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BA (Hons) Early Years Education
Module: EY128
Curriculum Studies

BA (Hons) Early Years

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Discuss and analyse the planning applicable to the curriculum for Foundation

Stage.

The Foundation Stage was introduced by the government in England in 2000, to provide guidance for settings which provide care and education to pre-school children (aged 3 to 5). It was named the Foundation Stage because “..it lays the foundations for children’s later learning.” (Neaum and Tallack, 2002:8). The aims for this curriculum are to ensure that all settings such as nurseries and schools, which receive government funding, are helping children progress in their learning and development. The aim is that this should be achieved through planning activities and experiences (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The Foundation Stage is an area of great importance and interest. It evolved from the Rumbold Report of 1990, which investigated the educational provision for the under 5’s, and found that there was a patchy, un planned curriculum which was unsatisfactory. The Foundation Stage was then established as an attempt to “..provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum for 3 to 5 year olds..” (Hallet and MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004:247). This has been the first time that educating children of this age has been recognised as a separate phase of learning within education. Since the development of this stage a framework has been developed to cover the care and education of 0 -3 year olds, entitled Birth to Three Matters. This aims to support practitioners working with this age group, and again it can be seen that it shows the care and education for the under 5’s has become widely recognised and is developing as a specialised field in its own right (Hallet and MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004).

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The Foundation Stage is organised into six areas of learning, which are: Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication Language and Literacy; Mathematical Development; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development and finally Creative Development. These six areas are aimed to help practitioners plan activities and experiences for children in their care, and also plan the learning environment for such activities to take place and provide a framework for the early year's curriculum. The planning of the Foundation Stage aims for the above areas of learning to take place across the board (QCA curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000). An example of this could be a Mathematical Development activity which may also cover Personal, Social and Emotional and also Communication language and Literacy areas, if the children were counting objects in groups or pairs for example. They are therefore developing in more than one area during just one activity

Each of the described areas has a statement of the skills and concepts, or Early Learning Goals (Neaum and Tallack, 2002). The aim of these goals is to establish skills for most children to reach by the end of the Foundation Stage. Practitioners need to know how to support the children under their care and supervision, in order for them to achieve these goals and progress to further levels (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000). The Stepping Stones were therefore introduced, in order to help practitioners plan. Practitioners need to know how to assess, and the guide is planned in order to help them, by identifying when the main focuses are being achieved by children, either individually or within a group. The focuses are knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes (Anning, 1996).

Stepping Stones are not age related, which means they allow children to progress at their own rate of ability. Three colours are used to show the progress made, yellow, blue

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and finally green. Although, in general most three year olds would be best suited to the yellow stage, progressing through to blue and then green at the age of 5 (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority have produced two documents to explain and set out the above goals and Stepping Stones for the Foundation Stage, these are "Curriculum Guidance for the foundation Stage" and "Foundation stage profile Handbook".

The guidance document is intended to help the practitioner with their planning, so they can meet the diverse needs of the children in their care, so that most will achieve the Early Learning Goals, and in some cases exceed them by the end of the Foundation Stage. It also gives guidance on teaching and learning, and gives examples of what children do, to aid practitioners assess the children. It sets out each area of learning, along with its goals and the Stepping Stones in colour code for ease of use (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The profile document supports the guidance, and was produced in 2003 in order to aid practitioners when assessing children and recording their development. It also supports the 12 page profile, that all children attending a Foundation Stage setting have, in which staff record their development. The profile replaced the baseline assessment on entry to primary school. It was brought about by the recognition that many children now attend some kind of care setting before entering school for the reception year, and it was planned to enable more communication between settings, meaning that the profile is therefore passed on to another setting if and when any child moves, and when they progress to Key Stage 1. The profile handbook sets out the assessment scales of which

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there are 13, some of the Early Learning Goals have been presented individually or have been split or combined for example, personal social and emotional development, has been split into, dispositions and attitudes, social development and emotional development, this was planned to make the profile easier for practitioners to use (QCA Foundation stage profile: Handbook, 2003) .

The first area of learning set out in these Foundation Stage documents, is Personal, Social and Emotional Development which covers the child's emotional well being and aims to enable the individual into "...knowing who you are and where you fit in and feeling good about yourself" (QCA curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000:28). The aims behind the planning for this is for children to develop respect for others and a positive attitude The Early Learning Goals involved include dispositions and attitudes, making relationships, self care, confidence and self esteem , behaviour and self control and a sense of community (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The next area set out is Communication, Language and Literacy which is aimed to encourage children to become competent in a number of skills , for which they need to be given the "...confidence, opportunity, encouragement, support and disposition to use them." (QCA curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000 :44). The goals in this area aim to enable children to communicate in a number of different ways and situations. The Early Learning Goals for Communication, Language and Literacy include ; language and communication, language for thinking, linking sounds and letters, reading, writing and handwriting (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

