years educators to seek places on these groups in order to speak for the very young child – and the profession – and to help promote existing, good-quality early years practice.

Attempts have been made in Wales to achieve effective liaison between education providers and other services, particularly those of health and social services. The consultation paper *Children and young people – a framework for partnership* was jointly released by the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Minister for Lifelong Learning in November 2000.

Access to information about childcare and early years education provision

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers fully supports the requirement that Partnerships should publish a diversity of information about childcare and early years education provision – this is provided by the Childcare Information Service in each area.

Nursery teachers and all other professionals who work with children need ready access to high-quality information and training to enable them to achieve the objectives of the Children Act with regard to:

- prevention of family breakdown
- prevention of child abuse
- services for children with special needs, including those with disabilities
- ensuring that due consideration is given to a child's racial origins, cultural and linguistic background, gender and religion.



² Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000.

³ December 2000, HC 33-1

LEARNING MATTERS

Right from the start is concerned with the extent and quality of publicly-funded early years education, and its overwhelming value to the child. The value of active learning through play is emphasised, along with the importance of outdoor space, adequate resources and professional and experienced staff. Early Years Partnerships and LEA Support Services have a responsibility for ensuring that appropriate provision is made for children with special educational needs, and positive action needs to be taken in the early years setting to ensure that culture, race, language and gender differences are respected and embraced through all areas of the curriculum.

Education or care?

Early years provision is characterised by its diversity.⁴ It ranges from care by relatives – still the most common option for working parents – to full-time education in primary schools, with a wide range of public and private services in between.

While it has traditionally been thought that different service providers should concentrate their emphases on either education or care, the Government has now recognised that it is unhelpful – and unnecessary – to maintain rigid distinctions between the two. This idea has long been held by early years staff. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that education is best delivered within a caring environment by responsible adults throughout the early years/school/college continuum.

More importantly however, we take the view that parents or carers, childminders, qualified and unqualified staff, and all other adults who spend time with young children, make an important contribution to their education. High-quality care and education of young children are both skilled tasks, requiring an understanding of children's development and learning. This view is recognised and endorsed through the National Childcare Strategy, which seeks to promote partnership and co-operation between sectors, but there remains a need to argue for a properly trained, qualified and remunerated workforce.



⁴ DES (1990)

Starting with Quality: The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Quality of the Educational Experience Offered to 3- and 4- Year Olds, Chaired by Mrs Angela Rumbold CBE MP London, HMSO (now The Stationery Office)

⁵ Cohen, B (1990)

Caring for Children: The 1990 Report London Family Policy Studies Centre in association with the Scottish Child and Family Alliance. Both of these reports (references 4,5) offer a comprehensive account of different types of provision for under-fives.

Work or play?

Children's minds are not empty vessels into which knowledge can be poured. Children learn best when they are interacting with their environment – which includes people, as well as materials and information – and by discovering how and why things happen. Wendy Scott, when she was Chair of The British Association for Early Childhood Education, confirmed this view: 'We now have the scientific evidence, from brain studies and child development work, to know that three- to six-year-olds learn by doing'.⁶ For adults, 'learning by doing' is often the best way to cultivate a skill; for young children, learning 'hands-on' through play is an essential ingredient in a feast of learning experiences.

Approaches and practices may vary between settings, but there is a broad consensus that an early years curriculum must take full account of children's interest in, and appetite for, play. 'Stimulation, variety, interest, concentration and motivation are equally provided by the play situation... If one adds to this the opportunity to be part of an experience which, although quite possibly demanding, is unthreatening and free from irrelevant constraint and which allows the participant a meaningful interaction within his or her own environment, the advantages of play become even more apparent' writes Janet Moyles.⁷

To the uninitiated, it might appear that children at play in an early years setting are simply trying out a variety of entertaining – and often messy – activities which may, or may not, engage their attention. But in a well-structured early years setting, there is much more going on than first meets the eye. By taking into account the children's previous experiences, current interests and developmental needs, qualified practitioners can make the most of a wide range of learning possibilities which arise spontaneously through play, indoors or outside. Whether children play alone or with other children, and whether play is free or structured, its purpose in the early years setting is not merely to keep children occupied, but rather to contribute in a vital way to their educational development.

Professional early years staff also ensure that children have uninterrupted time in which to explore their environment independently, setting their own challenges and making their own discoveries. They need opportunities to work on specific tasks in collaboration with their peers and time with adults who are able to promote and develop their natural interests. In short, young children learn best when they learn actively, and active learners need:

- access to a wide range of materials
- opportunities to manipulate these materials
- to be able to use language and have access to a rich vocabulary
- the opportunity to make choices
- the interaction of sensitive adults.

⁶ Wendy Scott, Chair of The British Association for Early Childhood Education (BAECE), quoted in the **Times Educational Supplement**, March 1998

⁷ Moyles, J (1999) **Just Playing? The role and status of play in early childhood education**

Opportunities for discovery

The environment in which a young child learns, both indoors and outside, can have a profound effect on the quality of that learning. Children respond most positively to other children and to adults when they feel secure, and it is therefore important for the early years setting to provide a safe and stimulating environment which reflects the cultural backgrounds and interests of all those who attend. The learning environment should meet the child's need for the familiar, offering opportunities for current interests to be pursued and developing skills to be practised and consolidated, while also promoting new challenges and fresh experiences. A well-organised, resource-based environment should provide plentiful opportunities for discovery in all areas of the curriculum.

Ideally, children will have easy and unlimited access to a well-resourced outdoor area. The outdoor environment gives children opportunities to play on a larger scale, enabling them to develop the physical skills and control necessary for future learning. This may be particularly important for boys. It also enables children to be much freer than is possible indoors, allowing them to explore boundaries and take risks.

In order to achieve the optimum learning environment, an early years classroom needs sufficient space, adequate resources and an appropriate number of professionally-qualified staff.

Early years education in the reception class

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that any classes with children below statutory school age should be staffed, as a minimum standard, at the same level as maintained nurseries (that is, a maximum of 13 children to each trained adult). A class of 26 should have one teacher, trained to work in early years education, and at least one fully-qualified nursery nurse. A ratio of one adult to ten children in approved early years settings has been recommended in Wales, and the Education and Life-Long Learning Committee has agreed that LEAs should continue to review the staffing ratios and qualifications in reception classes.

Hard-pressed reception class teachers would be the first to acknowledge that large classes, a wide age range, inadequate support, inappropriate resources and lack of space are not conducive to a learning environment which meets the needs of very young children. The problem is often compounded by pressure from parents who favour a more formal approach to learning, even for children as young as three.

In 1982, Cleave⁸ identified four main differences between practice in reception classes and in pre-school educational provision.

- 1 There was three times as much 'dead' or non-task time (for example queuing and waiting) in reception classes.
- 2 Children had much more freedom to choose their own activities in pre-school classes. In infant classes, two-thirds of the children's time was devoted to specific activities selected by the teacher.

- 3 The distinction between work and play was more explicit in reception classes. In a pre-school setting, play was seen as having enormous value in its own right, whereas in reception classes it had become an activity confined to the playground or a reward for work completed.
- 4 There were dramatic differences between pre-school and infant class settings when it came to the number of adults with whom children had direct or indirect contact. Adult involvement of any kind, whether on an individual, group or whole class basis, was far more extensive in early years schools and units.

In England, the reception class is now part of the foundation stage. Reception teachers should be able to provide an early years curriculum and environment for their children. Schools may need to reconsider their priorities to ensure adequate levels of funding, resourcing and staffing. They will also need to review curriculum and assessment policies and to ensure that staff and parents are aware of the implications of early years practice in the reception class.

According to HMI⁹, 'the introduction of the foundation stage of the national curriculum has required schools to review and adapt the curriculum for reception pupils. The teaching in reception classes remains a strength, and the majority of reception teachers demonstrate a good understanding of what to teach and how to teach it in ways that engage the interest of young children. Few schools, however, have reviewed their schemes of work for the reception year or have begun to evaluate the impact of the foundation stage curriculum on teaching and learning'.

The daily routine

The daily routine affects how a child will learn and grow. It is therefore imperative that we ensure that young children have access to a consistent daily routine that:

- supports active learning through a balance of adult-initiated and child-initiated activities
- encourages social interaction by enabling children to work in a variety of groupings with both children and adults
- gives children a way to organise their time
- supports the particular way children learn by starting with the child's own interests, needs and motives
- gives time to recall and discuss experiences and to represent them through art work, role-play etc
- enables adults to observe, monitor and record children's development.



⁸ Cleave, S et al (1982) **And So To School** Windsor, NFER-Nelson

⁹ The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, Standards and Quality in Education 2000/01 (February 2002)

The role of the adult

The role of the adult may vary from setting to setting, but what underpins this role is well-defined in the following statement.

WHAT PRACTITIONERS DO?

Most early years practitioners, at least some of the time, feel hurried and harassed, as if there were not enough hours in the day, or days in the week, to do all the dozens of different tasks they have set themselves, or to meet all their different responsibilities. They tend to think of themselves as busy people, with an ever-growing and endless list of what needs doing. And yet, for all the apparent pressure to keep busy, the central tasks of the practitioner can be very simply described.

