



BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION



Association for the Professional Development
of Early Years Educators

BERA Early Childhood special interest group / TACTYC collaboration

Policy advice and future research agendas: Early Years

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<i>Plus policy group to be added later</i>	

Appendix 1: future research agendas

Working groups

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Theme: Professionalism - Early Years as a career

Immediate concerns:

- Develop a Birth to Seven teacher training programme with Qualified Teacher Status as the only graduate qualification for those working in educational settings with children from Birth to age Seven. This ensures parity across all educational age groups ^{1, 2, 3}.
- Develop Teachers' Standards (Early Years) with QTS, to more fully include:
 - Care and education: appropriate pedagogies for babies, toddlers and young children, including play ^{11, 15}
 - Child development across the full age range, including attachment theories ^{4,5,6}
 - Health and well being
 - Leadership (including leading quality improvement, leading practice) ^{7,8}
 - Multi agency working
 - Parent partnerships
 - Reflective practice ^{7,8}
 - Work with children from diverse communities and with a range of needs
- Amend the Statutory requirements for qualifications, linked to the EYFS Statutory Framework and Ofsted Early Years inspection framework by September 2016. The amendments must reflect two issues, and be supported through adequate funding for children's places ^{9, 10, 11, 12}:
 - i. A member of staff with Early Years QTS (Birth to Seven) must lead practice in every setting
 - ii. All staff who are counted in staff: child ratios must, as a minimum, meet the criteria for Early Years Educator
- Make transparent the mechanisms by which the current workforce, with existing qualifications such as EYPS, NVQ and Early Years Teacher can meet the criteria for the new Early Years Educator title and Early Years QTS (Birth to Seven) in the move to standardisation of qualifications and titles.
- Develop, support and maintain local interdisciplinary communities of learning across the range of settings and types of provision to maintain best practice by the early years workforce, relating to pedagogy, inclusion, cross cultural perspectives, and leading practice. This benefits children.
- Review the processes, structures and training/professional development for effective interprofessional working in the early years sector beyond children's centres, particularly in light of the two year old offer ¹³

Mid-term issues

- Develop a standard for professional development of the early years workforce, recognising the many routes available to enter the workforce, the complexity of the role, and the range of roles and settings within which the early years workforce is employed. Include interprofessional and multiagency working in CPD ^{9, 10, 11, 12, 14}.
- Make clear the required content of pre-early years courses for 16 year olds in schools and colleges, and the minimum standards to progress into level 3 courses in early childhood education and care ¹⁶

Long term aspirations

- Parity is required in pay and conditions between those who are teachers within schools, and those who are teachers in the early years sector, including the PVI sector. This would be a major enticement to attract high calibre staff into the early years workforce.^{7,8}
- Develop a register of EYEs and EYT_s, with a requirement that there is an annual demonstration of the suitability of the individual to remain on the register and be fit to practice. This would include annual requirements for CPD relevant to the role.

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Theme: Parents and families

Immediate concerns:

- Develop professional development opportunities for all graduate practitioners working with children aged birth to five so that they are better able to lead practice that supports and empowers parents and families from different backgrounds
- In particular, identify ways to support key persons working with two year olds, so that they are better able to carry out the two-year-old progress check and share it with parents and health visitors
- Investigate ways to support parental choice of childcare options. This could include revising taxation/ parental leave structures so that non-working parents can transfer their tax allowance to a working parent at any point during the first three years of a child's life, so that the carer receives a small wage, funded by transferred tax allowance

Mid-term issues

- Ensure that all EY practitioners have a core understanding of social inequalities and their impact on families and that they are able to look at the world from a parent's point of view, whilst still maintaining fully professional relationships that allow them to carry out safeguarding functions.
- Ensure that practitioners are able to work in genuine partnership with parents and carers, avoiding a 'deficit model' of parenting that constructs the practitioner as the 'expert' and the parent as the 'learner/ junior partner'
- Continue to revise taxation/parental leave structures in innovative ways to help parents and their close relatives to work together to provide home-based care for children under five, where appropriate. For example, enable parents/ grandparents/ to share a period of 36 months leave from the workplace to care for the child in a flexible fashion.
- Continue to fund children's centres to provide a family hub for local communities. Extend their role by integrating services for the elderly with services for children and provide a venue for people of all ages to work together in various ventures.

Long term aspirations

- Find out more about how parents and families from a variety of different backgrounds understand 'quality' in early years provision
- Identify how different understandings of 'experienced' quality are related to quality as constructed in policy; that is, do measurements and judgments of quality capture what parents and families think is good about settings and what they would like improved?