Mathematical Development is aimed to encourage children to solve problems, counting and sorting out numbers, adding and subtracting, multiplying and dividing. By the end of

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the Foundation Stage, children should be able to say and use number names in order in familiar contexts, count reliably up to ten everyday objects, recognise numerals 1-9, and in practical activities and discussion, begin to use the vocabulary involved in adding and subtracting. Included in the Early Learning Goals for Mathematical Development are; numbers as labels and counting, calculating, shape, space and measure (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The area described as Knowledge and Understanding of the World, is planned to develop a child's crucial knowledge and understanding in order for them to make sense of the world. Some of the Early Learning Goals for Knowledge and Understanding of the World include; exploration and investigation, designing and making skills, information communication and technology, sense of time, sense of place and culture and beliefs (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

Physical Development aims for children to learn about co-ordination and movement. It was planned to enable children to move with confidence, imagination and in safety, move with control and coordination, show awareness of space, of themselves and of others and to be able to use a range of small and large equipment. Some of the Early Learning Goals for Physical Development are; movement, sense of space, health and bodily awareness, using equipment, and using tools and materials (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

Creative Development is used to enable children to make connections between one area of learning and another. This includes art, music, imaginative play and role play. The Early Learning Goals for creative development cover; exploring materials and media,

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music, imagination, and responding to experiences, expressing and communicating ideas (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

One of the main aims of the planning behind the Foundation Stage, is to build a relationship between the setting which a child attends and the child's parent or carer. It is important for a partnership to be formed between the two in order for children to gain the best experience possible. This can be achieved through guidelines set out by the QCA which include the careful management of the transition between home and setting, and any other settings to support all who are involved, establishing trust between staff parents and children and also for staff to find out about the families ethnic, faith and cultural and home experiences (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The diversity of needs that children acquire need to be met by the practitioners who should set out realistic opportunities. Early Learning Goals need to be set according to ability. Practitioners need to know, meet and understand the range of special educational needs that children may have. Diversity may include children with disabilities, children from different ethnic groups, culture and religion, refugees and travellers (QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000).

The stage was developed in order to provide a high-quality education, which is consistent with best practice established over a number of years. The problem with such curriculum guidance has been the embedding of the principles and guidance on learning and teaching. In 2004 there were still too few places which included the required characteristics set out by the guidance. Also, very often, there are teachers who are not specialists in early years teaching at Foundation Stage level, and have a

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lack of understanding the stage (Edgington, 2004). Observing the Foundation Stage in a primary foundation school and nursery and speaking to staff it was found that they often felt very isolated in the reception and nursery class and were almost seen as a separate part of the school. This is not the case in all settings, but is very common in many schools as two previous placements showed. The Foundation Stage was brought in to build the foundations of a child's education, and it is important for training to occur so that this segregation does not continue, and an understanding of the Foundation Stage throughout is gained. After all, it is clear when looking at the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum Key Stage 1, and also the Framework for the 0-3 age range, there is a link between the stages and areas set out in each for example, the Birth to Three stage of the Skilful Communicator leads on to the Foundation Stages Communication Language and Literacy area, which then allows a child to move onto English in Key Stage 1.

According to Hallet and MacLeod-Brudenell (2004) there are other limitations of the Foundation Stage. It has led to difficulties for some early year's settings with a curriculum that have been established for a long period of time, such as those following Montessori or Steiner models, which has led to these types of settings having to achieve a compromise, with the government driven curriculum in order to gain funding. Another is the training of teachers where planning is seen prominently as a professional tool. But less emphasis is placed on the philosophical background, which is in part to do with time but is mainly due to the emphasis placed on the compliance of the forms promoted by the government for planning. Another criticism that may be noted is the lack of allowance for free play in this curriculum. The majority of play is planned and largely adult led. It is in some cases felt that this needs to be revised in order for more child-led free flow play to take place (Hallet and MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004). However play is

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recognised in the curriculum , and it emphasises the important role it can have in a child' s development. It states play “..is a key way, in which children learn with enjoyment and challenge. “(QCA Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, 2000 :25).

This curriculum has been welcomed by practitioners , but the government could still it seems plan this area of the national curriculum further as there still seems to be discrepancies. However, the implementation of this curriculum, has brought about the recognition of this area becoming specialised. It also reflects the importance to recognise the diverse needs of children as many will have had very different experiences before attending a setting, and this is taken into account. It provides clear guidelines to follow and can be used by all relevant settings. On a final note it should be remembered that children are not legally required to attend a setting until compulsory school age, which is at the beginning of the summer term after a child's 5th birthday. Children do however very often start in a reception clas s before this age, and many have attended some sort of setting, and the Foundation Stage provides some continuity for this.

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