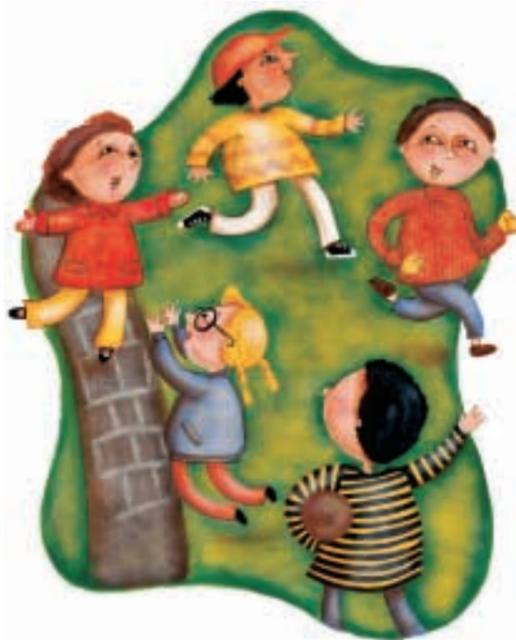
All early years practitioners, in every kind of setting, however diverse these may be, take on certain inescapable commitments.

- To plan for children's learning.
- To resource and organise opportunities for their learning.
- To support and extend that learning.
- To understand what is happening as children learn.
- To record progress in children's learning.
- To evaluate and adapt what they do in the interests of children's learning.
- To work in partnership with parents, carers, other family members and colleagues.¹⁰

Children with special educational needs

In 1998, the Government published the Green Paper *Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme of Action*, which clearly reiterated the Warnock principles, as did its guidance for Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships. The key principles of the Green Paper can be summed up as follows:

- setting high expectations for children with special educational needs
- supporting parents
- increasing the numbers of children included in mainstream schools wherever possible
- an emphasis on practical support, not procedures
- providing better opportunities for professional development for teachers and others
- promoting partnership for special educational needs issues locally, regionally and nationally.



Early Years Partnerships have responsibility for ensuring that appropriate provision is available for children with special educational needs and that all providers are able to identify and assess special educational needs. In drawing up plans they should include the following information.

- Details of the support which is available to help early education providers identify and assess special educational needs. (All maintained nursery and primary schools and all settings in receipt of Government funding for early education have a legal duty to have regard to the *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*.¹¹ Providers of funded nursery education outside the maintained sector also have a legal duty to have regard to the additional guidance produced by the Secretary of State, i.e. *Guidance on the Application of the Code to Providers Outside the Maintained Sector of Education who Provide Nursery Education as Part of an Early Years Development Plan*).
- Information about the childcare and early education provision available locally for children with special educational needs or with disabilities, including the support which is offered to such children, for example through the LEA Support Services' and the Early Years Partnership's plans for making provision inclusive.
- Details of the specialist training available locally for childcare and early education staff working with children with special educational needs or with disabilities (including shared training between sectors).
- Details of the information and advice available to parents and other carers about childcare and early education for children with special educational needs or disabilities.

Early Years Partnerships will need to ensure that all settings delivering the foundation stage have identified and trained a SENCO, who is responsible for establishing and implementing the setting's special educational needs policy. They must also:

- put in place a network of area-SENCOs, with a target ratio of one area-SENCO to 20 non-maintained settings delivering funded early education
- provide dedicated support and practical advice to early years and childcare settings, helping them to access specialist support to assist with the early identification of special educational needs and the action required to meet those needs.

The area-SENCOs are likely to be qualified teachers with extensive experience as setting-based SENCOs. Early Years Partnerships will also be able to draw on their knowledge and experience to inform their special educational needs and training strategies.

All Early Years Partnerships should endeavour to adopt a transparent and coherent special educational needs resource strategy which describes, as far as possible, the resources available for childcare and early years education and how and when they should be accessed. It is also expected that Early Excellence Centres will play a major part in promoting good practice. Multi-agency support for children with special educational needs and their parents is a priority for these centres.

¹⁰ Early Childhood Education Forum (1998) *Quality and Diversity in Early Learning*

¹¹ Department for Education and Skills, 581 (2001)

The 1994 Code in Wales was recently replaced with the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales* (January 2002) and became statutory from 1st April 2002. It contains much of the guidance from the original code but includes new rights and duties introduced by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. There are some significant changes from the original special educational needs Code of Practice, however:

- it contains separate chapters on provision in early years and primary phases
- in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 it includes the new right for schools and relevant nursery education providers to request a statutory assessment for a child, and places a new duty on schools and relevant nursery education providers to tell parents when they are making special educational provision for their child
- it is now possible for a child under the age of two to be in receipt of a statement, though this will be rare.

The Code also recommends that schools and LEAs should adopt a graduated approach, through School Action and School Action Plus, and Early Years Action and Early Years Action Plus in early education settings.



THE GRADUATED APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN EARLY EDUCATION

In early education settings, the approach consists of the following:

1 Early Years Action

- practitioners or the SENCO identify that a child has a special educational need
- practitioners and the SENCO make provision that is additional to or different from the usual programme
- practitioners and SENCO compile an Individual Education Plan (IEP)

2 Early Years Action Plus

- outside specialists provide advice and support
- strategies additional or different to those in Early Years Action are put in place
- a new IEP will usually be compiled.

A WHOLE STAFF APPROACH

Many teachers, nursery nurses and other workers in early years schools and units are sensitive to the challenges facing children with special educational needs, but worry about their abilities to give such children appropriate learning experiences. They may be concerned about the implications for other children in the early years setting, and (understandably) ask questions such as:

- would the other children be neglected?
- is the building suitable?
- do we have the right equipment?
- will additional, trained staff be appointed?
- what about extra training for staff already in post?

These and other expressions of concern should not be construed as negative. Indeed, such questions are legitimate and deserve to be answered. If a positive approach is to be adopted, staff will need opportunities to air their views (including their misgivings) frankly and honestly, addressing key points in turn. In an atmosphere of open debate, where staff are encouraged to explore their feelings towards young children with disabilities and where the multi-faceted professionalism of teachers is acknowledged, confidence in the concept of integration will begin to grow.

MAKING INTEGRATION WORK

Given adequate support and an appropriate learning environment, children with special educational needs can thrive in the setting of an early years unit. The following guidelines may help to define the constructive and sensitive approach early years workers will need to adopt.

- It is important to form good working relationships with other pre-school agencies, such as toddlers' groups, playgroups and day nurseries, so that a coherent and consistent policy towards children with special educational needs can be developed. Multi-disciplinary meetings, involving colleagues from education, health and social services, may help to establish a mutual support network.
- Before a child with an identified special educational need is admitted, parents, staff and the referring agency should all be satisfied that he or she would benefit from early years education. The LEA should provide an assurance that appropriate resources, including (where necessary) additional staff and equipment, will be made available.

- A sensible balance should be struck between provision for children with an identified special educational need and those without, to ensure that no children in one group suffer as a result of the other.
- Wherever possible, parents should be involved in the day-to-day activities of the early years setting, coming in to help out at times that are convenient both for themselves and for the staff.
- All the staff should be involved in planning the curriculum and in ensuring that the particular needs of individual children are appropriately and thoughtfully met.
- The progress of children with special educational needs should be assessed and recorded at regular intervals so that activities can be matched to abilities, and further development encouraged.
- All members of the staff team need access to appropriate, high-quality training and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in the LEA's special schools' service, including teachers who work in special schools and units.

IDENTIFYING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Special educational needs will not necessarily have been identified by the time a child starts attending an early years setting. Indeed, staff may well be the first to suspect that things are not as they should be. Direct observation, regular assessment and careful record keeping will help to highlight learning or other difficulties. Staff who judge that a child has special educational needs should immediately alert the headteacher, SENCO or other person with responsibility. This person will, if necessary, initiate appropriate help and support involving the relevant statutory agencies, and – most important of all – the child's family.

Multi-cultural and anti-sexist education

'We need to give all children the relevant experiences through images and activities which allow them to explore racial difference and be willing to deal with racial prejudice when it arises.'

Children are valued and their full development is possible only if they live in an environment which respects their individual identity and cultural heritage, and positive action is taken to support this.¹²

The seeds of discriminatory attitudes and practices are often sown in childhood: it is increasingly recognised that young children form ideas, prejudices and stereotypes from the earliest age.

For many children, an early years setting or playgroup is their first opportunity to make close contact with a wide range of children – and adults – in an environment that may be markedly different from that of the home. During their early years, they will form relationships and develop ideas that will serve as models for later life.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that early years education should be the springboard from which potentially damaging prejudices can be challenged in a gentle, respectful and non-threatening way.

Each child should be valued and cherished as an individual; differences of culture, race, language and gender should be respected and celebrated, not just in the setting of the early years but throughout the school community. This is not to suggest, of course, that multi-cultural activities and anti-sexist initiatives should be treated as separate or discrete areas of education. Every aspect of the curriculum should be infused with resources, ideas and dynamic attitudes which promote multi-culturalism and challenge gender stereotyping. Moreover, the ethos of the early years, and the powerful messages children receive when they first set foot inside the school or setting, should convey the feeling that every newcomer is welcomed and valued.

Spotlight on staff

The following questions may stimulate greater awareness of fundamental issues around equality of opportunity and multi-cultural education in the early years setting.

- Are staff sensitive to the day-to-day racial and gender stereotyping which can so easily go unchecked? Have they been given training in how to deal with racist or sexist remarks, for example?
- Is the staff team being helped to develop anti-racist and anti-sexist policies and practices through courses, workshops and discussion?
- Many early years classes and units are part of an infant or primary school which is required by law to publish a prospectus. Is the school's attitude towards multi-culturalism and anti-sexism clearly spelt out in that prospectus and in other literature which provides information about the early years?

