



London **Early Years** Foundation

‘The Twoness of Twos’

Leadership for Two Year Olds

June O'Sullivan and Sue Chambers



***“A two-year-old is kind of like having a blender,
but you don't have a top for it.”***

Jerry Seinfeld

Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	7
Methodology.....	22
Findings.....	24
Conclusions.....	32
Recommendations.....	37
References.....	40



‘Early childhood is... a period of momentous significance for people growing up in our culture. By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth.’

Margaret Donaldson

Executive Summary

“Each child has a spark inside him or her. It is the responsibility of the people and institutions around each child to find what would ignite that spark.”

Howard Gardner

The report on leadership for two year olds was commissioned to look at how two year olds **accessing childcare through the Government’s Two Year Offer** can be assured of receiving consistently high quality and care experiences and is intended to inform those responsible for policy decisions at central and local level as well as those leading services and practice.

Two year olds are a distinct group. The developmental changes between children who have just passed their second birthday and children who have almost reached their third birthday are enormous and yet this stage of development is often **the ‘poor relation’**. **There has been considerable** emphasis on threes to fives but two year olds are a category all of their own and have been lumped into a broad category known as the Under-Threes.

By two children have become mobile explorers who have started to develop their independence. Their language skills have not developed enough for them to make their needs known and they do not yet have the social skills to manage turn-taking, sharing or waiting and their tempers can erupt quickly.

Two year olds need more sleep than three year olds but much more active learning than babies.

The introduction of the Two Year Offer will put big challenges on those responsible for leading the curriculum for two year olds. The new EYFS curriculum was introduced in September 2012 and there is a statutory duty for lead practitioners to carry out **formal assessments of two year olds’** progress which will be shared with parents. Many of the practitioners leading the two year old provision are Level 3 qualified and will not have received additional management and leadership training. Not only are they responsible for leading their team and ensuring children are offered a curriculum of the highest quality, but also will be expected to hold **what could potentially be ‘difficult conversations’** with parents who may need help to fully support **their children’s learning, access services from their**

community and find their place within their own neighbourhood.

The purpose of the research was to look at how able practitioners were to meet the challenges. We decided to concentrate on six aspects of leadership that are key to offering a quality service:

- ✧ Leading Pedagogy
- ✧ Leading Learning Spaces
- ✧ Leading and Managing a Service
- ✧ Leading with Parents
- ✧ Leading within the Community
- ✧ Leading Your Own Learning

The methodology included a literature review of existing research and primary action research with a group of current practitioners and parents. The research findings were intended to provide immediate practical data to shape practice on the basis that that we have a better understanding using practitioner and parent knowledge, theory and experience would support the response to the anticipated large numbers of two year olds.

There was a raft of generalised information about quality for the Under Threes but surprisingly little emphasis on two year olds. The most significant piece of research found on funded two year olds was carried out by Peterborough EYFS and Children Centre Services team in 2009 which looked at how children coped emotionally when they started in childcare.

They observed how the children related to other children and adults, made friends and got on with others, felt secure and valued, explored and learned confidently and felt good about themselves. They found that where settings had a small number of funded two year olds at any one time they were better **able to support children’s emotional and physical needs** more effectively thereby enabling them to feel secure and to allow time to develop close attachments, especially with their key person; a

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point referred to in more detail in the recommendations.



They found that where two year olds were regularly involved in small group experiences, they were more able and confident at participating, thus enabling their *'voices and feelings'* to be acknowledged. Practitioners who were *'tuned-in'* to children's interests, especially during role play were able to support and

extend children's language more effectively. This was more successful when building onto previous experiences, knowledge of which was gained through shared discussions with parents.

Research evidence shows that low adult:child ratios, staff qualifications and a well-articulated curriculum are related to sustained interactions between adults and children and positive outcome measures for children.

The young children observed were much more confident in the outdoor space than the indoor. They enjoyed the freedom to practice and investigate what they could do and how it connected with the world around them. Interactions with peers were more evident when the children had regular access to the outdoor environment.

Children's emotional well-being was greater when:

- ✧ The adults were *'tuned in'*
- ✧ When they had a good understanding of how young children develop
- ✧ When they responded, supported and planned for individual needs
- ✧ When they were aware of and valued **children's fluctuating emotional** and physical needs

- ✧ When they considered the number of new two year olds coming into the setting at any one time
- ✧ When they allowed time to develop new relationships and close attachments with key person
- ✧ When there was regular involvement in small group experiences
- ✧ **When they planned for children's interests** and supported their language development, reflecting on current practice
- ✧ When they supported all children during transitions, particularly those who found it hard to cope or difficult to separate from their parent and provided regular access to outdoors.

Key to their findings was the importance of providing relevant training and support for leaders, managers and practitioners and in particular seeking ways of supporting practitioners to be able to confidently explain the pedagogical rationale for their actions.

An area which was highlighted in the research was the emerging evidence that good child nutrition can help protect against the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease in adulthood. This research shows that the period spanning pregnancy and the first two years of a **child's life is a critical time** for laying the foundations **of healthy development and children's attitudes to foods.**

However, despite this growing knowledge-base on **the importance of good nutrition to children's** development, many young children are still not receiving the balanced diet that they need in their foundation years but so far policy attention on **child nutrition has been mainly confined to children's** centres and educational settings.

The issues regarding nutrition remain of significant importance in relation to funded two year olds. Many children will have experienced little structure and routines at mealtimes. Practitioners report that many children arriving at nurseries have not been used to sitting at a table at mealtimes and have not learned to use cutlery. There are concerns about the amount of water children drink during the day and the quality of snacks provided and the shared

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behaviour and attitudes to the food often evident in the child parent relationship.

Although there is little published research on what makes an effective learning environment for two year olds we know that the needs of an active toddler are very different from those of a baby and also of a more mature three year old. We recommend that there should be more action research carried out to explore the most suitable buildings and learning spaces for two year olds particularly so that leading these services will be more likely to guarantee successful outcomes for all two year olds but especially those who will be accessing the Two Year Old Offer. If the buildings and learning environments are planned to take into account the developmental needs of two years olds, this could help practitioners when leading within such spaces.



When examining leadership we found that although there were many examples citing how good leadership is central to high quality settings the bulk of the evidence was based on school leadership. When it referred to an early **year's** setting it was focused largely on the role of the manager. There was no significant

research evidence available that examined the impact of quality leadership on this particular age group within a nursery setting.

Many early **years'** staff are reluctant leaders because they fear they will no longer spend time with the children and instead be consigned to the management aspects of the job. Yet, somehow it is really important to help practitioners to become confident leaders and managers whilst still being good hands-on role models for less experienced members of their team; a point also made by Professor Nutbrown in her 'Foundations for Quality' report. (June 2012)

Engagement with parents about their children's learning is cited time and time again as being an

essential means of sustaining children's effective learning and development in the long term.

From research we know that parents and the home environment they create are the single most **important factor in shaping their children's well-being**, achievements and prospects.

Whilst practitioners are aware that good parent partnerships are of prime importance to quality early years provision, we also know that working with parents who may have their own problems can present enormous challenges, particularly for young and less experienced early years practitioners.

The introduction of formal assessments of two year olds and feedback meetings with parents, some of which may be difficult, will almost certainly cause considerable anxiety. Anecdotally, we are already seeing that a higher number of the funded two year olds start nursery with additional needs and the parent child relationship can be challenging especially with regards to food, development expectations and behaviour management.

Practitioners will need to be fully skilled and confident to be able to assess against child developmental norms as well as being able to use their assessment evidence to measure and make professional judgements and make the relevant interventions to help the child to reach their developmental milestones.



We struggled to find research into how settings can lead within their local community although there is a lot of lip-service paid to its importance. There were few guidelines or models of good practice to use as strategies for settings to follow.

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Our research showed that the majority of lead practitioners working with two year olds are qualified to NVQ Level 3.

The Evaluation of the Graduate leader Fund (2010) found that of the 91 per cent of the 35 EYPs in the survey only 44 per cent spent time supporting practice in the infant and toddler rooms. On average EYPs spent 18.4 hours a week in pre-school rooms but only 4.7 hours with babies and toddlers. Given that evidence we need to consider whether graduate leaders are leading practice across the full birth to five age range.

In light of the evidence we have made recommendations to meet the training needs of lead practitioners and to also explore whether the training is enabling practitioners to translate their learning into an ability to describe their practice from a pedagogical perspective and within the child development parameters.

We believe that in order to develop their pedagogical leadership, lead practitioners should receive training on the revised EYFS, assessment and record-keeping, safeguarding and welfare requirements, child development (particularly regarding **children's speech and language**), **good practice** on delivering an appropriate, child-centred, active learning curriculum both indoors and outdoors and opportunities to develop their reflective practice.

In order to help them to better lead the service it is recommended that practitioners should be encouraged to receive accredited competence-based leadership and management training. This should be based on a coherent model of what leading a two year old setting looks like so practitioners are clear as to expectations, practice and monitoring for successful outcomes.

It may be necessary for a new training course to be developed with appropriate training materials. The introduction of the new assessment arrangements for two year olds confirms the critical

importance of developing engagement with parents. It is recommended that SENCos should receive up to date training on the revised Code of Practice and on how to assess two year olds who may have additional learning needs. Practitioners should also receive additional support and training in order to develop creative ways in which to engage with parents and how to use Learning Journeys more effectively as a way to better involve parents in their **children's learning**.

We recommend that practitioners should receive training on how to develop strategies to help them **to hold 'difficult conversations' with parents** as well as confident casual pedagogical conversation.



There are many opportunities to develop ways in which to lead within the community. Training should be available to help practitioners to develop their links with other providers and also with health visitors with whom they will be working closely with the two year old assessments.

In addition to the research remit we would also recommend training for all practitioners on what constitutes good nutrition and how to work with families in order to help children by providing consistent routines. It is also suggested that it may be good practice for nursery chefs to have a specific qualification to secure their knowledge and allow some leadership in settings from chefs.

Introduction

‘One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.’

