



Early Years Essentials: Linking theory to provision in the Early Years

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Abstract:

During their presentation, Poppy and Jayne will share insights into the origin of their upcoming book with Routledge - "Early Years Essentials". They will explore the importance of blending both theory & practice in the early years to ensure that all practitioners are effectively supported and our youngest children are nurtured to enable them to flourish. It's of significant importance to us that the early years remains high on society's agenda. If you have spent anytime with children under 5, then you will recognise the joy that they bring to seemingly everyday experiences. For them their whole lives are a series of 'firsts'! The development of our book not only recognises the significance of providing both research & pedagogical advice, but by including the voices of the early years workforce, champions the sector & celebrates the dedication & relentless enthusiasm to be 'essential' for the children they support.

Keywords: Early Years, Research, Pedagogy, Connections

The origins of our book grew overtime and mostly from frustration! Time which was spent in many, many meetings over the years where discussions seemingly had 'nothing to do with you in early years' followed by the accompanying annoyance that **everything** had something to do with early years! Research corroborates this viewpoint which provided some reassurance that our feelings were valid but coincidentally only added to the general level of exasperation.

The Education Endowment Foundation in their 'Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years' (2023) clearly states that 'A quality learning experience for children requires a quality workforce. A well-qualified, skilled staff strongly increases the potential of any individual setting to deliver the best possible outcomes for children'

This guidance goes on to emphasise the 4 cornerstones of improvement as,

1. build knowledge
2. motivate educators
3. teaching techniques
4. embed practice

These 4 cornerstones work as complementary to each other, feeding from the characteristics included in each of them & supporting practitioners to move towards the intention of being a professional learner within the CPD cycle.

If research is saying this & the voices within the early years sector are saying & feeling something similar, what can be done to flip the narrative? We recognise that our book will provide a small but significant part of the 0-5 jigsaw but by investing in & empowering all the adults who are part of the

early years family, we are committed & proud to make a difference not only to our children & their families but crucially the sector as a whole. Within the book we have purposely placed the early years practitioners in the spotlight; their voices are the recognition of their personal investment in reflecting on & implementing high quality experiences, approaches & systems which have led to improved progress & outcomes. We are thrilled with the response to our call for papers as not only we are reassured that our book can contribute to the ongoing CPD we deserve & crave but highlights the absolute brilliance of the early years sector.

Each chapter includes a ‘pondering question’, a provocation for the reader (& contributors) to muse over, which offers them the luxury of honing their own views, opinions & choices. This thread provides the reader with the opportunity to ‘dip into’ a chapter matched to their current priorities or interest, whilst allowing them the chance to have both reassurance of their own thoughts as well as being a learner. The pondering questions in each chapter are:

- Learning environment: indoors. Pondering question: how can the learning environment move from decoration to a place of adventure?
- Learning environment outdoors: Pondering question: what can the outdoor environment offer to children & deepen their learning?
- Effective partnership with parents: Pondering question: how can a true partnership develop which respects & engages all families?
- Prime area: physical development: Pondering question: how can we improve the physical skills of all children, so they become independent in their choices?
- Prime area: personal, social, emotional development: Pondering question: what should be included in a curriculum which both nurtures & supports?
- Prime area: communication & language development: Pondering question: how can we ensure that all children become confident & competent communicators?
- Specific area: literacy: Pondering question: how can we ensure that all aspects of the literacy curriculum are planned to ensure children build on prior learning?
- Specific area: mathematics: Pondering question: how can we connect explicit maths teaching to maths application & rehearsal?
- Specific area: understanding the world: Pondering question: how can we make sure that children’s key knowledge in this area of learning is in context & developmentally appropriate?
- Specific area: expressive arts & design: Pondering question: how can we move teaching & learning in this aspect from being taught as discrete learning modules to be embedded into the curriculum?
- Observation-assessment & planning cycle: Pondering question: What are the fundamental aspects which contribute to an OAP cycle which supports all children’s learning?
- Quality adult-child interaction: Pondering question: do we consider the range & impact of approaches & strategies we use in our interactions?
- The characteristics of effective learning: Pondering question: how can we ensure that the way children learn is given a similar consideration as what children learn?
- The importance of implementing EYFS principles as a whole school: Pondering question: what are the key EYFS ideas you would like to implement through your own school? Why?
- Protective characteristics in the early years: Pondering question: how can we discuss the protective characteristics with our youngest children sensitively?

- Wellbeing: Pondering question: how can we ensure that the wellbeing of all staff is the golden thread of a school/setting?

Our role, as co-authors, is to provide that connection between the research & the practice. We have the luxury & privilege of being able to learn from the sector & be guided by the wealth of research which will intentionally both compliment & extend the thinking of our readers.

The original aim & the chosen focus submitted to Routledge was this: *'Its aim is to provide a compendium of provision ideas which all early years practitioners, those starting their journey into teaching & others wanting to improve their own EYFS knowledge can use & personalise for their own children, providing a framework of improvement in teaching & learning for the youngest learners.'*

As we collect submissions and add to our manuscript, it's apparent that our book is developing into much more than this initial aspirational aim. We have both been humbled, grateful and astonished that early years practitioners across all sectors (childminders, nurseries, schools, ITT, Universities & beyond) have felt confident in trusting us to share their passions, opinions & expertise. We hope that it inspires, guides & enhances the world of early years so decisions made on behalf of children are grounded in a firm understanding of theory and practice.

EEF (2023) Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/support-for-schools/evidence-for-the-early-years/early-years-evidence-store/guide-to-effective-professional-development-in-the-early-years>