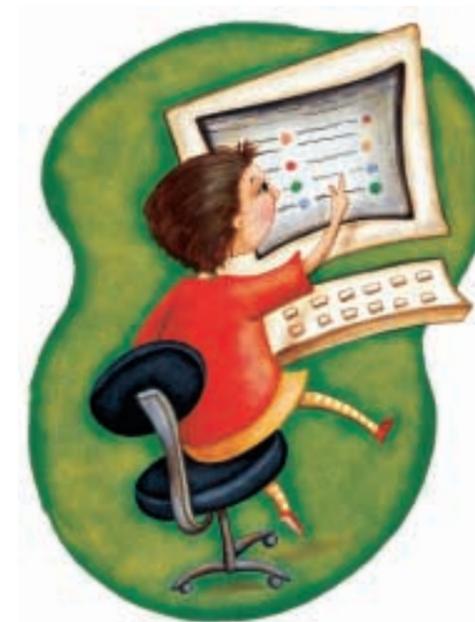
- Is the structure of the school (and the governing body) patriarchal? Has a positive effort been made to welcome male early years teachers and nursery nurses into the school community? Do fathers play a prominent role in school activities?
- Do members of the staff team, and the children on the roll, reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the local community?

MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION

- Is bilingualism celebrated as a positive asset? Do books, tapes and other resources such as labels around the room reflect the mother tongues of the children?
- Are efforts made to foster positive relationships with all parents, especially those whose language, cultural heritage or religion differs from that of the majority?
- Are all parents, particularly those whose mother tongue is not English, actively encouraged to share with the children something of their way of life? (This can be achieved by a variety of means including cooking, talking about religious and cultural customs and practices, and telling stories in the mother tongue.)
- Are the early years resourced in such a way that materials and equipment, including pictures, toys, notices, dressing-up clothes, books and – most importantly – the whole curriculum and the staff's attitude towards it, reflect the richness of cultural diversity in society?
- Are staff working in schools in Wales sensitive to the needs and rights of Welsh speakers and do they assimilate Welsh language, culture and history into learning programmes and activities?

Recommendations regarding the Welsh language made by the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee in Wales include the following:

- that Welsh language immersion teaching during early years be expanded and the key role of the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin acknowledged
- that findings of the audit of Welsh-medium early years provision should inform future policy development
- that expansion of early years provision should involve increasing bilingual provision, with some degree of immersion teaching, in accordance with parents' wishes.



¹² Iram Siraj-Blatchford (1994) **The Early Years: Laying the Foundations for Racial Equality** Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books

ANTI-SEXIST EDUCATION

- Do staff monitor whether boys or girls tend to dominate space and activities? Studies suggest that boys are more likely to 'rule the roost' with competitive and aggressive behaviour, while girls feel that they should please others by being quiet, clean and helpful. Children who challenge these demarcation lines should be reassured that their individuality is valued and respected.
- Have staff discussed the importance of observing free play and, where appropriate, intervening in a non-threatening way to challenge assumptions about appropriate roles for each sex?
- Is there a concerted effort to give children (and adults, for that matter) non-stereotypical tasks? For example, are girls asked to help put out PE apparatus while boys concentrate on tidying the home corner?
- Are girls encouraged to use tools and technological equipment and to take part in construction-based activities? Are boys urged to care for plants and animals, and to play in the home corner?

- Are children introduced to people who do a job not usually associated with their gender? A male secretary or nurse, or a female bus driver or construction engineer, could be invited into the early years setting to tell the children about their work. Visits to places of work outside the early years setting can be planned in such a way that children have the chance to see and talk to men and women in non-stereotypical job roles. Moreover, it is important to ensure that books, posters and other resources reflecting 'the work that people do' are not limited to traditional gender-linked stereotypes.

Early years education can have a powerful influence which either reinforces or challenges assumptions based on racial and gender stereotypes. Staff will need access to high-quality training and a supportive working environment if they are to develop an awareness of these crucial and complex issues as well as the vision to do something about them.

A CURRICULUM FOR THE EARLY YEARS

'The term curriculum is used to describe everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned.'¹³ This section examines the areas of learning and experience that the Association of Teachers and Lecturers considers to be the most important in early years education, and demonstrates how each area should be part of a coherent and structured curriculum framework. It also considers the role of assessment.

*'The ladder of education can never be firmly secure unless the first rung is firmly in place'*¹⁴

For too long it has been widely assumed that the primary role of provision for the under-fives in general, and early years education in particular, is to compensate for something missing in the child's home life. Deeply entrenched attitudes towards mothers who go out to work while their children are still very young have detracted from attempts to explore the significance of early years education for children, whatever their circumstances. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers is seeking to redress the balance by demonstrating that early years education is invaluable in its own right.

The period from birth to age five is one of rapid growth and development, both physically and intellectually. Parents are of course their children's first – and most important – educators, but the assumption that a nurturing home and family life prior to compulsory schooling is the only route by which children develop to their full potential must be challenged. There are sound educational and social reasons why young children should have the opportunity to play with, and learn alongside, their peers in a caring, secure and properly-supervised environment outside the home. Such an environment, be it the local playgroup or the reception class of a school, should be designed to promote the child's emotional, social, physical and cognitive development, effectively complementing the learning experiences rooted in home and family. All the evidence suggests that the benefits of early years education to the child are both short, and long-term.¹⁵



¹³ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000

¹⁴ Rosemary Peacocke, former HMI staff inspector with responsibility for the early years, quoted in **Early Childhood Education: The Early Years Curriculum** and the National Curriculum Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books

¹⁵ Schweinhart, LJ, Barnes, HV, Weikart, DP, Barnett, WS and Epstein, AS (1993) **Significant Benefits**, Perry Pre-school Study – Through Age 27, High Scope Press, Detroit, MI

The point at which young children enter education outside the home is not, of course, the point at which they start to learn. Anyone who has watched very young children begin to make sense of the world around them will know that most have an insatiable appetite for learning right from the start. Young children bring to early years education a variety of experiences and skills, many of which are too easily taken for granted.

Once early years education has begun, the learning opportunities offered to children by professionally-trained adults form the central part of 'the curriculum'. But what does this deceptively straightforward term actually mean? Defining a curriculum is virtually equivalent to defining education itself. It is often seen as a list of subjects, lessons and syllabi, but has also been defined as 'what each child takes away' from the school environment.¹⁶

The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority¹⁷ defined 'the curriculum' as follows: 'The curriculum offered by a setting comprises the full range of experiences, opportunities and activities which are planned to promote children's learning'. More recently, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority¹⁸ used the term to describe 'everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned'. The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales¹⁹ (ACCAC) states that 'the early years curriculum is about the child. It is concerned not only with the content but also with the context of the learning. The process is as important as the outcome.'

The importance of play in early years learning

When considering what might constitute a relevant curriculum for the early years, full account must be taken of the particular ways in which very young children learn. It is widely acknowledged that play is central to young children's learning.

'Play brings together the ideas, feelings, relationships and physical life of the child. It helps children to use what they know and to understand things about the world and the people they meet. When they play, children can: rearrange their lives; rehearse the future; reflect the past; and get their own thoughts, feelings, relationships and physical bodies under their own control. The act of playing gives them a sense of mastery and competence which helps them to face the world and cope with it... Play co-ordinates a child's learning and makes it whole.'²⁰

'Well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge.'²¹ The challenge for us as adults lies in the extent to which we are able to guide and support children's play as a powerful vehicle for learning.

Each area of learning and experience has a unique role to play in a child's education, but they cannot be taught and learned separately or in isolation from one another. Young children (and adults) do not divide the realm of their experiences into neatly-defined, bite-size chunks. So although an activity may focus on one particular area, the learning process itself will touch on several others. For example, *listening* to a story will help to develop appreciation of language. *Telling* the story may involve counting the number of pages in the book (mathematics) and looking at the details in the illustrations (aesthetic). It may lead to a discussion of a particular character's behaviour (emotional, moral and linguistic), and the plot may prompt children to invent stories of their own around a similar theme (literary and creative). Being part of a group listening to a story, and learning when it is appropriate to ask questions and pass comment, promotes personal and social skills.

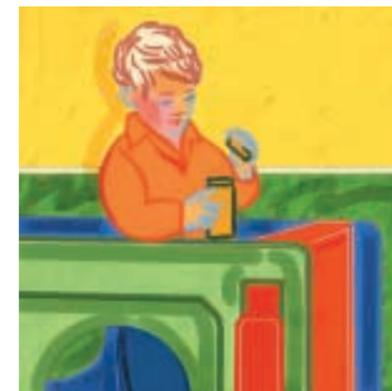
Opportunities for children to develop ideas, grasp concepts and cultivate skills often arise when least expected, however much thought has gone into curriculum planning. For the practitioner, the art is knowing where and when to intervene (and when not to), how best to validate and nurture the child's natural curiosity, when to focus on a specific task, and when to give the child time and space to explore independently.

Without a carefully-planned and structured curriculum, complemented by clearly-articulated aims and goals, there is a danger that learning will happen only in a random, haphazard way, and that targets or objectives may never be achieved. An effective and creative curriculum will be rooted in an awareness of each child's stage of development. It will be focused on objectives which are regularly and thoroughly monitored by means of child observation, and rigorously evaluated in order to assess the extent to which they have been met. Thus a framework for the curriculum and its assessment is crucial from the outset.

The foundation stage in England came about as a result of a review of SCAA's *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education* (1996). It identifies six areas of learning in the early years curriculum:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

This framework now acts as the basis for curriculum planning, within and across which knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes can be developed concurrently.



