

Playwork - Principles into Practice

With the launch of our new training course, **Playwork - Principles into Practice**, this September, we've been busy helping settings to understand what the Playwork Principles look like in their settings and how to use them to meet the requirements for EYFS. In the first of a regular series on this issue, we begin by sharing some of the experiences so far...

Is it me?

The Early Years Foundation Stage is now a statutory requirement for all schools and Early Years providers working with children from birth to the end of the academic year in which a child has their fifth birthday.¹ But of course this will only have an effect in playwork settings where children could be four or five years' old.²

Where children in a playwork setting do fall within this age-range, it is very unlikely that that setting will be the primary care setting for the child, and will not therefore be subject to the same requirements as, for instance, a school or nursery.³

It is the child's primary setting (the place where the child spends the majority of their time between 8am-6pm) which needs to complete the EYFS assessment scales.



ALL PHOTOS: COMMON THREADS

The Department for Children, Schools and Families recognises the fact that playwork is not part of formal education, and that children in out of school play settings are learning through play which is delivered by playworkers who base their practices on the Playwork Principles.⁴



So the message is clear - if a playwork setting is working to the Playwork Principles, it should be able to meet EYFS requirements through its daily practice.⁵ There is no guidance as to how this needs to be done, so playworkers need to be confident in their practice and to develop ways of demonstrating how they put the Playwork Principles into practice in their settings.

Opportunity

This could be seen as a bit of a challenge, but with support it could also be seen as a huge opportunity for playworkers to show how really good playwork practice benefits children in their settings.

Rebekah Jackson, a Childcare Development Officer with Cheshire County Council, describes how Cheshire took the lead in supporting their playworkers. "Our philosophy for preparing our playworkers for EYFS was that most Ofsted Inspectors would not have a real out of school club to practice on, and would therefore not know how mixing the EYFS and Playwork Principles would work in practice until they started inspecting. Rather than viewing this as a disadvantage, we thought this could well give our settings the edge."

With a comprehensive package of training and targeted support from Development Workers, playworkers across Cheshire have not only begun to develop their playwork practice in line with the Playwork Principles but also to describe to others what playwork is about.



“The inspection tally so far is 1 outstanding, 3 good, 2 satisfactory and 1 inadequate,” reports Rebekah Jackson. “We have learned some lessons and made some mistakes too, as change is never easy, but I think that both the after school clubs and the children attending them have had a lot of fun getting to where we are now.”

The Playwork Principles help to describe what is that playworkers do and why they do it – it is then up to individual playworkers to demonstrate what that looks like in practice in their settings.

Key practice issues

There are several key issues that playworkers need to get to grips with in order to put the Playwork Principles into practice in their settings.

“One of the issues is play value,” explains Rachel Mafliin, a Common Threads trainer. “It is important for playworkers to consider the play value of everything they provide, and very often it is not at all obvious! We also look at how, even when the play value of something is high, it can be very easily – and often unnecessarily – restricted by adults. On the other



hand, play value of equipment can be increased, just by thinking about where it is placed.”

Settings in Norfolk found this last point to be the case when they moved equipment around their indoor spaces, often putting things in random places to suggest different ways of playing with the equipment. Not only did this result in children playing with things they had not played with before, but they also played differently with stuff they would normally play with.

‘Loose parts’⁶ are often a favourite piece of theory for playworkers to try out. Laura Thornley of Little Foxes Day Nursery in West Sussex is pleased with the results so far, “The dynamics have completely changed and the children WANT to play. They are interacting very well and smiling much more. The atmosphere in the group is fantastic and they are happy which in turn makes us happy.”

Recording

Of course all this play is a wonderful thing, but as experienced playworkers will know, we do have to do some paperwork too! Good playwork practice has always involved observing children’s play and recording these observations in order to reflect on how to meet children’s play needs, and the introduction of the EYFS has made no difference to this: ‘whilst there will be an expectation for playworkers to observe and record, this should be within the context of playwork ethos and practice’.⁷ Again, there is no ‘official’ guidance as to what this needs to look like in practice, so make sure you read future issues of *Playwords* where we will be looking at observing and recording as part of this feature!

Can you share with other *Playwords* readers how you have put the Playwork Principles into practice to meet EYFS? Get in touch and tell us your story – **E:** publications@commonthreads.org.uk. There will be more from the people quoted in this article plus others in future issues of *Playwords*, with some articles posted our website in-between issues, so make sure that you sign-in regularly to **W:** www.commonthreads.org.uk.

All the people quoted in this article have taken part in ‘Playwork – Principles into Practice’. To find out more, take a look at page 23 or contact us **E:** training@commonthreads.org.uk or **T:** 02380 629460.

¹ EYFS Statutory Framework May 2008

² SkillsActive article in *Playwords* Issue 35, page 6.

³ SkillsActive article in *Playwords* Issue 37, page 6 (this issue).

⁴ SkillsActive EYFS Update – September 2008.

⁵ SkillsActive article in *Playwords* Issue 37, page 6 (this issue).

⁶ Nicholson, S (1971) *How not to cheat children – the Theory of Loose Parts*. Landscape Architecture.

⁷ SkillsActive article in *Playwords* Issue 37, page 6 (this issue).