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Theme: Assessment, transitions and school readiness

Immediate concerns:

Review the level of the early learning goals for literacy and mathematics and the inclusion of Literacy and Mathematics in the Good Level of Development.

1. Literacy and mathematics have been added to the areas monitored for the Good Level of Development and the expectations for these areas have risen in the 2012-2013 EYFS Framework; e.g. for example, the new maths goal for number is equivalent to Level 1 in Key Stage 1. Effectively therefore literacy and mathematics have become additional Prime Areas by default.
1 3 4 5 9 10
2. The percentage of children achieving a good level of development in 2012 was 64% and under the revised new Profile dropped to 52% in the recent Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) (DfE, 2012; 2013). Thus according to the revised 2013 EYFS Profile, which focuses upon raised thresholds in maths and literacy, a majority of children have not achieved a ‘good level of development’ and are therefore deemed to have ‘fallen behind’ in their first year of schooling. Such negative labelling of children at a young age is inappropriate and undermines the central EYFS principle which states that children are ‘strong and competent learners from birth’. ^{13, 14}
3. The heightened levels for mathematics and literacy emphasise what the child cannot do as opposed to what they can achieve. For example, learning dispositions and characteristics of effective learning that are an essential basis for all later learning and are at the heart of the EYFS, are potentially sidelined within the new assessment regime and its simplistic focus upon maths and literacy.
4. Assessment needs to benefit all children and not to focus resources on getting some children through to ELG. Assessment on the current model puts some children, especially boys, in a deficit position. Furthermore, only 30 per cent of summer-born children reached a ‘Good Level of Development’ compared to 52 per cent of the autumn-born children, thus highlighting just one important difference between children’s birth dates. ^{1 2 5 9 11 12}
5. Any proposed Baseline Check would inadvertently become part of the Primary school assessment system since pupils’ progress in particular areas (such as literacy and maths) would be systematically monitored across Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 as a continuum. This would have the effect of side-lining the EYFS, especially if the Profile were to be made non-statutory. ¹⁵
6. Practitioners should work with health professionals to identify children with needs as early as possible. ^{5 11 12}

Mid-term issues

- Birth-to-Seven continuity means no need for summary assessment at four or five. (*Currently there is a fixed expectation of attainment at five through the ‘good’ level assigned to the outcomes of 12 of the 17 ELGs.*) ^{5 6 7 8 9 11}

Long term aspirations

1. There are many ways to understand children's learning and there should be many interlocking ways to express this understanding. Early Childhood CPD should develop confidence to articulate and own a range of assessment strategies and be empowered by this.
2 3 4 5 9 10
2. Schools should be ready for the children who arrive and not make children ready for them.
1 2 3 4 6 7 8

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Theme: Play and Pedagogy

We welcome the Government's aspirations and ambitions that young children in early childhood education achieve high standards that compare well internationally and would draw attention to the 20th May 2011 Council of the European Union's conclusions that that measures should be taken to promote curricula that:

... foster the acquisition of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, [and] recognising the importance of play, which is also crucial to learning in the early years.¹

In those European countries with successful outcomes, such as Finland, young children's entry to school is delayed to 6/7 years of age: it is preceded by play-led kindergarten provision that contributes to children's all-round development and so, we believe, to their high levels of achievement.

In order to improve learning outcomes for young children and families we make the following recommendations for immediate, mid-term and long-term action, and for the development of a research agenda.

Immediate

- Develop Teachers' Standards (Early Years) with QTS to more fully include study of play and related pedagogy across the full age range as a crucial aspect underpinned by evidence-based research and exemplars from recent research to demonstrate what quality play looks like.
- Develop EYFS to ensure that high-quality play is given prominence with the importance of staff knowledge of up-to-date evidence emphasised. This would require the amendment of the Early Learning Goals and Ofsted's Early Years inspection framework, by September 2014.
- Emphasise the 'key person' approach^{7 8} throughout this age range, including in schools, to ensure there are individual adults who know, understand and can support children in their play.
- Promote staff documentation of children's play through 'learning stories' or journals to further understanding of the role of all aspects of play in children's learning⁹.
- Ensure that the EYFS promotes learning across *all* contexts including play, emphasising i) an appreciation and understanding of the existing cultural knowledge children bring to their early childhood setting and explore in their pretend play;^{10 11} ii) respectful and democratic learning cultures in all early childhood settings across this age range¹² and iii) rich talk and understanding.^{13 14}
- Ensure that contexts for rich, deep level play are provided and promote understanding of its role in fostering literary, scientific and mathematical achievements in later life. For example, an important aspect of mathematics is the *cultural* mathematical knowledge that enables children to make sense of the role and purposes of mathematics in society¹⁵ Recent research has shown how high quality, free and spontaneous pretend play enables children to explore and extend their home cultural knowledge of mathematics.¹⁶ The social nature of rich pretend play has also been shown to provide meaningful contexts in which children can make extensive use of both

