**Education Committee inquiry into the purpose and quality of education in England**

**Written evidence submitted by TACTYC**

Submitted on behalf of TACTYC: the Association for Professional Development in Early Years, an organisation of over 600 members.Our activities include:

* **advocacy and lobbying** - providing a voice for all those engaged with the professional development of practitioners through responding to early years policy initiatives and contributing to the debate on the education and training of the UK early years workforce;
* **informing** – developing the knowledge-base of all those concerned with early years education and care by disseminating research findings through, for example, our international [Early Years Journal](http://www.tactyc.org.uk/EarlyYears.asp), annual conference, website and occasional publications;
* **supporting** – encouraging informed and constructive discussion and debate and supporting practitioner reflection, the use of evidence-based practice and practitioner-research through, for example, our [newsletter](http://www.tactyc.org.uk/newsletter.asp) and website ([www.tactyc.org.uk](http://www.tactyc.org.uk)).

**Summary**

* Education does not have one purpose, but is and should be multi-purposed including focus on the present and the future, the individual and the collective.
* Although the emphasis varies across different phases of education, the range of purposes should be clearly articulated for all age groups.
* The tendency to measure only those outcomes which are easily measurable should be avoided.
* TACTYC’s response to the inquiry highlights aspects particularly in terms of education in the early years.

1. **What the purpose of education for children of all ages in England should be:**
   1. The purposes of education include focus on the future (preparing children for their lives ahead) and the present (meeting children’s current needs) and should take account of children’s past experiences, their cultural knowledge and interests. While good education does help prepare children for successful adult lives, it is important to see children not just as adults-in-waiting, but as people now who have an entitlement to rich and fulfilling childhoods. Children bring their past experiences and are *being* now, and *becoming* for the future, and education must reflect both of these in its purposes.
   2. In addition, education should focus both on the individual and on the collective. For very young children, who are closely connected to and dependent on others, the individual and being a member of a society are inseparable. Children learn in collaboration with others (children and adults) and this needs to be acknowledged. All purposes of early years education are fostered in the context of relationships.
   3. A sound basis for articulating the purposes of education are the twelve aims for primary education defined by the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT) <http://cprtrust.org.uk/about_cprt/aims/>. The CPRT aims are based on extensive research and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and fully explained in the final report, *Children, their World, their Education;* we acknowledge the depth of contribution the CPRT aims make to this debate and see little reason to alter them significantly. We therefore endorse the CPRT aims. Working from these CPRT aims, our contribution will be to articulate where emphases lie in the purposes of early years education.

**Purposes of early years education**

Early years education should foster:

* 1. *Well-being* - a growing sense of self as connected, valued and valuing others; worthy of attention, listened to and responded to contingently; physically and emotionally tended, nurtured and facilitated.
  2. *Engagement –* active involvement with deep interest and flow in activities that have meaning to them. For young children this involves play and playful self-chosen activity, as well as engagement in life experiences such as household routines and self-care activities.
  3. *Agency –* fostering *empowerment* and *autonomy* in a supported manner; a growing sense of themselves as beings able to confidently act upon, react to and be within the physical and social world. This means being self-driven to explore, try things out, experiment, initiate, problem-solve, seeking to test and extend their capabilities in matters of interest to them. It involves adults in supporting young children’s skills development, and discrimination in making choices.
  4. *Reciprocity and respect–* a growing awareness of the impact of themselves on others, and of others on them (such as primary carers, siblings, family members and friends); the importance and value of relationships and friendships and how to develop and maintain them; a growing awareness of *interdependence,* both in relationships and in relation to the natural world.
  5. *Citizenship, culture and community* – participation in decision-making, growing ability in a problem-solving approach to conflict, engaging in activities that reflect their cultural heritage and cultural communities.
  6. *Learning, knowing and doing* – through fostering a retention and development of the exploratory, creative and investigative drives through which children make meanings and make sense, and which children appear to possess from their earliest days but which can be lost. Foster enthusiasm, immersion, tenacity, creativity and imagination. Foster foundational skills of balance, manipulation, strength, stamina, co-ordination and energy, communication, meaning-making, and collaborative effort.
  7. *Imagination and dialogue* -- through play and open-ended activity, to extend beyond the here-and-now into worlds of possibility; to be listened to and collaborate on developing ideas and understanding.

1. **What measures should be used to evaluate the quality of education against this purpose:**

2.1 Measures of the quality of education in early years should be defined by aspects of high quality provision, including well-qualified staff with specific expertise in the learning and development of young children, pedagogy characterised by support for children’s active learning within warm relationships, and an environment offering experiences of exploration and opportunities to encounter new challenges. Significant indicators of high quality early years education include the quality of interactions, children’s deep involvement in their activities, and the involvement of families/parents. ,Measures should not be limited to the children’s performance seen as outcomes within a narrow range of knowledge and skills.

1. **How well the current education system performs against these measures.**
   1. Inconsistencies exist in the current statutory EYFS that militate against quality early years education. For example, a principle focused on the unique child is juxtaposed with an expectation that every child will attain the same goals by the time they are five years old. What is assessed tends to drive the curriculum, and current assessment systems warp the curriculum offered by prioritising particular practices -- for example, reciting nonsense words and early formal instruction in phonics and writing removed from contexts which make sense to children.
   2. Assessment must be considered as part of the larger system, to ensure it relates to and supports the purposes of education. Assessment is properly placed within the larger context of learning and teaching by Ofsted, in its guidance for inspectors of the quality of early years education: ‘Teaching should not be taken to imply a ‘top down’ or formal way of working. It is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities: communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children’s next steps in learning and monitor their progress.’

**References**

Alexander, R.J. (ed) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education:  final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Routledge, pp 197-9

Ofsted (June 2015*) Early Years Inspection Handbook*, p 34