¹⁶ Schools Council (1981) **The Practical Curriculum** London, Schools Council

¹⁷ **Looking at Children's Learning** (1997) SCAA

¹⁸ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000

¹⁹ **Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before compulsory school age**, ACCAC 2000

²⁰ Bruce and Meggitt (1996) **Children and Education**

²¹ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000

Theory into practice

Spiritual learning and experience of early years children is best seen within the context of human, social and moral learning. Religious education is legally required to be taught as soon as a child begins school. But it should be taught in ways that are appropriate to young children. While there may be some explicit work in religious education – particularly in denominational schools – the emphasis at this stage is more likely to be on learning from the life of the school and the relationships within it, through discussion with adults and with other children, and by sharing stories. Celebrating the major festivals of various religions and cultures will stimulate valuable discussion and project work, as well as visibly demonstrating that a multi-racial society positively enriches the early years setting. So, while in no way under-estimating its importance, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers does not consider it appropriate to focus on spiritual learning as an area in its own right at this very early stage.

In the following review of other aspects of learning and experience, there can be no specific order or priority since each area is an integral and essential part of the whole curriculum. Having said this, there is little doubt among early years workers that personal, social and emotional education (PSE) underpins all other areas of learning, and is fundamental to children's development.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When they start early years education, some children will have little or no experience of being part of a group of children and adults. They may find the new environment strange and bewildering at first, and it may not be easy for them to adjust to a new routine or to learn to play and share with other children. Equally difficult will be establishing a relationship with adults who have a responsibility for them during the school day. They will have to learn that, with 25 or 30 other children around, they cannot always have their own way.

Part of the practitioner's role in helping children make sense of their world is to foster what Donaldson²² calls the ability to 'disembed' learning, i.e. to extract from its context the concept that has been learned and to be able to apply it in other situations. The early years teacher has to build on the human and social skills each child brings to the early years setting, carefully nurturing and boosting confidence. Only when children feel secure and cared for in the early years setting will they be able to apply previous learning in new or different circumstances.

The capacity to share with and care for others is an important lesson for life, and one which can be developed in a variety of ways. Opportunities for children to explore their emotions, both as individuals and as part of a group, are invaluable. The children's own families and surroundings are a resource ripe for development from the earliest stage: skilled practitioners involve parents and other adults in the day-to-day life of the early years setting, and help children examine the kind of work their relatives do – thus heightening their awareness of the world around them and their place in it. Finding out about the work of people they meet in their everyday lives – shopkeepers, school meal assistants, bus drivers and the school caretaker, for instance – lays firm foundations for children's human and social learning.

They will, of course, learn by example too, and relationships between adults in the early years setting will influence how children treat each other.

This area of learning also embraces children's moral development. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines morality as 'moral science; moral principles; points of ethics'. Children can begin to reason about morality from a very early age, and the early years community – like family life – provides a framework for the development of moral learning and experience. Children need to understand that moral reference points exist both in the early years setting and in the wider world, and that, while certain forms of behaviour are acceptable, others are definitely not.

While children are very young, the example set by adults is of paramount importance: children learn an enormous amount from the way adults relate to them and to each other. The early years team should therefore agree a 'moral code' that is seen to be applied consistently with children, other adults in the early years setting, parents and people outside the immediate early years community.

Because the pattern set by adults is so important, there is a temptation to assume that most moral education happens by example, or incidentally as staff deal with particular situations as they arise. These routes to moral education are crucial, but there are others no less vital. Adults in the early years community will also need to decide which aspects of moral education are to be integrated into the curriculum by design rather than by default.

One of the basic principles of moral education is to help children towards an understanding of concepts such as fairness and justice; moral learning is inextricably linked with the human and social areas of experience. Children can be encouraged to talk through incidents which arise during play, explaining why they took certain actions and why they thought another child (or adult) was 'wrong'. Through role-play and dressing-up, they can put themselves in the place of others, act out situations which present moral dilemmas, and discuss the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of a particular case.

Likewise, carefully-chosen books can afford rich opportunities for children to explore moral values such as tolerance, honesty and fair play. Some children will already have deeply-held views about right and wrong, and sensitively-led discussion will allow them to come to terms with the fact that the views and feelings of others must also be taken into account.



²² Donaldson, M (1978) *Children's Minds* Glasgow, Fontana

AESTHETIC AND CREATIVE

Time and energy invested in establishing – and sustaining – a safe and secure learning environment will pay dividends in helping to set the tone for children’s aesthetic and creative development. Children and adult helpers can be encouraged to share responsibility for developing the look and feel of the early years environment, since this process can be both time-consuming and labour-intensive. There are many ways to create a rich and stimulating learning environment, not least:

- mounting and displaying children’s work imaginatively and thoughtfully
- setting out objects of natural beauty for children to look at, feel and touch
- collecting interesting fabrics, pictures and objects for use in topic or project work
- encouraging children to handle materials with sensitivity and care.

If children are to use their imaginative and creative faculties to the full, they need sources of inspiration and instant access to a range of resources and techniques. At this early age they can be encouraged, for example, to think about what colours or textures they like and dislike, and to begin to explain why. They can make models, pictures, stories and music, talk about the creative process, and begin to form aesthetic judgements. They should be given ample opportunity to express themselves through music and movement, and a wide variety of dressing-up clothes should be available to stimulate ideas for creative play. The sooner children experience and enjoy the work of professional artists, musicians, actors and story-tellers the better – this can be a powerful source of inspiration.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

‘Communication, language and literacy’ covers listening, speaking, reading and writing – fundamentally important activities which form an integral part of the curriculum.

Good early years education encourages children to use and extend their linguistic skills and helps them to become confident and articulate communicators. Children’s confidence can be boosted through openings for conversation with peers – an excellent way to enhance and develop their communication skills and widen their vocabulary. Adults have a key role too: the quality of adult language children encounter, and the opportunities they have to talk with adults, play a vital role in their development.

By the time they start early years education, some children will already have developed an interest in reading; they will be aware, in varying degrees, of the written word. Confident beginners will be able to pick up a book, know the back from the front, understand that the text runs from left to right, and recognise that the pictures incorporate information which is related to the story. But for every child who comes from a home where books are commonplace, there will be others for whom the world of books is a new experience. These children will need plentiful opportunities to learn the basics.

Every child’s interest in the written word will be heightened if it is established that books are something to be valued and looked after. Whatever the space constraints in the early years setting, books should be logically and attractively displayed, and children should be encouraged to handle them correctly and with care. The quality of the text and illustrations – or, in text-free books, the quality of the illustrations alone – will do much to stimulate children’s appetite for language and reading.

Equally important, the choice of reading material should reflect not only the culture and languages spoken by the children, but also the cultural and ethnic diversity of society as a whole. There is a wealth of high-quality material – poetry, stories, text-free books and expertly-illustrated myths and fables – which represents our multi-cultural society in a positive and enriching light, and such books deserve pride of place in the early years setting.

Whatever the subject matter, story-telling is an invaluable tool. Having listened to a story, and talked about the theme, children will soon be able to recall the plot and can be encouraged to relate the meaning to the printed version. They will begin to associate sounds with letters, and will relish the challenge of reading and writing their own names. To stimulate reading, familiar objects around and about the classroom can be labelled, and children can start to make or copy their own labels.

In this way, the early stages of reading and writing can be drawn together, one complementing the other. As soon as ideas can be recorded, initially in the child’s invented symbols, young writers can be gently encouraged to reproduce symbols closer to accepted letter forms. Early years workers can build on these emerging writing skills by teaching children to form letters and words which can then be linked to what they want to say about their own experiences – for example by making labels to identify their paintings and models. A writing or ‘office’ area equipped with desks, chairs, pencils, paper and other writing equipment will foster an organised approach.

In England, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies begin in the reception class. Both were developed alongside the foundation stage, and can be taught in ways that are suitable for young children. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority’s *Curriculum Guidance for the foundation stage* suggests that the elements of the daily literacy hour and mathematics lesson can be taught across the day, but that both should be in place by the end of the reception year. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers continues to argue that the literacy hour and the mathematics lesson should not be introduced as a daily requirement until the beginning of Year 1.



MATHEMATICS

'We should take a new look at the abilities children possess before they start school, for it is pre-school children who have been most seriously underestimated... we should devise tasks which make sense to young children, so that we can look at their strengths rather than their weaknesses, at what they can do rather than what they cannot.'²³

Mathematics can and should be a lively and invigorating area of the curriculum; the formal rote-learning approach sometimes associated with the development of early mathematical abilities is by no means the most appropriate or imaginative way forward. A well-resourced early years setting, where staff have the confidence and skills to use both structured and spontaneous events, can provide a wealth of opportunities for activities and discussion which develop mathematical understanding.

Sorting objects by colour, size and other characteristics, matching things together, and ordering by size, length, weight or capacity all help children to develop basic mathematical skills. Handling materials and constructing models will increase understanding of ideas around order, difference and quantity, as well as develop spatial awareness.

Every area of the early years setting is alive with possibilities. In the 'home' corner, mathematical skills are underpinned whenever children dress dolls of various sizes, lay the table or match colours. Sand and water play offer many excellent opportunities for the development of number language and concepts. Filling containers of various shapes and sizes leads children towards an understanding of capacity, comparative measurement and conservation; experimenting to discover which objects float and which sink, and discussing why this should be so, are relevant to science as well as to mathematics. Awareness of numbers and their sequence can be reinforced by playing simple counting games with, for example, fingers and toes, or objects around the room. Children can talk about who is first, second or third to tidy away, and familiar counting stories and rhymes can be enjoyed both in their own right and as themes for discussion using the language of number.

As soon as children can recognise them, number symbols can be matched to quantities of objects and, in due course, the children can be encouraged to write and sequence the symbols themselves. This is an important step forward, demanding a secure understanding of the counting process and the relationship between number symbols and groups of objects. Appropriate and sensitive teacher intervention will enhance each child's ability to use language accurately in order to express ideas of shape, size and number.

