

# Introduction

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Most of us have an inbuilt desire to learn and also to help others in learning. These desires have been described by Clutterbuck (2004: 3) as 'deep seated emotional drives within most people'. He goes on to say how the human instinct that leads us to pass on information, knowledge and wisdom to others goes hand in hand with the ability also to receive it. However, he then provides us with somewhat of a warning:

It often occurs that the desire of the more experienced person (especially if he or she is much older) to pass on accumulated wisdom exceeds greatly the desire of the less experienced person to listen. Most people may have the instinct to be a mentor, but to do the role well requires a capacity to hold back and allow people to learn for themselves.

(2004: 3)

As professionals working within the field of early years we are aware of the fundamental principles within our practice that underpin early learning. These principles include the notions that:

- Children develop at different rates, and in different ways.
- All children have abilities which can (and should be) identified and promoted.
- Young children should learn from everything that happens to them and around them.
- Children learn most effectively through actions, rather than from instruction.
- Children learn best when they are actively involved and interested.
- Children who feel confident in themselves and their own ability have a head start to learning.
- Children need time and space to produce work of quality and depth.
- Play and conversation are the main ways by which young children learn about themselves, other people and the world around them.

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- Children who are encouraged to think for themselves are more likely to act independently.
- The relationships which children make with other children and with adults are of central importance to their development.

(Ball, cited in Drury *et al.*, 2000: 17).

Reflecting upon these principles, and considering the role we play in ‘mentoring’ the children within our settings, is it not the case that they could be applied equally to the learning that takes place for practitioners being supported by a mentor?

This book was written as a result of being involved in the development of the SureStart-recognised Sector-endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years (FdA EY) at the University of Worcester (UW) and the need expressed at the National Network for the Early Years Foundation Degrees for guidance and advice when mentoring students undertaking this programme.

Mentoring is regarded as an important part of good professional practice and is well established within the field of primary and secondary education. Consequently, the majority of texts available on this topic are written very much with a focus on schools and colleges.

This text has a wider audience and is aimed at early years settings. In these mentoring takes place constantly and the role is undertaken by many different people and involves many varied partnerships. For example, nursery managers will mentor new employees or students undertaking practice experience; Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) mentor fellow Teaching Assistants (TAs); teachers mentor newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and colleagues mentor each other in order to evaluate and develop practice within their workplace. Accordingly, this book will aim to serve the needs of the diverse ‘types’ of mentors within early years settings.

With such a broad audience and, following much consideration and debate between the author team, it was decided that, unless otherwise stated and justified, the terms ‘mentor’ and ‘practitioner’ would be used throughout.

The government agenda associated with the Children’s Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2006) emphasises the need for specialised help in order to promote opportunity, prevent problems and act early if and when problems arise. This can be associated with the staff working within the sector and also the children and families with whom we work in partnership. From whichever perspective we consider this, trained professionals are essential to the process and the government also acknowledges the need for recognised standards and accredited qualifications within the sector. With the onus on settings to demonstrate high standards and quality in all areas, and an increasing number of qualifications, such as foundation degrees, being work-based in nature, the role of the mentor is of utmost importance.

### **The aim of the book**

The aim of this book is to provide practical guidance for professionals undertaking mentoring, giving advice on how to carry out this role effectively. The

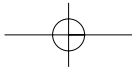
chapters provide the reader with a mixture of relevant theory, practical suggestions, case studies, questions for reflection and discussion (pauses for thought), activities for professional development and suggestions for further reading. There are materials and suggestions within the book that may be copied and used as appropriate. The topics covered can be considered individually or together with other chapters.



*Children enjoying play and conversation*

## **Content**

Chapter 1 acknowledges current models of mentoring practice with a view to identifying a framework for mentoring in the context of early years. It challenges mentors to reflect on the complex nature of their role in order to promote a clearer awareness of its significance to quality in training, practice and delivery of services to young children and their families. Chapter 2 explores the complexity of relationships within the mentor role, gives top tips to support the development of these relationships and provides working examples and scenarios that consider what may be done when things 'go wrong'. Reflective practice is fundamental to improving quality within early years settings, ourselves and those we mentor as practitioners and lifelong learners. This notion is discussed in Chapter 3 and practical suggestions are offered for how the reflective process may be taught. The development of some form of portfolio of evidence is a goal for many practitioners being supported by a mentor. Chapter 4 takes the mentor and practitioner through a profiling exercise from beginning to end, identifying challenges along the way and offering strategies for overcoming potential problems. Chapter 5 is based upon an



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active mentoring scheme and identifies the principles underpinning the design of the mentoring scheme for early years practitioners seeking Senior Practitioner Status through the SureStart-recognised Sector-endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years. The final chapter is a case study which takes the reader through a journey which involved a mentor supporting the process of change. It considers the effectiveness and outcomes of having a mentor working alongside practitioners to reflect upon, develop and improve the quality of experience for young children.

