

# Let the children play - how to get your head around the new EYFS Framework!

**Rebekah Jackson, Childcare Development Officer, describes how Cheshire County Council are supporting playworkers to work within the Early Years Foundation Stage.**



We are now in the brave new world of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework. In Cheshire we have been on quite a journey and thought it might be interesting to share our experience with you.

Before the introduction of the EYFS, playwork settings in Cheshire were starting to get improved gradings at inspection and practice was, in the majority, coming on leaps and bounds. We felt well placed to implement the play-based framework that is the EYFS. However, as a team, we struggled to get our heads around the new framework and how it could work in practice for the out-of-school clubs and the playschemes that we support.

## Measuring up

We were worried that if the framework was rigidly imposed in its entirety by Ofsted that our out of school settings would really find it difficult to measure up. We were also concerned that we would have mass resignations or that a significant number of our settings would stop offering places to children in the EYFS age range. We were hoping for further guidance from Ofsted and the Department of Schools, Children and Families (DSCF) on how EYFS was to be implemented in the play sector, but this did not materialise.

Thankfully we were not alone with our concerns. SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council for playwork, campaigned and negotiated on our behalf with the DCSF. The DCSF agreed that those settings who were implementing the

Playwork Principles into their day-to-day practice would be in a good position to meet the EYFS. They also said that playworkers need not undertake any additional training other than that which was necessary for their day-to-day playwork practice. We held on to this piece of information and used it in our briefing sessions to settings and also in the training programme that we developed to support the settings with all the changes brought about with the new Ofsted registers.

## Play environment

Our briefing sessions went well on the whole. No one seemed to panic; everyone seemed pleased that there was a comprehensive programme of training that would not only support their playwork practice but also address some key themes that Ofsted will focus on at inspection – inclusion, leadership and self evaluation. We shouted loudly that out-of-school clubs are not the main providers of a child's EYFS entitlement and, being playwork settings, should mainly be concentrating on providing a fantastic play environment for children.

Our philosophy to this point was that, like us Development Officers, most Ofsted Inspectors would not have a real out-of-school club to practice on, and would 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. Our challenge to the



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settings was to be confident in the knowledge that what they were doing as secondary providers of a child's EYFS entitlement was appropriate and proportionate to what the child had experienced during the day. We hoped that they could show Ofsted through self evaluation and at inspection, that they were doing what was right for the children in their clubs.

### Into the unknown

Armed with this knowledge, off went our clubs into their new unknown world, with (we hoped) enough information and support to give it a go. The inspection tally so far is 2 outstanding, 7 good, 3 satisfactory and 1 inadequate. We have learned some lessons and made some mistakes too as change is never easy, but I think that both the clubs and the children attending them have had a lot of fun getting to where we are now.

At this point, I need to write a note of thanks to our settings in Cheshire. They have trusted and believed us; given it a go and, as a consequence, have had some really good results. They have been courageous and have learned a great deal but have kept in mind throughout that this is about providing the best play opportunities they can for all children, regardless of their age.

### Top tips

So, on to some top tips from those Cheshire providers who have been putting playwork and EYFS to the test so far. They have been good enough to share the good and the slightly scary!

**Be true to yourself.** Knowing your strengths and areas for improvement through consistent reflective practice is the key to better practice. Sensitive observations are a requirement of the EYFS and by being a reflective practitioner this should be easy. Observing the play process daily in your setting will give you a great insight into the children in your setting and allow you to notice when something isn't quite right and intervene appropriately.

**Let the children own their club.** Enabling them to do what they want to do (within reason!), when they want to do it and how they want to do it can be



really challenging for staff, for parents and often for other people such as school staff. One very successful way of doing this is through using wall paper stuck to the door of the club with marker pens, stickers, badges etc so that children can indicate what they want to do on that day. This can then be set out by the staff as the children settle in. If the process is used again at the end of the session, children can indicate if there is anything they really enjoyed, want leaving out or setting up the following day. This gives you the plan and the review of the 'Plan, Do, Review' cycle. You can leave the rest of the doing to the children!

**Know what you are going to do with yourself whilst you are standing back allowing the children to play.** Observing the play process in your setting is one thing and peer observations is another that you can plan to do. Both of these allow you something to focus on whilst you are getting used to allowing the children to play freely with appropriate intervention. Concentrate on what is play, what is not play and how much fun the children are having. Don't worry about whether you can show developmentally appropriate progress. Use what you observe as a way of recording what is happening in your club through photos and snapshot observations.

**Headteachers don't always react well upon finding children hanging out of the trees or brandishing a make-believe sword if they were not expecting it.** For the good of everyone's health and wellbeing, please make sure you communicate well with people so that they are aware of what might happen whilst children are being allowed the freedom to make choices about the content of their play.

**Include every child.** Playworkers have a head start on some other practitioners as the Playwork Principles lend themselves very well to including every child. They are about freedom of choice, play that comes from within and play that is not outcome driven. If we believe that play is a necessity for every child as it is something that comes from within, then as playworkers we need to facilitate an environment, both emotionally and physically, that enables every child to take part.



Also, try not to get mixed up with vandalism and recapitulative play. Too much freedom may not necessarily be a good thing. Setting fire to the school toilets may lead you to question your methods of supervision and when it is necessary to intervene! Same goes for children pulling drainpipes off the wall. It is ok to annihilate their play if they are going to cause damage to themselves, others or someone else's property.

**Playwork is something that out-of-school clubs are good at. Believe in what you do and let the children play!**

In the next issue of *Playwords* (Issue 39 Summer 2009) there will be a feature by some Cheshire playwork practitioners on putting the theory into practice.

**W:** [www.cheshire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshire.gov.uk)

### Ready for bog snorkelling?

And finally, some top tips of things to avoid! Going for full blown, hands-off playwork from the beginning is great and commendable - however the children may not know how to handle it straight away and staff may also not know what on earth to do with themselves. Pick a place to start, like introducing more 'loose parts', and go from there. You may not be ready for tree climbing, bog snorkelling and fire pits just yet!

As part of their training programme for out-of-school clubs Cheshire County Council have run several Common Threads 'Playwork Principles into Practice' two-day training courses across the county.

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