(Helen Keller, quoted in Vos, J, and Dryden, G [1999] *The Learning Revolution*, p368)

Research has shown us that at the age of 3 there are big differences in cognitive development between children from rich and poor backgrounds, and this gap widens by the age of 5. Goodman and Gregg (2010) commented that, *“it seems that even by the age of 3, while we can identify several aspects of the early childhood caring environment that appear to contribute to the gap between poor children and children from better-off backgrounds, it is factors that are either unobserved, or in some sense predetermined or very hard to change, that explain the largest element of the socioeconomic divides in cognitive outcomes.”*



Sabates and Dex (2012) noted that children living in families with both multiple risks and low income fared the worst across most developmental outcomes **and** *“that they also had more conduct disorders than children living in low income*

households, more emotional problems than the rest of the children, and more peer problems than children living in families with multiple risks”.

Hosking (2001) said that, *“Because the early years are critically important to the child’s later social development, pathways to crime are often laid down by the age of 2 or 3”* and *“after age 3, the habit of violence is increasingly difficult to shift. Three quarters of aggressive 2-year-olds are still aggressive at 5”*

Esping Andersen (2009) wrote: *“If the race is already half run before the child begins school, then*

we clearly need to examine what happens in the early years” (p. 136).

In order to narrow the gaps for the most vulnerable two year olds we must provide care and education of the highest quality. This report was written to look at how two year olds accessing childcare **through the Government’s Two Year Offer can be** assured of receiving consistently high quality learning and care experiences and is intended to inform those responsible for policy decisions at central and local level as well as those with leading services and practice.

The research looked at six areas:

- ✧ Leading Pedagogy
- ✧ Leading Learning Spaces
- ✧ Leading and Managing a Service
- ✧ Leading with Parents
- ✧ Leading within the Community
- ✧ Leading Your Own learning



The main objective was to define what constitutes high quality provision for two year olds and what skills, knowledge and understanding are required by leaders and practitioners in order to deliver an effective and outstanding service.

Our methodology included a literature review of existing research examining what good leadership

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in the Early Years looks like and how it could impact on high quality provision, available training offers, and indicators of good pedagogy for two year olds, nutrition, learning spaces, parental engagement to improve home learning environment and the impact of social capital from leadership within a community.

The focus of the research was to explore the evidence from a lead practitioner perspective, many of whom may not have received formal leadership and management training or relevant CPD. We wanted to ascertain from them whether they felt confident in their role and their training and professional development needs.

When looking at what constitutes high quality education and care for two year olds we considered what makes the needs of children in this age group different from under-twos and three-year-olds.

What is different about 2 year olds?



Developmentally two year olds still play alongside other children, can be shy and clinging, are easily frustrated and can be destructive to objects when angry, can be very affectionate and love hugs and cuddles. They are beginning to be independent and insist on trying to do several tasks without help. They

can be jealous about adult attention. They can be very demanding and sit still and concentrate for no more than a few minutes. Two year olds can be very possessive; they can offer toys to other children but then want them back. They need considerable time to change activities, can show aggressive behaviour and the intent to hurt others without awareness or understanding of the consequences of such actions.

At approximately 2 years of age, their ability to use language suddenly increases rapidly. The size of

the vocabulary increases and they begin to string words together in short sentences but are capable of frequent tantrums, which are often a result of their inability to express themselves clearly.

Many two year olds, regardless of their social-economic background, entering nursery have severe language delay. There may be a number of reasons for this.

The Bercow Report (2008) reported, *'Approximately 50% of children and young people in some socio-economically disadvantaged populations have speech and language skills that are significantly lower than those of other children of the same age. These children need access to early year's provision which is specifically designed to meet their language learning needs and they may also benefit from specific targeted intervention at key points in their development.'*

Approximately 7% of five year olds entering school in England, – nearly 40,000 children in 2007, – have significant difficulties with speech and/or language. These children are likely to need specialist and/or targeted intervention at key points in their development.'

This language delay may be for a number of reasons including hearing impairment, over use of dummies or too little verbal interaction with adults or children.

How sensitively staff raise the subject of such issues with parents highlights one of the challenges Early Years practitioners face. It throws into question their ability and confidence to have difficult conversations with parents which parents may perceive as a challenge to their parenting skills.

The Nutbrown Report (2012) says that *'students must learn **how to work effectively with families**'* and that *'practitioners must learn how to regard parents as experts on their own children and listen and learn from them so as to support each child's well-being, learning and development'*.

It is universally agreed that attachment is of prime importance to **children's longer term development**. John Bowlby described attachment as *'the bond which ties'*. He saw it as the basis of our evolutionary survival. Other researchers have observed that there is a psychological, as well as a physical need to form early attachments: ***'Attachment is central to our very survival, and what we are beginning to realise is that it is also central to our wellbeing'*** (Svanberg, p.6).

In 2009 Peterborough EYFS and Children Centre Services team carried out a small piece of local research looking at how funded two years olds coped when they came into childcare. They based their research on twelve children from eight Early Years nursery and pre-school settings. More than fifty hours of observations were gathered over a six month period (*'Episodes of evidence'*) **about the youngest children's experiences in settings**.

They looked at how the children related to other children and adults, made friends and got on with others, felt secure and valued, explored and learned confidently and felt good about themselves.

They found that where settings had just a small number of funded two year olds at any one time, they were better able to support their individual needs, both emotional and physical, more effectively thereby enabling them to feel secure. Children needed to be allowed time to develop close attachments, especially with their key person.



They found where two year olds were regularly involved in small group experiences, they were more able and more confident at participating, thus enabling their ***'voices and feelings'*** to be acknowledged.

Practitioners who **were 'tuned-in'**, and by that we mean when the adult observes, listens, encourages and shows sensitivity to the children before deciding to intervene in their play or practical activities. Adults who tune in are alert to children's interests), and able to support and extend children's language more effectively. This was more effective when building onto previous experiences, knowledge of which was gained through shared discussions with parents.

Children attending from the start and who stayed to the end of the session tended to settle better than those who were starting and leaving at various times during the day. The children found it difficult if too many transitions took place around them; it affected their security and emotional well-being.

The young children observed were much more confident in the outdoor space than the indoors. They enjoyed the freedom to practice and investigate what they could do and how it connected with the world around them. Interactions with peers were more evident when the children had regular access to the outdoor environment.

Children's emotional well-being was greater when:

- ✧ The adults ensured that they paid attention to the strengths, interests and learning preferences of every child;
- ✧ They had a good understanding of how young children develop;
- ✧ They responded, supported and planned for individual needs;
- ✧ They were aware of and valued **children's** fluctuating emotional and physical needs;
- ✧ They considered the number of new two year olds coming into the setting at any one time;
- ✧ They allowed time to develop new relationships and close attachments with key person;
- ✧ There was regular involvement in small group experiences;
- ✧ **They planned for children's interests and supported their language development, reflecting on current practice;**

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- ✧ They supported all children during transitions, particularly those who found it hard to cope or difficult to separate from their parent;
- ✧ They provided regular access to outdoors.

Key to their findings was the importance of providing training and support for leaders and practitioners.

They said, *'If we can understand the behaviour as a message to us, we can look behind the annoying behaviour and think about the need of the child. Once we focus on the need, we can think about how to meet it.'*

Lead Practitioners talk about how labour-intensive two-year olds are. They are very mobile and often unpredictable. Probably one of the most challenging times of day for practitioners is at mealtimes when the combination of the two-year olds' growing independence and food 'faddyness' occur together.

Louise Bazalgette from Demos carried out research into nutrition for the under-threes. A large body of evidence demonstrates the importance of a **healthy and balanced diet to infants' and children's early development and later life outcomes.**

Breastfeeding and good nutrition in the pre-school years have been found to be extremely important **to children's health, behavioural development and educational attainment.**



There is also emerging evidence that good child nutrition can help protect against the development of chronic diseases such

as diabetes, obesity and heart disease in adulthood. This research shows that the period spanning pregnancy and the first two years of a

child's life is a critical time for laying the foundations of healthy development.

However, despite this growing knowledge-base on **the importance of good nutrition to children's** development, many young children are still not receiving the balanced diet that they need in their foundation years but so far policy attention on child nutrition has been mainly confined to educational settings.

The Preliminary Review of Early Years Food, Nutrition and Healthy Eating Guidance in England by the School Food Trust (2010) reported that according to (Feinstein, et al. (2008), Gardner, (2009) and Wiles. (2009). **'Healthy eating habits in the years before school are important because in later childhood they impact on growth, development and achievement'**.

They quoted from WHO, (2003) that: **'A healthy diet and regular physical activity are identified as fundamental determinants of general health and wellbeing. A poor diet is one of the main causes of ill health and premature death. Evidence suggests that interventions to promote the initiation and duration of breastfeeding and good nutrition in Early Years will reduce later obesity and associated chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers'**

Eat Better, Start Better (2012) says:

- ✧ *Over a fifth of children are either overweight or obese by the time they join reception class in primary school (their final year in the EYFS).*
- ✧ *Type II diabetes, which usually appears in adulthood, is starting to be seen among some overweight children.*
- ✧ *Dental health is poor in many young children.*
- ✧ *Cases of rickets are appearing more frequently.*
- ✧ *More than one in four young children in the UK may be at risk of iron deficiency, which is linked to slower intellectual development and poor behaviour in the longer term*

Many two year olds will have not been given a nutritious and balanced diet at home and may

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already have the beginnings of tooth decay which will impact on their ability to chew which in turn will affect their language development.

Data from UK show that: in England, 28.6% of 2-10 year olds are overweight or obese in 2007. The issues about nutrition are of particular importance in relation to funded two year olds.



Many children will have

experienced little structure and routines around mealtimes. Practitioners report that children arriving at nurseries will not have been used to sitting at a table at mealtimes and have not learned to use cutlery. There are issues around the amount of water children drink during the day and the quality of snacks provided.

Leading the Pedagogy

“Play is not trivial: it is highly serious and of deep significance. To the calm keen vision of one who truly knows, the spontaneous play of the child discloses the future inner life of the man..”

Froebel (1826)

We know that the quality of the curriculum offered to young children is key to their successful learning and development. The lead practitioner is in charge of a group of staff and is responsible for the planning and delivery of rich learning experiences.

In 1999 Siraj-Blatchford described practitioners as **‘recoiling’** at the term pedagogy, which they associated with teaching. This may account for the apparent lack of confidence we found throughout the research from practitioners about their ability to frame practice and experience within a pedagogical conversation.

The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL) Project began from the premise that the characteristics of effective pedagogy were

embedded in practice and went on to attempt to identify and validate these characteristics.