At each stage, the teacher will need to take into account previously-learned mathematical ideas, knowledge and skills. As in all other areas of the curriculum, thorough planning and preparation are essential if time is to be used to greatest effect for carefully-differentiated group and individual work.

PHYSICAL SKILLS

No two children are alike, and early years newcomers will have a wide range of physical skills, some of which will be significantly more developed than others. Most will be able to walk and run, some may be able to hold a pencil, use a paintbrush and hammer in a nail, and others will already be acquiring the knack of using a spoon or a pair of scissors. Nothing, however, should be taken for granted. Throughout their early years careers – and in their outside lives – children need abundant opportunities to practise and hone existing physical skills and cultivate new ones. Time, concentration, opportunities for practice and – needless to say – appropriate resources are the key. Activities which are normally associated with physical education, and which help to develop bodily and spatial awareness, should be an integral part of the early years programme. Children will need a safe space – both indoors and out – in which to play and exercise, as well as access to apparatus and equipment ranging from climbing frames, slides, ladders and benches to bats, balls, beanbags and hoops. Running, skipping, jumping, climbing and learning to balance in a carefully-planned environment will help young children develop physical control, co-ordination and mobility.

The fine-tuning of these gross motor skills is complemented by the development of finer motor skills, and early years children need plenty of opportunities to practise using crayons, chalk, pencils, pens and paintbrushes of different sizes and on surfaces of different sizes. They will also need help to get the hang of using tools for cutting or shaping modelling and construction material with care and precision. Making music with a simple percussion instrument is fun and an excellent way to develop co-ordination and manual dexterity.

For many adults, these important motor skills are second nature. In the early years setting, practice makes perfect, and young children need regular opportunities to test out skills which will be relevant to many areas of the curriculum. The area of learning and experience focused on the physical also includes beginning to understand how our bodies work and what promotes well-being. Children can absorb simple facts about nutrition, dental care and hygiene, and can start to think about why exercise, sleep and food are important to their well-being.



²³ Martin Hughes (1995) *Children and Number*

SCIENTIFIC (AS PART OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD)

A well-planned and well-resourced learning environment will stimulate early years children to begin to think and talk about the world around them in a scientific way. They can be provided with opportunities to observe and investigate why things happen in a particular way, and encouraged to look for patterns, seek inferences and start to question – or hypothesise – ‘What will happen if...?’. Learning to recognise things by smell, feel, sound, touch or taste can be an impetus for many enjoyable group games and activities.

During cookery sessions, early years staff can encourage children to observe and discuss the changes which result when ingredients are stirred together and baked. Likewise, mixing paints (intentionally or otherwise!) can lead to simple experiments in what happens when one colour is combined with another. Discussing, observing, predicting and recording outcomes all broaden children’s scientific knowledge – and extend their use of language.

Staff working in a well-resourced early years setting can make available a range of modelling materials – for example playdough, plasticine and clay – and encourage children to decide which is most appropriate for a particular project or activity, thereby heightening awareness of similarities and differences between materials. Children need time to experiment if they are to discover which material best suits their purpose, along with opportunities to discuss – with adults and other children – why they have made a particular choice.

Early work with magnets will help towards an understanding of matter; creating sounds stimulates ideas about energy. Using levers and pulleys, wind and water power, and experimenting with objects which float or sink can spark activities to investigate the use of forces and their effect.

Many scientific initiatives demand no bought-in resources whatsoever. Recording the weather from day to day with simple symbols or illustrations, and observing what happens in nature as the seasons change, promotes vital understanding of the natural world. Indeed, the early years setting is an ideal environment in which to feed children’s natural curiosity about living things. They can be gently motivated to notice that plants thrive in a natural light, and that the ones in a sunny spot need watering more often than those in other parts of the room. Imaginative practitioners can follow this up by instigating an investigation into what happens when plants are deprived of either light or water. An outside garden plot – or a light, sunny area indoors – is a boon: children can plant and cultivate flowers and vegetables, sometimes from seed, and measure and record growth and changes.

Classroom pets provide an endless source of fascination and the impetus for a wide range of scientific activities. Children might, for example, compare the feeding habits of a guinea pig with those of a gerbil – a piece of work involving careful observation, discussion and recording of results. It is, however, important to remember that pets will need to be cared for outside term-time, and this should be taken into account before turning the early years setting into a menagerie!²⁴

TECHNOLOGICAL (AS PART OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD)

This area of learning is one with powerful relevance to even the youngest early years child. From a very early age, children start to develop confidence in their ability to relate to the world about them as active participants and initiators as well as users and spectators. Through technology, they can search for ways to extend and enhance their power to control events and order their environment.

This area of the curriculum stimulates a wide range of activities and demands a degree of ingenuity from the early years team. Young children derive great satisfaction from finding out how things work, and an ‘investigating corner’ where, under supervision, they can explore the mechanics of egg timers, old clocks, battery-operated gadgets, mechanical toys and so on is popular in many early years settings. New technology is clearly another matter, but many early years children will already be familiar with microwave ovens, video recorders, digital clocks, push-button telephones and answerphones. They may also know about credit cards and cash dispensers, automatic tills and even bar codes, but they are unlikely to know how these things work – only that they do.

In a world where information technology is ever more sophisticated, many children will have computers at home. Unlike many of the adults that work in early years settings, they may be very much at ease with ICT: many arrive at school having already developed basic computer skills. The challenge for practitioners is in keeping one step ahead of the children in mastering the abundance of software now available to support early learning in this area.

Used selectively and with care, microcomputers, pocket calculators and electronic toys and games can further an understanding of technology and its applications. Children can, for example, try adding up – with counters, cubes, fingers or whatever is appropriate – the cost of goods purchased in the early years ‘shop’, and check the sum on a simple calculator. The results may be different: the challenge is to question why. Likewise, keying-in instructions on a programmable electronic toy, and ‘directing’ it to move forwards, backwards, left or right, cultivates skills in the use of technological equipment and promotes early mathematical understanding. Handling and working with such resources will also help children develop language skills and concepts and improve their physical co-ordination and control.

Nonetheless, teaching children to use relatively sophisticated, and sometimes expensive, devices is just one approach to technology in the early years.

Children can design and construct their own models, perhaps using a basic kit. With the help of adults, they can assemble simple electric circuits using low voltage batteries or toy vehicles powered by elastic bands or balloons. Estimating how far a vehicle will travel, testing and modifying the original design, and exploring the use of alternative materials are all important facets of technological learning. Through designing (which at this stage may simply involve explaining their intentions) and constructing, experimenting and testing, children learn how to ‘make things work better’ – thereby bringing about change in order to achieve an element of control.

²⁴ DES Administrative Memorandum AM3/90, **Animals and Plants in Schools: Legal Aspects** (HMSO – now The Stationery Office), gives a clear summary of the legal restraints teachers must take into account.

Moreover, technological learning can provide early years staff with valuable opportunities to combat the influences which dispose boys and girls to ready acceptance of conventional gender-linked roles. Through their own approaches, and the way they organise the learning environment – for example through their choices of pictures of people at work – teachers can seek to ensure that in technology, as in other areas of the curriculum, girls and boys enjoy equality of opportunity.



HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY (AS PART OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD)

Children need opportunities to talk about events in their own lives as a means of helping them to acquire a sense of chronology. It is through sharing events of the past, present or future, – for example birthdays, visits, parties and celebrations – that they begin to sequence personal experience with accuracy.

Their awareness of the past can be fostered through the exploration of artefacts and photographs, and by hearing older people talking about the past. Story and role-play can also be useful vehicles for helping children to learn about the past and explore future experiences.

Children should be given plenty of opportunity to talk about where they live and begin to see their home in relation to the street, school, shops and wider community. Their earliest geographical experiences will happen as part of discovering their homes, gardens and educational settings.

Children need to go on journeys and be able to discuss where they are going and how they will get there, and to speculate about what they might see.

In helping children learn about the wider world, story-telling is invaluable. There are many excellent picture books about other localities and countries, and even very young children are fascinated by maps and globes.

Within an early years setting, work of this nature will form firm foundations for future work in history and geography.

Assessing children's learning

Assessment has been described as 'observing children's learning, trying to understand it and putting our learning to good use.'²⁵

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers recognises the very close link between learning and assessment. The bedrock of sound early years education is a carefully-planned and effectively co-ordinated curriculum, rigorously but sensitively monitored. The assessment of children's learning, the recording of their progress and the evaluation of activities are essential elements of good practice in the early years classroom.

In assessing young children, it is vital for the teacher to give full credit not only for what is known, but for the strategies used by the child to make meaning of the world in which he or she lives. Although the evidence for assessing a young child's capabilities and learning potential are abundant in an early years setting, the skills of the teacher are essential in helping the child reveal his or her learning. It is vital, too, that these judgements and observations represent the child's whole development as a person.

'To achieve a good-quality observation and assessment it is essential that you adopt an holistic approach. This means being concerned with the 'whole' child (his/her feelings, attitudes, health, development) and the process by which a child learns and develops through the complex interaction of physical, intellectual, linguistic, social and emotional growth.'²⁶

Parents should also be involved in their child's assessment as they can provide invaluable information about their child's development. Early identification of a child's particular needs should lead to immediate and appropriate intervention and support. The theory of assessment is one thing, but of course putting it into practice is quite another. Detailed planning, observation and evaluation are central to the implementation of a coherent approach to assessment but, in many early years settings, there is no time during the working day for all staff to join together to develop these skills. Teachers' terms and conditions of service allow time for professional development outside the classroom, but those of nursery nurses and other workers rarely provide an incentive for them to stay behind after sessions to work what is – in effect – unpaid overtime. Many, however, have the dedication and commitment to do so – but often in an entirely voluntary capacity.²⁷

Some LEAs have developed and implemented their own framework for assessing early years children; elsewhere teachers have devised systems for themselves. The best provide information about social competence, eagerness to learn, physical health, perceptual ability and other areas of particular relevance, such as language and literacy, maths and knowledge and understanding of the world.

