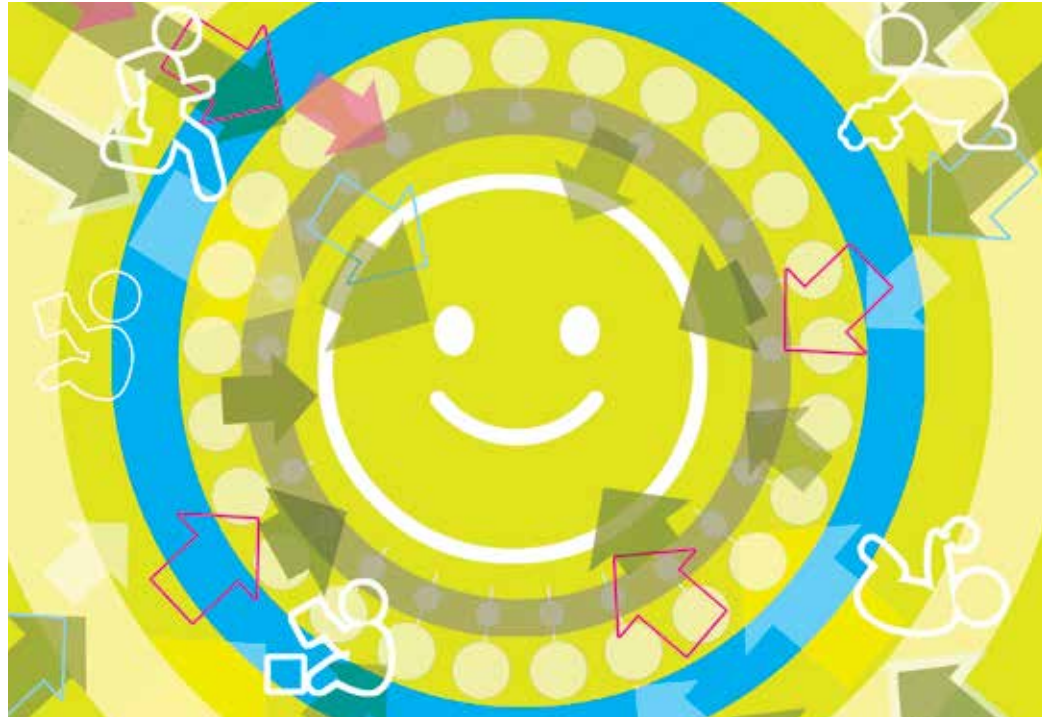


# Going back to basics

In a new series updating our popular EYFS Training series from 2010, **Charlotte Goddard** looks at the EYFS, its underpinning principles and changes ahead in 2019

- EYFS training must inform practitioners about forthcoming changes to Ofsted inspection judgements and the Early Learning Goals
- Practitioners need more training on the child development theories that underpin the EYFS principles, especially the Characteristics of Effective Learning
- Training should also clear up confusion about using child development guidance as an assessment tool, moving away from a tick-list approach



All practitioners should have a good understanding of the EYFS. While this might sound obvious, many practitioners would benefit from a better understanding, according to leading early years consultant **Penny Tassoni**.

She says, 'Sometimes practitioners are not using the statutory framework as their starting point. This often means that they are doing things that are not actually benefiting children, but believing that they "have to". The EYFS is now quite brief, so it is worth settings going through it with staff and unpicking it line by line.'

'Everything done in the setting needs to come back to the EYFS statutory framework and be seen in that context. Ofsted inspects to the EYFS and practitioners need to understand that. Enabling environments relate to the EYFS. People know what they are and that they are important, but not always how to apply them in practice with different

activities appropriate for different ages. Another area of weakness is how to observe, assess and plan in a way which relates to the EYFS. You get a lot of "Tommy played with dinosaurs today". But what does this mean for the child? Did he do anything new or significant?

'There is a real danger that time is spent away from children writing observations that will not actually be of benefit. The EYFS is very clear that paperwork should be kept to a minimum, but sometimes this part of the statutory framework is overlooked.'

**Michael Freeston**, quality improvement director at the Pre-school Learning Alliance, adds knowledge of the EYFS 'will become even more important this year when Ofsted's new Education Inspection Framework places greater emphasis on practitioners' understanding of

how children learn and develop.'

Ofsted is preparing new handbooks to explain changes to its headline inspection judgements, due to come into force from September, while new Early Learning Goals are being piloted. Whatever these look like in their final form, practitioners will need to spend time familiarising themselves with them, and any training should reflect them.

The downward 'school readiness' and SATs-driven pressure on early years practitioners makes it even more important that they can articulate the child development theories behind the EYFS to leaders and managers who may lack an early years background.

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Most early years practitioners are familiar with the importance of the four

overarching principles of the EYFS, and the seven Prime and Specific areas of learning. These were introduced after a review by Dame Clare Tickell in 2012.

However, there is less confidence about the theories behind the principles. Felicity Dewsbery, deputy head of centre and research lead at Pen Green Centre, says, 'It is important to start with the child in front of you not the document, and you should know the child development theory that has informed the EYFS.'

**Jo Baranek**, NDNA's lead early years adviser, says, 'If practitioners don't fully understand how a child's brain works, it can be difficult to effectively support children with complex subjects. This does not tend to be studied in enough depth for Level 2 practitioners.'

