

TACTYC response to the Teachers' Standards (Early Years)

Teachers' Standards (Early Years) have a vital role in shaping the nature of the work that early years teachers will undertake and the training towards meeting those standards. Thus, they will strongly influence what happens in practice with our youngest children in early years settings, many of whom spend long hours in day care. It is therefore imperative that the Standards take full account of the knowledge and experience of the early years sector, academic experts and organisations representing these, as well as paying attention to research evidence.

In light of this, we are concerned and disappointed on two fronts in relation to the new standards:

1. The consultation responses have not been taken into account adequately;
2. The standards show several serious omissions and include several aspects that will skew work with young children.

1 The response to the consultation

The responses are shown as totalling 282. Although a footnote explains that this includes responses received from membership organisations and sector bodies on behalf of their members/sector, very little regard is paid to the weight of evidence and number of views that this represents. TACTYC, for example, has been counted as one response, but in fact speaks for over 500 members. At TACTYC, consultation responses are formulated in depth amongst a group of early years experts from different parts of the sector and presented to the wider membership for further refinement. The content of TACTYC's consultation responses includes thorough referencing to research evidence and should not be dismissed lightly. It is highly likely that responses from other organisations follow a similar format. Counting such responses as individual makes nonsense of using figures such as '10% of respondents' to justify action and underestimates the strength of feeling across the sector.

It is hard to reconcile a claim 'to move decisively away from the idea that teaching young children is somehow less important or inferior to teaching school age children' (p. 6) with the plan *not* to offer Early Years Teachers the same status, i.e. Qualified Teacher Status. How can one set of teachers claim to be as important as or equivalent to those with QTS, when by virtue of the fact that they do not have QTS they will be paid less, have different terms and conditions of service and have fewer career opportunities?

2 The standards

- **Inadequate and inappropriate coverage of the EYFS age range**

It is stated that 'A small number of respondents (10%) felt that the standards were aimed more at over 4s. We have strengthened the preamble which sets the scope for the standards to reflect more clearly the age range and included more specific wording to specify working with children from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.'

Simply adding the age range to the preamble does not take account of the fact that many of the Standards still refer to pedagogy that is more appropriate to older children. For example:

- '2.6: Develop children's confidence, social and communication skills through **group** learning'
- 4.4 Use a variety of teaching approaches to lead **group** activities appropriate to the age range and ability of children' (emphasis added)

These are not appropriate to babies and very young children whose confidence, emotional well-being, social and communication skills are developed and enhanced primarily by *individual* responsiveness and learning¹²³⁴⁵. To state only group learning and teaching here is to promulgate a pedagogy that will not be in the best interests of young children's development or teachers' planning and assessment.

The involvement of early years teachers in using care routines as pedagogic encounters is omitted, leaving this to the Early Years Educator. Yet, care routines provide a key opportunity for learning, and the division of such tasks across occupational groups rather than being provided holistically by one person for each child is not a model of effective practice with babies. It is disingenuous to claim that such standards will improve provision for babies and children aged birth to three years.

- **Play in early years pedagogy**

The lack of emphasis on the vital role of play in early learning and development is indefensible. It ignores the strong response from many individuals and groups, which are well grounded in evidence⁶⁷⁸⁹. The statement that this is to allow 'a range of pedagogical approaches, thus giving these highly qualified professionals the freedom and flexibility' to decide for themselves is belied by

¹ Schore, A. N. (1994) *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: the neurobiology of emotional development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

² Sroufe, L. Alan. (1997) *Emotional development: The organization of emotional life in the early years*. Cambridge University Press

³ Svanberg, Per OG. (1998) "Attachment, resilience and prevention." *Journal of Mental Health* 7.6: 543-578.

⁴ Trevarthen, Colwyn, and Kenneth J. Aitken. (2001) "Infant intersubjectivity: Research, theory, and clinical applications." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 42.1: 3-48.

⁵ Wells, G. and Nicholls, J. (1985) *Language and Learning: an Interactional Perspective*. Lewes, UK: Falmer Press.

⁶ Bodrova, E. and Leong, D. (2005), The importance of play; why children need to play. *Early Childhood Today*, 20 (3): 6-7

⁷ Brooker, L. (2010) Learning to play or playing to learn?. In *Engaging play*, ed. L. Brooker and S. Edwards, 152-165. Maidenhead: Open University Press

⁸ Evangelou, M., Sylva, K., Wild, M. And Glenny, G. (2009) *Early Years Learning and Development. Literature review*. London: DCSF

⁹ Hirsh Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R., Berk, L. and Singer D. (2008) *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press

the narrow, unjustified and unfounded requirement for the use of systematic synthetic phonics. Instead, play, playful pedagogy and a broad based approach to supporting early literacy including the use of phonics amongst a range of strategies should all be clearly specified. In this way, all early years teacher must take account of and extend children's innate abilities expressed through play.

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