²⁵ Mary Jane Drummond (1993) **Assessing Children's Learning** D Fulton

²⁶ Harding and Meldon-Smith (1996) **How to Make Observations and Assessments** London, Hodder and Stoughton

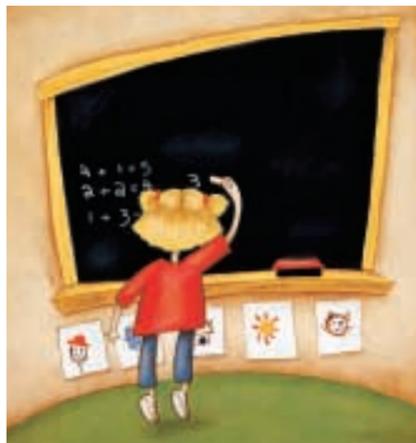
²⁷ Moyles, J (1997) **Jills of All Trades? Classroom Assistants in KS1 Classes** London, ATL

STATUTORY ASSESSMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

From September 1998 onwards, it was a statutory requirement for all maintained primary schools to carry out baseline assessment of children as they started school.

In October 1998, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' Early Years Working Group made the following recommendation:

'Due to the plethora of accredited baseline assessment schemes around the country, it is not possible for the Association to make comments about any specific scheme. However, we recommend that all assessment with very young children should be embedded in the normal activities of the classroom and, wherever possible, use anecdotal evidence. This should apply whether using focused or incidental observation. It is important to acknowledge the contributions of the other adults working in the setting. We disapprove of children being removed from their usual environment for testing'.



From September 2002, baseline assessment in England was replaced by the foundation stage profile. This is a way of summing up each child's progress and learning needs at the end of the foundation stage, and is based on ongoing observation and assessment over all six areas of learning in the foundation stage. Profiles will need to be completed in June of each year for every child. For most children, the profile will be completed in the reception class, although there will be a small number who will not be in school at the end of the foundation stage. Children in funded foundation stage provision will be assessed in that setting when they reach the end of the foundation stage.

Completed profiles can be used in part or in their entirety as the written report to parents, or as the basis for discussion, at the end of the reception year. Additionally, data will be collected and used to provide information about attainment so that schools and other settings can compare their results with the national picture. More information can be found in QCA's *Foundation stage profile handbook*.

Teachers will continue to assess children as they start school, in order to plan for their learning and development. If schools are to provide 'value added' measures, it is essential to establish a baseline of each child's capabilities, skills and knowledge at the point of entry to school. Only then can real progress be measured. It is intended that the foundation stage profile can enable these measures to be made.

Early years education and the national curriculum

The introduction of a national curriculum for children of statutory school age prompted many early years practitioners to rush to the defence of the early years curriculum, and to draw attention to the threat – as they saw it – to that 'well-proven' tradition. Many expressed fears that teachers would be under pressure to focus the early years curriculum on programmes of study for the first key stage (i.e. ages five to seven) of the national curriculum.

In England, following the introduction of the foundation stage, Key Stage 1 programmes of study do not begin until the beginning of Year 1. Developments in Wales and Northern Ireland are likely to have even more far-reaching effects. Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that good practice existed long before the foundation stage and, in the early years, it is critically important that the context for learning is appropriate and relevant. A vital part of the teacher's job is to ensure that children are helped to achieve tasks which are well-matched to their individual stages and abilities. The key factor is that early years education is important in its own right. The younger the child, the more vital it is to identify and plan for individual learning needs – and the less appropriate it is to expect him or her to conform within a large group. Children must not simply be offered a watered-down version of a curriculum appropriate for older pupils.

It is important that early years practitioners continue to articulate ways in which they can influence, rather than be influenced by, developments. As Margaret Clark²⁸ concludes:

'There is an urgent public relations exercise to be undertaken by those concerned with early education, to ensure that research evidence on the contribution of broadly-based experiences at home and at school to children's early education, and as a foundation for literacy and numeracy, is appreciated'.

This conclusion is as relevant today as in 1988, when it was written. Now that experts in the field of early years education are being listened to, there must be no slipping back. The need to press for good-quality training for all early years staff should be highlighted as a priority.

The QCA's current work on a framework for qualifications and training in the early years education, childcare and playwork sector will hopefully address this urgent need.

²⁸ Clark, M (1988) *Children Under Five: Educational Research and Evidence* London, Gordon and Breach

4

EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

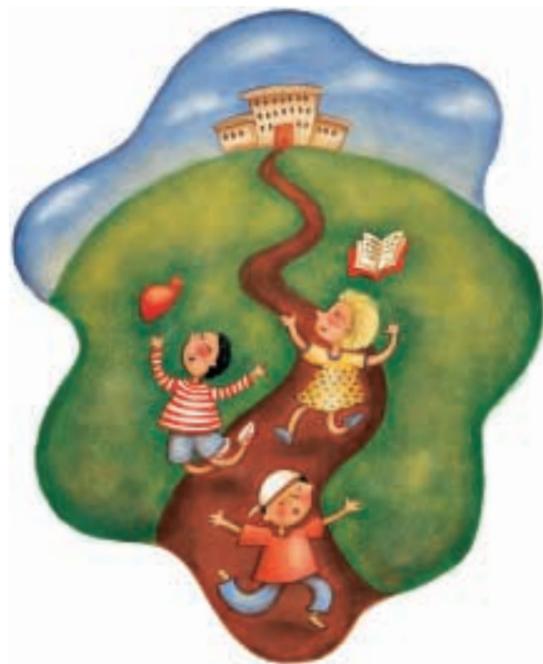
Proposals in England to develop the role of support staff are likely to have an effect on early years provision. This section sets out the principles underpinning effective teamwork in the early years class.

At the heart of the thriving early years class remains a team of workers pooling their talents and expertise. Leading this multi-disciplinary team – which may include students on work placement, nursery nurses, other teachers and parent helpers – is a demanding professional responsibility. To fulfil this role effectively, a teacher must plan, liaise, allocate, motivate, train, monitor and innovate, creating a stimulating learning environment in which the skills and talents of each member of the team are valued and respected. Early years education is about much more than putting willing adults into a classroom with lively, eager young children and letting them get on with it!

The extent to which early years teachers are able to draw on the skills and resources of a wide range of adults inevitably varies, but it is the exception rather than the rule for a nursery teacher to be left to cope single-handed. Nonetheless, it has come as something of a surprise to many newly-qualified early years teachers to find that – from day one – their duties include organising, managing and leading a team of adults. This is a complex responsibility demanding a high level of organisational and interpersonal skills, yet it is the managerial aspect of the early years teacher's role which is too often taken for granted.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers believes that team management should play a central role in the initial teacher training of early years students, and that this should be reinforced by well-resourced, high-quality in-service training. It should never be taken for granted that the early years teacher – no matter how well-qualified and experienced – will automatically be a skilled team leader.

Within many Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, early years teachers are being asked to work with and support practitioners in early years settings outside the school. While this, too, is vital to promote good quality practice and a smooth transition to school for the children, it is an additional responsibility for which teachers need additional funding, time and training.



Planning as a team

Careful, well-structured planning is essential to good team management and, at different times, all the people concerned – staff, children, parents and governors – may be involved at various levels. Within the early years unit itself, it will usually be the teacher who decides the stage at which team members come into the planning process – as a general rule, the earlier the better. In the early years workplace, as in any other, people relish the opportunity to take part in decision-making.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers maintains that the interdependence of adult roles in early years education makes some form of joint planning essential. However, as experienced practitioners know too well, the sheer practicalities of involving everyone in the planning process from start to finish present very real problems – even for the most democratic leader.

Whole school planning

Gone are the days (we hope!) when teachers working in infant or primary nursery early years units were confined to their own corner of the school and left to plan in isolation. The development of the foundation stage means that early years staff must be involved in planning both with feeder settings and with the rest of the school. Teachers in the early years have a key role to play in helping to set budget priorities and the allocation of financial resources, and in shaping school curriculum development plans.

The early years curriculum will obviously be the priority for early years/foundation stage teachers but, if there is more than one teacher employed in the foundation stage, there may be an opportunity for those members of staff to lead the development of an area of the curriculum across the whole school. For many years, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers has lobbied to improve the status of early years teachers, and the Association continues to endorse the Rumbold Committee's recommendation that 'nursery teachers might be enabled to earn promotion by taking responsibilities for areas across a wider age range in the same way as infant and junior teachers are able to do.'²⁹

But however many early years teachers work in a school, and whatever their formal role in the wider curriculum, it is essential that they work closely with all colleagues to ensure that the early years unit is not seen as something totally separate. It bears repeating that continuity and progression within and across each phase of learning are vital, and nowhere is this more so than at the point where early years and primary education meet.

²⁹ DES (1990) *Starting With Quality: The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Quality of the Educational Experience Offered to 3- and 4- Year Olds*, chaired by Mrs Angela Rumbold CBE MP London, HMSO (now The Stationery Office)

Planning with nursery nurses

Proposals in England to develop the role of support staff may lead to changes in the ways that teachers and nursery nurses work together in the early years.

Qualified nursery nurses have an essential role to play in the planning and evaluation of the early years curriculum, and in supporting the day-to-day management of the early years unit. They are also part of the whole school team, and there have been welcome initiatives to draw them into curriculum planning, staff meetings and in-service provision – both inside and outside school. However, the involvement of nursery nurses in ‘after hours’ initiatives depends not only on their goodwill and professional commitment, but also on their terms and conditions of service – which vary significantly between LEAs.

