

The role of teachers in children's centres

The British Association for Early Childhood Education firmly believes that all young children are entitled to high quality education in their earliest years. To ensure that they have this, the evidence is clear that all young children must have access to input from a qualified early years teacher. The association is committed to teachers in children's centres and the key role they play in improving outcomes for all children.

Introduction

The British Association for Early Education believes that all practitioners working in children's centres play an important role in improving outcomes for all children attending especially the most disadvantaged. The association recognises that children's centres are complex organisations. They undertake a wide range of tasks including supporting children's learning, work with parents, health promotion, increasing employment opportunities and training. Undertaking all these tasks requires a staff team with a wide range of skills and understanding. No one profession can provide the full range of skills in sufficient depth and children's centres need a multi disciplinary team rather than a multi disciplinary person. Each role in the children centre team is equally valuable but different roles have different contributions and responsibilities.

There is a long tradition of teachers working as part of the team in nursery centres, schools and classes. This paper explains why teachers are a crucial part of the team, the particular contribution they make to children's centres and how they are most effectively deployed.

Why teachers? Messages from research

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project provides robust evidence on the contribution of teachers to improving outcomes for children. EPPE is the first major European longitudinal study of a national sample of young children's development between the ages of 3 and 7 years. The project found a significant relationship between the quality of pre-school settings and improved outcomes for children. Good settings had sound leadership, good communication, shared a consistent way of working amongst the staff and a higher number of teachers.

In particular the researchers found that:

- Integrated centres that fully combine education with care and have a high proportion of trained teachers, along with nursery schools, tend to promote better intellectual outcomes for children. The integrated centres in the EPPE sample were all registered as nursery schools but had extended their provision to include flexible hours for childcare along with substantial health and family support services.
- Fully integrated settings and nursery classes tend to promote better social development even after taking account of children's backgrounds and prior social behaviour.
- Good quality pre-school education can be found in all kinds of settings, however the EPPE data indicates that integrated centres and nursery school provision have the highest scores on pre-school quality.
- Having trained teachers working with children in pre-school settings for a substantial proportion of time, and most importantly as the curriculum leader, had the greatest impact on quality.
- Less qualified staff were significantly better at supporting learning when they worked with qualified teachers.
- Having trained teachers was linked specifically with better outcomes in pre-reading and social development at age 5.

DfES requirements

In England all children's centres are required to have at least one 0.5 teacher and are strongly encouraged to increase this to a full-time qualified teacher over the first 18 months of operation.

The Guidance states that:

"Research.... shows that qualified teacher input leads to higher quality provision and improved outcomes for children, especially where teachers are the leads in the planning and development of the curriculum. The most positive outcomes are achieved where qualified teachers work with children and practitioners in the setting. It is therefore essential that Local Authorities ensure qualified teacher input."

Sure Start Unit Guidance 2005.

What works? - The most effective ways to deploy teachers

The British Association for Early Childhood Education has many members working in children's centres. Feedback from members indicates that teachers in children's centres are most successful when their role is clear and the particular contribution of teaching staff is recognised and capitalised on. It is important to ensure that the teachers are an integral part of the centre team. They are least effective when they are seen as an 'add on' or 'drop in' in an advisory capacity. Teachers in this position can experience difficulties as they are not seen as part of the staff and are not part of the centre's management structure. If they are not in the centre for a substantial part of the week they are not able to develop a deep understanding of the children and so are less effective in promoting learning.

Teachers are most effective when they are 'hands on' working along side colleagues to support children's learning. To be successful in a children's centre teachers need to have specialist knowledge of young children's learning and development from birth. They also need to have the skills to lead colleagues and work closely with other early years staff in observing, planning, supporting and extending children's learning.

In order to be a successful teacher in a children's centre it is crucial that the teacher has an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the other professionals and is able to establish effective, professional relationships with colleagues from a range of backgrounds. As well as their role in supporting key workers in planning and assessing they must also be able to offer advice on children's learning and development to the wider range of children's centre practitioners including childminders, home visitors, drop in and crèche workers.

References

- Sure Start Children's Centre Guidance 2005
- Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Sammons, Melhuish and Elliot (2003) *EPPE Technical Paper 10 – Case studies of practice across the foundation stage* ISBN: 085473 601

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The British Association for Early Childhood Education (Early Education), founded in 1923, is the leading national voluntary organisation for early years practitioners and parents with members and branches in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Early Education promotes the right of every child to education of the highest quality. It provides support, training, advice and information on best practice for all those concerned with the education and care of young children from birth to eight.

It is an established national organisation with the expertise and experience to support the development of the early years workforce.

Early Education's objectives and main activities are to:

- provide a national voice on early childhood education, advising central and local government and the media;
- acknowledge and encourage partnership and involvement with families;
- disseminate information about national initiatives through training, publications and the website;
- offer information, advice, guidance and consultancy to develop high quality integrated services for young children and families;
- organise training courses, conferences and seminars;
- manage major projects on key national issues;
- support a network of branches and regional networks throughout the UK;
- publish material on early childhood education and child development;
- produce a termly journal *Early Education* and newsletter *Integrate*;
- maintain a historic archive and library;
- maintain a comprehensive website.

Membership subscription includes the termly journal *Early Education*, regular newsletters and mailings, reduced rates at training, conferences and branch events and voting rights at the annual general meeting.

www.early-education.org.uk