

Principles for early years learning from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

In a series of significant documents, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has set out several principles for early years education (QCA 1999, 2000, 2001):

- ‘effective education requires both a relevant curriculum and practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements;
- early years experience should build on what children already know and can do. It should also encourage a positive attitude and disposition to learn and aim to give protection from early failure;
- no child should be excluded or disadvantaged;
- to be effective, an early years curriculum needs to be carefully structured. In that structure, there should be three strands:
 - provision for the different starting points from which children develop their learning, building on what they can already do;
 - relevant and appropriate content which matches the different levels of young children’s needs;
 - planned and purposeful activity which provides opportunities for teaching and learning both indoors and outdoors;
- a well planned and well organised environment gives children rich and stimulating experiences. It provides the structure for teaching within which children explore, experiment, plan and make decisions for themselves. . . . children learn through play and in other ways. . . . Children need time to be engrossed, work in depth and complete activities;
- practitioners must be able to observe and respond appropriately to children;
- well planned, purposeful activity and appropriate intervention by practitioners will engage children in the learning process;
- practitioners need to ensure that all children feel included, secure and valued. They must build positive relationships with parents in order to work effectively with them and their children;
- children, parents and practitioners must work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect;
- above all, high quality care and education by practitioners will lead to effective learning and development for young children.’

These principles, it can be seen, embody several of the axioms of learning set out above. Learning is embedded in human relationships. Significant amongst these are parents, and the QCA is explicit in according a highly significant role to parents as partners and major players in their children’s education. As the QCA reports: ‘parents are children’s first and most enduring educators’ (2000: 9). This involves two-way communication flow and a welcoming stance by schools towards parental involvement. These principles are addressed in the curriculum guidance documents provided by the QCA, and in their provision of examples and a series of cumulative ‘stepping stones’ for progress of children through the foundation stage, with assessment requirements built in at the end of this stage. These stepping stones

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articulate with the statutory National Curriculum, which children from the age of five are required to follow.

References

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (1999) *Early Learning Goals*. London: QCA.

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (2000) *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*. London: QCA.

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (2001) *Planning for Learning in the Foundation Stage*. London: QCA.