Striking the right balance between the inter-dependent roles of the teacher and the nursery nurse can be both complex and challenging. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers is well aware that the salary, status and career prospects of nursery nurses do not compare favourably with those of teachers. Grievances have arisen in some schools but, if two professionals can establish a working relationship in which the one complements the other, a successful partnership will be forged. This can be fostered, in part, by ensuring that duties and responsibilities are carefully negotiated between both parties – and with the headteacher – so that each has a shared and explicit understanding of who is responsible for what and why. As Lally³⁰ concludes:

‘Nursery education gains its strength and quality from the two professionals involved. An effective nursery teacher plus an effective nursery nurse equals a very powerful combination of expertise.’

Planning with adult helpers

When parents and other adults in each setting work together to support children’s learning, the results can have a measurable and lasting effect upon children’s achievement.³¹

At any one time, the early years team could include parents, pupils on work experience programmes, students (both trainee teachers and nursery nurses) and even older children who have come to lend a hand. The permanent qualified staff will be around, of course, but there may also be support teachers (section 11 or special needs, for example) who do not work in the early years full-time. Each has an important contribution to make, but careful and thorough planning is vital if the children are to derive maximum benefit.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers has analysed this planning process through research. The long-established tradition of inviting adult helpers into the early years classrooms is one that is welcomed – although with some significant reservations. The inexperienced teacher is well-advised to exercise a degree of caution before agreeing to take on every willing pair of helping hands. Nothing is more daunting than facing a brigade of eager volunteers when you are still in the throes of organising the daily routine. The teacher should have the final choice in this matter, so think twice before you say ‘yes’ – after all, you cannot be expected to work confidently with others until you feel confident yourself. Once you have agreed to accept help, make sure that your helpers know exactly what is expected of them.

It is natural for new teachers to be apprehensive at the prospect of working with adult helpers, but there is a wide variety of ways to set about planning their integration into early years life. Experienced teachers will have found what suits them best – usually by trial and error! There are no hard and fast rules, but these may be useful starting points:

- find out if the school has a policy on the role of parents and other adult helpers in the classroom
- if you opt to welcome helpers, ask for volunteers by sending a letter to parents, putting a notice on the parents’ noticeboard or by talking to your parent governor
- make time to talk with parents and other helpers about the skills they have to offer: you may be able to point to ways you could help them develop existing talents (bear in mind that you will probably be learning from them as well as vice versa)
- agree times and days when you would value help – there is obviously no guarantee that volunteers will always be able to honour a commitment – make it clear to them that you recognise and accept this
- volunteers need to know what they are doing and when – make sure that all helpers have relevant information on each day’s programme of activities, and that individuals know which group(s) of children they are to work with and where
- if you are not working single-handed, see to it that your helpers know which member of staff is responsible for who – and who to approach for specific advice
- keep an up-to-date list of odd jobs (such as covering books, replenishing stock and sewing on apron strings) in case anyone has a moment to spare.

Most important of all, make sure that all helpers – not least parents – understand what the early years unit is setting out to achieve. They should be aware of the purpose and structure underpinning play and other activities and of the agreed rules in the classroom, so that children have continuity of authority. This can be done in conversation, but this is time-consuming so most early years units use a handbook which outlines not only the early years aims and objectives, but also the range of strategies to achieve them. The handbook should explain the early years approach to learning, and describe the education and care offered to the children. The language should be clear, accessible, and jargon-free.



³⁰ Lally, M (1991) **The Nursery Teacher in Action** London, Paul Chapman

³¹ SCAA (1996) **Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning**

Insurance

Employees, parents and other voluntary helpers should be covered by the school's or LEA employers' liability and public insurance cover. The insurance covers compensation which may have to be paid to a third party (for example, a pupil) as a result of negligence. Insurance must be arranged as employers are vicariously liable for the negligent actions of their employees, which occur in the course of the employment, whether on or off site.

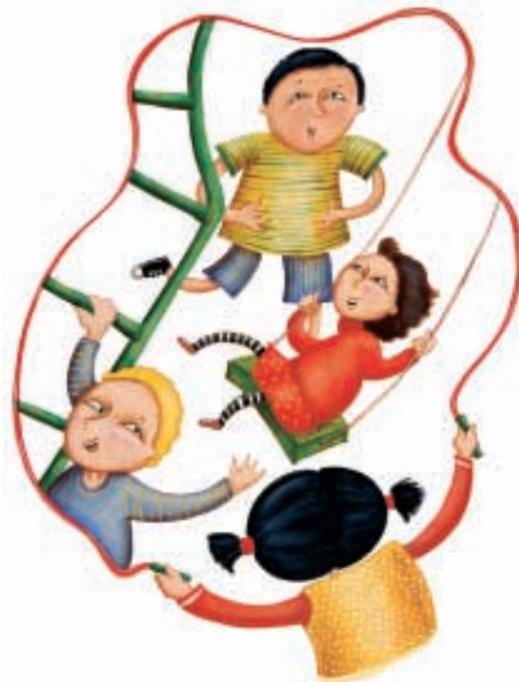
It is advisable for employees, parents and other voluntary helpers to ascertain from the headteacher how far the insurance cover extends.

Although it is relatively unusual for an individual to be ordered by a court to pay compensation following a successful claim against him or her, some people may wish to consider taking out cover for personal liability through a private insurance company. Those who are eligible are strongly advised to join a teachers' association which provides automatic cover for personal liability. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers automatically indemnifies all its members against liability arising out of their employment. This includes voluntary activities and covers awards for damages up to £2,500,000.

Screening for criminal records

Since April 2002, employers will use the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to check the criminal backgrounds of job applicants. It will provide information about applicants for teaching posts. Employers will have to register with the CRB. Successful job applicants will most likely be asked to apply to the CRB for an Enhanced Disclosure. This is the most stringent level of Disclosure, and will apply to education professionals. The process should apply only to applicants for jobs: existing staff should not be asked to obtain a Disclosure, unless there are grounds for concern about an individual's suitability to work with children.

The DfES has published a guidance note, *Child Protection: Preventing Unsuitable People From Working with Children and Young Persons in the Education Service*, which includes information about pre-employment checks and the CRB. Call DfES Publications on 0845 602 2260.



TRANSFER AND TRANSITION

Throughout their early years education, young children are likely to experience a number of different forms of provision, ranging from time at home, or in the care of relatives or friends, to childminders, playgroups, preschools, parent and toddler groups, nursery schools and classes, and reception classes.

'Let us ensure that all our children pass each milestone with exhilaration, joy and a sense of achievement'³²

With the development of a foundation stage, the transition to school will take place mid-stage for many children. Some will attend the school nursery and reception classes or will transfer from pre-school settings, but for others their first experience of group provision will be in the school. A few will start school in Year 1, either directly from home or from other settings.

A further transition will occur where the foundation stage is implemented – between the end of the foundation stage and the start of national curriculum provision. (In England, this is between the end of the reception class and the beginning of Year 1.)

Wherever the transitions occur, it is important that they are handled sensitively, so that children experience continuity and consistency of provision. This is every bit as important as continuity and progression between classes in primary school.

The first day at 'the big school' continues to be a major step in every child's life, and it is significant too for parents, brothers, sisters and all the other relatives and friends who will be sharing the youngster's excitement – and apprehension.

Cast your mind back. How did you feel as you moved from one rung of the educational ladder to the next? Think about the forebodings, or perhaps the sheer delight, when you were told who your 'next' teacher was going to be in primary school. Remember too the strange, bewildering feelings of starting out in secondary school – a quantum leap from the security of the primary class. Everyone was bigger. Even the teachers seemed bigger, or somehow different. For children moving on from the early years setting, many people in 'the big school' will certainly be very much bigger – and more distant – than the friends they are used to seeing every day.

Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that the transition from the early years setting to the reception class is as smooth as possible. This is particularly the case where the reception class (or, the vertically-grouped infant class) operates a very different regime – in terms of teaching style, curriculum content, access to adult attention, and even wearing of school uniform – from the early years setting.

³²David, T (1990) *Under Five – Under Educated?* Milton Keynes, Open University Press

Starting school

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' report *Starting school*³³ drew the following conclusions about children's experiences of starting school.

- The ideas teachers learned in training did not appear to help them understand what children know on entry or how they respond to school.
- Children need to learn 'survival' skills, including knowing what they can do and what they can't. Being able to cope with 'not knowing', and the feelings this may arouse, is the most valuable survival skill of all.
- In view of the enormous differences in the skills children already have at the point of entry to school, including the so-called survival skills, teachers need to be able to respond to them as individuals.
- The ratio of staff to pupils in infant classes was inadequate. Teachers felt that summer-born children starting school in the summer term suffered, particularly when they went into existing classes.
- It was felt that ideas about 'work' and 'play' needed to be clarified so that parents, teachers and children could communicate about activities in school.
- Teachers, carers, parents and other professionals identified a need for stronger links between themselves and between home and school.

Smoothing the way

Sadly, there is no blueprint which will guarantee a smooth transition between the early years setting and the reception class, but the following guidelines – rooted in experience and common sense – all have a part to play.

- It is important for children and their parents to visit the reception class (both separately and together) before the first day at school arrives. Getting to know the way around the main school building (if it is unfamiliar) is a confidence-booster in itself.
- Explanatory booklets, which parents can share with their children, complemented by a video about the school and an open meeting between staff and parents, can help children and their families understand 'how the school works.' A meeting with staff can also be a golden opportunity for parents to talk about their expectations of the school.
- Early years and reception class colleagues should be encouraged to visit each other on a regular basis – particularly if the early years setting is not part of the primary school. It is especially useful for reception class teachers to be able to observe potential pupils in the early years setting.
- Although time is always at a premium during the school day, a period set aside for a discussion – or, better still, a series of discussions – between reception and early years staff about written records or profiles of each child's programme of study is a sound investment.