Moyles et al (2001) linked the history of early **year’s provision in the UK to the struggle by so many leaders and practitioners to articulate and then balance the dual purpose of compensatory nurture and care and planned support for physical, social and cognitive learning and development.** It is often described as the care versus education dilemma.

There appears to be a growing consensus that pedagogy with under-threes is specialised and different from teaching and learning with older pre-schoolers. This is due to the different communication styles of infants and toddlers, and the increased physical care and emotional nurturing that they require.

‘Pedagogy is the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practice through which we can enhance that process. It is rooted in values and beliefs about what we want for children, and supported by knowledge, theory and experience.’
Learning, Playing and Interacting, DCSF (2009)

EPPE (2003) research refers to the importance of settings seeing educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance. This is particularly helpful because in this case children make better all-round progress. What is recommended is a balance between teaching through instructive learning environments and **‘sustained shared thinking’** all framed within a visible pedagogical structure with sensitive and engaged adults.

The Leuven Well-Being & Involvement Scales



illustrate what young children need in order to thrive and succeed. Laevers created a 5 point scale to measure both well-being and involvement. If

there is a consistent low level of well-being and or **involvement, it is likely a child’s development will**

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be threatened. The better the involvement and engagement the better the outcomes for children not least because deep level learning is taking place.

Many researchers (Gallagher and Mayer, 2008; Gevers Deynoot-Schaub and Riksen-Walraven, 2008; Muenchow and Marsland, 2007; Munton et al., 2002; believe the key to quality provision lies in high adult: child ratios. Gallagher, K. C., and Mayer, K. (2008) and Gevers Deynoot-Schaub and Riksen-Walraven (2008) recommend a ratio of 1:3. Love, Kisker, Ross and Raikes (2005) state, “*low adult: child ratios, staff qualifications and a well-articulated curriculum are related to sustained interactions between adults and children and positive outcome measures for children.*”

The Wave Report (2013) identified three common core knowledge areas of focus for practitioners:

- ✧ Core knowledge that informs all interactions with infants and toddlers
- ✧ Core knowledge of child development from pre-birth to three years
- ✧ An effective working knowledge of the interface with safeguarding systems.

Pascal and Bertram (1991) believe that there are ten dimensions of quality essential to early years education and care which includes: Care, Learning & Development Experiences, Facilitating Care, Planning, Assessment and Record keeping, Staffing, Relationships and interaction, Home & Community Liaison, and Physical Environment.

NAEYC’s Features of Good Practice include well-being and learning, consistent, positive relationships with a limited number of adults and other children, opportunities to play together in small groups and for adults and children to talk with each other in order to enhance their own learning and development.

Key also to quality is the importance of the learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, not least because it helps meet **children’s need for** activity, sensory stimulation, fresh air, nourishment and a balance of rest and active movement throughout the day.

Very importantly, children need to have an orderly routine that provides structure within an environment that is dynamic and changing but also predictable and comprehensible.

Stewart, N. and Pugh, R. (2007) Early Years Vision in Focus, Part 2: Exploring Pedagogy say ‘*Pedagogy is the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practices through which we can enhance that process. It is rooted in values and beliefs about what we want for children, and supported by knowledge, theory and experience.*’

The 2008 OFSTED Report describes the best early years leadership as demonstrating: ‘*children being at the heart of all that happens, children enjoying taking part, children being given responsibility and developing independence, stimulating environments enabling children to thrive safely, staff being involved in continuous professional development.*’

Quality of pre-school provision is regarded as a vital feature of early **year’s** education and care and quality is **directly linked to children’s learning** outcomes. EPPE (2004) said, “*Pre-school quality was significantly related to children’s scores on standardised tests of reading and mathematics at age 6.*” They found that “*high quality pre-school provision combined with longer duration had the strongest effect on development*”.



This research was born out in the DfE research report into the Early Education

Pilot for Two Year Old Children (2013). They noted that although there was no evidence that children in the pilot showed better outcomes at five, “*The exception is for children in the pilot study who received early years education in high quality settings*”.

The point reaffirms the key message that quality is **critical to children’s success**.

Leading Learning Spaces

Back in 1938 (p. 25) Dewey commented that “all genuine education comes through experience.” The constructivist perspective of development advanced by theorists such as Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and Lev Vygotsky, views young children as active participants in the learning process. Constructivists also believe that young children initiate most of the activities required for learning and development. Piaget (1951) said “A child’s development is directly linked to its ability to interact with its environment. Children develop an understanding of themselves through their interactions with events and materials outside themselves”.



In 2006 Evans noted that the quality of the physical

environment is linked to positive learning outcomes and that the design of interior space (e.g., room size, layout, furniture, lighting, noise) and the external environment (e.g., outdoor spaces, nature, play equipment) in an early learning childcare setting may enhance children’s learning and development. Curtis and Carter, (2005, p34) highlighting the importance of creating environments with a vision for childhood talked about “a time of wonder and magic when dreams and imagination get fuelled”. Malaguzzi (1998) describes “the environment as “the third teacher.”

If good environments have the ability to contribute to children’s, then, as Anita Olds points out, (1979, p.91) poor environments can retard this process. She says “the motivation to interact with the environment exists in all children as an intrinsic property of life, but the quality of the interactions is dependent upon the possibilities for engagement that the environment provides.”

Quality provision must take account of the physical environment provided to two year olds. Many spend their days with threes to fives in an

environment designed to meet the needs of the older children and the two year olds have to fit in and adapt.

There is little research available about the design of an appropriate learning environment for the under-threes and virtually nothing specific to the needs two-year olds and how best to support leaders of two year old provision. Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) argue that in a UK context, because of poor funding, frequently the environment offered to young children is often ill-thought out and ugly and not designed from pedagogical leadership perspective. .

‘Many rooms have furniture which is not the right shape, cushions and curtains of colours and textures which do not add up to any harmonious scheme, and which most of us would not tolerate in our own homes...we are often content for children to spend their most formative years surrounded by ugliness and clutter’(p.17).

Mark Dudek (2001) believes we continue to fail to understand how children relate to space,

‘Good architecture combines the practical with something less tangible; a sense of delight in the spaces which make up a building as a whole, which may even modify the moods of its users in a positive way. If designed skilfully, a building will help to make children’s experience of their early year’s care a secure yet varied one.’

Many nurseries and pre-schools try to make their environments as “homely” as possible. But this, says Dudek, “overlooks the need for challenge. Indoors and outdoors, children should feel secure enough to be adventurous. Buildings should inspire their play in practical and subtle ways. A transparent drainpipe can show them rainwater coming off a roof while a high platform lets them look down - an empowering change for those used to everything going on over their heads”.

He says that small buildings with small budgets are often designed to a “lowest common denominator” and in the worst cases they adopt a quaint adult perception of what children’s architecture should be. All this does, he says, for children is “patronise them and to make them feel as small as they obviously are”. In 2004 he said, “Young children

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tend to use the floor instead of chairs and tables, so it is important to make the surface not just clean and safe but also interesting.”

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)) assessment was devised within the context of developmentally appropriate practice, includes consideration of the space and furnishings, personal care routines etc. This assessment was used in the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children (2013) to identify settings that offer the highest quality.

(Shonkoff (2010) says that early childhood settings for under-two-year-olds should be low-stress environments that actively avoid **‘toxic stress’** or are able to buffer children against toxic stress **‘through supportive relationships that facilitate adaptive coping’**.

Two-year-olds need for lots of physical movement means it can be harnessed by the special nature of the outdoor learning environment. Gopnik et al (1999) tell us that, **“Babies and toddlers have an insatiable appetite to explore and control their own bodies and to move around their environment. The idea that toddlers ‘don’t really concentrate’ and ‘just need to let off steam’ may lead practitioners to make a false distinction between ‘play’ (running about) and ‘learning’ (sitting down). This distinction disregards the huge amount of learning that occurs as toddlers move around in their play. Movement and exposure to varied physical experiences allows them to explore various concepts and thereby lay down more connections in the brain.”**



We know that two year olds find it hard to stay still and making them sit *‘properly’* can disrupt rather than help their powers of concentration. Although they be happy occasionally to sit at tables most of their play takes place on the floor therefore a room where many play

experiences are set out on tables with little space for movement will be inappropriate.

Two year olds need play opportunities that support physical activity indoors and outdoors throughout the day and match closely their rapidly changing physical skills. If the buildings and learning environments are planned to account of the developmental needs of two years olds, this would have a positive impact on leading such spaces.

The outdoor learning environment is of critical importance to very young children. The EYFS states:

- ✧ *Being outdoors has a positive impact on children’s sense of well-being and helps all aspects of children’s development.*
- ✧ *Being outdoors offers opportunities for doing things in different ways*
- ✧ *Being outdoors gives children first-hand contact with weather, seasons and the natural world.*
- ✧ *Being outdoors offers children freedom to explore, use their senses, and be physically active and exuberant’.*

When planning the environment for two year olds perhaps we should remember Montessori’s words, **‘Adults admire their environment; they can remember it and think about it – but a child absorbs it. The things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul.’**

Leading and Managing a Service

Research undertaken over the past 25 years has confirmed the connection between the quality of **leadership and children's learning and development**. OFSTED in their annual reviews continue to consider good leadership to be an important central feature of high quality service.

When considering what is needed to lead two year old provision, we need to use as much as we know about quality for our youngest children as well as the key tenets of good leadership in Early Years settings.

We must remember the interesting observation made by Ebbeck and Waninganayake (2002) that there are few publicly acknowledged leaders and therefore no set of common expectations for leaders in early childhood: an idea also supported **by O'Sullivan (2009) who suggests that 'by placing so much emphasis on leadership, and consequently making it appear complicated, almost unattainable, it seemed that unless we were superheroes we could not possibly lead'**.

We need to take account of these dynamics when developing leadership programmes that will ensure the best provision for two year olds. We also need to remember the wisdom of Sylvie Rayna and Ferre Laevers (2010) who remind us that we need to *'...realise the enormous relevance of the insights coming from research on the under-3s for the whole of the educational system and how much potential there is for a bottom-up movement where early years takes the lead'*.

It makes sense to ensure we build on what we have learned from the research, not least the powerful message that in most effective settings *better leadership is characterised by a clear vision, especially with regard to pedagogy and curriculum, which is shared by everyone working within the setting.*' Siraj-Blatchford et al, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector*, (2006)

Of course, leadership of the Early Years has many facets as noted in figure 1. Leaders need to be able to manage the service as well as understand and embed a child-centred approach to everything they do. Great leaders are courageous and willing to take risks to improve the service and the learning

and development opportunities for children, They tend to have a vision that allows innovation, collaboration and distribute their leadership so its shared throughout their service and prepares and nurtures leadership at every level.

