

Campaigners launch 'alternative' EYFS ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

A group of academics and early years practitioners has published an 'alternative' EYFS.

The document, which was due to be launched by Early Childhood Action (ECA) at a conference in Winchester on Saturday, has been designed to support 'progressive early years practice' and challenge those aspects of the statutory framework for children from birth to five that some experts believe could harm children's development.

It builds on ECA's previous campaign work, specifically that the reform of the EYFS has not gone far enough, and that young children's development is being put at risk by Government policies that focus on 'school readiness' at the expense of seeing early childhood as a developmental phase in its own right.

There are also concerns that a 'too much, too soon' mentality has the potential to harm children's social and emotional development. Many supporters of ECA argue that the school starting age should be raised to at least six years old.

Unhurried Pathways: A new framework for early childhood has no early learning goals and is not intended to be prescriptive.

ECA says that it is intended to be a 'living' document to which they hope the whole early years sector will contribute.

The EYF's founding principle, summed up in the foreword by Professor Janet Moyles, is 'a curriculum and pedagogy, which favours a nurturing, supportive and playful approach to the early years, devoid of constant assessment, measurement and monitoring.'

Like the EYFS it has key principles (see box), but instead of early learning goals it has 'learning competencies and aspirations'.

These will 'tend to stretch across all "areas of learning", such as communication, literacy, numeracy, physical development, personal, social and emotional development.'

Suggested themes include: becoming worldly, contributing to a world full of change, learning in inclusive ways, expression of experiences, and living in a sustainable world.

The framework also describes different approaches to early childhood, highlighting Steiner Waldorf, Montessori, Forest Schools and Reggio Emilia.

In the introduction, the authors say they hope to offer an alternative approach 'to sit alongside the revised EYFS', so that practitioners who have no choice but to work within the statutory framework, 'can bring an informed and critical viewpoint to their pedagogy and work with young children - and, hopefully, find ways of preserving the core principles of their practice, notwithstanding the countervailing demands that the EYFS, at its worst, can make upon them.'

Dr Richard House of the University of Winchester, and co-founder of ECA, told Nursery World, 'We would like everyone in the field with an interest in progressive early years practice to read our document - and to give us constructive feedback on it, too. This is very much a living, evolving document, to which we want the whole field to contribute their thinking, and thereby take "ownership" of.

'We hope that ultimately the document will contribute to a fundamental paradigm-change in the way policy-makers think about early childhood, but until that happy day arrives, practitioners can still use our document to "humanise" their work with young children such that it strives to be as unhurried as possible - and also to challenge those aspects of the EYFS that hurry children's learning and development unnecessarily and, at worst, harmfully.'

He added, 'We'd like readers to allow it to feed and stimulate their own imaginations, and so generate new progressive ideas about practice - a kind of catalyst for reflective practice, you might say. We by no means claim a monopoly on wisdom, and we'd really like to see the creativity and experience of the whole field ignited and brought to life by, and through, our document.'

Principles from 'Unhurried Pathways: A New Framework for Early Childhood'

- All children deserve successful life experiences that recognise what we call their existing 'worldliness'
- Children can learn in myriad different ways, although always in relation to something or someone else.
- Any assessment of children's learning can and should be negotiated with their families and communities to enable successful experiences for all children, and should not necessarily be standardised according to unhelpful 'developmental norms'.

- If felt to be appropriate and helpful, 'learning goals' (which we prefer to call 'learning competencies and aspirations') should more appropriately be focused on what children offer to the world now, as well as having a future orientation. Learning 'competencies and aspirations' are also just as important for practitioners as they are for children - an equivalence that, when acknowledged and embraced, will help to eradicate what we see as the damage done by the didactic imposition of adult-centric 'learning goals' on to young children.
- Inclusive education draws from a range of different perspectives and approaches to seek out the best in and for children, and how their best contributes to their current and future worlds.
- Children should have access to the outdoors and the real world as a right, and should be allowed to be active as their physical needs dictate.
- Children's creativity should be allowed to flourish in all situations, and children should have access to the arts in many forms.
- Emotional well-being and social competence are of core importance, and all basic needs should be met in order to ensure that all children can achieve emotional well-being.

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