- Before they leave the early years setting, children will gain a great deal from spending half a day or more in their new class, possibly with a 'paired' reception friend, joining in activities in the classroom and playground and, where appropriate, sharing lunch facilities. Older children will relish the responsibility of keeping a watchful and caring eye on the newcomers.
- At the start of the first term a staggered entry, with groups of four or five children starting every few days over the first two or three weeks, will ease the pressure on both children and teacher. It may be preferable for children of non-statutory school age to attend on a part-time (mornings or afternoons only) basis.
- No matter how well-prepared children have been, they are likely to need time, space and support to settle down in their new class or school. The new reception class will have to establish an identity of its own, and the children will need a while to get to know one another. Class assemblies (perhaps with the headteacher present), separate playtimes (which must be properly supervised) and lunching together as a group – possibly in the classroom – have all proved their worth in helping children feel safe and secure during their first few weeks at school.

ATL's recent publication *The early years: developing partnerships with parents* provides more suggestions to help children (and their parents) as they start school. It also contains advice on carrying out home visits.

Above all else, though, the transition from the early years setting to school should be seen as a series of carefully-planned and measured steps rather than a giant stride into the unknown. It is vital that all primary school colleagues, particularly reception class teachers, should be alert to – and in sympathy with – the aims of early years education. If they have a sound understanding of the environment, activities and expectations established in the early years setting, they will be uniquely-placed to value and extend children's earliest learning experiences.



³³ Barrett, G (1986) *Starting School: An Evaluation of the Experience* London, AMMA (now ATL)

APPENDIX 1

Useful addresses

Association of Advisers for the Under-Eights and Their Families

c/o Highclear, Cot Lane
Chidham
Chichester
Bucks PO18 8SP

Campaign for State Education (CASE)

158 Durham Road
London SW20 ODG
Tel: 020 8944 8206
Web: www.casenet.org.uk

Children in Scotland

Princes House
5 Shandwick Place
Edinburgh EH2 4RG
Tel: 0131 228 8484
Web: www.childreninscotland.org.uk

Children in Wales

25 Windsor Place
Cardiff CF10 3BZ
Tel: 029 2034 2434
Web: www.childreninwales.org.uk

Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE)

8 Chequer Street
St Albans
Hertfordshire AL1 3XZ
Tel: 01727 847 636
Web: www.cache.org.uk

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

Clarendon Dock
29 Clarendon Road
Belfast BT1 3BG
Tel: 028 9026 1200
Web: www.ccea.org.uk

Daycare Trust

21 St George's Road
London SE1 6ES
Tel: 020 7840 3350
Web: www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Department of Education (Northern Ireland)

Rathgale House
43 Balloo Road
Bangor
Co. Down BT19 7PR
Tel: 028 9127 9279
Web: www.deni.gov.uk

Department for Education and Skills (England)

Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0870 000 2288
Web: www.dfes.gov.uk

Early Education (BAECE)

136 Cavell Street
London E1 2JA
Tel: 020 7539 5400
Web: www.early-education.org.uk

Early Years NTO

Pilgrims Lodge
Holywell Hill
St Albans
Hertfordshire AL1 1ER
Tel: 01727 738 300
Web: www.early-years-nto.org.uk

Forum for Maintained Nursery Schools

136 Cavell Street
London E1 2JA
Tel: 020 7539 5400
Web: www.early-education.org.uk

Home-Start UK

2 Salisbury Road
Leicester LE1 7QR
Tel: 0116 233 9955
Web: www.home-start.org.uk

Kids Clubs Network

Bellerive House
3 Muirfield Crescent
London E14 9SZ
Tel: 020 7512 2112
Web: www.kidsclubs.org.uk

The National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA
Tel: 029 2082 5111
Web: www.wales.gov.uk

National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)

The Bungalow
Moulton College
Moulton
Northampton NN3 7RR
Tel: 01604 647 646
Web: www.nape.org.uk

National Childminding Association

8 Masons Hill
Bromley
Kent BR2 9EY
Tel: 020 8464 6164
Web: www.ncma.org.uk

National Children's Bureau (NCB)

8 Wakley Street
London EC1V 7QE
Tel: 020 7843 6000
Web: www.ncb.org.uk

National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO)

Unit 4, Pride Court
80/82 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF
Tel: 020 7833 3319
Web: www.ncvcco.org.uk

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

Oak House
Woodvale Road
Brighouse
West Yorkshire HD6 4AB
Tel: 0870 774 4244
Web: www.ndna.org.uk

National Early Years Network

77 Holloway Road
London N7 8JZ
Tel: 020 7607 9573
Web: www.neyn.org.uk

National Playbus Association

93 Whitby Road
Bristol BS4 4AR
Tel: 0117 977 5375
Web: www.playbus.org.uk

NIPPA – The Early Years Organisation

6c Wildflower Way
Apollo Road
Belfast BT12 6TA
Tel: 028 9066 2825
Web: www.nippa.org

Northern Ireland Childminding Association

16/18 Mill Street
Newtownards
Co. Down BT23 4LU
Tel: 028 9181 1015
Web: www.nicma.org

Pre-School Learning Alliance

69 Kings Cross Road
London WC1X 9LL
Tel: 020 7833 0991
Web: www.pre-school.org.uk

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

83 Piccadilly
London W1J 8QA
Tel: 020 7509 5555
Web: www.qca.org.uk

Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC)

Castle Buildings
Womanby Street
Cardiff CF10 1SX
Tel: 029 2037 5400
Web: www.accac.org.uk

Scottish Pre-School Play Association

14 Elliot Place
Glasgow G3 8EP
Tel: 0141 221 4148
Web: www.sppa.org.uk

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

Hanover House
24 Douglas Street
Glasgow G2 7NQ
Tel: 0141 242 2214
Web: www.sqa.org.uk

Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association

Ladywell-House
Newton
Powys SY16 1JB
Tel: 01686 624573
Web: www.walesppa.co.uk

APPENDIX 2

Useful reading material

The publications listed here may be of particular interest to the early years practitioner. There are, of course, many other excellent titles on this subject.

Moyles J and Suschitzky W (1997)

Jills of all trades? Classroom assistants in KS1 classes (summary report)

Association of Teachers and Lecturers. London

Bennett, N, Wood, L, Rogers, S (1997)

Teaching Through Play: Teachers' Thinking and Classroom Practice

Open University Press. Buckinghamshire

Bruce, T (1991)

Time to Play in Early Childhood Education and Care

Hodder and Stoughton. London

Bruce, T (1997)

Early Childhood Education

Hodder and Stoughton. London

David, T (1990)

Under Five – Under Educated?

Open University Press. Milton Keynes

Drummond, MJ and Pollard, A (1993)

Assessing Children's Learning

London, David Fulton Publishers

Drummond, MJ, Rouse, D and Pugh, G (1992)

Making Assessment Work

Nottingham, NES Arnold/National Children's Bureau

Drummond, MJ and Nutbrown, C (1992)

Observing and Assessing Young Children

London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd

Dunne, E and Bennett, N (1994)

Talking and Learning in Groups

London, Routledge

The Early Years Curriculum Group (2002)

Onwards and Upwards, Building on the Foundation Stage

EYCG

Featherstone, Sally and McInnes, Alison (1998)

First Hand – A Quality Curriculum for the Under-Fives

The Featherstone Education Partnership

Featherstone, Sally and McInnes, Alison (1998)

Early Years Audit and Policy Framework

The Featherstone Education Partnership

Fisher, J (ed) (2002)

The Foundations of Learning

Buckingham, Open University Press

Hall, M (1995)

Exploring Writing and Play in Early Years

London, David Fulton Publishers

Harding, J and Meldon-Smith, E (1996)

How to Make Observations and Assessments

London, Hodder and Stoughton

Heaslip, P, Hurst, V and Joseph, J (1992)

First Things First – Educating Young Children

Boon Printers Ltd

Hutchin, V (1996)

Tracking Significant Achievement in the Early Years

London, Hodder and Stoughton

Lally, M (1991)

The Nursery Teacher in Action

London, Paul Chapman

Moss, P (1996)

Transforming Nursery Education

London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd

Moyles, J (1989)

Just Playing? The Role and Status of Play in Early Childhood Education

Milton Keynes, Open University Press

Moyles, J (1994)

The Excellence of Play

Milton Keynes, Open University Press

National Assembly for Wales Education and Life-Long Learning Committee (2001)

Laying the Foundation: Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds

Cardiff, National Assembly for Wales

National Assembly for Wales (2001)

The Learning Country

Cardiff, National Assembly for Wales

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2002)

Detailed Proposals for the Revised Primary Curriculum and its Assessment Arrangements

Belfast, CCEA

(see www.ccea.org.uk for updated information)

Nutbrown, C (1999 2nd Edition)

Threads of Thinking – Young Children Learning and the Role of Early Education

London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd

Pascal, C (1990)

Under-five in Infant Classrooms

Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000)

Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage

London, DfES/QCA

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (forthcoming)

Foundation Stage Profile

London, QCA

Roberts, R (1995)

Self-Esteem and Successful Early Learning

London, Hodder and Stoughton

Siraj-Blatchford, I (1994)

The Early Years: Laying the Foundations for Racial Equality

Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books

Whitehead, D (ed) (1996)

Teaching and Learning in the Early Years

London, Routledge

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First published 1991, second edition 1999, third edition 2003.

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