Ofsted often comments on the powerful value of having highly motivated staff who are committed to improvement and keen to draw out the best from all their colleagues.

Fullan (2001) suggests that pedagogical leadership is about motivating and convincing practitioners to do things differently, producing evidence that the change is worthwhile and beneficial to children and their learning.

This is particularly relevant today as we develop a service suitable for two year olds and support policy decisions to increase the number of two year olds attending Early Years settings.



If we are to ensure what Rodd (1998, p. xv) suggests is so critical to good quality childcare then **we must be clear about 'the experiences and environment provided for the children, the relationships between adults and adults and children, meeting and protecting the rights of adults and children and working collaboratively'**. It is a point also made by Nupponen (2006a, 2006b) who considers that effective leadership is vital to quality services for young children and that effective leadership frameworks are needed as a starting point towards ensuring quality.

According to O'Sullivan (2009) 'those would be the pedagogical leaders who will use all their skills to create quality which places children at the centre of the service and will help them gain a sense of belonging, self-worth, value and respect,

London Early Years Foundation

independence and the ability to make sense of the world.

Nutbrown, (2012) reaffirms the importance of excellent pedagogical leadership as vital to improving the quality of provision, and recommends that all early years practitioners become pedagogical leaders.

When we look at the current and future challenge of providing sufficient places for funded two year olds we need to ensure that the focus is on leading high quality provision delivered by sensitive, skilled, committed and well qualified staff. We must not compromise this by the need to find places at any cost.

Leading with Parents

A key part of quality leadership in early years is engagement with parents, an idea which has been around for many years.

From research we know that parents and the home environment they create are the single most **important factor in shaping their children's well-being, achievements and prospects.** Parents are a crucial influence on what their children experience and achieve. The evidence of the importance of parental impact is building and the shape and structure of families and the social context in which they live is changing rapidly.

We know that almost all parents want their children to do well. Sylva, 2004 notes, **'Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's learning and development.'**

Easen and others (1992) acknowledge **'the parents' own learning process'** in the dialogue with practitioners, and emphasise the importance of: **'taking what children do now as the starting point for observation and reflection (as this) allows for a positive and non-judgemental dialogue to develop between parents and educators (practitioners).'**

It is known that what parents do at home with **young children has the greatest impact on a child's** social, emotional and intellectual development.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) report concludes: **'What parents do is more important than who parents are.'**

(Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003) report, **'Parents are children's first and most effective motivators for learning. The key to keeping young children's natural curiosity alive is for parents to take an interest in everything their child does and to talk about it together'**

'Parenting behaviour influences children's development from birth' (Gutman and Feinstein, 2007; Feinstein, 2003); **'fathers have an important role to play'**

Attending pre-school can be considered good for all children, but it seems to be particularly helpful for children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and those whose first language is not English. As a recent review of research by Springate et al (2008) has shown, there is considerable evidence that early years interventions can narrow the gap between disadvantaged and other children in terms of their cognitive development. This is also the case for social and behavioural development and this benefit can be sustained into later schooling (Sylva et al), (2008)

Ofsted (2007) **stated that:** **'the biggest challenge continues to be narrowing the gap in opportunities and outcomes between most children and young people and those that are the most vulnerable or underachieving'** and that this should be supported by **'strong partnerships ... from strategic level to front-line working ... in order to secure the necessary level of support and style of service delivery that will have a positive impact on outcomes for all children and young people'**. In 2008 they noted **'In well-managed settings, communication with parents about their children's development is a key strength. Managers and key staff take time to gather information from parents about their children. Parents feel valued and welcomed. They are consulted and their views are appropriately responded to. Providers work actively to include parents and to encourage them to contribute to their children's learning at the setting. Often parents help with the children, which may also help parents' own understanding and development.'**

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Whilst research shows that good parent partnership is of prime importance to quality early years provision, its implementation is of concern to many early years practitioners.

O'Sullivan (2009) says, 'many young staff say that one of the areas they are most nervous about is working with families. There are many reasons for this, ranging from lack of confidence to never getting the opportunity to learn. Many settings face daily encounters with difficult parents which clouds the impressions of staff.This means focusing on the family's needs as identified by the family and involving families wherever possible in service delivery and design, while being realistic.' We know that working with parents who have may have their own problems can present enormous challenges, particularly for young and less experienced early years practitioners. Practitioners need skills and confidence to actively engage each of these groups of parents.

Confident staff are more likely to readily engage with parents on a day-to-day basis by welcoming them into settings and explaining face to face what parents can do at home. Staff will need to learn to develop the casual pedagogical conversation where they become sufficiently confident to explain to parent what and how their child is learning. Critical to this is the methods



necessary to make the message understood as the purpose will be to extend **the child's** experience from home

to nursery and back again. These casual pedagogical conversation could be supported by written information, home learning resource bags, apps and other ways of reaffirming the message.

Carol Vincent (1996) examined home-school relations in a small number of inner-city schools and devised a four-way classification of parental positions with regard to practitioners, which continues to be informative. She identified four

basic 'types' of parents: Detached Parents, who prefer practitioners to take full responsibility, Independent Parents, would like more involvement but lack confidence, Supportive Parents who readily engage with suggestions and invitations and Irresponsible Parents who do not support their children's learning.

The EYFS Statutory Framework 2012 states: **'Staff could be made aware of the importance of their relationship with parents. Traditionally staff in childcare settings have focused their attention on the children in their care rather than on children and their parents. Therefore, there may need to be a greater acknowledgement of the importance of parents in children's early learning so that all staff become confident about working with parents to encourage early home learning.'**

A significant challenge for staff working with the under-threes will be the introduction of assessment for all two year olds.

The Statutory Guidance also states, **'When a child is aged between two and three, practitioners must review their progress, and provide parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child's development in the prime areas. This progress check must identify the child's strengths, and any areas where the child's progress is less than expected. If there are significant emerging concerns, or an identified special educational need or disability, practitioners should develop a targeted plan to support the child's future learning and development involving other professionals (for example, the provider's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) as appropriate.'**

This raises important issues for those working with the under-threes and the sensitivity needed to **carry out what might possibly be 'difficult conversations' with parents, where concerns about a child's developmental progress may have to be initiated.** This emphasises the importance of early interventions and ongoing conversations between **practitioners and parents about children's learning and development.**

Some Early Years practitioners will require training in order to help them to work as partners with

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parents in children's learning. There are currently some concerns that Early Years staff may miss problems, or, conversely, over-identify special needs. There is a

risk that if the check is not conducted and communicated in an appropriate way, it could damage relations with parents and possibly put them off future engagement.

The Evaluation of the SureStart Programme 2010 found, 'If standards of provision are to rise, ***Continual training ... should be particularly focused on the developmental needs of two-year-olds, the planning and implementation of appropriate programmes, supporting and assessing children's developmental progress, and involving and working with their parents.***'

The report described how **Medway's trial of the Free Entitlement** found that quality of settings and the qualifications of leaders were critical to improving outcomes, as was encouragement for parents/families to support home learning.

The report reported how Tower Hamlets planned to ensure that practitioners were securely achieving continuous professional development, with better systems for quality improvement. They found early years settings lack the funding, and sometimes the staff expertise, to meet the challenge of working with two-year-olds with additional needs.

Nutbrown (2012) states, '***No study of child development would be complete without a solid understanding of special educational needs and disability. Indeed, a key part of understanding how and when children typically develop is being able to notice signs of slower, or different, development and whether an apparent delay in development is an indication of other special educational needs or disabilities. Early years practitioners need to know what to look for, how to respond to it, and how to interact with parents and the range of other bodies, professionals and services that may play a part in***

supporting a child with special educational needs or who is disabled.

Importantly they need to be able to work inclusively, so that the individual needs of all young children are identified and met in the context of interdisciplinary collaboration with other related professionals and with families'.

Most of the trials for funded two year olds addressed the issues of quality of settings and improving the skills of their workforce through training. They illustrated that the quality of settings and the qualifications of leaders is critical to improving outcomes, as is support for parents/families to develop strategies for effective home learning.

Leading within the Community

There is little UK evidence available about how nurseries work with their local communities to support the transmission of cultural norms and values from one generation to another through a community focus while building social capital. Leadership has to work in very different ways in the context of community development so that we can better support children and families by bridging across the communities and strengthening bonds which reinforce the importance of understanding children within the context of their local communities.

Although the DfE Children's Services' The Childcare Market Report (2010) says 'Many voluntary groups have strong links to local communities or offer specific services which would benefit from integration with other providers' there is little evidence about how it takes place and therefore how effective it is.

Community aspects of leadership are emphasised by Kagan and Hallmark, (2001) who suggest that ***'community leadership, connects early childhood education to the community through informing and constructing links among families, services, resources and the public and private sectors'***. Meaningful community leadership enables and sustains rich social and parental networks by facilitating conversation and creating trust. To

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construct high levels of trust, leaders need to share power and authority through empowerment and by building leadership capacity in others. This means recognising and reinforcing potential and respecting competence while demonstrating personal regard for others.



Leaders need to secure involvement and participation in the community through personal

credibility, understanding the motivation of community members and ensuring that the decision-making processes are real, significant and make an impact.

In the Ofsted Good Practice Guidance Resource, Engaging with Parents and the Local Community (Feb 2012), the only reference to working within **the community** is *'Ensure that you are visible within the community so that parents and carers can contact the forum members easily'*.

Fredriksen-Goldsen, Karen, Robin, Nancy (2006) state *'There is no doubt about the importance of multi-generational practice to the social context of the UK and the benefits to children in early years as strong family makes strong community.'*

Multigenerational practice can be defined as assisting individuals, families, and communities within the context of cross-generational relations and larger social systems to promote change which strengthens the inherent capacities of the family system and supports the best possible relationship between individuals and families and their environment'.

They comment that there are very few intergenerational centres – *'designated public indoor and outdoor spaces where children, young and older adults participate in ongoing services and/or shared programming at the same site.'*

We believe that positive contact between groups can nurture relationships that merge boundaries, resulting in more positive attitudes and better local relations.