'Some Level 3 practitioners are being taught a lot more in-depth about child development than



## GOOD TRAINING CHECKLIST: Helen Moylett

early years consultant, trainer and co-author of *Development Matters*

The EYFS as a statutory framework is brief by necessity, and you can't rely on it as a text book. So if you haven't had child development training, you are not going to get it from the EYFS or even *Development Matters*.

Training should be looking at the Characteristics of Effective Learning in depth and the child development theory that underpins them. Self-regulation is important to cover. The DfE has picked up on the importance of self-regulation but sees it as about children being able to behave themselves. It is about behaviour, but it is also about emotional and cognitive self-regulation, learning about feelings, how to think about your own thinking, and being motivated to be a learner.

Any good training course will always have reference to the Characteristics of Effective Learning even when it is

looking at something like early language development. The Characteristics are how children learn. Practitioners need to be able to tune into this, and be aware of how play is important. For example, how children learn empathy and self-regulation through role play is still news to some practitioners.

CPD should encourage practitioners to think about the children they have with them every day in the context of what they are learning. If they don't have children there in front of them then watch videos of children, think about them, talk about them.

It is very difficult to do training on the cheap, and managers are having to be creative about where they find the money. The Early Years Pupil Premium is funding which can be used for training.

My favourite model of CPD is to have at least two or three sessions where

practitioners come to you, reflect on current practice, think about development, put what they have learned into practice, then come back with evidence of what they have done, and talk about it. A one-off course may have some value, but its impact is doubtful.

It is important to tell practitioners about the research behind the training, otherwise it is just another fad, another 'do this if you want a good Ofsted'. Training should not be for Ofsted, it should be for the children. I make sure practitioners have the opportunity to think about what they do well, and challenge them as to how they can make it better. Good training should give people food for thought, as well as practical ideas. It's crucial that whatever the subject matter, it's about children's learning and how adults can support self-regulation and dispositions to learn.

others. Practitioners need to spend time understanding the theories behind the learning of child development. If [they] have that foundation of understanding, they can build effective practice around that.'

Training needs to focus on how the Characteristics should be used in a setting, says **Kathy Brodie**, early years consultant. 'The EYFS is written looking more at outcomes than processes, so it is harder for practitioners to get their heads around,' she says. 'More work should be done on how the Characteristics affect everything else – sometimes they seem too separate and we need to look at how they integrate within the EYFS.'

Many experts agree that there are misunderstandings around the use of the *Development Matters* guidance which need to be picked up in training, with practitioners using the bullet-pointed suggestions as goals to be met for every child, rather than treating every child as unique.

**Jan Dubiel**, head of national and international development at Early Excellence, says, 'There is a huge misunderstanding about *Development Matters* and how it is being used. People feel imprisoned by it and talk about

children in certain age bands in a way that is sometimes quite disturbing.'

'While *Development Matters* states on every page that this is not a checklist, it has morphed into an assessment tool which does not take into account the full picture of children's development' says **Di Chilvers**, advisory consultant in early childhood associate at Early Education. 'We now have a generation of practitioners who don't have a broad understanding of child development, who have been deskilled because they only need to tick boxes.'

Training can go deeper into theories of child development that support the delivery of the EYFS but which may only be briefly mentioned or not at all in the framework, says Ms Brodie.

'It's like a gobstopper – now people have got to grips with the core of EYFS we can add the beautiful layers on the outside,' she says. These include theories and practices such as Sustained Shared Thinking, In the Moment Planning, schematic play and the Leuven scales for well-being and involvement.

### TRAINING COURSES

**Early Education** is running a development programme

during 2019 called Reclaiming the EYFS. 'The idea is we will get back to what we know is right – themes and principles, child development, the Characteristics of Effective Learning,' says Ms Chilvers.

The **Pre-school Learning Alliance** launched a CPD-accredited online training course, *Psychological Theories of Early Childhood Learning and Development* that inform the EYFS, in December. Developed with EduCare and free to Alliance members, the course is intended to refresh the knowledge of practitioners at Level 3 and above, providing an outline of the interrelationship of physical, emotional and cognitive factors in a child's early development.

It also offers *Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning*, which covers how to better understand and observe the way children learn, rather than just what they learn.

The **NDNA** runs a number of relevant face-to-face courses, including: *Vital for lifelong learning: Embed the Characteristics of Effective Learning in your setting*; *Quality Teaching in Early Years*; *Self-Regulation*; and *Adult Role in Supporting Play and Quality Interactions*.

**Early Excellence** training includes *Securing Expert Teaching in the EYFS*, which covers the Characteristics of Effective Learning and developing a balance of child- and adult-led learning, while *EYFS Practice Essentials* focuses on supporting children's self-initiated learning, building on their interests and securing high-quality interactions.

### USEFUL GUIDANCE

- *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, DfE, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2AJNSfP>
- *Learning, Playing and Interacting: Good Practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage*, National Strategies for Early Years, 2009. <https://bit.ly/2HknfUe>
- *Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage*, Early Education, 2012. The DfE published a truncated version in 2013 called *Early Years Outcomes*, but this only focuses on the Unique Child. *Development Matters* also covers *Enabling Environments and Positive Relationships*. <https://bit.ly/2DdmM31>
- *Principles into Practice*, DCSEF, 2007. <https://bit.ly/2VG62rI> ■