

# Every Child Matters

*Sue Owen*

*Every Child Matters: Next Steps* includes the following description of the task for all who work with children and young people:

‘[We] are all working together to improve the lives of children, young people and their families. We are determined to make a step-change in the quality, accessibility and coherence of services so that every child and young person is able to fulfil their full potential and those facing particular obstacles are supported to overcome them.’

(Department for Education and Skills (2004) *Every Child Matters: Next Steps*; London: DfES accessed 16 March 2009)

For early years practitioners there is a need to ensure that young children who do less well than their peers should be specifically targeted with support so that local authorities can gradually improve the Foundation Stage Profile results for the 20% of children who are seen as falling behind at that stage of their education. This is often described as ‘narrowing the gap’. The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services (C4EO) has published a review of approaches in early years practice which are shown to be effective in narrowing the gap for these children (the latest versions of C4EO reviews can be found on their website at [www.C4EO.org.uk](http://www.C4EO.org.uk)). This includes the finding that attending pre-school is good for all children but seems to be particularly helpful for children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and those for whom English is not their first language. There is considerable evidence that early years interventions can narrow the gap between disadvantaged and other children in terms of their cognitive, social and behavioural development. However, the provision needs to be of a high quality and the EPPE study investigated pre-schools where children achieved good or excellent outcomes and found that such pre-schools<sup>1</sup>:

- View cognitive and social development of children as complementary, and avoid prioritising one over the other.
- Provide children with a mix of learning through free play and group work initiated by staff. Free play is important because it enables children to explore their own interests and take responsibility for their own learning. In excellent pre-school settings, children spent around two-thirds of their time in child-initiated activities.

- Provide opportunities for 'sustained shared thinking' between adults and children, whereby the child and the adult work together to extend and develop learning.
- Provide learning opportunities that are tailored to the needs of particular individuals and groups of children, such as those who do not speak English at home.

To what extent do you feel that your provision meets these quality criteria and can you give examples for each? If not, can you think of ways in which your setting could move towards this?

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<sup>1</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K and Taggart, B., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P and Elliot, K. (2003) *Technical paper 10: intensive case studies of practice across the foundation stage* (The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project), London: DfES/Institute of Education, University of London.