London Early Years Foundation clearly sets out its vision for a multigenerational approach. It states, *'Community is at the heart of our approach, so we take children on regular outings to the local park, places of interest, restaurants and museums. We also get involved with local events and really appreciate it when parents can afford the time to help out. We take a multigenerational approach in everything we do, which includes welcoming grandparents, singing with residents at local elderly homes, supporting local volunteers and citizenship programmes for young people.'*

They carried out action research in all of their nurseries to establish how they engage with their local communities. They created a list that included in addition to events frequently offered by good nurseries, such as coffee mornings, summer fayres and open days for families. Complementary and more unusual projects include *Teens and Toddlers* (a project helping young people avoid becoming teenage parents), local walks passed homes where older people live stopping for regular chats. Football sessions, Locomotion Day, (joining generations together, 5-13 years, market workers, local residents etc. to explore locomotion), Street Tea Parties, Anti-Vandal projects and an Arts project with 6 – 9 year olds. Although this is all part of **LEYF's** multi-generational approach ethos, similar practice receives only sporadic and limited attention or robust investigation across the sector in general.

Leading Your Own Learning

London Early Years Foundation

All early years practitioners have a role to play in quality improvement by developing their personal and professional skills as reflective practitioners.

Shonkoff (2010) argued that the path to quality ECS for children is **“well marked – enhanced staff development, increased quality improvement, appropriate measures of accountability, and expanded funding to serve more children and families”** (p. 362).

The National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce (Scottish Executive, 2006) **noted**, *‘the area which requires most urgent investment is improving the skills level of the workforce, and that although further investment is required in the 3-5 sector, the under 3 sector is the most immediate priority’* (SPEC, 2006, para 16).

The Nutbrown Report (2012), very clearly sets out the importance of a high quality workforce. She says, *‘I am concerned that the current early years qualifications system is not systematically equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to give babies and young children high quality experiences.*

A new long-term vision is needed for the early years workforce, with a reformed system of qualifications to help achieve this. In working towards this vision, a balance must be struck between supporting existing good practice and challenging the sector to ensure provision is high quality in all settings’.

Most countries are moving towards raising the qualification levels of early year staff, realising the importance of this to ensuring high quality **educational experiences for young children.**’

We know that high quality early childhood education can make a lasting difference and act as a protective factor for children at risk.

Research carried out in 2009 by Professor Rae Condie and Liz Seagraves at Strathclyde Department of Educational and Professional Studies and Jacqué Fee and Jackie Henry Department of Childhood and Primary Studies into training needs of Early Years managers

and practitioners working with children under 3 years of age showed that CPD provision was dominated by short-term provision such as day, twilight and evening in-service courses. However, practitioners also expressed the view that one-off sessions were insufficient to change practice. The research also indicated that well-supported, in-house development opportunities with peers, more experienced colleagues, practitioners from other centres and specialist support were valued and seen to be effective. They found that such approaches can generate locally relevant professional development and are supported in the literature as both engaging and empowering practitioners in the development process. They believe, however, it important to ensure that locally developed and supported opportunities are underpinned by sound knowledge of relevant pedagogy and child development.

The research revealed that those working in the private sector were less likely to participate in CPD.



Practitioner Research is, as the name suggests, research carried out by practitioners, but **importantly it is ‘for the purpose of advancing their own practice’** (McLeod 1999). Pascal and Bertram (2002) talk about the importance of those involved in the delivery of a service not just trying out something new but instead deeply questioning **‘how’ and ‘why’ and ‘what’ things are done.** They believe it is about those involved systemically gathering evidence to gain a greater knowledge of their own impact on the services that they offer and giving them a greater knowledge, understanding and confidence to make constructive changes for the better.

London Early Years Foundation

They suggest that *‘Those people working on the front line with young children and their families, whether they know it or not, have a vast wealth of knowledge grounded in real life experiences and through developing practitioner research this knowledge can be used to improve service delivery without the need to bring in outside observers.’*

Munton and her colleagues (2002) state, *‘research has consistently demonstrated that high levels of training – both pre-service and in-service – are necessary for quality outcomes with infants and toddlers’.*

The Evaluation of the Graduate leader Fund (2010) found that 91 per cent of the 35 EYPs in the survey spent time working in the pre-school rooms, only 44 per cent spent time supporting practice in the infant and toddler rooms. On average EYPs spent 18.4 hours a week in pre-school rooms but only 4.7 hours with babies and toddlers. The recommends that EYPs should work with the *younger children*.

Coupled with this it is evident that a systematic piece of research is required to establish the most effective ways of raising quality for our youngest children through workforce development.

Whalley, M (2002), in *Early Years Leaders Involving Parents in their Children’s Learning*, Creative Waves states that it is crucial for leaders and staff to be reflective and to be willing to cultivate their own practice. Improved co-operation of early childhood professionals with parents as part of that will mean a big step forward for **children’s** learning and development.

Principal investigator for the Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund (2010), Sandra Mathers said, *‘We found clear evidence that EYPs were effective in leading quality improvement for pre-school children. Settings which gained an EYP made significant improvements related most strongly to direct work with children and the quality of support for learning, reflecting the role of EYPs as “leaders of practice”’*

The Wave report (2013) identified the following points that must be taken into account when

looking at the training needs of practitioners working with the under-threes. Staff should:

London Early Years Foundation

1. Understand the importance of secure attachments using the Key Person system.
2. Support effective parenting by having the skills to offer evidence-based interventions.
3. Understand the importance of speech and language development and the vital part it **plays in a child's future learning.**
4. Develop practitioners and managers who are "*emotionally competent based on the on the fundamental importance of emotional intelligence (or competence) of the Early Years' sector workforce.*"
5. Keep up to date with the evidence in order "*to disseminate key messages to inform practice. There is a case for regular updates to keep busy professionals well informed.*"
6. Supervision. "*Families in the Foundation Years outlined that in order to make this goal a reality there needed to be motivated, qualified, and confident leaders and professionals. The process includes devoted time to explore the thoughts and reactions of the practitioner to the intensity and specific focus of the work and provides the opportunity for both supervisor and supervisee to reflect on the practitioner's work with infants, their parents, wider families and their joint work with other professional practitioners within the network.*"

Methodology

Questionnaires were sent out to 23 settings, most of which offered full daycare from 6 months to 5 years. All took two year olds.

Setting	Number on roll	Age range	Open
1	53	6 mths.-5 yrs.	51 weeks
2	51	"	"
3	52	"	"
4	35	"	"
5	35	"	"
6	25	"	"
7	43	"	"
8	50	"	"
9	35	"	"
10	53	"	"
11	45	"	"
12	39	"	"
13	35	"	"
14	45	"	"
15	36	"	"
16	35	"	"
17	48	"	"
18	40	"	"
19	50	"	"
20	30	2-5 yrs.	"
21	30	"	"
22	24	18 mths-5 yrs.	"
23	30	2-5 yrs.	9.00-4.00 Term-time only

Parent Questionnaires were also sent to three selected nurseries where parents had recently **experienced their child's transition from the Baby Room** into a space for two year olds. Parents were offered the opportunity to fill out the form and email it or to have a discussion on the telephone. There were replies from two parents from the same nursery who decided to fill out the form online and five from a second nursery who filled out the forms by hand.

The results of both surveys were analysed against findings of EPPE, REPEY and The DCSF Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP) to identify training needs specific to those working with two year olds. We looked at specific areas around quality, leadership and staff development.

The EPPE and REPEY Key Features of Effective Practice:

- ✧ Providing and achieving a balance between opportunities for group work and freely chosen activities, allowing children to take the initiative to learn
- ✧ Providing differentiated activities and challenge in areas just beyond what the child could learn on their own but where they can succeed with adult help
- ✧ **Engaging in 'responsive teaching'** by considering the background and social perspective of the learner so that you can **'build bridges'** between what the child knows and what they are capable of knowing
- ✧ Using open ended questions that provoke speculation and stimulate the imagination
- ✧ **Responding to children's emotional and learning needs** in a caring way without criticism and encouraging children to try new experiences
- ✧ Modelling activities after allowing children to explore for themselves
- ✧ The leadership, qualifications and quality of the workforce and their understanding of Early Years pedagogy, anti-discriminatory practice and equality
- ✧ The importance of the home learning environment and the involvement of parents **in supporting and extending children's** learning and development
- ✧ A safe and stimulating environment both indoors and outdoors which promotes physical, mental and emotional health and well-being and provides continuity of care
- ✧ The adults formed warm interactive relationships with children;

London Early Years Foundation

- ✧ Settings viewed educational and social development as complementary
- ✧ The adults used open-ended questioning and encouraged **'sustained shared thinking'**
- ✧ The adults used formative assessment to differentiate the curriculum according to the needs of individual children
- ✧ The adults supported children in being assertive while at the same time rationalising and talking through their conflicts
- ✧ The adults had a good understanding of appropriate pedagogical content
- ✧ A trained teacher acted as manager and a good proportion of the staff were (graduate, teacher) qualified

The DCSF Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP)

What quality looks like

Settings – What are the key elements of high quality provision?



department for
children, schools and families

'Teachers of young children could make a revolutionary move forward in developing a pedagogy of the early years if they recorded how they conceptualised and shared their professional concepts with parents'.

Athey, (1990)

Findings

The staff questionnaire was sent out to 23 settings and there were 23 replies from 17 nurseries. Some nurseries asked more than one member of staff to complete the form either individually or together and one nursery worked as a whole staff team to examine its approach to two year olds.

There were responses from 5 managers, 4 deputy managers, 1 deputy manager/SENCo, 13 nursery practitioners, 1 nursery practitioner/SENCo, 1 EYP/nursery officer/family coordinator, 1 whole team, 1 assistant early years practitioner and one apprentice.

The range of qualifications of the respondents was wide, with:

- ✧ 2 unqualified,
- ✧ 11 at NVQ level 3
- ✧ 1 NNEB
- ✧ 1 NVQ level 4
- ✧ 1 working towards ILM level 4
- ✧ 1 NVQ level 5
- ✧ 2 with an unspecified management qualifications,
- ✧ 3 working towards degrees and EYP
- ✧ 8 with degrees or EYP.