literacy (emergent writing) and their emergent mathematical representations (*children's mathematical graphics*) to communicate, thereby providing strong foundations for subsequent literacy and mathematics in school.¹⁷ Routine, brief and low quality pretend play will not fulfil these expectations.

- Ensure greater understanding of how children learn and of the importance of play among all staff working with children birth to 7 year age range, including through initial training, CPD and higher level qualifications.

Mid-term:

- That 'Specialist Leaders of Education' (SLE) for play be introduced throughout England, to be accorded equal status and importance as SLE for subject areas such as mathematics.
- That the significance of OfSTED's influence on play and pedagogy in early years settings and classes be recognised: in relation to this we recommend that OfSTED inspectors need to be highly knowledgeable about play and its value in order to make informed judgements across the entire EYFS age group. In connection with this we recommend that Ofsted's Early Years inspection framework be amended to reflect the importance of play and also of the 'key person' approach by September 2014.

Long-terms

- That research practice into effective children's play and the pedagogy to support be promoted as an important and integral aspect of staff development in all early years settings, and that settings be encouraged to share their findings at a local and national level, since we acknowledge the value of practitioner research in early childhood settings as a means of developing professionalism and informing practice to achieve effective and high-quality play.

References

See 1-17 at end of document

Theme: Learning, development and the curriculum

Immediate concerns

- Amend the legal requirements for physical space to ensure settings have sufficient indoor and outdoor space to provide daily opportunities for physically active play that supports young children's physical development.^{i ii iii iv}
- Revise the EYFS/training/Standards/assessment to ensure focus on the process of learning (the diversity of learners and learning, what learning is, what learners do) and pedagogy, rather than products of learning (outcomes/targets/predetermined goals).
- Review the EYFS and ELGs to ensure 'school' literacies take account of current research relating to how children develop and experience literacies within family and community contexts.^{v vi vii}
- Review the 'overarching principles' and philosophy of the EYFS to include a focus on children's voices and rights to highlight the importance of these issues.^{viii ix}
- Provide guidance on ways to ensure that provision for two years olds in school settings is organised to promote the development of close and sustained relationships between children, key persons and a small number of other staff.^{x xi}
- Review the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS to ensure they have priority within the Statutory documents.^{xii}
- Place more prominent emphasis on the importance of children's self-initiated play as a medium for learning.

Mid-term issues

- Define 'school readiness' in light of children's diverse abilities and backgrounds.^{xiii xiv xv}
- Review the EYFS to ensure a more explicit focus on inclusive approaches to curriculum implementation and assessment, giving consideration to issues of ethnicity, religion, gender, class, disability and date of birth for children's learning and development.^{xvi xvii xviii xix}
- Strengthen the expectations for practitioners (early years teachers and early years educators) across EYFS settings to work in partnership with parents to support children's learning and development, including expectations to build on children's learning within families and communities.^{xx xxi}
- Endorse reliable, validated sources of neuroscientific, educational and psychological research that reflects a holistic, consilience approach to learning and development in order to frame a curriculum that effectively integrates the bio-psycho-social framework of learning.^{xxii xxiii xxiv xxv}

- Emphasise the significance of relational pedagogy for children's learning and development and within the early years curriculum, including practices relating to supporting children's behaviour and well-being.^{xxvi xxvii xxviii xxix}

Long term aspirations

- Review links between the EYFS and National Curriculum to ensuring consistency with a play-based pedagogy.
- Review the UK and international research evidence supporting the EYFS separation of areas of learning and development into prime and specific areas, with particular regard to implications for early mathematical development.^{xxx xxxi}
- Integrate the sustainability agenda into early childhood learning, development and curriculum to reflect and promote the roles, rights and responsibilities in relation to the promotion of sustainable futures for children.^{xxxii xxxiii xxxiv}
- Undertake further research into how young children's self-initiated learning is supported across different settings.

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