

Highly qualified staff make a difference to children's learning ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The report, *Making the Difference*, by Education Scotland, formerly HMIE, found that the most effective practice was found in settings employing staff with higher-level qualifications, such as the BA in Childhood Practice, and those that had access to a pre-school teacher with a background in early years.

The best settings for children's experiences were those that had a range of staff with complementary skills and relevant higher-level qualifications.

The study examines the impact of higher-level qualifications on children's learning in early years settings by analysing pre-school inspection reports from 336 nursery schools and classes, family and children's centres and private and voluntary nurseries.

Since August 2010, pre-school centres have been asked to record the qualifications held by each member of staff.

The impact of staff qualifications in settings on the level of performance was evaluated using five quality indicators.

The qualifications of all staff were analysed and it was noted if staff held a teaching degree in education or in early childcare.

The report is also based on nursery case studies, information from local authorities, providers of the BA in Childhood Practice and the Scottish Social Services Council. The research particularly focused on the impact of the BA in Childhood Practice, launched in 2009, as one of the first work-based qualifications in Scotland with entry based on Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and the experience people have gained in their careers so far.

The key findings include:

The impact on the quality of children's experiences was less when staff had not taken high-level qualifications or training

The BA Childhood Practice Award is beginning to show a positive impact on children's learning in early years

Access to teachers varies widely

A teacher with a background in early years methodology tends to make a positive difference to children's learning.

The report said, 'In centres where staff demonstrated effective practice and there was no teacher deployed, we found that staff had often undertaken additional higher-level qualifications and training.

'Our evidence would suggest that in almost all centres surveyed, staff, who either have the BA Childhood Practice Award or are undertaking the qualification, believe that it is having a significant and positive impact on children's learning.'

Bill Maxwell, chief executive of Education Scotland, said, 'The breadth of our inspection and review programme has given Education Scotland a unique evidence base on which to base judgements about the impact of increasing levels of qualifications in the early years workforce on children's learning.

'Few can now doubt the importance of ensuring the best possible educational experiences for our youngest children, and the positive investment that represents for individuals and for society as a whole. What this publication shows is that particular higher-level qualifications do make a real difference to improving young children's learning. Also, the commitment of staff to undertaking additional qualifications while in work is contributing to giving our youngest children the best possible opportunities to learn and grow as responsible, confident individuals. It is essential that the positive start to helping young children identified in this report fulfils its potential, is built upon further, and developed in ways which maximises its impact on future achievement.'

Scottish Social Services Council chief executive Anna Fowlie said, 'Where nurseries, out of school clubs and other day care of children services are led by people with degree-level qualifications, we can see the benefits in delivery of care and learning and therefore in the overall quality of provision for the children. The Childhood Practice awards provide a suite of bespoke, work-based qualifications for early years managers and practitioners who are looking to progress their careers. The research adds to the anecdotal reports we have of the positive impact that Childhood Practice is having for people working in early years and, most importantly, for our children.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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