The length of time staff had worked within their role varied from 1.25 years to 24 years. There were:

- ✧ 4 at 1-2 years
- ✧ 4 at 2 years
- ✧ 5 at 3-4 years
- ✧ 2 at 4 years
- ✧ 2 at 5 years
- ✧ 1 at 8 years
- ✧ 2 at 10-12 years
- ✧ 1 at 13 years
- ✧ 1 at 16 years
- ✧ 1 at 24 years

We asked the following questions:

1. Everyone wants to lead a high quality service, what do you think are the key features of quality when leading a setting for two years olds? List in order of importance?
2. What do you understand by leading the curriculum?
3. What role do you have in leading engagement with parents?
4. What role do you have to support your setting to get involved in the local community?
5. What leadership tasks do you carry out daily?
6. What is involved in leading positive relationships within your team?
7. If you had a magic wand, what training and support would help you lead a better service?

The wide range of experience and job roles meant that key issues were addressed from very different perspectives.

Leading the Pedagogy

What do you understand by leading the curriculum?

An apprentice said, ***'I think it's about always constantly developing your practice and professional knowledge and learning. To always be reflecting and improving yourself and as a team member to evolve and improve the setting's provision from what you observe from the children's interests and family's needs.'***

A whole-staff response said ***'Informed and skilled staff to work together to implement the curriculum also to involve and inform parents so they know what their child is learning and the parents will then work with us.'***

There were few references to the need for a balance between group work and freely chosen activities. A graduate deputy talked about the staff team, ***'having the right balance of***

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observation, interaction and scaffolding techniques.'

A nursery practitioner said, 'To be a leader of the curriculum it is essential to follow the EYFS to ensure each child is supported in their physical development and use of language.'

A deputy manager believed it was important to *'provide a platform where staff can be proactive and innovative with their ideas.'*

Interestingly, there was little reference to the specific provision of a safe and stimulating learning environment in the research replies. Nor was there much mention of the outdoor learning environment in developing physical skills and the mental and emotional health and well-being of two year olds.

Their replies were generally quite broad, such as:

- ✦ Providing activities to develop all areas of learning and skills according to age and ability
- ✦ Following the children's interests

A deputy talked about, *'Delegating tasks to the staff and supporting them to learn new challenges and take on more responsibilities and showing support at all times.'*

Leading with Parents

What role do you have in leading engagement with parents?

A large proportion of respondents talked about making informal daily contact with parents or coffee mornings etc. Far fewer discussed having more formal meetings. A few talked about parents being invited on trips and outings and invited to Stay and Play sessions and involving parents in **their children's learning. Two nurseries have specially focused on involving fathers.**

There is little emphasis on having **'difficult conversations'** with parents. A practitioner talked about *'Building a friendly and professional relationship where they are able to talk on an informal basis'* but goes on to say, *'Signposting*

parents for extra help and support.' Another raised the issue of involving ECAT, presumably with a child with speech and language difficulties.



A whole-staff response said

'Informed and skilled staff to work together to implement the curriculum also to involve and inform parents so they know what their child is learning and the parents will then work with us.'

A manager talked about, *'it is important that parents feel confident in approaching staff members not only to share any concerns about their child's development but also to celebrate their child's achievements.'*

Another manager said, 'Communicating with other professionals – making links.'

Another manager talked about the importance of staff meetings where staff, *'reflect on what has been happening and we continually re-visit the importance of feedback/communication and knowledge of any change happening in a child's life.'*

A nursery officer said, 'Parent evenings are important to discuss children's progress.'

Some practitioners talked about finding out about **children's interests at home. One said it was important, 'Getting ideas and interests from home.'**

Another said, *'Some parents value the Learning Journey reviews.'*

Another said, *'As a key person I find out about a child's development between home and nursery. This informs planning and target setting.'*

London Early Years Foundation

An assistant said, *'I have no specified role. I engage with all the families informally.'*

There is little reference to the importance of the home learning environment and ways in which nurseries engage with parents to work in **partnership to develop children's learning and development.**

Leading within the Community

What role do you have to support your setting to get involved in the local community?

All of the respondents reported developing links with the local community. Many made regular trips and visits with groups of children to shops and places of interest.

Some nurseries were developing their **multigenerational links.** A deputy said *'I have also been trying to strengthen links between us and sheltered accommodation for the elderly.'*

A manager talked about the nursery links with a Day Centre for the elderly. **She said, 'Every Tuesday during group times children go to the P 50+ Centre for activities; making book marks, cooking, stories etc....this week has been Elvis Presley week. J played her ukulele and we sang along! (Requested from Arnold aged 75).'**

One nursery builds a walk around the local area into the staff induction process.

A deputy talks about the organisation's Social Enterprise ethos and how, 'the staff and chef will buy products from the local grocers to support local economy.'

A nursery flagged up some of the difficulties of trying to develop community links. The deputy said, *'During our pancake day, Easter hunt events we have invited and involved our local elderly residents. We are also still trying to work with our local residents in the estate our setting is based which is a very hard task, but we as a team will not give up.'*

Some were developing links with the local **children's centre, local schools and nurseries.**

A deputy said it has been her role to 'develop links with feeder schools by holding events and visits.'

A manager talked about links with the children's centre and, 'information about events around the area for parents and children.'

Some actively marketed their nursery out in the community. A practitioner reported how she *'Developed the occupancy of the setting to promote the (organisation's) name and allow more children to access quality care and education.'*

Another practitioner talked about, *'acting as an ambassador for the nursery.'*

Several joined in with the children in local community events. An apprentice noted that he attended, *'Events such as the South West Fest which also gets our nursery noticed.'*

A manager said, 'We have stalls at every opportunity; F. Festival Fun Day at Easter. LS took part in a Healthy Eating initiative in the library by offering the chef to cook for the community.'

One nursery talked about its initiative to involve local fathers. A practitioner reported, *"We also do volunteering once a month to open the nursery for fathers and their children which reaches out to the whole community".*

An assistant early years practitioner said, *'I have no specific role but I support our community activities ads a central part of my role.'*

Some invited members of the community to nursery events. A nursery officer said, *'We encourage the community to get involved in our summer fayre.'*

One nursery was quite innovative in their approach. They, *'planted daffodils in X Park, recently involved with Y Park in its redesign; children have done art workshops with staff from royal parks and decorated Christmas tree in W. Hall with children's work.'*

Some settings have invited local people in to talk to the children. A deputy talked about the

nursery's links with a park ranger *'when implementing a Forest school ethos.'* Leading Your Own Learning

If you had a magic wand, what training and support would help you lead a better service?

This was designed as a wish list without constraint. The answers were therefore very diverse and often related directly to specific nurseries. Some did raise the need for training to implement the new EYFS curriculum and some flagged up the need for specific leadership and management training. A deputy said she would like, *'Any training that will enhance my leadership skills.'*

Some just wanted regular refresher courses. One nursery officer said, *'Often when staff do a full time job or long term their practice and ideas get 'stale' or they get stuck in a rut so only do the minimal, so needs support to reflect on what we do and also some regular refresher courses for new ideas and inspiration. i.e. how to set up activities/room more creatively – after all there are only so many ways a tub full of Lego can be displayed or modelled which will grab the attention of an over-two's child who has been attending your setting since they were six months old! (Yes, I'm sorely lacking in the inspirational department right now.)'*

Another asked for, *'Ongoing rolling workshops to maintain good practice.'*

An apprentice said he wanted, *'A little more training on everything just to make me more confident, you can never have too much knowledge.'*



A nursery officer asked for, *'More support for leading the Two Year Programme'*

A deputy said she would like, *'More training on planning and assessing two year olds and gain more ideas for an activity bank for two year olds. It is sometimes a challenge to provide for two year olds as they can sometimes be boisterous. It is difficult to provide when you do not have a lot of space. Two year olds need a lot of time and space to test **their boundaries.**'*

Another officer wanted training to help her to, *'Communicate better to my colleagues and parents in stressful situations.'*

A nursery officer flagged up the need for SEN training. She said she would like to, *'Learn more about children with SEN so that we are more knowledgeable about the different types and how to recognize the signs, which will enable us to confidently help the child and the parent deal with SEN.'*

A manager asked for, *'Mental Health training – increasing numbers of people suffer with poor mental health and I feel that I don't have enough knowledge.'*

There was a wish for more cooperation between nurseries to share good practice. A nursery officer said she would like to, *'meet with other EYFS leads to share ideas on Learning Journeys, activities and planning'*

Generally, the responses support the general view that staff need to be well-informed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic and lead a curriculum which puts the child at the centre.

Clearly, many staff see their role to engage with parents so as to stimulate **and extend children's** learning especially their social physical and communication skills and competence.

Leading and Managing a Service

1. *Everyone wants to lead a high quality service, what do you think are the key features of quality when leading a setting for two years olds? List in order of importance.*

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2. *What leadership tasks do you carry out daily?*
3. *What is involved in leading positive relationships within your team?*

Supporting colleagues and meeting and assisting families were the daily leadership tasks carried out by a large proportion of practitioners. How that support is carried out was dependent on job roles and experience. Some were responsible for supervision; others for more general guidance. An EYP talked about, *'Developing my own knowledge and supporting others to understand.'*



A practitioner said, *'I inform the apprentices of how they should do things when I am working with them.'*

Another told of, *'helping others in the team with advice or guidance with tasks which I may have a particular strength or experience of doing effectively.'*

A deputy talks about supporting various groups. She says she *'supports all staff members*

throughout the day and leading them into achieving high standards of the nursery and taking into account the needs of the children and families and supporting the nursery manager.

The amount of leadership responsibility given to practitioners seems to vary between settings. One practitioner replied to this question, *'None but I try my best to carry out all my duties and responsibilities as best I can.'*

Another practitioner says, *'Sometimes I am given tasks such as who is going to do the lunches or when they leave me in charge in the nursery but I prefer not to be in charge.'*

Meeting families seems to be high on everyone's agenda and this links directly to the high number of responses in the question about parent partnership where a large number of practitioners talk about informally talking to parents on a daily basis.

A nursery officer said, *'Very important we need to communicate at all times so there is not a misunderstanding. I always need to keep reminding myself to do that.'*

A deputy noted, *'The management team are positive role models, praise is used for good work.'*

Another deputy talked about, *'Delegating tasks to the staff and supporting them to learn new challenges and take on more responsibilities and showing support at all times.'*

A nursery assistant talked about, *'Telling others how much you value them, so they feel positive about what they do.'*

Responses to the Parent Questionnaires

We asked the following questions and received 12 replies:

What were the things you liked about the Baby Room?

'I liked the fact that a separate outside area had been created so that the little ones could feel safe outside without the older children encroaching on their space but they could see the older children playing too. I like the fact that there was a lot of interaction between the two rooms so that when my son eventually moved up because of group activities and spending some time in the over-2s room as he got older meant the move was far less traumatic. At first I was not keen on the fact that they did not have a separate sleeping area so I wondered how my son would cope with afternoon naps but he is generally a good sleeper and he adapted fairly well. I also liked the fact that at first when he was not into the routine of nursery nap times, nursery carers didn't force the issue if he wasn't going to sleep but he would get some 1:1 time with someone while the other children slept.'

- ☆ The room is open plan
- ☆ The lay out is dynamic, the carers change it
- ☆ The room is full of the children's work
- ☆ Big windows floor to ceiling, lots of natural light
- ☆ There is a sink and a little "kitchen" area inside



*'Lots of staff attention (which P needed), lots of different exploring areas, singing'
'Social interaction with other children. Not too many plastic toys'*

*'Great activities, friends and staff. The outdoor area and brand new facilities.'
'Kind and caring. Very happy.'*

'Quiet, calm and friendly.'

'Lovely environment. Calm.'

'Great to have caring staff for the children.'

'Staff very supportive.'

Did you feel you were well-informed about your child's learning and development?

'The nursery has two planned Parents' Evenings per year where the children's Learning Journeys are updated. Both of I's keyworkers have spent a lot of time updating this folder so I now have a record of his time at nursery (have got to keep the under-2s folder since he has moved up) which is a lovely source of memories. There's plenty of opportunity to interact between Parents' Evenings though and staff will comment on things my son has done or said during the day. Little magic moments as well as routine issues. I always try to check what time he woke up, how long he slept and dirty nappies and whoever is available to speak at pick-up time is always willing to check the books to share this information even if they haven't been with I much during the day. Also between Parents' Evenings I used to get lots of lovely little laminated photos of different activities at nursery which are all on our fridge at home and which I likes to look at when he's eating. So for example, I could see that he was perfectly happy to use the slide at 18 months even though he never wanted to go on a slide when with me!'

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'I would say you can take your child "and run" or you can take the time to interact with the carers, ask questions, observe how things are done etc. It is pretty much up to you to spend time and ask questions and observe. Carers are open and approachable.'

'Yes, feedback from staff.'

'Regular contact with staff provided info.'

'Yes, daily and reassuring phone calls.'

'Yes, informed every day.'

'Through chats at the end of the day and the activity folder.'

'Yes, each day I ask, 'How was he?'. I get a full written report was also good.'

'Yes, P's folder where C kept everything and showed me often and pictures.'

Was there anything that could have been improved?

'The nursery is very good at communicating with the parents and organising and hosting community events for Christmas, Royal Wedding etc. I think life could be made easier for them in terms of communication if the organization implemented something for each nursery (e.g. a members' only section of the website for each nursery where parents could log in and see



forthcoming diary dates, fees' notices, staff news (would recommend

Sharepoint as a very simple way to do this) and the nursery could generate group emails and parents could sign up to the service. I have noticed that since returning to work I now have much less time to stop and chat or even register the contents of

sharing information is harder and this would help. I would hope and also cost-saving in terms of printing out individual letters for children's pegs for parents to take home.'

All is great as it is.'

'There have been a few Dads' Saturdays which are a great idea where the nursery have opened on a Saturday to allow Dads to bring their children and have a play session so they get to see the nursery if their working hours don't permit much other interaction with nursery. Having returned to work 4 days a week when I turned 2, I now wonder whether there is opportunity to do a similar thing for working mums who don't have much time to interact with nursery even if they are doing drop-off and pick-up?'

'I wish children were more encouraged to eat well. Table manners are important.'

'More food and sleep charts'

What were your experiences of moving from the Baby Room into the next room? Were there things that happened in the Baby Room that didn't happen in the 2s-4's?

'I miss the laminated little photos! I would also like to know what their 'themes' are in the over-2s room - so for example, I think they have been doing mini-beasts (insects) but it took me a while to twig (despite big display in over-2s room) and connect that with I's new interest in spiders.'

'Can't think of anything'

'No problem, informed by both baby staff and 2-3's staff well.'

'The people she has formed relationships with.'

'Gradual process.'

How was the transition managed between the two rooms?

'The nursery was very accommodating. I's keyworker M. along with A. and E. spoke to me well in advance of moving due to awkward timing (I's

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birthday is next to Christmas so combined with a week's break and a holiday abroad we felt that he needed time to be resettled in Baby Room before moving up in a staged way. The transition included his new keyperson visiting him to build up rapport and I spending more time in there with his current keyperson M. It was all a lot smoother than expected and was also helped that the nursery was not operating at maximum capacity and so there was a bit of space in the under2s room still to allow for this flexibility.'

'Transition from under 2s to over 2s was awful. Massive backward steps happened with both my boys. Potty training and eating, if I remember correctly staff were doing things differently and this lack of consistency meant a massive step back for the boys.'

'OK all went well.'

'Very well.'

Now your child has settled into the new room are there things you specially like?



J. has been running some new musical sessions. I. is very much into music so I have noticed a marked increase in his song-repetiote since moving up into the over-2s room. T. has introduced a Reading Record Book so that I. chooses a book a week for us to read to him and note his responses/learning in the record book. We're not at this stage yet but I like the fact that for children nearing school-age there's a lot of prepping them for the experience

'The room is bigger. Children are looked after in groups. They go out a lot.'

'Lots more focus activities. "Talking" has improved.'

'That there are new activities for this stage of development.'

Do you feel well-informed about your child's learning and development?

'Yes, always'

'I don't really care about generic tables of activities and development. I like knowing what they have done on the day, what has happened, what they enjoyed so I can talk about it with my child.

I absolutely love taking their work home and putting it up on our walls.'

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'Yes, when I drop off/collect I get feedback. Lots of pictures come home'

Is there anything that you feel could be done better?

'Apart from the communication piece as mentioned in Qn. 3 which I think is something (organisation) needs to address for all their nurseries, I have been very pleased with X nursery's relationship with my son. He is very happy to go to

nursery in the morning and enjoys his time there which is the main thing.'

'What would be nice is more trips outside the nursery.'

'Just the reports – maybe one at the end of the week. More photos.'

'More activities outside the nursery (like theatre, museums) on Wed/Thurs/Fridays.'

Conclusions

The questionnaires were completed by practitioners with very different roles ranging from a fairly recently appointed apprentice to a very experienced manager. It was predictable, therefore, that there would be a variety of interpretations of what constituted a quality curriculum, how the service for two year olds should be led, how they view parent partnership, how they lead within the community and view their professional development. For that reason, the decision was made to focus on the views of the qualified practitioners who are responsible for leading the curriculum in their rooms.

Research has provided us with clear evidence of the impact of strong and confident leadership on the quality of early years provision. We do not yet know whether the style of leadership of staff working with the under-threes needs to be adapted or whether there are significant training implications, particularly for those staff who will lead on **the two year olds' assessment**.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is essential during childhood, as it is a time of rapid growth, development and activity. This is also a vital time for healthy tooth development and prevention of decay. General eating habits and patterns are formed in the first few years of life, so it is important that the food and eating patterns to which young children are exposed - both in and outside the home - are based on good nutrition.

In order to address the management of the needs of two year olds in settings it is recommended that lead practitioners receive training on what constitutes good nutrition, how to help children to develop good eating habits through consistent routines and how to work with families to share good practice.

There are also training implications for nursery chefs and managers.

Leading Pedagogy

From published research we know that there are several key characteristics of what is required to lead a quality curriculum. We know that quality must be based on a sound knowledge and understanding of child development and it may be assumed that trained and experienced practitioners would be very secure in that knowledge; however several respondents asked for refresher courses to update their knowledge.

There is obvious anxiety about the introduction of a more formal assessment of two year olds as part of the new EYFS and practitioners will need to be **confident of discussing children's progress with parents**, particularly if children are failing to meet expected milestones.



Several practitioners mentioned issues around assessment, particularly in relation to the early identification of children with additional needs.

The revised statutory framework for the EYFS notes, '*Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners observing children to understand their level of achievement, interests and learning styles, and to then shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations.*'

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Since the introduction of the EYFS in 2008 there have been concerns expressed by practitioners about the level of paperwork required by OFSTED around the observation/assessment/planning process.

It is to be hoped that OFSTED will note that the 2012 EYFS places emphasis on the quality of adult/child interaction rather than on unnecessary paperwork.



Although many practitioners mentioned the importance of the learning environment, there was little mention of the critical importance of outdoor learning. In the light of the revised EYFS curriculum with its emphasis on the physical development of young children it is of utmost importance that the lead practitioner should be fully committed to taking the curriculum outside.

A number of respondents said that they would like ongoing refresher courses on delivering the early years curriculum. Research shows that pedagogy **with under two's is specialized and different to** teaching older children. In rooms with an age-range of twos to fives it is important that practitioners are confident about delivering a curriculum that fully meets the needs of the youngest children.

The issue of practitioners fully understanding the welfare requirements, particularly around safeguarding, was raised by a lead practitioner. It is critical before the revised EYFS is implemented in September 2012 that all lead practitioners are fully aware of the relevant regulations.

It is recommended that lead practitioners working with two year olds receive training when necessary on:

- ✧ The revised EYFS
- ✧ Assessment and record-keeping
- ✧ Safeguarding and welfare requirements
- ✧ Child development, particularly around **children's speech and language**
- ✧ Good practice on delivering an appropriate, child-centred, active learning curriculum both indoors and outdoors for two year olds
- ✧ Reflective practice

Several practitioners said they would find it helpful to share good practice with other settings. It is recommended that regular meetings are arranged for this to take place, possibly within a local cluster where reciprocal visits can take place.

Leading Learning Spaces

Although there is little published research on what makes an effective learning environment for two year olds we know that the needs of an active toddler are very different from those of a baby and also of a more mature three year old.

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) based on notions of developmentally



appropriate practice, includes consideration of the space and furnishings, personal care routines etc. was used in the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children (2013) to identify settings that offer

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the highest quality. It is critical that all settings offering places to the most vulnerable two year olds provide learning environments of the highest quality.

We know that rooms should be set up to appropriately meet the needs of two year olds with lots of space to move around, few tables with easy access to a stimulating outdoor area.

We recommend that there should be more action research carried out into the specific learning needs of two year olds and how those needs can be met through the provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor spaces.

Leading and Managing a Service

Few practitioners in non-management posts have received leadership training and one respondent even said that he avoided responsibility for leadership whenever possible.

Research shows us that effective leadership is an essential starting point towards ensuring and sustaining quality. Little research has been carried out into the impact of leadership of practitioners who are not in senior management roles. We know that pedagogical leadership is about motivating and convincing practitioners to do things differently. However, we also know that many early years staff associate leadership responsibilities with additional paperwork that they feel takes them away from their main role of **working with the children**. We know from Rodd's comments that leadership in early years is not understood well by those working in the sector.

Many respondents talked about the importance of being a positive role model for less experienced staff and supporting colleagues.

Clear and consistent communication between team members is seen as very important, as is praise, respect and appreciation. Respondents talked about motivation and empowerment and we know that vision, particularly around curriculum and pedagogy is critical in raising levels of performance.

Few practitioners, however, discussed the issue of being able to challenge weak practice. Supervision was seen as important tool in raising quality of performance but not all lead practitioners will be responsible for the supervision of less junior staff as this may be undertaken by the senior management team.

Just because practitioners are very skilled working with children it does not necessarily follow that they can effectively guide and lead less experienced members of staff within the team or deal with issues around competency.

It is recommended, therefore, that lead practitioners working with two year olds are offered the opportunity to access accredited leadership and management training.

Engaging with Parents

Many respondents rated working with parents as very high on their list of quality features and comment on the importance of daily informal talks. Several talked about how they offer support



to families.

There are descriptions of how parents are **encouraged to be partners in their children's** learning and practitioners understand the importance of working with parents to understand **the children's interests which are the basis of the** planning process.

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Nurseries run a variety of events for families and there are innovative approaches to involving fathers.

We know from research that parents and settings working together in partnership are key to **children's future learning and development** but we also know that parents who have their own problems can present enormous challenges to younger and less experienced staff.

Staff who are confident in their skills and abilities will be more likely to engage with parents on a day-to-day basis, however, it takes a great deal **more skill and confidence to deal with 'difficult conversations' with parents who maybe do not** want to hear what is being said. This could arise during the two year old assessment. Concerns have been raised by a number of groups that if this assessment process is handled in a less than satisfactory manner, relationships between settings and parents could be permanently damaged.

The expectation that all key persons will be able to do this without training is unrealistic so the recommendation is that training on how to handle difficult conversations should be offered first to lead practitioners and then rolled out to all key persons.

It is critical that the SENCo in all settings is confident and competent at helping staff to identify children who are failing to reach their expected milestones and to work with parents to devise appropriate strategies to support children and their families.

It is therefore recommended that all SENCos receive up to date training on the revised Code of Practice and how to assess funded two years olds in order to identify additional learning needs at the earliest point.

All staff need to be aware of ways in which they can extend their knowledge of working in partnership with parents to extend opportunities for home learning.

It is recommended that training should be available to help lead practitioners to develop

creative ways in which to translating the casual conversation with parents so as to influence and influence the home learning environment.

Leading within the Community

Research shows that multi-generational practice has a significant impact on the social benefits to children and their families. Several nurseries are beginning to engage effectively with local communities through their links across the generations.

LEYF nurseries regularly take children out on visits into the local community and engage with community groups such as the police etc. and invite them to join in nursery events. Also nurseries participate in community-organised events and **effectively raise the nursery's profile locally.**



This is a relatively un-researched area in the Early Years sector and there is little evidence to show how close links with the local community can have **a positive impact on children's learning** and wellbeing. Research on social capital (Putnam 2000) supports the assertion that the more practitioners know about the context within families live, the greater understanding they will **have about how to best meet children's needs.**

skills, professional expertise and cycle of reflection of those leading a team working with two-year olds. Only two practitioners raised the possibility of receiving management and leadership training.

It is recommended that practitioners should be given support and advice about how they can further extend opportunities to engage effectively with the local community.

Some settings are beginning to build links with **their local children's centre and feeder schools and nurseries.** This provides not just opportunities for smooth transitions for children but also offers opportunities for sharing good practice.

It is recommended that nurseries, children's centres and schools should form local clusters to share good practice and enable smooth transitions.

The two year old assessment should be carried out jointly by health visitors and practitioners. It is therefore recommended that lead practitioners should be given opportunities to build close links with health visitors working in **children's centres and health centres.**

Leading Your Own Learning

We know that high levels of training are necessary for quality outcomes for children but research has shown that most training for those working with the under-threes is dominated by short-term day, twilight or evening training courses. Although in-house development opportunities with peers and more experienced staff is valuable it is equally important that more opportunities are made available to practitioners to raise their professional skills and qualifications.

Most practitioners requested regular curriculum refresher courses that can be carried out effectively in short one-off sessions but we need to look at a much wider picture at whether or not training currently available is enough to raise the



The previous sections contain recommendations for specific training to meet particular needs but we need to look, however, at whether current leadership training is appropriate to meet the needs of a workforce that works with this specific age group, whether it could be adapted or whether a new training package would need to be written. Leadership and management skills may be things that some people naturally possess but it is

probably the exception rather than the rule. We **must consider whether practitioners' training, that** has focused almost entirely on meeting the needs of young children, are well-prepared for the challenge of leading a workforce team and working with parents and other professionals and it seems unlikely. In addition to the previously stated recommendations for we believe it is of great importance to consider developing an accredited leadership qualification with appropriate training materials.

The evidence from the Evaluation of the Graduate Leadership Fund highlights the evidence of the positive impact EYPs were making to the quality of provision in early years settings. It, however, noted that EYPs spent very little time working with the under-threes.

We would recommend that more practitioners working with two year olds are positively encouraged to obtain graduate status and to use those qualifications to raise both the professional standing of those working with the youngest children and the quality of provision.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to support colleagues from three perspectives with responsibility for strategic policy, local policy and operational leadership.

Our research shows that the challenges for lead practitioners working with funded two year olds will be great. In addition there are strategic implications for central policy makers and local authorities.

Leading Pedagogy

1. We need to articulate a coherent model of what leading a two year old setting looks like so practitioners are clear as to expectations, practice and monitoring for successful outcomes.
2. Training needs to be designed to strengthen child development knowledge at every level. We particularly need lead practitioners who can translate child development norms into practice and articulate this to team members and parents, including extending the casual conversation into a pedagogical learning opportunity.
3. Training need to be designed to ensure lead practitioners have a specific focus on language acquisition with relevant materials to support this.
4. All practitioners should receive training around attachment
5. Training need to be designed to ensure lead practitioners can understand the need to design and implement methods of assessment and record-keeping which allow for the most effective interventions to ensure children achieve their milestones.
6. Training and qualifications need to be developed which helps practitioners and chefs support parents and children develop an understanding of nutrition which will sustain lifelong good eating habits.
7. The issue around training is about how training will look. There needs to be a focus on a self-improving system where

leaders and practitioners learn in a variety of ways, (e.g. peer mentoring, coaching, induction, performance management, joint practice development rather than traditional CPD and local engagement in action research). All these need strengthening)



Leading Learning Spaces

1. All settings offering places to two year olds should reach Scale 5 in ECERS
2. Learning spaces should appropriately meet the developmental needs of two year olds and offer sufficient space for plenty of floor play with few tables
3. There should be easy access to a stimulating outdoor learning environment
4. We recommend that there should be more action research carried out into the specific learning needs of two year olds and how those needs can be met through the provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor spaces.
5. We need to design buildings and learning environments which are based on the developmental needs of the child and support leaders to ensure high quality practice.

Leading and Managing a Service

1. We need to collate effective data to help maintain a focus on narrowing the gap in order to measure the success of the programme.
2. We must maintain ratios at an appropriate level in order to ensure the most vulnerable children are given the level of support necessary to narrow gaps of attainment.
3. We must develop robust professional networks and partnerships comprising of:
 - ✧ Leader to leader support
 - ✧ Effective implementation models
 - ✧ SLE models for two year old support
 - ✧ Collaboration rather than competition
 - ✧ Structured strategic approach to capacity building.
4. Training needs to be designed and support materials developed that will include specific CPD programmes for those working with two year olds to include:
 - ✧ Child development needs of two year olds
 - ✧ Appropriate assessment for effective interventions
 - ✧ Effective assessment to identify children with additional needs at an earlier stage
 - ✧ Engagement with parents
 - ✧ Extending the home learning environment
 - ✧ Sustaining good quality practice
 - ✧ Personal supervision
 - ✧ Developing the next generation of two year old practitioners
 - ✧ Translating child development into pedagogical conversations

Leading with Parents

1. Parental contribution to the research suggested that we strengthen, where possible, the confidence of the parents so

they can sustain an appropriate level of attachment and assured parenting.

2. In addition, our research suggested that we also need a suite of activities and support materials to better educate lead practitioners of two-year olds to ensure that:
 - ✧ Staff are more confident and successful at engaging professionals to work with parents at the earliest stage
 - ✧ Assessment methodology is meaningful and makes the link between the nursery and the home learning environment
3. Training needs to be designed to help lead practitioners to both manage difficult conversations and convert the casual conversation in a way that could extend the home learning environment.

Leading within the Community

1. Community leadership is about caring for all the people our actions and choices affect; those whom we cannot see as well



as those whom we can. We therefore need to introduce the lead practitioners to the concept of sustainable leadership and be able to influence and empower parents and the wider community to find and sustain solutions for a safer neighbourhood.

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2. Leaders need to:

- ✧ Create a positive atmosphere
- ✧ Focus on what really matters and avoid distraction
- ✧ Model appropriate leadership behaviours

Leading Your Own Learning

1. Leaders need coaching and mentoring support to help reflect on their personal leadership style and behaviour
2. Provide opportunities to work beyond their own setting
3. Opportunities to engage in joint practice development

4. Consideration needs to be given to how the leadership role can be used to influence and forge even stronger partnerships with other agencies
5. Training needs and CPD to be designed by those with the right experience and knowledge and takes account of existing research on good quality leadership and Under Threes to ensure the needs of the children are embedded in the effective service for two year olds including:

- ✧ Pedagogical leadership
- ✧ Sustaining the service
- ✧ Managing and motivating the team
- ✧ Generating income to improve the service
- ✧ Extending the quality feedback loop
- ✧ Leading the pedagogical conversation.



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